

Fated out Chapter 34

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Lyla

My smile didn't waver, but my eyes turned cold.

"I'm afraid that's not on the menu. Coffee and pastries, however, are. Would you like to order? Can I get you guys started with water first before you decide on what you want to have or should I ask you to leave?"

The guy's friends snickered but he looked taken aback by my firm response. After a moment of tension, he straightened up. "Fine. Five large black coffees. To go."

I moved over to the counter and in a few minutes, I had their order ready, I package it in the to-go box

and went over to them with c

"Hey!" I said casually – they stopped talking as soon as I approached them but I paid no attention to them. I dropped the coffee on the table. "Here you go gentlemen," I flashed them a smile but my eyes held a warning. "Before you pay, are you sure you don't want me to get anything else for you guys? Our Lemon cake is quite popular."

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"No, lady!" their leader huffed and brought out his card. After swiping up and confirming their payments, I thanked them again and went back to the counter marvelling at my composure. In the pack, I would have shrunk away from such confrontation. But here, in this small coffee shop, I found a strength I didn't know I possessed. It was as if a lot of things had changed since I got back.

To say the truth, it hasn't been all sun and roses. I remember when I and Nanny – Miriam had first arrived in the human world exactly 3 years and six months ago today. We had little more than the clothes on our backs and some money my parents had given me. It had been a hard transition, especially for me who was used to living in ple

Having whatever I

wanted to eat, all the clothes that I liked... and also for Miriam who was used to the structure of the pack life.

But we had managed, surviving on Grace's little savings and the little money I had left.

For six months, we wandered from one shop that was looking to employ. We didn't have referees or CVs as the human called it. They couldn't trust us enough to let us work for them. Despite, our willingness to work

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without being paid until they realized we weren't fraud, they had all refused.

Finding this job had been a stroke of luck for us. One of the days, famished and munching on hamburgers we got at a place where they gave free food, we stumbled upon the 'Help Wanted' sign in the Coffee

Nook's window.

The owner, a gruff but kind-hearted man named John had taken one look at us and hired us on the spot.

"I trust my instincts." He had said peering at us "And they're telling me you two are exactly what this place

needs."

He hadn't asked for references or even our experience, he just smiled and told Miriam after she finished recounting how her husband left us to fend on our own. "You look like someone who needs a break." *www.n0v4lW0(r)m.cOm*

It was the first time since we'd left the pack that I felt seen for something more than my past. We settled into the little apartment above the coffee shop, and for the first time, I started to believe we could make a life

here.

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Thankfully, I and Nanny were quick learners and soon found out that we enjoyed the work. It was simple, predictable – everything our lives at Blue Ridge wasn't. A year later, we've saved up enough money and moved out of the apartment above the coffee shop and Mr John made Nanny the manager. These days, he was always on one cruise or the other and only called every month to get the analysis of sales.

The memory brought a small smile to my face as I prepared another order. Just as I handed it to the customer, my phone buzzed in my pocket. I frowned, slipping the phone out and glancing at the screen. It was a private ID and had no number.

"Sarah, can you cover for me for ninute?"

I hesitated for a moment frowning as I stared at my phone before stepping into the back room to answer.

"Hello?" I said, but all I heard was static.

"Hello?" I repeated, a knot forming in my stomach.

There was no response, only the faint crackle of interference. I was about to hang up when I thought I heard something – a voice, perhaps? – buried beneath the white noise. But before I could make it out, the call

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disconnected.

Puzzled, I stared at my phone. Almost immediately, it

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rang again this time, it was an unknown number.

My heart quickened. This time, I answered with a sense of urgency. "Who is this?"

Again, only static.

I was feeling frustrated at this point as I hung up once more. The pattern repeated several times over the next hour. Each time I thought I could almost make out something in the static – a word, a name, warning? – but it slipped away before I could grasp it.

Frustrated and unnerved, I fir

breathing heavily as I leaned *ww.n@v4lw(o)rm.c0m*

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turned off my phone,

inst the wall. What

was going on? The constant calls were grating on my nerves, adding to the stress of the day.

Feeling a sudden need for air, I called out to Nanny, avoiding her knowing gaze. "I'm going to step out for a minute."

I slipped out of the back door of the shop, then went towards the suggestion box that no one ever uses and retrieved a pack of cigarettes and a lighter. I leaned against the brick wall of the alley beside the coffee

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shop, contemplating if I should break what I'd worked so hard to leave. I've been sober for three months.

But I needed it at this moment, my nerves were all over the place. I lit it with trembling hands, inhaling deeply as I took the first smoke. It was a habit I had picked up at seventeen, finding it an easy way to deal with all the bullying in school. I had promised Nanny that I would quit but right now, I needed something to calm my nerves. The day had been too strange – first school, then these phone calls. And that man... Mr Dupree... there was something about him that set me on edge.

'I took several drags, watching he smoke curl into the evening air. The memory of M upree's eyes on me earlier sent a fresh wave of fear down my spine. Who was he? Was he really Xander's dad? And why did he make me feel so uneasy? Why does it seem like I've met him before? I had never reacted to anyone like that before. It wasn't just fear... *Www.0v4lLW0rm.0@m*

Lost in thoughts, I didn't notice the group of men approaching until they were too close. They moved with a certain sleekness, their eyes glinting in the dim light. Something about them was off, putting me on

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alert instantly. As they drew closer, my eyes widened

in shock. Their pupils were slitted like cats and I recognized their faces from earlier. They were a rude group of five men.

And they were – shifters.

I had heard of humans dabbling in dark magic to gain the ability to change form but I'd never encountered any before. They weren't like our kind – they were dangerous. Diabolical. My heart began to race, but I forced myself to remain calm. My grip on the cigarette tightened as I took another drag, ignoring them, keeping my eyes focused on the ground.

But they didn't walk past me. Ilead, one of them – a burly man with a scar, runnin own his cheek – stepped closer. "Hey there, sweetheart. We meet again. How about you give us that number now?"

I clenched my jaw, taking another drag of my cigarette as I gave the man a sideways glance. "You're not my type," I muttered, trying to keep my voice steady.

"That's a shame," he drawled "Because you're exactly our type. How about you go with us home and we will show you that appearances can be deceiving... you

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know, teach you a little lesson on how you should treat your customers right..."

"My memory is bursting with enough lessons but thank you for your help. I'll pass."

The man chuckled – both him and his companions as they closed in on me. "Who said you had a choice?"

My mind raced, this felt all too familiar. "Look!" I said, dropping my cigarette and grinding it out with my heel. "I'm sorry if I had spoken to you guys in a way that wasn't pleasant enough. It won't happen again and I'm sincerely sorry."

'The shifters laughed. "That sounded fake, Lyla, too fake

that it's annoying me. Perhaps

e should teach you a

lesson about fake apologies...ead."

I tensed, ready to defend myself. I migh