

Chapter 5

Ollie's POV

The day of the Mating Gala, my birthday, quickly approaches.

I awake that morning with a mix of trepidation and anticipation making knots twist in my stomach. My wolf should manifest today, though I have no idea when. It could happen at any time.

All day I wait, but my wolf does not reveal itself.

Eventually, it's time to head toward the gala. Sylvia, Diana, and the quadruplets all leave without me, forcing me to ride with Ella and her family. They are kind about it, making room in their trunk for my dress and makeup, alongside all of their own things.

This is Ella's first Mating Gala as well, so her parents' are extra delighted for her and insist on bringing far more than she should possibly need.

"I don't need three different pairs of shoes, Mom," Ella says. "And four dresses?"

"You never know. Trust me, you want to be prepared for everything," her mom replies.

With the car loaded, we start the trek to the banquet hall venue in the capital.

Once we arrive, Ella and I check-in at a desk for attendees. Ella is given her own changing room. I'm told to find room in the communal area.

"Come with me to mine," Ella tells me. "We can share."

I don't need more reasons to appreciate Ella, but she keeps giving them to me regardless.

I use Ella's room to change into my dress. It's a deep purple satin that hugs my curves tighter than anything I've ever worn before. Ella helps me pull my hair up, exposing my long neck. Then she helps me with my makeup, too, accentuating my eyes and lips in ways I never would have considered doing on my own.

Looking in the mirror, I feel beautiful. I may not be covered in diamonds but I still feel like a princess.

Ella's dress is similar to mine but green and with a different collar. While the top of my gown scoops low, showing the upper swell of my breasts, Ella's comes up all the way to her neck. After Ella finishes her own hair and makeup, we stand side by side looking in the mirror.

"We look great!" Ella says, grinning.

I agree, though I do feel somewhat self-conscious standing beside Ella. She's taller and leaner than me, with long blonde hair and bright blue eyes. With my curves, I know I'm a bit heavier than her, and though I like my brown hair and eyes, I don't stand out as much as her.

"Let's make a deal," Ella says, turning to me. "We stay here for an hour, but if we don't find our mates by then, or if we get bored sooner, we just go home and watch a movie instead."

I exhale in relief, only realizing now how nervous I feel. "I'd like that," I say.

"Good. Then it's a deal."

Leaving the safety of the changing rooms, we enter the massive banquet hall together. The ballroom is enormous, with one end littered with tables, the other end open for dancing, and all the space in between, an area for mingling.

"I want to avoid Sylvia and the quadruplets," I say.

"Got it," Ella says and sets out to assist me. I follow her toward the food table. Unfortunately, a crowd passes by at just that moment and I lose Ella in the shuffle.

Some of the crowd gapes at me as they pass by.

"Is that Ollie?"

"Gods, how can she look so beautiful?"

"She looks even better than Sylvia!"

Their words leave me with a slight blush. It vanishes a minute later though, when Christie bumps into me and somehow manages to upend an entire glass of red wine all over my bodice.

"Oops," Christie says, but she's grinning. "I've heard red wine is really difficult to get out. My bad."

I turn to get away from her, only to walk into Vikki, who dumps another glass on my dress. She's even less subtle than Christie, making it clear she meant only to ruin my outfit.

"You should know better than to try to outdo Sylvia," Vikki says.

"Get away from me," I tell them both and scurry away. I can feel everyone's eyes on me now. Any compliments I previously received were now mockery instead.

Remembering that Ella's mom packed her an extra gown, I immediately make my way to the changing rooms. Somewhere along the way, however, perhaps because of my rising anxiety, I get turned around.

I enter a room I'm sure is Ella's, only to realize it's not after I've closed the door behind me.

Yet, just as I'm about to go for the door again, I hear a wolf howl in my mind. My body convulses, and I bend over, clutching my chest as my heartrate picks up. My pupils dilate, and I'm suddenly able to see so much more than I ever have before. It's like all of my senses expand.

I lift my head, see myself in the mirror. My eyes are red.

This is it. My wolf is manifesting.

I know what comes next. I will shift and I will run, overwhelmed by the call of the wild.

As my wolf takes shape inside of me, her feelings start to align with my own. I feel her compulsion to run. These first few minutes are crucial to help ease the development of our new partnership.

"Not yet," my wolf says in my mind, though if she's talking to me or her own instincts, I can't tell. "There's something more important."

"More important than building our bond?" I ask, incredulous. What could possibly be more important than -?

"Your mates are approaching," my wolf says.

My mates?

My heart hammers wildly against my chest as my excitement starts to soar. "Where are they?" I ask. "Are they close?"

"They are here," my wolf says.

Listening, I hear voices just outside of the door.

"Christie is acting very clumsy tonight," Conrad says. "I brought her a glass of wine, turned my back for a minute, and she spilled it somewhere."

"Vikki did the same," Declan replies.

"Are you sure they didn't just down the drinks?" Hugh asks. "This party is so boring, I wouldn't blame them."

"The party is fine," Wes replies. "Not everything has to be like the club, Hugh."

"That makes it boring, Wes."

I freeze. Looking around the room, I see some familiar items. Hugh's leather jacket. Conrad's lucky comb. One of Wes's sweaters.

Oh, no. Is this their exclusive room?

But wait... no...

"Your mates," my wolf says.

My stomach drops so quickly I think I might be sick.

The quadruplets are my mates?!

"Hold on," Declan says, silencing the others. "Do you smell that?"

"I do," Conrad says. "Our mate?"

"She's here?" Hugh adds excitedly.

"How is this possible?" Wes asks.

"Who cares? Open the damn door," Hugh says.

One of them grips the knob of the door. I watch it turn.