

Chapter 19 – Eve

For the next week, work was hellish. Then came that fateful day. The one that every countdown had been working towards. All around the nation people sat and prepared to spend one of the most revered days of the year with their families. For the most part, after a week of relentless calls, it made the day relatively straight forward. It was no less busy than any other, but it was much less painful. Most of the questions and comments moved from trouble to happy people just wanting to make sure something got set up correctly to make the holiday go off without a hitch. It was much more doable. No less busy, but a much more pleasant sort of busy.

Still, by the time lunch finally rolled around to give him a break, Mattias was in a state. His throat hurt and he didn't want to talk anymore. He just wanted to walk off the conversations for a while and be out of the office. So, he went out into the halls, outside his company's office, and he walked in circles. He tried drinking his bottle as he walked. He was going slow though. Between the daylight from random windows he passed by, and general nausea from dealing with people all day, it was slow going. He made sure to finish the bottle before he finished his walking in circles. He couldn't risk losing control again. And he wouldn't.

From time to time, he'd stand in the hall and just concentrate on sucking the blood out of the bottle for a few seconds. At least on one occasion he awkwardly locked eyes with some worker from another company and gave him a friendly single nod. He was kind of curious if the man knew what he was doing. It wasn't a common thing, and the bottle was just red-colored with minimal branding, so it wasn't like he was out in the open drinking blood. Still, it was an odd thing to do, he thought. It must have been at least a little morbid for those around him too, but he really wasn't sure what he could do about it. The only real alternative was to lose control and drain people, and that would be much worse. So, really, he wasn't sure why in the world he felt like it was awkward to choose this option.

Either way, his break came to an end. His pocket vibrated as the alarm on his phone went off, giving him the two-minute warning on his time, and he let out a defeated sigh. He began to schlep his way back to his office. He was in no hurry and had no desire to return to work. So, he took his time. A minute or two late wouldn't hurt anyone.

When he came back through there was a woman at the counter talking to Ava. He thought about passing on by, but a burst of familiarity with the brunette and the look on the receptionists face both made him linger for a second. The lady turned towards him with a sort of scowl. She was annoyed about something.

"Can I help you?" Mattias spoke up softly, turning on his customer's voice and adding a little smile.

"I'm looking for Ashley Tran. I need to talk to her." The woman said. He couldn't quite put a finger on where he knew her from. Her voice wasn't familiar to him.

His eyes turned to Ava, who just shook her head and shrugged. There was something else there though. "It is Christmas Eve so she..."

"I know she's here. And I want to talk to her. I'll go back there myself to get her if I have to."

"Sorry, ma'am. I'll check for you," He replied. The tone the woman had didn't instill him with any trust, though. "Anything I can pass along to her about who was asking to speak to her?"

"I just need to talk to her," The woman turned and stared straight into the vampire's eyes. She bore a hole in him with her look, anger virtually dripping out of the air around her.

"Okay, fair. Business or personal?" He continued, though there was enough snark in his voice to be picked up. Enough that her eyes narrowed deeper on him. A shame that he lacked the empathy most humans enjoyed. He was tired, and with his human parts still recovering, he couldn't quite find the courage to give in to the worry he knew he should have felt.

"Personal." She spat the word at him.

"Okay, I'll see what I can do. Ms. Mays, would you be kind enough to treat the lady to some coffee or cookies or anything she needs," Mattias said as he walked off and through the doors.

"I don't want any treats," The woman howled after him.

He didn't see poor Ava's response. It wasn't the first irate customer she had to deal with. Or team member. Or whoever this lady was. He didn't care. He walked back to his desk and paused at the edge of the cubicle. Every one of his agents was sitting and talking to a guest or team member and going just as hard as they could go. He walked over and set his bottle on Ashley's desk, which caused her to look up at him. She never flinched or changed her tone of voice with the guest. She was on a roll, and she just kept going.

He took a pad of paper and jotted down a quick message. *Someone up front to see you. Seems pissed.*

He didn't need to write anymore. She just nodded and went back to the phone call. That was good enough for him. He stretched and moved towards his desk, but then the curiosity got the better of him. He tried to remember where he had seen the woman before. He couldn't put a finger on it. He thought about it for a moment and decided to walk back up to the front and talk to her.

He was surprised when he saw Hal there talking to her already. He wasn't against it. A couple of managers was better than one, after all. Especially at calming down an irate guest. He hustled a bit to get to the door quicker and pushed it open in time to hear some words.

"You aren't welcome here," Hal didn't pull out a stern voice often, but with a confident point to the exit. "Now, leave."

Mattias started to say something, but then he noticed the blurred reflection on the brass of the receptionist's desk, with Hal's reflection being fine. His heart sank a bit. She looked taller than when he left too, but surely that was just in his mind or the way she was standing.

"I want to talk to her now, and I won't take no from some random jack off,"

"Whoa, that escalated. What the hell is going on here?" Mattias held up his hands.

"Fine, Ava, call security," Hal ordered the receptionist, who was nervous.

“This fat ass won’t let me talk to my girlfriend,”

“Girlfriend?” Mattias said quietly. Suddenly he saw it all come back together in his mind. She was the woman he spotted on the texts. He had seen her here before. And, then there was Thanksgiving. “Hal’s right, you need to leave. Now.”

She gritted her teeth. There was a visible vein on her neck for a moment, and her face twisted to an angry red. Hal gave a nod of his head, “We know all about your anger problems, so why don’t you,”

He never finished the sentence. The woman raised a hand and backhanded Hal. There was a sickening slap and it knocked him off his feet. Then another sickening snap as the woman’s leg twisted and shattered, growing and reforming. Then it got worse. Her face twisted, her nose tore and twisted, a maw growing out of her face and fur beginning to sprout from every visible point of skin. This wasn’t some movie like transformation where she stood still though. She stomped forward on mismatched legs. One hand, half transformed to a claw reached out and caught Mattias by the throat and she lifted him off the ground with no trouble what-so-ever. He might as well have been a doll. Then the transforming lycan threw him.

Not just tossed him aside. Threw him. She launched him back and hard, and he slammed into and through the glass doors that separated the foyer from the cubicle farm. He rolled limply up against one of the nearby cubicles in a shower of shattered glass shards.

“Mattias!” He heard Ava’s voice. By the time he looked up to see where she was, Hal was back on his feet. He was bravely if stupidly doing his best.

The heavysset man charged the werewolf with all his might and heft, catching her in a tackle rather low. With only one leg transformed she was easy to bring down in that first second. She kicked him off of her and tossed him up and onto a nearby chair like a ragdoll.

Ava had taken the opportunity to run out of the foyer and over to the vampire’s side, “Are you okay?”

“I just got thrown through a glass door, Ava...” He muttered as he pushed himself up. “Get out of here, get to Ashley. Call the damn cops while you’re at it.” He said quickly.

“Right, what... you’re going to fight?”

“Gotta save Hal.” He said quickly, before standing up. She stood too, and then an idea crossed his mind. This fight wouldn’t be fun. “I hate to ask, but do you mind if I get a boost?”

“A boost...?” She asked before she saw him bear his teeth. Even in this situation, the sudden realization excited her more than he would have liked. “Oh, fuck yes,” She said as she pulled her hair away from her neck.

He didn’t wait for further permission. He just leaned forward and latched onto her neck. She let out a noise that was too close to euphoric for him, or this situation, as his venom began to slip into her veins and he pulled forth some of her life force.

Now frozen donated blood was sustaining for him. He didn’t need to worry about that. But fresh blood. Fresh blood was an entirely different thing. And from a neck, there was so much. He felt a

warmth in his veins he hadn't felt in years, a flow of energy stolen from a willing victim. It was invigorating. Dangerous. But invigorating. He released her neck and watched the woman slumped over for a second, taking a moment to catch her breath and let herself restore a bit of energy. Looking down at her, he could not help but want to drink more, even if the woman and her obsession bothered him to no end. He gave her a light smack on her shoulder.

"Do me a favor and call the cops," He spoke as he sat up and cracked his knuckles.

She gave a nod but didn't say anything. He didn't look back. He just trusted she would do what he asked. In the meantime, he turned his attention back towards the danger that awaited him. There before him was a pissed off woman, half-way transformed into her lycanthropic form. Her body was still twisting. Bones and ligaments tore and twisted, snaps and disgusting tearing sounds were light on the air. He stepped forward back into the room and dusted himself off.

"Sorry I gendered you," He asked coldly, his eyes twisting up to the massive beast. "I just assumed Ashley's loser with a temper was a guy."

She snarled down at him and it seemed the fight was on.

Now, it was important to remember that there was no glory in fighting. That this had devolved into hand to hand combat was a great failure on his part, and he knew it. Then again, he knew what she had done to Ashley and personally he thought she deserved a beating. He had a good line in mind too. His celerity would be perfect to slip in and out of her blows, to bob and weave, and launch small attacks of his own when he had an opening. Then he'd coolly ask if she was done yet once she was visibly winded. A solid line, a good plan, he was ready.

Of course, no he wasn't. No one was ever ready for a fight. No plan ever survived being introduced to someone else. He was reminded of that when she pounced him, and once again caught him in one great paw. She tackled him to the ground without hesitation and dragged his head up in preparation to slam it back down.

After his head was put through one of the floorboards he realized he should have done something smarter. Turn to mist maybe. That would have been good. Luckily for him, she assumed he was dead. She was right, but off on her timing. She bounded forward, towards the cubicles – but that was something he couldn't have. He closed his eyes and his body rose from the ground without a movement, carried by the solemn winds of the grave back to his feet.

He pushed off from the floor with one foot, and he was on her within a second. He didn't have a catchy phrase to give to her right then. He just grabbed her by the back paw, and with a moment of undead strength, he yanked her back and threw her with all of his might.

She did not go as far as he had hoped. He was hoping for a heroic throw where she flew back across the foyer and through the glass doors. But no. She just toppled a few feet and scrambled onto all fours, charging him once again with her teeth bared. That was enough to let his instinct take over and when she reached him he was just a cloud of mist. She tried to snap at him, but traveled right through him, tumbling against the pathetic cloth and board wall of the nearest cubicle – which startled a few people beyond.

“Hah, missed me,” Mattias spoke as he reformed in the lobby. “Ah, damn. Mist. Mist me. Shit.” She turned with a howl and rushed back towards him. That warranted another move from him, and with his unnatural speed, he slipped away from that charge. He didn’t realize how quickly she could pivot, though, and she very quickly caught him in the side as he tried to turn to face her. Her momentum, even staggered by the change in direction, was more than enough to slam him hard into the receptionist’s desk. That snarling maw snapped at him and caught him in the cheek, tearing flesh from bone.

He had plenty of blood in him at the moment though. The pain wasn’t there, just a feeling of anger. He slashed at her with his claws, fingers across her arm. A small spray of blood and a howl from her was all he needed to get a little wiggle room. She wasn’t holding as tight with the wound, and that let him send a swift kick to her knee. His enhanced strength was more than enough to add another sickening snap to the series that had been filling the room. He did not enjoy the feeling or the sound, or her angry howl afterward.

She snapped at him again, and he tried to dodge and pull away from her. Her teeth sank into his upper arm, and he didn’t have time to change his mind on pulling away. Instead, he pulled his arm out of her teeth, causing his flesh and cloth to be ripped away like it was nothing. It left only a bloody bone and some hanging flesh on his arm, and the wolf spit out the flesh, her maw twisted into a look he could only describe as ravenous.

He raised the now partially skeletal arm and pointed at her. “We can stop this anytime, you just need to calm down.”

He should’ve left that last part off. She roared and charged at him, and he bolted towards the foyer door in response, with the werewolf right on his heels. At least she was concentrating on him for now. He pushed through the doors and into the hall, not glancing back as he heard shattering glass. He wasn’t sure what he was doing exactly. Leading her away, he thought. So he headed down the hall towards the stairs. When he reached the fire exit he kicked open the door and vaulted over the side and down the stairs.

His little bit of levitation let him snake his way between floors, hitting the ground on the first floor after falling a few stories, while the wolf was bounding down levels of stairs one at a time. He ran through the door into the foyer and waved off the nearest work. “Go, leave,” He yelled before he turned to see a couple of police officers, “Oh, thank god, she,”

He felt an odd sensation. Two small pricks, then searing pain and his body locking up hard. He twitched and collapsed to the ground, convulsing as one of the police officers loosed every ounce of juice into him from his taser. Luckily, they seemed prepared, because as soon as that werewolf ran through that door, she met the exact same fate.