

## Payment To the Alpha by Ms.M Chapter 14

James' POV

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I was staring down at her. She seemed so broken. All I wanted was to hold her and tell her that everything will be okay, that her family never deserved her.

But I didn't want to touch her. I wanted her emotions and words to be her own. She was so fragile and I knew I could make it all go away by simply holding her hand or leaning my forehead against hers, which is why I pulled back earlier.

I didn't want to manipulate her answers, her emotions, or her feelings. She was just a young girl going through something that no child should ever have to.

The things her mother said to her made me want to run to their home and rip their throats out. I couldn't imagine what Avery was going through. I wish I could tell her we didn't have to get married. That it would be her choice. But it wasn't. It was nearly the truth when I had told her that the arrangement was written in stone.

The witch that had stripped Avery of her powers, Natasha, also put a locking spell on Avery and me. We have to marry before Avery turns 19 or both of us will lose our souls. It was sealed with our blood. The soul part was the witch's payment and insurance policy to see that the plan worked. The lock Spell was Avery's parents' demand so that she would be, and I quote, "put to good use, she doesn't deserve much less." The thought alone made my blood boil and Blade was seething in rage, roaring loud in the back of my mind, baring his teeth.

I closed my eyes and took a few deep breaths to calm us both, I didn't want Avery to have to experience more than she had. I also didn't want her to know about the 'losing her soul' part of the marriage contract. She had been through enough. If I had to be the bad guy in order to protect her from more pain, then so be it.

I had calmed myself enough to open my eyes, they immediately locked with Avery's big doe, honey brown ones. God, she was beautiful. I knew who she was to me, of course, I knew, but we had so many things we needed to get past before we could ever be each other's mates. Hell, she doesn't even know what a mate is.

She had stopped crying. Now she was just staring into my eyes. She looked quizzical. How did she stop crying? She looked calm and collected. I looked down and realized she was holding on to my arm. As if she had intended to push me away. I quickly yanked my arm away.

Her quizzical look now turned to shock and right on cue the tears started streaming down her face and as if she was reliving everything that had just happened, her breathing sped up and her heart rate was increasing by the second. I couldn't... I can't.

I couldn't stand this, she was breaking all over again. Before giving it a second thought I grabbed her hand in mine and pulled it to my lips. Gently placing a kiss on her knuckles. And just like that, she was beginning to spiral down.

"Thank you," she said, closing her eyes and enjoying the momentary calmness. Her heart rate was slowing down and becoming steady. And I had never been so happy to see someone this calm. Does she know what I do to her? What my touch does to her senses, to her body?

And as if she was reading my mind, she answered my unspoken question.

"I- I know. I knew from the first time you touched me that something was off. The power you had over me every time you touched me. How it consumed me. I know. I can't explain it either, just like I know you can't. And it scared me. But I need it..." she continued, her voice breaking. Not in a distressed way though, but in a knowing way. Knowing what my touch did to her and that, right now, it could bring some calm to her storm.

"I need it. I needed it so much. I don't know what's happening. Everything...everything I knew is gone and everything I am going with it. Who am I, James?" She asked me. As if her mind was trailing for answers that I couldn't answer, I decided to tell her, who she was, to me.

"You are Avery. You are the most beautiful girl I know. You love reading. You have a fire inside of you, begging to be let out. You're not much for partying and you hate being the center of attention. Which I have to admit, is why I introduced you to everyone like that earlier... I kind of just wanted to see your reaction. To see your beautiful cheeks turn to blush." She giggled at my confession which made me continue.

"You are kind-hearted and it is like everyone you meet, whichever mood they may be in, you make them smile. Sometimes, in a world full of hatred and chaos, the greatest gift one can receive is a reason to smile. You have been that reason to so many people Avery. One example...me. Every time I watched you from a distance... excuse the creepiness... I smiled for the first time since my parents passed. That is who you are. You aren't your family Avery, nobody is. We are who we are DESPITE our family." She chuckled again. Her cheeks turning red from my compliments, which were all true.

She nodded her head and looked down at her feet. I cocked my head and took my free hand to her chin, carefully lifting her head, so our eyes met.

"You never stop learning who you are, because people always change, those who say that they have found themselves may have, but only for the moment. Because in five or

ten years, they won't be the same person anymore. Neither will you. What has happened does not define you, Avery. This-" I said and pointed to her heart, "this defines you."

"Thank you. I- I'm... thank you, James," she said looking into my eyes, with some emotions I couldn't quite decipher.

"Are you ready to head back inside?" I asked, still holding her hand.

" No, I need some time alone... I'll be in the garden," she said. I quickly furrowed my brows. I didn't want her out here all alone when it was dark outside.

"I think it's better you come inside," I said, a bit more sternly than I had intended.

"James, I'm not coming. Please just let me-" I quickly pulled her arm to me, she slammed into my chest. A look of shock was once again visible in her eyes. However, she rolled her eyes and shook it off.

"Let go of me James," she said, her voice held some amusement. However, I wasn't amused. Anything could happen if I left her alone out here.

"No."

"James! Let go of me!" She said more annoyed this time. I only held her closer

" Fine. Then I'll come with you"

"No! I need time. Alone," she emphasized the last word as if I didn't understand it the first time. No way in hell little girl.

" Then you're coming inside," she looked at me with wide eyes, trying to struggle against my grip however I didn't move an inch

"James let go of me! How the hell do you suppose I will ever get a handle on the things in my mind if I'm not left in peace to THINK?" She asked. That was a valid question, however so was my answer.

"Avery, it's dark, you don't know the place, and the wolves in my pack don't—shit," I realized I slipped up. She was calm and collected before. She probably didn't remember the part about the werewolves her mother told her about. She was too busy coping with everything else her mother had said. FUCK!

"Wo-we-no-n-fuck no no no-" she trailed. She was starting to hyperventilate again. This time my touch was doing nothing to calm her.

" Avery please-"

"No! Get away from me!" She wiggled herself out of my grip, I of course let her, knowing this was a big blow.

"It's not true it can't be-we- they don't exist," she said looking around frantically. Holding her head with both her hands. I tried to reach over and grab her arm but she stopped me.

"No you get away from me... please, please I need to breath I need to be alone I can't- I -"

"I can't leave you alone like this Avery, please."

"GET AWAY FROM ME!" She yelled at the top of her lungs, her scream was agonizing it wasn't fear, it was pain.

I heard footsteps coming from behind me and I quickly turned around. It was my siblings.

"What the hell is going on here !?" Amber yelled as they came up to the two of us.

"Avery honey are you okay?"

"Am I okay? Am I okay!? Fuck NO I'm not okay! Werewolves, are you kidding me? Is this a joke... yes a joke, it must be a joke. James said pack and wolves but he was joking right?" She said while bobbing her head up and down and as if she was trying to convince herself that that's what this was, a joke.

Alex looked over at me, judgment could be easily seen in his eyes.

"Really? She forgets and you remind her?" He said with a sarcastic and bored tone.

"Watch it" I seethed back at him.

"Forget? What d- my mom. Oh my god, my mother told me. She said werewolves and pack and all that too oh my god," She was a crumbling mess by this point.

I looked over at Alex who had squeezed his eyes shut and wrinkled his nose. I had a glum look on my face, my smile showing just how glum. As if he sensed me staring at him he shook his head

"Don't." He said

I looked back at Avery. Amber was by her side trying to console her. And it actually seemed to be working. Her breathing had become more regular now. She was holding her arms around Amber in a tight hug, still sobbing but her heart rate and breathing normal nonetheless.

"I think you boys should head back inside. I got this," Amber said in the softest tone.

"No. I'm not leaving her," I said taking my stance.