

## In Love With My Best Friend Chapter 5

Astrea

I thought I would meet my mate on my birthday, but I didn't. Was I disappointed? Not really. But was Ash unhappy? Sort of. My wolf was eager to find our mate but when we didn't, she blocked me for the remainder of the night. I took it as a sign. It meant that I should focus on the mission in front of me. I should use this time to focus on my training and blossom into my best form as beta Ava had said earlier.

What surprised me the most was when Ash stirred in excitement when our eyes landed on Leo. She yelped at first but then went silent. He wasn't our mate but she swore she thought something was there. Something special about him. Nonetheless, she couldn't recognise the bond so I concluded that the reason for her excitement must be because he was our best buddy.

I bid my family goodbye, promising my parents that I would make them proud. I watched them from the back window of the car. I felt my throat tighten as I waved them goodbye. Never in my life had I left my family for more than half a day. Although I was excited about joining the training sessions, I knew I would miss them dearly. I watched them until we no longer could see them.

Sighing, I leaned against the seat. My vision blurred for a while but when Zelda squeezed my palm, I forced a smile. Zelda, her brother Xander, and Leo were traveling with me while the Queen and her husband traveled in a separate car.

Leo placed his arm around my shoulders and pulled me closer.

"We are here," he said. Holding back a sniffle, I nodded and leaned against him. Being close to him made me feel better. Gulping down the lump in my throat, I closed my eyes.

"We'll be fine."

I heard Ash in my mind. I smiled.

"I know. With you beside me, I will be perfectly fine," I linked her back.

During the entire ride, Leo held me in his arms. I didn't move away, as his warmth felt surprisingly soothing.

We arrived at the Palace and since I was close to the Royal family, I was given a room in the palace. I went inside and looked around. The place was spacious and elegant. As soon as I put my luggage on the side, I picked up my phone and called my mom's number. I had to call and inform them that I had arrived safely. They told me that a group of young wolves who were interested in joining the team were preparing to leave. They would arrive at the kingdom the next day. They ended the call making me promise that I would keep them informed about everything I do in the kingdom. I laid my tired body on the mattress. I needed some rest before anything else. I was relaxing on the bed when someone knocked on the door.

It was Leo and Xander.

"Hey," I walked out of the room.

"Hey, aren't you hungry?" Xander asked.

"We were going downstairs and thought you also might want to join," Leo added.

"Yeah. That would be nice," I agreed.

"Would you like to go for a walk? Or maybe a ride? We have the whole day to do what we want. After the training sessions began, we would barely have time for ourselves," Xander said.

"Right. Sir Elliot is one hard coach," Leo mumbled. Chuckling, Xander shrugged.

"Yeah. Dad is hard to please," Xander agreed.

"Wow. And I thought my dad was being hard on me," I laughed. "Let's see. I know the training wouldn't be easy."

After having some light snacks in the kitchen, we went outside for a walk. Since the time for dinner was close by, we didn't have anything heavy.

I walked around the various types of plants in the garden of the palace. Ash seemed to be satisfied with the greenery of the kingdom. I wouldn't deny it. The place was breathtaking. What fascinated me the most was the fish swimming in the pond in the garden. Fishes of different sizes and colours wiggled their fins in the clear water, swimming through the plants as if they

were competing with each other. The sight was mesmerising. I always adored animals and watching the little fish's movements was entertaining.

"You look sad," Leo's deep voice startled me.

"Huh?" I glanced at him and shook my head. "No. I'm not," I paused. "Well, I miss my parents, but I'm okay. I want this," I told him. "I want to make it to the team," I said firmly.

He chuckled. "You always admired it. I remember how you loved watching documentaries about ancient ninjas and their techniques."

Smiling, I bobbed my head. "Yeah," I agreed.

After spending some time in the garden, the three of us went back in. We didn't have much to do until it was time for dinner.

Sitting at the same table as the Royals felt weird. We usually ate together when they visited our pack, however, this was the first time I was eating with them in the Palace, and that too without my parents.

I silently sat at the table, feeling nervous. I guess Leo felt my hesitation and started to add food onto my plate.

"Here, you would love this," he said, putting a piece of meat and some noodles.

Smiling bashfully, I mouthed a 'thanks' to him and started to eat.

"Hope you are feeling comfortable here," Sir Elliot said.

"Yes, Sir."

"Have you called your parents?"

I nodded in response to the Queen's question.

"I did, Your Highness. They told me about a group of wolves preparing to leave the pack to join the tryouts," I told them.

Nodding her head, "that's good. We will wait a couple of days more. The deadline for those who want to join would be up tomorrow night. I want to give every wolf who wants to join, a chance," the Queen said.

“Your Highness, where will they stay?” I humbly asked her.

Munching on her food, “we have prepared a special unit adjacent to the warrior’s quarters for them. The groups who had arrived from various packs are already staying there. Troops from the Silver Moon pack, and the Elusive Crawlers pack had arrived earlier this week. I expect the Dark Howl pack to send theirs by tomorrow night. The packs in the south can send their team when they are ready. I was informed that they needed time. So I will recruit one group now and hopefully another group later this year. I think Leo and Xander will be ready to join by then.”

I glanced at Xander who seemed to be more interested in his food than anything else. Smiling, I looked at Leo who smirked and winked at me.

My lips parted. The way he smirked made my heart race. I tried to ignore my erratic heart, but it was hard. I bit my lower lip. I didn’t want Leo to find out that he could make me feel strange emotions. If he did, he must think that I was being crazy.

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I was speechless. No. I don’t....

I told myself, but I wasn’t able to say it out loud, even in my mind.

I gulped and looked at him in my peripheral vision. He continued to chew his food, unaware of what he had made me feel.

I frowned.

I cannot like him more than a friend. I shouldn’t like him more than that. He was my childhood playmate. And I didn’t want to ruin our friendship because of some bizarre feelings. Besides, my mate is out there and as soon as we meet him, I would forget about everyone else.

After the dinner, Leo walked me back to my room. Xander had to stay back since he had to attend special classes. Being the Crown Prince meant his

schedule was packed. As we reached the second floor which was a bit deserted, I sucked in a breath.

When we were around others our odours were mixed up a little and it didn't bother me much. But since I was alone with him, all I could smell was his wonderful scent – coffee – a scent that I always loved. But the problem was, the aroma was pulling me into a trance.

“Is everything okay? You seem to be silent,” he said as we reached my room.

I managed to pull myself out of the daze I was being pulled in. I looked at him. His deep brown eyes were searching my face. My breathing hitched and once again, I found myself struggling to form words.

Inhaling deeply, I offered the best smile I managed. “I guess I'm a little anxious,” I told him.

He flashed his lopsided grin and chuckled. “You will nail it. I just know it,” he said and softly pinched my cheek.

I felt the hair on the back of my neck rise at the simple gesture.

“Good night,” he murmured and walked away. I stared at his retreating back, stupefied. Even the way he moved was appealing to me.

“I told you. You like him!” Ash mumbled.

I hastily entered the room and closed the door shut.

“Will you stop that?” I groaned through our link. “He isn't our mate and I don't want to be weird,” I told Ash.

“Mate...” she mumbled, making me frown.

“Yeah? Our mate. He must be out there,” I pointed out.

“I guess so. But I am confused, Astrea. I thought...” there was a short pause. I patiently waited for her to speak.

“I thought I felt something but then it vanished,” she said. I pursed my lips.

Sighing, “Ash. It only means that he isn't the one,” I told her.

“But... he is special. Why else are you secretly yearning for him?”

Shaking my head, “Of course he is special. He is my best friend,” I retorted.

I was stubborn. I didn't want to admit that he did make me feel new emotions.

“Whatever, human. But you can't hide your most hidden feelings from me. I am part of you. Remember?” She muttered and blocked herself in my mind.

I was left conflicted. The creases on my forehead deepened as I shifted on my feet. I wiped my sweaty palms on my jeans and shook my head in denial.

“No... I don't like him like that...”

I whispered to myself, wanting to reassure my confused heart.