

Chapter 5

Mate

When Ava snarled at the advancing male, she couldn't tell which one of them was more surprised. This walking monster was probably shocked that female dared bare fangs at him. Ava was just shocked she had fangs. On further inspection, her fangs hadn't protruded, but her gums ached in a way they hadn't in a while. She was suddenly filled with a primal urge to protect herself in a way that she hadn't since the night Layla died. Her chest fluttered again, and Ava would've been knocked off her feet if she weren't already cowering on the floor. The fluttering, the hypersensitive awareness and anxiety she'd been feeling...this wasn't sudden, she'd been feeling Mia reawaken all night. But, why now?

Thick boots stopped in front of Ava and then she was face-to-face with the huge, irate male she'd just publicly challenged.

"You feelin' feisty, bitch?" He snarled back in her face. Mia might be present, but Ava didn't seem to have any more access to her than she had

in the dungeon. Continuing to oppose this psycho would only get her killed. "Speak," He commanded.

"N-no."

"No, what?"

"No, sir," Ava muttered, eyes downcast.

Seeming appeased with her swift acquiescence, the male bared his teeth in a sadistic grin and stood stalking back over to the whimpering waitress.

"See," he taunted. "Your friend gets it. Denying me and my friends wasn't very hospitable of you, now, was it?" He grabbed a glass from off of a nearby table and filled it with dark red wine. Crouching in front of the female, he pressed the glass to her trembling lips. "Let's get back to having fun, yeah? Drink up."

"Alright, let up, Lance!"

"Mate, you're scarin' the lasses!"

Ava wasn't sure what had changed for these idiots, but apparently the show wasn't funny anymore. Voices around the room began to speak up in defense of the sobbing girl on the ground.

"I'm not doing anything, 'cept offerin' the girl a drink!" He yelled to the increasingly unamused crowd. "What? We're all drinkin', you're our host it's rude if you don't have a cuppa, too." He darts forward, crowding her again with his fat ugly mug, "You wouldn't Miss Bella to hear you're bein' rude, do you? You're already bein' a bad server!"

"N-no, pl-please...", she began sobbing again in earnest.

Energy thrummed in Ava's chest telling her that this was her opportunity to get out of this shitshow. Most of the partygoers looked to be on the girl's side, so it was time for Ava to leave while the jackass and his enabling friends were preoccupied.

Preoccupied terrorizing a girl while you run away, Ava pushed down the nagging voice in her mind telling her how much of a coward she was. She already knew, but she'd only just begun to realize just how much she'd already lost, and she wasn't interested in risking any more of herself for a fight that wasn't even hers to begin with.

Careful not to attract any more unwanted attention, Ava moved on quick and silent feet toward the door. Every step of the way, Mia roiled within her.

The formerly absent beast was making her presence fully known, practically writhing, and clawing at the invisible bonds that kept her caged beneath Ava's skin. She was certain that if the Wolf could, she'd burst forth, forcing a rare change, but to do what exactly, Ava couldn't determine.

At the moment, pure instinctive drive was pushing her forward, but the many signals coming from Mia were muddled and conflicting; fight, protect, run, run, RUN!

As if there were a demon on her tail, Ava obeyed the silent command and darted for the door handle. The feeling of heat blossoming on the back of her neck told her that she'd been spotted, but it didn't matter - in a matter of second's she'd be in the clear. She'd let security know that the party in 803 had gotten out of hand, but as far as Ava was concerned, her job here was done-

"Stop."

The male didn't raise his voice to issue the command, but his deep, husky voice rang loud and clear all the same. Cut crystal cut into Ava's white knuckled hold on the ornamental doorknob, but she froze as instructed. But of course, she did. That's what you do when your Alpha gives you an order.

"Turn around."

Mia seemed to deflate inside of Ava's chest in effort to make herself as small as possible. It was exactly what Ava wanted to do, what she would have done in Mia's place, but they both knew it was already too late. The quarry had been spotted and the predator was in position to pounce.

Despite the general raucousness of the atmosphere, one-by-one the rest of the partygoers were beginning to pick up on the dangerous energy the room had taken on. Unexpectedly, the real world had crept into the middle of their bacchanalia, putting a damper on their depraved fun. Grimacing, Ava gripped the doorknob harder, preparing to flee - out of the room, out of the club, she didn't care. She needed to be away from him and every ugly feeling he resurrected within her.

"I won't repeat myself." His already harsh tone took on a razor-sharp edge.

Swallowing down her trepidation, Ava did as she was told. She kept her eyes trained squarely on the floor in front of her as she turned, fist still clung to the door like a lifeline.

"Look at me, Ava." He spoke directly to her, the licentiousness taking place throughout the rest of the event falling away, until it was just the two of them in this heavily charged moment.

Ava lifted her chin, unsure of what her next play should be. She didn't want to go through with this interaction, but if she was forced to, she couldn't ignore that beaten down part of her that wanted to rebel against fate and take back some of the control this male had stolen from her.

What else can he do to me? I didn't do anything wrong three years ago and I haven't done anything wrong now.

Mia whimpered and Ava thought back to her death grip on the door and the waitress being accosted across the room. Look at what he's made you, Ava, she gritted her teeth. This isn't you.

In that instant, Ava decided that no matter what happened next, she was finished cowering. She'd lost her hold over everything, every ideal she'd ever had under the shambles her life had become. The only thing that she had any say in taking back was her self-respect. She could be scared and uncertain, she'd always be broken, but she'd be damned if she let this sonofabitch see her shed another goddamn tear over him.

Setting her jaw, Ava met Xavier's eyes full on, meeting his order but sending a clear signal that she wasn't cowed. For the first time in three years, they took each other in. The boy she'd spent countless hours with growing up was gone. The male in his place was bigger, harder. His shoulders had been broad enough before, but they'd filled out, defined by layers of lean muscle. From his deceptively casual splayed position, Ava could see that he'd finally grown into his long limbs, growing from a lanky youth to a well-honed machine, the male mirroring the wolf within.

His hazel eyes glittered with repressed emotion. Ever the stalwart leader, Xavier had always known how to put on a show when it suited him and reign it in when the situation demanded it. He'd had an iron clad ability to control his emotions since he was a child, but his eyes rarely lied. Not to her, not to someone who knew him so well, despite the time apart. She saw the hostility in his expression, knew that his opinion of her hadn't changed, but there was more there tinging those honey eyes with colors she couldn't name. She was sure he saw the same reflected in her own.

"So, this is what you like, eh?" A flippant comment from a faceless blur in the crown. Xavier didn't acknowledge it and neither did she. Instead, Xavier uncurled from his seated position rising to his full height, a few inches taller than she remembered.

"Didn't forget me, did you, Ava?" His gruff voice was light, playful in a way that was achingly, unnervingly familiar. A lock of pitch-black hair fell carelessly into his face, and he left it there, all part of the façade he was putting on a leashed beast on his best behavior.

"Alpha." She dipped her head in a shallow show of acknowledgement, unwilling to play his game. She knew he picked up on her every subtle defiance, but he didn't show it on his face. If anything, whatever feeling she'd clocked in his eyes before was completely gone now.

As you reach the final pages, remember that 000005s.org is your destination for the complete story. Share the joy of reading with others

and spread the word. The next chapter is just a visit away! "How did you escape, Ava?" The edge in his voice crept back in. He wasn't happy about this clandestine reunion. Good. Neither was she.

He slowly came forward, hands in his pockets, posture loose, eyes hard and purposefully blank. As he neared, Mia's hackles rose, but not in any of the warnings she'd been plagued with all day. Wood ash and violets. The fragrance suddenly saturated the air between them, their individual natural musk comingling to create a new scent. A mating scent.

Xavier stopped short of her. His nostrils flared and, just like back on that night, he'd caught her scent. But this time it wasn't just her scent, it was theirs. The careful reigns on his demeanor slipped as Xavier bared his teeth and snarled. His hands tore from his pockets and balled into claws at his side, the veins protruding from his throat evidence of his battle to keep his Wolf seated, away from its mate. Me, Ava thought blankly, body trembling at the realization. I'm Xavier's mate.

"Get away from the fucking door, Ava." Xavier growled; heated eyes locked on where her hand was still poised for escape.

The reality-bending revelation that she and the male before her were mated, came with abrupt clarity for Ava. At the forefront was the fact that she was now in a far more precarious position than she had been only moments before. Newly mated males were not to be contended with.

Right now, Xavier's body was being flooded with hormones that he had no control over, his primal being and human body fighting through a supernatural alteration to his very DNA. A male was dangerous in this state and Alpha was even more so. It was exceedingly rare, but mates didn't always make it out of the initial bonding stages unscathed.

Ava was sure that the fact that Xavier already hated her wouldn't help.

Never taking her eyes off of the panting male, Ava slowly removed her hand from the door. As soon as her arm reached her side, Xavier's aggressive posture lessened, but not by much.

The air between them seemed to simmer, the room around them seeming to get hotter and hotter as they considered each other. Ava saw sweat begin to bead on Xavier's flushed forehead and she realized that the room was actually heating up. Hers and Xavier's body temperatures had begun to rise in reaction to their close proximity.

In a more distressing discovery, Ava's body was beginning to heat up in other ways. She felt her pulse quicken and a thrumming ache was building low in her belly. She shook herself internally, reminding herself that she was only reacting to Xavier on a biological level and none of what was happening would amount to anything at the end of the day.

Abruptly, the atmosphere shifted. Like a switch had been flipped, Xavier went from glaring daggers at Ava to scoping her out, his amber eyes

slowly trailing up and down her body. Ava shifted on her feet, feeling cornered for what could be the hundredth time that night.

When he began stalking toward her, she couldn't help but retreat, pressing her back up against the door.