Fated to My Vampire Lord

Chapter 5

Mira‘s POV I froze. Every word I'd prepared vanished. I'd planned the whole speech for a stranger. I had nothing ready for this. For him. My arms were still around his neck and I couldn't make them let go. Damon didn't move either. He just looked down at me, frowning, like I was a math problem that had appeared in his hands without warning. He smelled like cold air and something expensive. Footsteps. Alyssa was already crossing the café. "Mira?" She stopped a few feet away. Her eyes went from me to Damon and back, wide and disbelieving. Jason was right behind her, his face caught somewhere between confusion and alarm. "Your boyfriend is... Damon??" "Yes," I said. It came out before I could think. Fast and certain, like I'd been saying it for months. The café went louder around us. I heard it ripple out — whispers from the couples at the nearby tables, a fork set down, someone's low *no way*. Damon Voss. The Lord's son. Standing in a coffee shop with a wolf girl's arms around his neck. Please, I thought. Please don't say anything. Please. He didn't. Damon raised one eyebrow at me. Just one. He didn't pull away. He didn't correct me. I let my arms slide down from his neck, my face burning so hot I could have heated the whole café. I had no idea what came next. I had built this lie on sand and now I was standing on it in front of forty people and it was sinking under my feet. Then a server appeared at my elbow. "Excuse me — sorry to interrupt." She was holding a notepad, looking apologetic. "Were you still planning to keep that table by the window? We've got a couple waiting and it was the only one we didn't take a reservation for." The window table. My table. The one I'd grabbed because I had nothing booked and no one to book it for. Alyssa's eyes sharpened. "You didn't have a reservation?" She looked at Damon. "On Valentine's Day? You two didn't book anything?" I opened my mouth. Nothing came. "Damon Voss," she said slowly, crossing her arms, "took you to a coffee shop with no reservation. On Valentine's Day." The disbelief in her voice was hardening into something else. Certainty. She thought she'd found the seam. The lie was cracking down the middle and I could see her watching it crack. "Mr. Voss?" Another server — a different one, older, in a black apron — came up holding a paper bag. "Your takeout's ready. Did you want it now, or should I hold it?" "Now," I said. Too quickly. "Yes. He ordered takeout. We're not eating here. We're — we have plans somewhere else." I reached out and took the bag from the server's hand before Damon could respond. It was lighter than I expected. Plain brown paper, no ribbon, no card, nothing like the dressed-up Valentine's orders going out to every other table in pink tissue and curled ribbon. I glanced inside without meaning to. Blood — not the emergency-room kind, but the gourmet kind vampires paid ridiculous money for. Private-clinic blends, labeled by source, freshness, and serving temperature, delivered from the city like humans ordered wine or artisan coffee. Some drank it chilled. Some had it warmed. Some probably claimed they could taste notes of cherry, smoke, or whatever nonsense rich vampires said to sound

refined. Something stirred at the base of my throat. A pull, like hunger but sharper — and wrong. I closed the bag fast and stepped back. Alyssa was leaning in to look. I pressed the bag to my chest and forced a smile. "We should go. Lyss, Jason — have a perfect night. Really. The pasta looked amazing." I grabbed Damon's sleeve and pulled. To my shock, he came. He let me drag him toward the door, past the staring couples, past the server holding the notepad, out into the cold street with the bell jingling behind us. I didn't stop. I kept walking, fast, the takeout bag clutched against my chest with one hand and Damon's wrist in the other, putting block after block between us and that café. The cold hit my face and I breathed it in like I'd been drowning. My heart was still hammering. Every lie I'd told in the last ten minutes was replaying on a loop in my head and I wanted to be a hundred miles from Alyssa's face. "How far are you planning to walk?" Damon said behind me. His voice was calm. Bored, even. "My car's back there." I stopped. I looked around. We were three blocks down, past the café, past the next two storefronts, almost to the corner where the streetlights got dim and the Valentine's decorations ended. I'd dragged him half the street without realizing it. "Oh," I said. "I — sorry. I'm sorry." "Unless," Damon said, "you'd like every couple on this street to see us holding hands." I looked down. My fingers were laced through his. Tight. I didn't remember letting go of his wrist and grabbing his hand instead. Somewhere between the café door and here, my grip had shifted, and I'd been holding his hand like it was the only solid thing in the world. I dropped it like I'd touched a stove. "Sorry — I didn't — that wasn't — " But up and down the block, couples were already slowing. Looking. Two girls at the crosswalk had stopped mid-conversation and were staring with their mouths open. An older man walking his dog turned his head. At Damon Voss. And the wolf girl who'd been holding his hand like she meant it.