Fated to My Vampire Lord

Chapter 7

Mira's POV ****Dream**** I'm small. The walls are dirt and they go up too high and there's no roof, just a square of gray sky way up at the top. My knees are scraped. Something is crusted on my arm and I don't want to look at it. There's a boy in the pit with me. He's pale, even paler than me, and he's crying without making any sound, the way you cry when you've learned that crying out loud makes things worse. "Don't worry," I tell him. "Someone's going to come." "No one's coming for you," he says. "They said so. They said your phone call didn't go through." I knew that. I'd heard the men say it. We were kidnapped by two lion shifters. Two of them, big, with the smell of cats under their skin. They'd grabbed two children thinking they'd caught two little vampires, two ransoms, two piles of money. They'd been wrong about one of us. He looks at me. His eyes are dark, almost black. "What if I tell them you helped me a lot," he says, eyes lit up all of a sudden. "I promise they will bring you out with me. Together." Then there's noise above us. Shouting. A light. Hands reaching down — but only for him. They lift him out. He's looking down at me the whole time, getting smaller, his face getting farther away, and I'm reaching up and no one is reaching back — "Wait," he says. His voice breaks. "She's still down there. She helped me. You have to get her too—" He starts fighting then with his mall fists and thin legs. A desperate, ugly kind of panic. For one second, I think maybe he can make them hear him. Then someone grabs his arm. A needle flashes in the light. They shove it into his neck. "No," he whispers. His eyes find mine one last time, wide and terrified, like he's still trying to tell me something. Like he's sorry. Like he doesn't want to leave me. Then his body goes loose. They carry him away. And I'm still in the pit. The bigger man looks down at me. His face is only a shadow against the gray sky. Then the dirt starts falling. At first, I don't understand. Then I started to scream, but the dirt gets into my mouth. I claw at the walls. My nails break. More dirt comes down. It covers my legs, my chest, my throat..... ****Dream**** I jerked upright in bed. My room. My own bed, the glow of the streetlight through the thin curtain, the hum of the heater. My pillow was on the floor. My heart was slamming so hard my ribs hurt. I pressed my palms flat against the mattress — solid, warm, real — and counted my breaths until the pit stopped feeling closer than the ceiling. A dream. Just a dream. Except it didn't feel like a dream. It felt like a thing that had happened, worn smooth and strange from being kept somewhere I couldn't reach. The pit. The boy with the black eyes. You tell them I helped you. I'd had pieces of this dream before. Never this much of it. Never the boy's face so clear. Never his eyes looking like — Like Damon's. I shook the thought off. Pulled my blanket up around my shoulders and sat there in the dark until my hands stopped shaking. Outside, the sky was starting to go gray at the edges. Almost five in the morning. If I wanted to avoid Alyssa, I needed to be gone before she woke up. I'd snuck back in past midnight — walked home from the café because I couldn't face the bus and the questions it would bring — and

nobody had heard me come in. If I left now, I could make it through another day without explaining where I'd been on Valentine's Day. I got out the door clean. Hoodie, jeans, backpack, gone before anyone's alarm went off. It didn't help. The whispers started the second I stepped onto campus. People I didn't know turned to look at me. Two girls by the lockers stopped talking when I passed and started again behind my back. A freshman I'd never spoken to smiled at me like we shared a secret. By the time I reached my first class, I had a cold feeling in my stomach that had nothing to do with the dream. It had spread. Of course it had. Half the café had been students. By now the whole school knew that Mira Hale had kissed Damon Voss. That she'd held his hand and dragged him down the street. That the late shifter foster kid from Silver Ridge was apparently dating the future lord of the world. It wasn't just Alyssa I had to handle anymore. By lunch it was worse. People I'd never spoken to came up to my table in the cafeteria. Is it true? You and Voss? Since when? How did it happen? I tried to leave with an awkward smile that I always wore. Then Alyssa was there. Planting both hands flat on my table, leaning in with that face she got when she knew she'd cornered something. Kissing Damon Voss must have been a bigger mistake than I expected. Alyssa had always hated it when I got more attention than she did—but now, everyone’s eyes are on me, and she looked furious and so determined to take me down. "I was there last night," she said. Loud enough for the nearest tables to hear. "At the café. And you know what I noticed? Damon Voss never actually said you were his girlfriend. Not once. You said it. He just stood there." People were listening now. A circle was forming — not obviously, not crowding in, but chairs turning, forks going down, conversations dying mid-sentence. "I think you made it all up." Her voice climbed. "The mate. The boyfriend. All of it. I think there's no mate bond, there's no fated connection, and you're just a girl who can't shift because she's not actually a wolf." "Alyssa — " "So tell them." She straightened up and gestured at the gathering crowd. "Tell everyone, right now. Is Damon Voss really your boyfriend? Yes or no?" The cafeteria had gone quiet. Faces everywhere, all turned to me, all waiting. I could feel my pulse in my ears. I was so tired. Tired of running, tired of lying, tired of the lie getting bigger every single day until I couldn't see over the top of it. Maybe it was time to just stop. Tell the truth. Take whatever came next. I opened my mouth to say no. An arm settled across my shoulders. Heavy and Certain. "Of course it's true," Damon said.