

Chapter 11

Untold Feelings

Ava didn't bother tensing up when she felt Xavier's arm drop around her shoulders and didn't pull away when he pulled her into his chest. After the night she'd had, the cautious comfort felt...nice, even if it were offered by the very source of her anguish.

And, if that weren't the most fucked up thought she'd ever had, she didn't know what was.

Despite everything he'd done to her and the hoops he was currently making her jump through seemingly just for his cruel amusement, Ava's body still yearned to be close to his. The cloying scent of their mating bond threatened to suffocate her, it was so strong.

Ava shrugged out of his hold and sniffed back her remaining tears. Wiping her face dry, she walked off a couple of feet to give herself some much-

needed space. When she finally turned to face Xavier, she was surprised by the surprise she found etched on his face.

The Alpha looked utterly perplexed and mildly disturbed, frowning at her with something that looked infuriatingly like disdain creeping into his eyes.

Ava hadn't liked how he'd looked at her earlier, like no time had passed between them. She hated* how he looked at her now, like she was a complete stranger. The expression on Xavier's face as he took in her unkempt, crestfallen form was nearly an exact replica of how he'd glared at her three years ago, right before committing her to a virtual death sentence.

"What?" She snapped.

"What do you need money for?" He gestured to the empty street, "You planning on trying this again?"

Ava choked back a contemptuous laugh. She recognized the loaded question for what it was - he was testing her, asking her leading questions, and analyzing her reactions. She'd seen him do it a hundred times when meeting with outside territory members, gauging their reactions and making determinations based on what he found.

The slight creasing around his eyes and nose told Ava that whatever he saw in her, he found lacking. And if that didn't piss her off...

Instead of playing further into his little game, she did the one thing she knew he'd hate. She stayed silent and expressionless, giving away none of the turmoil she still felt roiling inside.

When it was clear that she wouldn't be answering him, Xavier gave a dismissive grunt and grabbed her arm. Ava didn't try to resist as he pulled her a little further down the street.

That is, until they came to a parked black car. It wasn't as obnoxiously flashy as the other sports cars she'd run past on the way out of the club, but it was still sleek, black, and awfully expensive looking. When he led her to the passenger-side and opened the gullwing door, Ava planted her feet and refused to budge.

By now, Ava's stubbornness was born more from a need to make her displeasure known, rather than any lingering hope that Xavier would get tired of her obstinacy and leave her to her own devices.

Xavier sighed and leaned in, to murmur into her ear, "Get in the car before I get the chains, Ava."

Ava scoffed, "At this point, that's not as much of a threat as you think it is, *Xavier*."

Without looking back to catch his reaction, Ava slid into the front seat of the car.

"What was that supposed to mean?" Xavier asked as he slipped into his own seat and pressed the button to bring the doors down.

He looked at her, but she remained doggedly silent, resolved to remain quiet for the rest of the car ride. Better yet, for the rest of the time she was forced to remain in Xavier's presence. If she continued to refuse to dance to his whims, eventually he'd get tired of her and toss her aside.

He'd proven a long time ago that he didn't consider her worth fighting for.

Xavier took off down the street and Ava watched the sleeping city roll by. When Xavier turned a corner revealing the façade of a bakery Ava had enjoyed as a teenager, she was surprised to find that they were still in Rochester, the closest major city to where they'd grown up in Caledonia, New York.

Growing up in a secluded part of an already-small town, Ava had loved to travel whenever she could, usually into the cities frequented by Alliance Region's reigning Packs - Red Moon, Silver Moon, Dark Wood, Eclipse, and Grave Crown. Raleigh was a popular meeting point for the Alliance Packs to meet on fair ground, so Ava had frequented the city growing up. She'd only been away for three years, but it seemed as if so much had

changed already. It made Ava sad to think about how the world had moved on without her.

She was scared she'd never get the chance to catch up.

Ava couldn't say she was surprised when they pulled up to a massive brownstone featuring a flashing sign hailing The Green Light Club, but she was annoyed to see the building again so soon.

Actually, now that Ava thought about it, this was actually her first time seeing the club from the outside; the building was one of the old stonework buildings, nestled among gleaming skyscrapers, that gave Rochester it's signature old-meets- new architecture.

It's beauty belied the atrocities it held within, operating without question within normal society. In its own way, it was just as bad as the dungeon and Ava hated it.

Xavier got out of the car and waited for her climb out behind him. When he was satisfied she wasn't planning on taking off again, he turned to a male waiting near the club's entrance.

Xavier handed the male the key fob to his car and told him to park it in its usual place. The male nodded and made to leave before Xavier caught him by the arm. Xavier leaned in close and whispered something to the male that was too low for Ava to catch.

Immediately, alarm bells started going off in Ava's head.

Mia seemed to agree, as the Wolf seemed to pace anxiously back and forth from within Ava's chest. There wasn't much to like about this Xavier who'd stormed back into Ava's life - he was vindictive and suffered from the most wildly inconsistent mood swings she'd ever witnessed.

Oh, and there was always still the fact that still insisted on believing that she'd betrayed their Pack by colluding with the enemy to murder her best friends.

Through all of that, the fact remained that Xavier was honest to a fault. He'd never been one for lying, so he'd learned to choose his words carefully. Instead of leading someone astray, either intentionally or not, he preferred to stay silent and let them reach their own conclusions.

Even in his new volatile state, Ava recognized that he'd never lied to her, even about his own feelings. Every time he told her that she was a murderer and a traitor, it was because he was convinced of it himself. While that hurt Ava to know that was how he felt about her, even after all of this time, at least she knew where she stood with him on that matter.

What Ava **really** didn't like, she was quickly coming to understand, was an Xavier who kept secrets. They were already in a strange flux, where Ava didn't know what Xavier had planned for her - she was almost certain **he** didn't know what to do with her either.

Ava relied on being able to read his immediate intentions, and the fact that he was hiding his plans meant he was purposely keeping her in the dark.

Xavier led Ava into the building and through the club's lobby as if he were familiar with the place. When he veered off down a non-public corridor, Ava wondered just how often Xavier frequented sex clubs and if he was as comfortable in the rest of them as he seemed to be in this one.

When they came to a nondescript door, Ava started looking around for the security guard who'd need to let them in. Instead, Xavier took a key from his jacket pocket and let them in.

In the three months she'd been here, Ava had never set foot in this hallway, much less seen the kind of rooms it held. At first glance, it looked to be a standard - if richly appointed - meeting room, with a circular marble conference table surrounded by high-backed leather chairs.

As soon as Xavier flipped the light switch, though, Ava realized that this was no ordinary conference room. The far wall held a large...what Ava could only describe as a display window, nestled between a pair of thick velvet curtains. On the other side of the window looked to be a lavish room, complete with a king-size bed, plush couches, and a claw-foot bathing tub.

Honestly, Ava wasn't even surprised at this point. What didn't this place have? It was basically Disneyland for kinksters.

Xavier pulled out a chair and motioned for Ava to sit before taking a seat for himself. "Might as well get comfortable. We might be here a while."

"What are we waiting for?" Ava asked warily.

"Madame Bella."

Ava shot to her feet, "What? Why?!"

Before he answered, the door opened to reveal the striking woman.

"Because," Xavier said. "We have business to discuss."