

Chapter 28

Warn

Jealousy. That's what this all boiled down to. Money, status, power...you didn't have to be making world-altering decisions to covet those things. Everyone from national leaders to catty cocktail waitresses wanted the same things, in their own ways. If you were privileged enough to not have bigger things to worry about, that is.

She almost couldn't blame the girl for her envy. Ava got it; she really did. There had been plenty of times in high school where she'd been on the receiving end of bitter girls who coveted her relationship with Xavier. Just like there had been just as many times when she'd quietly seethed whenever Xavier's eye turned on a female that wasn't her.

This song and dance were as old as time, and maybe it made Ava as self-centered as Madison clearly thought, but Ava felt so wholly removed from such trivial pettiness, it was all she could do to keep from laughing in the irate girl's face. This was kiddy bullshit, to be frank. Madison clearly had

no idea what she was talking about - she thought Ava was gaming the playing field to her advantage, when in reality, they weren't even in the same stadium. Madison's hot girl problems were a matter of pride, where Ava's were a matter of life or death.

It was only because Ava had been Madison, once upon a time, that she didn't lay into the girl. After spending the last few months struggling to stand her own against Alpha males and violent himbos, Ava wasn't going to let some nasty pseudo-teenager intimidate her. As far as she was concerned, this little altercation wasn't worth the rise in her blood pressure.

"I'm not messing around with Dylan, if that's what you're worried about," Ava stated plainly. "If you want, I can put in a good word for you? Well...maybe not good, but I'll leave...whatever this is, out for you."

Ava's response may have been a tad bit glib, but the sympathy she injected into the offer had been sincere. She couldn't be sure, but she thought it might've been that pity that stoked Madison's already deep agitation.

It was eerie seeing such a pretty girl, like Madison, darken with such intense rage. Her blonde ringlets and bright blue eyes belied the growing frenzy within her.

"How. Dare. You? You think you're fucking better than me?" Madison began prowling toward Ava, looking as lethal as any she wolf, "I've been

working my ass off for years to pay my way through university. All you do is spread your legs for easy money, and you have nerve enough to look at me with pity?"

Ava knew better than to poke the bear, but Madison's rant brought up a point that had been bugging Ava for, like, days now, "I'm sorry, you do realize you work in a sex club, correct? Talk about the pot calling the kettle black, Maddy. You don't need a college degree to serve drinks here or literally anywhere else."

When Madison lunged forward and wrapped her hands around Ava's throat, she couldn't honestly say that she hadn't seen it coming at that point.

The girls crashed into the heavy wooden door, slamming it shut. Madison began to squeeze, her grip steadily tightening around Ava's neck.

Ava placed her hands on the girls straining wrists but didn't make any moves to get the girl off of her. Internally, she was at a crossroads. It wasn't a matter of if she'd make Madison back off, but how.

Ava didn't need to be at a hundred percent to put the human on her ass, she didn't even need to be close. At the same time, though, she wasn't trying to hurt her, either. As far as Ava was concerned, she'd been minding her own business, and especially with a reputation like hers, she didn't

need to go inviting trouble by putting the twenty-year-old cocktail attendant in Rochester General.

Whatever Ava was going to do, she needed to do it quickly. Werewolf or no, the lack of oxygen was beginning to make Ava see stars.

Unfortunately, Mia didn't have the same compunctions about harming reckless young humans as she did.

The deep growl that tore from Ava's throat wasn't her own.

"Get your hands off of me," Ava gritted out as a warning, but Mia's continued guttural snarling made it sound like a threat.

"Mia, please!" Ava tried and failed to console her angry beast. Ava feared for the perky blonde girl. Where Ava and Mia were clearly at a physical disadvantage when they were up against many of the males they faced, Madison was slight - only an inch or two taller than Ava - and oh, so human.

Prey.

Mia's naturally predatory nature was rushing to the forefront now that she'd perceived an opponent they could easily beat. If Ava wasn't

successful in talking the Wolf down, Mia would use the human to assuage the years of pent-up frustration that had been building inside of them both.

It was too late. Sharp stinging sensations Ava hadn't felt in years radiated along her limbs. Her gums ached dully as inch-long fangs burst past her lips. She moaned in discomfort as she felt the skin on her face stretch to accommodate her elongated jaw.

Madison stumbled back in a hasty retreat, horror quickly replacing the fury on her face.

Now, of all times, Ava was shifting.

Ava hadn't been able to voluntarily shift since her arrest, since the silver-infused wrist cuffs required of all prisoners prevented Wolves from fully rising to the surface, therefore disabling them to change. And even after Mia's return, the Wolf had refused to surface enough for Ava to even consider shifting.

Ava felt her jaws unhinge, letting out a ferocious howl right in Madison's face. The girl screamed, loud and piercing, before falling the floor and scrabbling back until she bumped against Ava's bed.

The human had likely never seen a Wolf in full form before. This uncanny in-between state Ava was fighting to maintain must be quite the terrifying sight for her. If she lived through tonight, Ava figured this would be quite

the lesson for her. Ava's skin began to itch in earnest. When she looked down, russet colored fur had begun to sprout from her pores. Mia was out of control and Ava was losing the fight against her. Crack!

Ava whimpered as knees shifted their orientation. She fell to her hands and knees, as her body slowly, agonizingly become more wolflike. Goddess, this hurt. The transition was usually quick and painless, the clunky human body effortlessly giving way to the elegant lupine one.

Her change hadn't been this painful since the first time she'd shifted. Luckily, Mia wasn't immune to the agony they were feeling. It was only the anguish of the transformation that tempered the Wolf enough for Ava to wrestle back control. 'Mia, you need to stand down!' Ava channeled every ounce of authority she had over the beast, willing her to cede stewardship of their body back to Ava.

'I'm angry, too', she pled. 'But this is only going to land us in more trouble. Do you want to be sent back to that place?'

Ava's stomach lurched as the transformation halted. She'd gotten the Wolf's attention. The years had been as hard on Mia as they had on Ava. The Wolf was intelligent enough to know that attacking Madison would mean Big Trouble, no matter how good it would feel.

‘She's soft and defenseless’, Ava tried to reason with the Wolf who yelped in tempted agreement. ‘No! That's not what I meant, and you know it. Madison is not a threat. Not unless you hurt her.’

And, in their experience, Big Trouble meant the prison. Mia didn't want to go back there. Mia didn't want Ava to have to go back there. Not because of her, not ever.

Ava reassured Mia that she wouldn't let any further harm come to them, and gingerly, the Wolf retreated back into the depths of Ava psyche.

Ava shuddered in revulsion at the feel of the partial transformation reversing itself. She didn't recall the experience being quite so...visceral, the last time she'd undergone it, but as with seemingly everything in her life, much had changed and there was a lot to get used to.

When the jerking of her bones sliding back into place ended, Ava was left on all fours, panting and exhausted. She patted her face to make sure everything was back in its rightful place, closing her eyes in relief that that particular experience was over.

She shivered as a drafty gust of air rustled the remains of her shredded athletic wear. Groaning at the soreness in her freshly worked muscles, Ava got to her feet and grabbed a robe.

When she turned back around, Madison was still on the floor, gaping up at her. Slowly, the girl began to rise, her eyes still glued onto Ava's face.

Her hand flew up to her scar and found her bangs had gone askew, leaving it exposed. It wasn't large or discolored, but upon close inspection, it would be clear that the scar ran deep. Ava calmly readjusted her hair, patting it back into place. "You're...a monster." Madison's voice quaked.

Ava licked her lips and spoke slowly, "One last time, Madison. This is a Werewolf owned and run sex club. Sweetie, I do not think this job is for you."

Madison bared her own teeth in a pale approximation of Ava only a few moments before. Ava cocked her head to the side, knowing that the remnants of Mia's glowing lupine eyes would still reflect in the dimly lit room. "Now, I mean this with all sincerity. I will slit your fucking throat if you ever pull something like that again. And know that I am never in the mood to play along with your petty little games, Madison."

Madison rushed toward the door, but Ava was faster. Just as Madison got the door open a crack, Ava slammed it shut again. She leaned into the frightened girl's space, channeling every intimidation tactic she'd learned from Xavier over the years, "And I expect this to stay between us. Got it?"

Madison gulped, but nodded. Ava stepped back, letting her escape into the hallway.

Left alone in the room, Ava sighed and turned to start looking for her ice pack. Goddess, she hoped it was still cool, because she was gonna need it.

The blonde girl ran out of the bedroom like a bat straight from hell. She failed to notice a mysterious man standing in the darkness.

He'd heard the entire altercation from where he'd stood outside of the suite.

He waited a few more moments to see if Ava would follow suit, but she never did.

His lips curled, "Well, that was interesting."