Fated to My Vampire Lord

Chapter 4

Mira's POV Alyssa looked at the empty chair across from me. The one with no coat on it, no second mug, no sign that anyone had been sitting there or was going to. "He's not here yet," I said. "Oh." She drew the word out. "He's running late?" “Yeah, the traffic,” I said too quickly. I tucked a strand of hair behind my ear and gave her what I hoped was a casual shrug.“Mm... Valentine’s Day. You know how it is.” Jason pulled out a chair at the reserved table next to mine and sat. Alyssa took the one beside him, but she angled it toward me so she could watch. They'd gotten a table. Of course they had. Alyssa booked things three weeks in advance. She has changed into a red dress I'd never seen before, her hair curled and pinned on one side. Date night Alyssa. Every detail planned. Then I looked down at my gray hoodie. Definitely not a date-night outfit. I picked up my hot chocolate. It had gone lukewarm. I drank it anyway, because it gave my hands something to do. The minutes crawled. Jason and Alyssa ordered. Their food came — steak for him, pasta for her, a shared dessert with a little chocolate heart on top. My boyfriend did not come. Every few minutes Alyssa glanced at the door, then at me, then at the empty chair. She didn't say anything for a while. She didn't have to. Her eyebrows did the talking. I ate my grilled cheese in small, slow bites and looked at my phone. I even typed messages to no one then deleted them. "He must be really stuck," Alyssa said finally. Her voice was light. Casual. Like she was making conversation and not sharpening a knife. "Yeah." "It's been almost twenty minutes, Mira." "I know how long it's been, Alyssa." She set down her fork. The fake concern dropped from her face like a mask coming off. "You know, it's funny. Nobody's ever seen this boyfriend. He never comes to anything. And now he's late to a date he supposedly picked." She tilted her head. "It's almost like he doesn't exist." My stomach went cold. "If you can't even produce a fated mate," she said, lower now, leaning forward across the gap between our tables, "people are going to start wondering what you actually are. And we both know what happens to wolves who turn out not to be wolves." There it was. The thing under everything. The thing she'd been circling for two months. If I couldn't prove I was a shifter, I was human. And humans didn't belong in a pack. Humans didn't belong anywhere. Humans were extinct, or close enough — the weakest species, the first to fall when the vampires started conquering. Being human meant being nothing. Less than nothing. "Lyss." Jason's voice was quiet. "Come on. Ease up." Alyssa turned on him. "Why are you defending her? Still got feelings you forgot to mention?" "That's not — " "Because if you do, that's even more reason for her to go." She said it flat, like she was reading a grocery list. "She's not your mate. I am." Jason's jaw tightened. He looked at the table. He didn't say anything else. I stood up. I didn't decide to. My legs just did it. Heat was crawling up my neck and I knew if I sat there one more second I'd either cry or scream, and I couldn't do either in front of her. Not here. Not with half the café pretending not to listen. "He texted," I said. My voice was steady. I don't know how. "He's

outside. I'll go meet him." I grabbed my bag and walked toward the door before anyone could answer. The door was at the front of the café, maybe twenty feet from Alyssa's table. Far enough that she couldn't hear me but close enough that she could still see the entrance. I stopped beside the glass door and stared out at the dark street. My reflection stared back. Gray hoodie, messy hair, no lipstick, no effort. The worst-dressed person in a café full of Valentine's couples. I looked like a girl who'd been stood up, which was worse than a girl who'd never had a date at all. Okay. Think. It was Valentine's Day. People were coming in two by two, all couples, all wrapped up in each other. But it was a public café on a busy night. Someone would come in alone eventually. A guy picking up an order. A guy meeting a friend. Anyone. I would catch the next single man who walked in. I'd put my arms around him like I'd been waiting, lean in close, and whisper — please, just help me, thirty seconds, I'll explain later. Most people would be too startled to say no. I just needed Alyssa to see a man. Any man. It was a terrible plan. It was the only plan I had. I wiped my palms on my jeans. My heart was hammering so hard I could feel it in my throat. The bell over the door jingled. A man stepped in alone. Tall. Dark coat. I couldn't see his face. There were no streetlight outside and the café was dim and my heart was hammering too hard to focus on anything except tall and alone and now. I didn't think. I moved. I crossed the last two steps, reached up, and wrapped my arms around his neck. I turned my face up to whisper my plan into his ear, except I misjudged the distance in the dark, and my mouth landed on his. I kissed him. Behind me, somewhere across the café, I heard Alyssa suck in a sharp breath. I opened my eyes. Damon Voss was staring down at me, our faces an inch apart. My blood turned to ice.

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