

## Chapter 0040

All my friends were carrying gift bags too. I was so overwhelmed, but I couldn't help myself and look at Mateo. He knew my question without me having to ask. He just shook his head once, almost imperceptibly. I couldn't help the wave of sadness that rolled over me and I felt my heart break.

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. I was not going to let his absence detract from this amazing thing my friends and their families did for me. They can't have any idea what this means to me. The first birthday I will celebrate outside of my bedroom and with other people is my 15th birthday. Even my nanny wasn't allowed to celebrate my birthday. She always said 'happy birthday' to me, but we couldn't do more than that. She tried once to bring me a cupcake and my father punched her in front of me, then kept her away from me for a week.

This will be one of the most special memories I have. But, I cannot cry, I won't cry. I take another deep breath. Not happy tears, not sad tears. Today is going to be an amazing day, even if it has to include dress shopping. I come out of my daze and walk around to hug and thank everyone. Luna Ava hugs me longer than necessary, telling me she probably has a pretty good idea what this actually means to me. Like always she lets me have my silent moment and then moves

on like it was nothing, not drawing attention where I don't want it. She has always just understood me without explanation.

"What about training?!" I suddenly ask, looking at Delta Kyle and noticing the time. Panic washed through me at the thought of the pups running a muck by themselves.

"We canceled it today and told the pups you were not allowed to workout with anyone today on pain of having to play capture the flag against you solo, after completing your entire, personal, daily workout. I can guarantee none of them are going to even look in your direction today." Delta Kyle laughs along with everyone else. I don't know if I should be offended or smug.

"I guess it's good I already went for my run today then, jeez." They all just laugh again.

Luna Ava helps me get dishes out and stack them on the island and we all dig in. The food is amazing. Along with all of the fruit and pastries, the hot dishes had eggs, sausages, and fried potatoes. We go through most of it, these boys can put down some food. Sierra and I eat almost as much as the guys do, and Delta Kyle is quick to mention it.

"I like that you girls eat a healthy amount. I am always worried about some of the girls who don't eat enough, getting hurt at training. They are worried about gaining weight, but it's really hard to do even if they train the bare minimum." That launched a whole load of conversations

about girls and eating and picky eaters. This then launched a competition of the worst dinner dates. These boys spent far too much time on high maintenance girls from the sounds of it, but who am I to judge. Until I met Sierra I did the exact opposite and avoided people like it was my job.

I'm standing at the center of the Island, Cam, Kota and Mateo to my left. Oliver, Sierra and Sam to my right and their respective adults across from them. It was kind of a neat image, previous and future generation of leaders all at the table. The Beta is the only person missing. It makes me sad for a moment, not for myself, but for Mateo. Because of me, my dad refuses to share this moment with him.


"Okay you have to open your presents." Sierra sings at me from the end of the island.

"What? Now? I thought I would just open them later. We are all having fun just hanging out and I really need to go shower, I probably smell."

"You smell fine to me." Chorused from all of the boys, except my brother who looked at his friends with his eyebrows smashed together and letting out a little growl.



"What?" asked Oliver, looking around. "She smells fine, like the forest." He shrugs. "I assume that's where she was running this morning."

"Yeah, Tiny, you smell good, just open your presents." Cam smiles at me.

 +20 BONUS

The look that Luna Ava gave Alpha Lucas did not go unnoticed by me. What is going on?

 Comments

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## Chapter 0041

Naturally breaking the tension, Sam shoved a bag in my face. "These should help Little Bit." His Cheshire Cat smile made me a bit nervous to open this in front of the adults for some reason.

"Should I be afraid?" I opened the bag slowly. It was heavy. When I got through the tissue paper I found a pair of black platform converse high tops. "Awe, Thank you. I was actually expecting something to embarrass me.

"Nope, but now you will at least be taller than our elbows." He laughs with everyone else, me included.

Cam and Kota got me black skinny jeans with a few tears in them to look worn, but not trashy and a black belt with metallic thread woven into it.

Oliver got me a cornflower blue cropped peasant top, that goes off the shoulder and has puffy long sleeves.

Mateo got me a delicate white gold chain with a crescent moon pendant that had 2 little stars on the end.

"Mine comes later, so you just have to be patient." Sierra wiggles her eyebrows at me and I am instantly afraid.

"This is all great guys, Thank you! I really am going to go shower and change now. I'll be right back." I grab all my stuff and turn to race out of the room. I am becoming

uncomfortable with all of the attention on me.

"If you didn't catch on, that's the outfit you are wearing today." Sierra yells at my back. Followed by a boom of laughter. I just roll my eyes, of course she picked this out and I can't not wear what the guys gave me. I have to watch out for her sneaky tactics.

I have never showered so quickly in my life. I debated on having Sierra come up and help me do my hair and make up. I've never cared before, but for some reason having my birthday recognized by all of them made me want to care a little bit, at least today. Wrapped in my towel I raced out to my room to grab my phone, just to get a shock from seeing her on my bed.

"Oh Shit! Stop doing that." I place a hand on my forehead. The other is still keeping my towel secure. She just laughs. "Will you help me do my hair and make-up please?" I'm still trying to steady my racing heart.

"Oh, girl! I thought you would never ask! Let's do this!" Way too excited, she looks way too excited about something as simple as hair and make-up.

30 minutes later I have been brushed, curled, styled, mascaraed, and lip glossed. She didn't actually put a ton of makeup on my face, but what she did brought out the blue gray of my eyes and made them stand out and my lips were just average in size, but now they look full and fit my face better. My hair is up in a high ponytail with big beach waves.

I actually feel confident like this.

"Do you like it?" She sounds unsure.

"Yes! I'm sorry. This is great. I've never really worn make-up before. I train too much to put the effort in and have it all sweat off. But, this is just right. Thank you, this really means a lot to me." I hug her tightly, hoping to put all of the emotions I am feeling into the hug. I can't explain why to her now, I will just get sad and cry. But she needs to know, this was not some little thing she did for me today.

"Okay, okay. Get dressed before these boys kill us. And I told you they would all go shopping with us." She giggled as she shooed me out of the bathroom. "Now for your brother to hit one of them."

I put the outfit on and did a little twirl in my full length mirror. The outfit she picked was perfect. The pants hugged me in all the right places, but I didn't feel restricted and even though the top was cropped it still skimmed the waistband of my high waisted jeans and covered the worst of the bruises and scars on my torso. What wasn't covered she applied a layer of tattoo concealer. She really did think of everything. She was trying to push me out of my comfort zone, but knew what I needed to do that. I don't know what I did to deserve a friend like her.

"Oh, my necklace! I must have left it down in the kitchen. I think we are ready, right?" I did one more twirl for her approval.