

Chapter 121 - He Stole My Heart, I Stole His Child

Axel POV

Something feels off today, but I can't put my finger on what it is. Bailey is her usually cheerful self, currently playing with Aly on the floor in the living room. She's so pregnant now. The doctor said 4 weeks and it would be safe to deliver, and even suggested scheduling a c-section. Bailey said to wait until the date gets closer. We still don't know when our son and my dad will be back with Thyra.

That's another thing that feels a little off today. Usually, Bailey is always sighing and will randomly say that she misses him. She would walk past his room, staring at it for long periods of time. I can see the longing on her face every time she does it and I know she is wishing for him to return.

Today, though, I caught her staring in his room with a huge smile on her face. She even cleaned it yesterday with her mom. I came home to Bailey making his bed, Katherine vacuuming the floors, and Aly with a little duster in her hand saying she was a big helper.

When I asked what she was doing, she simply said that it was time to get it ready for him. If she knew when he was coming back, she would tell me, right? That would help me to not be so anxious all the time. I fucking hate leaving the house right now, but with the new kids in the Beta house and Courtney having her millionth son, needing Casey home with her, I've had to go to work more than I would like.

That's another fucking thing making me anxious today. I have to go to the lumber camp closest to the mill and deal with an issue after the foreman got injured in an accident. Casey doesn't know the business or how to deal with the complicated issues of running machinery, so he can't do it, and Rick flew out to Seattle on an overnight trip to deal with a contract for the Alaska mines. Someone wanted to lease one of our more profitable plots for a few seasons and he needed to outline the terms in person.

Fuck, I don't want to leave my mate today. Not with the anxious feeling that is overwhelming me. I feel like I just need to stay home with her. The need to lock her up in the clinic where nothing can happen to her keeps coming to me, but I already promised her I would stop doing that. I can't lock her up or threaten to tie her to the bed just to ease my own anxieties.

At least she hasn't had an episode for 2 days now. They were getting really scary for a while there. She would look on the verge of death, like something was tearing her apart from the inside out for longer periods of time, and I could do nothing but watch and wait, holding her if I could until it passed, then hiding my stress and tears from her when they did. The last two days, though, there has been nothing. It's like she's back to normal. Katherine still mixes her that drink to keep her from getting sick around the clock, but other than that, Bailey is acting as she did when she was pregnant with Aly.

I watch from the kitchen for about 10 more minutes, sipping my coffee after our lunch as Bailey reads Aly a book about fairies she likes right now. I think it's called Thumbelina. I've watched the movie with her a thousand fucking times now and still can't get on board with the singing frogs and little people living inside flowers. Cringy shit. I miss her Rapunzel phase. I could tolerate singing along with those songs in the car. I think Rapunzel was her favorite because of the horse. It was grumpy and named Maximus. Probably reminded her of my dad.

Aly, knowing the book by memory, takes it from Bailey at some point and starts telling her version of the story herself. It's fucking adorable. I'm about to pull out my phone and take a picture, but before I can tear my eyes away from them to get my phone out of my back pocket to set it up, I see a weird look cross Bailey's face that makes my anxiety levels rise.

She looks grieved. She is staring at our daughter with so much sorrow in her eyes that it scares me.

"Bailey?" I croaked out hoarsely, unable to hide the tension in my voice. She snaps out of whatever thought she was having, a radiant smile replacing her sorrowful expression.

"Yes?"

"What.... Um....," I fight for something to say or ask. What was that look on her face? Did I imagine it? I'm not sure now. My anxiety and worry are reaching new peaks. Maybe I just imagined that look on her face. It's definitely not there anymore. She looks so happy and content, though a little confused right now.

She keeps telling me to trust her, promising me that I wouldn't lose her, but why am I finding it so hard to trust those words right now?

"Are you okay?" she asks, her smile faltering.

"Fine!" I huffed out to prevent her from worrying. "I just, um, you looked like you might be hurting. I was worried."

Her beautiful dimpled smile returns, and she tilts her head to the side and giggles. "I'm fine. No pain anywhere. You just worry too much."

Fuck. Maybe I really did imagine it.

I don't want to leave. I don't want to go to this stupid job. What if I didn't imagine it?

"Hey, what do you think about coming to the lumber camp with me? It's a bit of a drive, but it could be like a road trip. We could eat somewhere on our way back?"

"Aww, I'd love to, but mom and I already promised to see my grandma today. She is making us dinner at her house." She giggles, "That really means Dusty is cooking us dinner while she stands near and bosses him around. Chris and Dusty are a godsend when it comes to grandma. They handle her so well."

I groaned. "Could you reschedule? Maybe do it tomorrow?"

She presses her lips together and shakes her head. "She's making a pot roast. I'm sure she has already started. I don't want to make her feel bad."

Fuck. "Well, what if I just stayed home today instead?"

"Axel," she laughed humorlessly, shaking her head, "what is wrong with you? You have a pack to run. You can't skip work every day to hang out with me. I'll be fine. Mom will be with me all day."

"I will," Katherine says, walking into the living room after getting a shower. She took a brief nap, which was very uncharacteristic for her. She seems to be worrying about something lately too, but I've caught her talking to Antonio a few times. She is probably just tired from dealing with his shit. I know I am. He was calling me daily to ask about her. He stopped doing it 4 days ago, thank the goddess.

She smiles at Bailey, then moves into the kitchen to get herself coffee laced with the blood she needs for the day. "You know she is safe with me."

"I know," I groan, "I just hate leaving."

"Daddy go work?" Aly tilts her little head at me.

"I guess so," I grumbled, walking over to crouch next to them.

"Aly hep-per wiff daddy?"

Bailey and I both chuckle at her innocent question.

"No, baby. Daddy has to work far away where there are no cookies or friends to play with. Wouldn't you rather go to Grandma Lucy's with me and Kiki?"

Aly has started calling Katherine 'Kiki' instead of Grandma Katherine. She loved the special nickname so much and that's what Bailey is calling her to Aly now.

Aly thinks deeply, tilting her face to the side as she weighs her options, the edges of her tantrum still showing as she contemplates what to do.

“Aly get cookies?” she asks Bailey.

“Lots of cookies,” Bailey smiles, playfully nuzzling her nose into Aly’s neck and making her giggle.

“Yay, cookies!” She cheers. I’m a little sad she didn’t fight more to go with me. I was beat by fucking cookies.

“I can stop and buy-”

“Stop it,” Bailey cuts me off, sending me her adorable disapproving look. “You can’t work on a job site with a baby, Axel.”

I huffed, “I could try.”

“Nope. Go to work.” She runs her hand up my chest and grips the side of my neck, pulling me towards her for a kiss.

The kiss was innocent enough at first, but as her mouth moved with mine, I could almost taste her desperation for me on her lips. What started as a light peck deepened to a heated act of passion; one that had my heart racing and embarrassing moans leaving both of us.

“What was that?” I whisper breathlessly when she pulls away from me, resting her head on mine as she pants for air.

She smiles, but it doesn’t reach her eyes. It’s not her usual teasing grin. It almost seems....mournful. My heart plummets in my chest, my anxiety building once again. What the fuck is going on with her?

“I miss sex,” she ends up saying. I fucking do too, but I’m not fucking mourning over it. Is this just her pregnancy hormones? Fucking hell, this is driving me crazy.

Aly had wiggled away from us while we were kissing, going to Katherine in the kitchen, thankfully giving us a little bit of privacy. “That’s it? Bailey, I feel like something is wrong with you today. It makes me not want to leave at all.”

She smiles sadly, running a hand on my cheek and tracing my bottom lip with her thumb. “I’m just ready for my son to be home,” she confesses. “I’m fine. Everything is going to be fine.”

Fuck, I don’t know. I just don’t know what the fuck to think.

“I’ll try to hurry back,” is what I end up telling her.

“I know you will,” she grins, rubbing my lip a few more times and then leaning forward to kiss me again.

I helped her to her feet. How she got on the ground as pregnant as she is, I don’t know. She probably slid down from the couch. I said bye to both my girls, even offering a hug to Katherine, and as I was leaving out the door, Bailey yelled after me, “I love you, Axel. So much.”

I froze, searching her face for some other meaning. Why did she add the ‘so much’? She looks cheerful and back to normal now, but I’m still anxious.

“I love you too, baby.”

I’m going to make this the quickest fucking trip I can.

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Bailey POV

When Axel is gone, his truck no longer in sight on the main road, I breathe a sigh of relief.

“I still think you should have told him, Bailey,” my mom shook her head disapprovingly.

“I can’t. They showed me what would happen if I did. He would go behind my back and try to get Xiomara to find a way to sacrifice himself so this wouldn’t happen.”

“We could stop him,” she offered.

“No,” I shook my head. “The only one who could have stopped him would be his dad, and Max isn’t here. Axel goes crazy at the thought of losing me. He wouldn’t have acted rationally at all and no one is strong enough to stop him.”

That was what the goddess had been warning me about the past few nights. Our bond is strong. Too strong. With the past, me leaving him and going back to Levi when I was pregnant, then with Taegan being kidnapped years ago, and the thoughts and worries of losing me to the curse, Axel gets a little crazy when those worries come back to him. He would instinctively choose any other option that risked losing me. If I tell him, he will go straight to Xiomara and make her work to find a way to take my place. He will order the warriors to keep me prisoner in the clinic. It just won’t work.

I’ve gone over this a million times already. This is the only way to keep my pack and mate safe.

“I talked to Felix,” mom tells me, sighing heavily from the burden I placed on her, “They will be at the border waiting, and Tony will be here at midnight as promised.”

“Good,” I smiled at Aly as she snuggled to my mom’s side, sipping on her juice. Juice that we will be continually feeding her throughout the rest of the day, laced with my blood. This was my

only apprehension with all of this, but I am going to trust my son and the goddess to do as they said. “What about Phoebe?” I asked her.

“Addison will bring her. They will meet us at the falls. Addison will be guarding the girls while we hold off the rest of them.”

“Did she tell Stephanie?” I didn’t want to tell her to lie to her mate, but I knew Stephanie would be in a blind frenzy with the rest of the pack to save me, and she would have been obligated to tell Axel what was going on.

“No. I told her this was to save you, Aly and Phoebe. I think she was apprehensive until I said this would save Phoebe too. She’s all in. She’s not telling her mate for the reasons you said. She said she knows Stephanie will forgive her in the end.”

I hope Stephanie forgives me as well. This is going to be the longest day of my life. I reached out for Aly and she came right to me, sipping away at her juice. I have been trying to get as many cuddles and love from her as I can. I held her tightly against me, smelling her baby curls and Axel's scent still lingering in them.

Please, Axel, forgive me. I'm doing this for you. For our pack. I pray when this is all over, you understand.

“We should get ready for grandma’s,” I told my mom.

“Yeah,” she sighed, “Let’s go.”

Mom is exhausted. She is the one that snuck into the lumber camp last night and sabotaged all the machines. Her time working at the mining camp when she was much younger was a huge help for her to get it done without anyone finding out. She said that Axel would have to be there late into the night getting everything working again.

It’s a critical time for the lumber yards, so procrastinating on these repairs could cost the pack millions. Axel couldn’t skip work today, no matter how much he wanted to. I was scared he was going to try and find a way out of going, but there wasn’t one. Not with Rick gone. Casey can do minor fixes, but he didn’t intern in the mining and lumber camps and do the mechanics schooling that the Alpha and Beta always do to be able to run all aspects of the pack businesses. Gammas are in charge of the warriors here, so he never needed to.

Axel was the only one who could go today.

When we get to my grandma’s, I urge mom to go take a nap while I hang out with my grandma and the boys cook. Dusty and Chris treat my grandma like their own grandmother now, so watching the banter between the three of them is always entertaining. Grandma and I sit and talk by her back porch sliding door so she can still see the warrior center. Her favorite pastime is still watching the warriors, and Aly helps Dusty make cookies.

I have to be careful about feeding Aly the juice in front of them. I'm sure they would be able to detect my blood in the mix. When mom wakes up from her nap, she makes the excuse of going to check on Max's house, taking Aly with her to give her the juice she needs to drink then. She needs my blood in her entire system before tonight. Taegan said that was going to connect her to me.

Werewolves' sense of smell is no joke. The boys would have picked up on it and that could have caused all kinds of issues.

We eat a late dinner when mom and Aly get back, then leave my grandma to rest, our visit exhausting her quite a bit.

The weight of what is to come starts pressing on me when we walk back to my house. Mom is already carrying Aly, but she ends up helping to support my weight too. When we get home, I plop down on the couch, rubbing my belly while my phone goes off in my pocket. I know it's going to be Axel.

This isn't the normal curse pain. I would already be screaming if it was. I haven't felt that in a few days. This is different. It's like the full weight of the curse is starting to fall upon me. I feel the burden of generations before me, the responsibility to take the brunt of the consequences that led to a species being able to thrive for so long. This is the weight Rieka and her daughter took upon themselves to save their people. The burden on Rieka's daughters ended with their death. This makes me wonder how much Rieka has had to suffer throughout the centuries. Does she feel this infinite weight all the time?

The weight of carrying twins is nothing compared to the weight I'm feeling now. It hurts on an emotional level.

"Bailey," mom whispered, crouching on the floor in front of me. "You need to answer that phone. If you don't, he will come home too soon."

I know. I know that if he comes home early, all will be for not. I will be consumed by the curse, he won't let our son do what needs to be done to bring me back, and Axel will never forgive me.

I take several deep, steady breaths, trying to slow my heart rate and tame my emotions. When my phone is about to quit ringing for the third time, I'm finally ready to answer.

"Hello?" I tried to sound cheerful.

"What the fuck? Why didn't you answer?" Axel growled, anxiety laced in his voice.

"Sorry. We just got back from grandma's. I was having a hard time waddling so mom had to help carry me. I couldn't get to my phone."

"Shit," he exhaled tiredly. "Fuck, Bailey. I thought the worst. You....you felt weird in the bond."

“Nope,” I force a giggle, “Just tired. I think I’m going to wash up and go to bed. Grandma kept us later than I thought she would.”

“Hmm,” Axel still sounded apprehensive on the phone line. “Okay. I still have a few more hours here. Someone destroyed the internal structure of all the machines. We tried to find the mechanic responsible but couldn’t, and now are having to take them apart and rebuild them from fucking scratch. It may be really late, maybe even early morning, when I get back.”

I smiled weakly, still trying to fight the distress the curse was placing on me. “Be careful,” I whispered. “I’ll be here waiting.”

“Okay, baby,” he says, then someone yells at him in the background. “I love you,” he quickly tells me.

“I love you too. Bye, Axel.”

I leaned back on the couch, staring up at the ceiling with dread of what was to come. Dread for myself as well as my daughters. If this doesn’t go exactly as Taegan and the goddess instructed, my life is over, as well as the two babies inside me. Aly may survive for now, but both her and Phoebe will be doomed.

“I’m going to get Aly ready,” Mom tells me, getting up from the floor and rubbing my knee. She goes to fetch my daughter from her ball pit in the corner of the room, then takes her back to bathe and dress in warm layers since we will be outside for a while.

I look at the clock. 3 hours. 3 hours until my death.

The curse presses down on me more and more as the time draws closer. It’s suffocating, the weight of centuries of the women in my family dying to satisfy the acts of the first werewolves and the moon goddess herself. It’s like the pressure of drowning, unable to take a breath or find the surface as you fight for your life. It makes death seem like the only possible escape.

“Bailey?” I heard my mom’s voice through the fog of my pain. Her voice is quickly drowned out by an ear-piercing scream.

I struggle to open my eyes, to see where the scream is coming from, and then I realize it is coming from me.

The pressure inside me is tearing me apart, my very soul crumpling along with all my reason and control. My lungs are burning, my body on fire, the curse doing its job and consuming my essence and the life growing inside me.

It’s time. It won’t be too much longer. I bet Axel is already racing back home.



The fire breaks across my skin, cool arms sliding underneath me. I can distantly hear a muffled conversation, but making out the voices around me becomes impossible. I can't focus on anything but the pain tearing me apart.

This is it. This is how everything is going to end, so it can start again.

## 2.42 Painted Red

# Chapter 122 - He Stole My Heart, I Stole His Child

### Axel POV

Anxiety still ate at me after leaving home, but once I got to the camp, I didn't have time to focus on Bailey like I would have liked to. Distance doesn't fucking help me with feeling her through the bond, her humanity being the biggest hindrance. I know if she were a werewolf that I wouldn't be having these issues, but with her still being human, it makes it hard to always fully detect her. I have to strain myself when we are apart.

I wonder if it was anything to do with her goddess blood? It is supposed to protect her from negative supernatural influences. My constant need to always have her within arms reach and control every aspect of her environment could definitely be described as negative to most people. Fuck, I need to pull myself together. I need to focus on work so I can get back home.

Whoever the fuck messed with our machinery is going to be skinned alive when I find them. I hope it was sabotaged by another business or maybe even rogues, because if it was one of my men, I just might kill them. It's a fucking headache getting everything sorted out, then putting everything back together. Our foreman on this site had a log fall on his legs and is out for the season while he recovers. The one who was holding the position temporarily had no idea how to handle this shit.

I don't fucking know how to handle this shit besides just gritting my teeth and getting it fixed. If we don't finish clearing the plot before the freeze forces us to stop, then we won't be able to fill all our promised orders for next year. I could scrap some of the human contracts, the one with Miss Big Hair Texas has yet to be finalized, since she keeps asking to finalize over dinner and I'm blowing her off until she will just send the contract over by fax, and I have two others that could be canceled, but that isn't good for business and could reflect poorly on the pack.

No, this shit just needs to get fixed and get back to running. I need to fucking focus and get this done so I can get back home.

I could faintly feel Bailey distressed in the bond, and started to panic when she wouldn't answer her phone, but she sounded fine when she did finally answer. A little breathless, but if she walked the whole way home from her grandma's I can understand why. I tried to speed this shit up even more after getting off the phone with her, feeling more restless than ever.

When we were nearly done, working with halogen work lights, I started to feel pain like I could never describe coming through the bond from Bailey. It fucking knocked me on my ass, the breath leaving my lungs in a burning roar, my chest feeling like it was tearing in two.

Thank fuck that this is a camp with solely pack members. Workers rushed over to me, asking me what was wrong, trying to help me to my feet. My chest, my heart especially, feel like something is squeezing the life out of it. I'm choking on the pain, fighting for the ability to move despite its crippling agony.

Bailey. Fuck, I need to get fucking home. Now. She's never felt like this in all her past episodes. This one is scaring me, more than ever before. It feels final and deadly.

When I finally was able to move again, I yelled out to the man I left in charge to handle the rest, then sprinted for and hopped in my truck to start driving home. I hit the gas, flying over the divots and rocky terrain on the dirt road, not letting it cause me to lose my focus. I tried to call Bailey, but she wouldn't answer. Katherine won't either. I tried calling repeatedly, then my panic reached its peak. Katherine would never intentionally ignore my call. Something must be wrong.

I called Casey, waking him.

"Alpha? What fucking time is it?" he grumbled in the line.

"GO TO BAILEY! NOW!"

"Shit, okay. Let me get my fucking pants on. What the hell is up your asshole?"

"CASEY, SHE IS FUCKING DYING! I FUCKING FEEL IT."

"Shit." I hear Casey and Courtney having a mumbled conversation, then he's back on the phone, "I'm going now. Courtney is waking her dad and calling the clinic. Is she home? Where the hell are you?"

"Driving back. I was at the lumber camp. She was at home going to bed when I last talked to her. She and Katherine won't fucking answer their phones."

Casey started breathing heavily, and I knew he was sprinting for my house. I can hear warriors howling in the background, coming to assist him if he needs it.

"Don't you fucking hang up on me until you have your damn eyes on her, Casey. I can fucking feel her. She's dying. It feels like she is fucking dying."

I want to scream, kick, throw myself out of this damn truck and shift, running the rest of the way home. I'm tempted to do just that, but I need to hear what Casey has to say first. I need to hear him say he's got her.

"I'm coming up now," Casey pants, the wind making the phone line fill with static. "Uh, your door is wide open, Alpha."

"Go get her!" I screamed, "Go fucking--"

An agonizing pain shoots up my spine, making my whole body convulse. I have to slam on the fucking break to prevent myself from driving right into a tree. I fall over in my seat, my eyes seeping with tears as my soul shatters. That's it. I feel it. This is our fucking bond, and it's barely hanging on by a thread. She's dying, and it's almost too fucking late.

"Shit. Alpha? Alpha!" Casey yells at me in the line. "She's gone! They're all gone, and the place reeks of vampires. Not just Katherine. It smelled like her boyfriend."

"FIND HER!" I snarled, struggling to open the door of my truck and throwing myself out of it, letting my truck roll and crash into the tree. I'm giving myself to my beast side, not knowing how else I can get to my mate. I can't make my body function past the pain in human form, but in wolf form, my pain and agony combine with my anger at the fucking leech, fueling my drive to get to Bailey. I barely feel her now. She is barely hanging on, on the brink of being lost to me forever.

She promised me. She fucking promised me that I wouldn't lose her. She told me everything was going to be fine and I fucking trusted her.

My grief and anger are making me irrational, my wolf side clouding more with the primal need to destroy whatever is preventing me from being together with my mate. Antonio, Katherine, even the fucking moon goddess herself. I will destroy whoever I have to to get to Bailey, and if I lose her, I will burn the fucking world down to get her back.

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Katherine POV

"We have to hurry," I told Tony, hearing wolves howling in the background. If they catch us before we get to the falls, we won't be able to fend them off.

Tony has my daughter, who is barely clinging to life, bundled tightly in his arms. He's carrying her like she is something precious and delicate, scared to add to her pain further.

I have Aly, who is only asleep because Tony used his power to make her. She was scared awake when Bailey started to scream from the pain of the curse. Bailey told me it would get bad, but she didn't tell me how bad. I was a panicked mess, unable to do anything but hover over my

daughter, feeling her anguish in her desperate cries and strangled breaths as she began clawing at her own skin.

Tony came, and took charge right away, helping to calm Aly before using his abilities to make Bailey lose consciousness. We were never going to make it out of this house with her screaming. The house is sound-proof, thanks to my daughter and her mate having a very loud sex life, but the second we were outside the doors, the warriors would know their Luna was in distress and come running.

Tony instructed me to get Aly, then when I had my sleeping granddaughter bundled in the warmest blanket I could find, we raced for where his men were waiting with Felix at the border. We would have to travel quickly to the falls, moving silently and hoping that it would take them some time to follow our scents.

Addison is carrying Phoebe and waiting for us when we finally meet the others. Phoebe looks scared to see us, probably remembering the last time that she saw Tony when he destroyed the clinic to get to me. I pray that when this is over, Axel doesn't try to kill him. Bailey won't let Axel, but if we fail, I fear for all of us. I wonder what Addison told Phoebe to get her to agree to come. Phoebe keeps sending Bailey worried glances, and I can only guess that Addison mentioned Bailey to get Phoebe on board. Phoebe loves Bailey, as does everyone. She would only go against Axel's wishes for Bailey's sake.

"They know," Addison whispered low enough that patrols couldn't possibly hear her, but we all can. Vampire hearing makes it easier to move stealthily and catch the tiniest of noises. "Casey just ordered all the warriors to hunt you, father. Stephanie wants to know where I am. She says no one is exempt from helping to save the Luna."

"Oh no," I gasped.

"It will be okay, my love. I won't let them get to her, just as she asked." Tony pulls a vial out of his pocket. It's filled with his blood, just as Bailey asked. He complied with every single one of Bailey's wishes, not questioning any of them. I thought he might, or that he might demand me to come home after this was over, but he did none of that. He is asking for nothing in return, simply helping because Bailey is my daughter.

He hands the vial to his daughter, who nods and has Phoebe take it to keep it safe while we start to sprint for the Blue Cliff Falls. This is where Bailey said it had to finish. The curse had to be fulfilled here, because it's where it all started.

I would cringe every time she said 'fulfill', guessing the meaning behind it. It's where she will die, and be born again.

This whole thing is rather biblical. The curse of sin, the sacrifice, coming back from the dead. I didn't grow up in church, but I did attend a Catholic school when I was a human teenager. This whole thing got me thinking about Jesus on the cross, becoming the ultimate sacrifice for all mankind's sins. He had to come back from the dead too.

In all the books of the Bible, you won't find records of Joseph at the cross, watching Jesus being killed. Mary, Jesus's mother, was there, but never Joseph. I think a teacher once told me that Joseph had already passed away, because God knew no man could stand back and just watch someone he loves sacrifice themselves for their sake. God knew that Joseph would try to interfere, like the goddess knew Axel would try to interfere. Mary could stand to watch her son being killed, believing him when he said he would be raised from the dead, but not Joseph.

My dad was a good man, but he learned of the curse and interfered. Antonio did too. The cycle has to stop somewhere. We have to make sure it stops here. Bailey will be the last, and Axel will forgive us. He has to.

The falls came into view, the sight nearly taking my breath away. It looked like the waterfall was cascading down from the moon itself. It was glowing in the light, taking on a mystical and magical hue. It looked like a walkway to the heavens. That's not all. At the bottom of the falls there stood a man and a young boy.

The man's appearance was screaming power and authority in everything about him. His clothes didn't look like any you could find in this world. His long, thick hair cascades around his shoulders in velvety waves. His eyes are a deep, glowing green, above high cheekbones and a strong jaw. His shoulders are broad. His aura is seeping out of him, strong and magical. The boy by his side looked to be around Taegan's age. He is watching us warily, especially Tony carrying Bailey.

"Of course he's here," Tony sighs.

"Who?" I asked. "Who is that?"

"That, my love, is the Northern Fairy King. King Aengus. He is Thyra's brother."

"Oh," I studied the man's face again, and found many similarities with Thyra. He has the same nose and mouth as her, but everything else about him is far too masculine to compare to his sister. The boy, on the other hand, looks just like Thyra. Same eyes and coloring. Is he her nephew?

Wolves howling in the forest made chills run up my body, but the answering howl that is unmistakably Axel's makes fear shoot through my chest, freezing my insides with dread. He sounds feral. Primal. So, so angry.

"We don't have long," Tony sighs, coming to a stop right in front of the man and small boy. "Hello, King Aengus. I didn't expect to see you here."

The king narrows his eyes at Tony, then reaches for Bailey. Tony gently handed her to the king, Bailey's entire face ashen, purpling rimming her eyes and her face contorted in agony. The fairy adjusted her in his arms, then waved a hand over her face, making her face go completely lax. She looked so close to death that it scared me.

“Do your job, Lord Antonio. I am here to do mine. With this, both our species will be free from our obligations to this curse as well. This is to overwrite our part in the doom of an entire bloodline.”

The king looks at me, his face a lot less hostile. “Rian will take the daughter. She will be safe with him. They are family, after all. You will be needed in the battle.”

“That’s my daughter,” I tell him, brokenly, staring at Bailey who is struggling to breathe in his hold. I want to stay with her. I don’t want her to die alone. I want to be with my daughter when she takes her final breath. I failed her so much in life. I don’t want to fail her now.

“She will be still when this is over. They are coming,” he nodded to the treeline, the sounds of the warriors drawing closer and closer. “Your daughter needs you to protect them all in her place until she wakes again.”

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Axel POV

Casey has been following the trail, discovering dozens of different vampire scents, even finding Addison’s and Phoebe’s in the mix.

I’m going to kill them. I’m going to fucking kill them all. What they did is unforgivable. I knew not to fucking leave Bailey this morning. I knew something was going to fucking happen.

Not only my mate, but my fucking daughter. My entire world is gone, and they are to blame. All of them.

The bond is barely holding on, the last flickerings of her life the only thing keeping madness from overtaking me completely. If that thread tying us together snaps, goddess help whoever is fucking responsible.

Casey and his warriors howl, indicating where they are. My answering howl is terrifying, even to my own ears. I’m much closer to madness than I thought.

“The Falls, Alpha. They are heading for the fucking falls,” Casey tells me.

I look up at the moon, resting on top of the cliff, and I know he is right. Why the hell Antonio would kidnap my mate and bring her here is beyond me.

“Alpha, Stephanie said that we shouldn’t attack them. She said that they are helping her to break the curse,” Casey adds, sounding hesitant.

“If that’s so, they wouldn’t have had to fucking steal my dying mate. The fucker needs to die, and if Addison is helping the son of a bitch, she can die too.”

“Alpha! Addison wouldn’t do anything to hurt her Luna. If she says it’s to help Bailey, we should trust them.”

“I FEEL HER DYING!” I snarled “HOW CAN THEY HELP HER IF SHE IS DEAD!?”

I won’t let her die. She can’t. I can’t live without her. I will have no reason to.

Casey goes to answer me, but then I feel the last thread of my mate bond snap, tearing her from me. My wolf’s body collapses to the ground, the air leaving me with a strangled cry. I’m not the only one who felt the connection to Bailey snap. The warriors, Casey, everyone howls in anguish, feeling our Luna’s life disconnected from mine.

“No,” I gasp, “No, NO, NO! NO!!”

She can’t. She can’t be fucking dead. She can’t die on me. Not my mate. Not my wife.

The screams leaving me burned my lungs, my heart exploding inside me. My ears are ringing, nothing makes sense to me. My entire fucking world is crashing down, my very reason for existing is gone.

My sorrow is short-lived, quickly being replaced with anger.

Antonio did this. Someone did. Someone is going to pay.

Casey and the warriors' snarling is echoing in the trees. They are pissed, almost as enraged as me. They are out for blood now, same as me.

Our Luna is dead. My mate is dead. The world and everyone in it will pay for taking her from me. My vision is painted red.

2.43 Thank the Goddess

## Chapter 123 - He Stole My Heart, I Stole His Child

Phoebe POV

“Shit,” Addison cursed under her breath, staring at the forest ahead. The howls are getting closer, making me wince in fear.

She took me over to the water's edge, setting me on a smooth rock, cold and wet from the water falling nearby. She rotates her shoulders, probably stiff from carrying me. I told her I could walk, and could even run with them, but she still insisted on carrying me, telling me that she didn't want me to struggle or get hurt.

I haven't been struggling lately, though. Ever since Luna Bailey started to give me her blood, I've been feeling almost back to normal. I know I could keep up with Addison, but I like the feeling I get when she starts to act concerned about me. She and Stephanie take turns staying in the hospital with me, and bring my brothers by my room to visit every day. I don't want to get my hopes up, but they really are starting to feel like family.

"Wait here," Addison grabs my face in both her hands, making me look at her, "You don't move from this spot, Phoebe. I don't want you to get hurt."

"She will be safe," the pretty but old guy with the long hair and fancy glow-in-the-dark contacts carrying Bailey comes up to us, a little boy holding Aly following close behind. "The boy will shield them so they stay unscathed. I will need that vial you are holding." The man nods down to the little glass container I'm holding filled with the jerk vampire Lord's blood. I forgot I was holding it.

Addison takes it from me and places it in the man's waiting hand. I watched Bailey's face as he adjusted her to put the vial in his pocket. She looks dead, which scares me. I don't want her to die. I thought we were here to save her and to cure me? I can hear the warrior wolves howling as they get closer, and it seems like we just kidnapped her so she could die instead. Alpha Axel is going to be so mad. Scary mad. I'm kind of mad too. I thought this was a rescue mission. She isn't supposed to die.

The boy who is standing with the man that needs a hair-cut is holding Aly awkwardly, like he isn't used to holding a child. He is still a child himself. I want to take her from him and protect her myself, shielding her from the attack that is about to happen. She is sleeping so peacefully. Too peacefully with all the stuff going on.

"Rian," Old Man Rapunzel calls the boy to stand in front of him. "Just as we practiced. You don't let up the shield until you see your mother. Do you understand?"

"Of course I understand," the boy huffs, rolling his eyes, "You only told me about a hundred times."

"Attitude, young man. Arrogance will be your downfall in life. Do you remember me telling you that a hundred times?"

"More like 2 hundred," the boy grumbled.

Oh, my, I'd like to knock the arrogance off him right now. By the way that Mister Hair Model is glaring at him, I think he'd like to knock him down a few pegs too.



The man then turns to stare down at me. “I can feel your unease, young one, but if you try to run and are outside the shield Rian puts up, you will fall in slumber when the Luna perishes and be in the way of battle. Stay put, like your mother said, or she could get herself killed trying to protect you.”

I look at Addison and see her watching me warily. “Please,” she whispers.

I don’t understand everything that is happening, but I understand that I can trust Addison. I want to trust Addison.

“I’ll stay here. I promise,” I tell her.

“Thank you,” she whispered, resting her hand on the side of my face. Her relief makes me happy, and also makes me feel a bit relieved too.

A gargled noise leaves Bailey, and the man curses, staring down at her. “They’re coming. Now, Rian,” he says as the most majestic, biggest set of wings, translucent and glowing with a green tint like his eyes, protrudes from his back, making me almost fall from the rock in shock. They are glorious, and more intricate than a butterfly, or maybe even a dragonfly's wings. I want to reach out and touch them, but am frozen in place with stunned amazement.

He takes off into the air, gripping Bailey to his chest. She is gasping, her face turning a shade of blue and I know she will be dead at any moment. My face burns at the thought of a world without someone like her. Someone who would walk into a lion’s den, or a rogue vampire’s hospital room, to save a girl she barely knew.

I watch in fascination and horror as the man flies to the top of the waterfall with Bailey. It looks like he is flying directly into the moon itself. There is a sheen glow to the water, silvery rainbows cascading down, making the whole scene look otherworldly.

The boy, Rian, comes to sit on the rock next to me, then stares up at Addison. “I would move a bit, unless you want to feel a little zap crackle pop on your hind-quarters, lady.”

She narrows her eyes at him, but does as he says. She is still standing in front of us to protect us from whatever may come.

The boy beside me lays Aly on the ground in front of us, then begins to chant incoherently, holding his hands out in front of him and his eyes begin to glow green. A glowing green, translucent barrier surrounds us. I’m studying his face, then looking around in surprise, but then something inside me freezes over, and I hear multiple gasps on the other side of the green shield.

Suddenly, my body feels lifeless, my world turning black as I slide forward off the rock onto the hard, cold ground. I feel nothing. I see nothing. I am losing all my senses one by one. The last thing I hear before even my hearing goes out is the sound of a wolf, howling the most heart-shattering cry I could ever imagine.

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Katherine POV

The moment Bailey is dead, everyone knows it. It's like the air itself is becoming dense with the weight of what her death means to us all. An airless sob leaves me, watching the fairy king fly to the top of the falls with my lifeless daughter in his arms.

She's dead. I knew it was coming, but that doesn't change the intense heart-ache I feel, because however long it takes to bring her back, the world would be a worse place without her light. It already seemed so dark and hopeless without her. I know there's hope. I trust her when she says she will not be dead for long, but that doesn't lessen my sorrow at all.

"I am sorry, my love, but the wolves are less than a minute away, and the Alpha is on the warpath. We must be ready," Tony whispered in my ear, rubbing my back.

I know Axel is on the warpath. I know because Bailey said it would be so. Anyone who heard his mournful howl, so full of anguish and suffering, would know that my son-in-law is out for blood.

Tony and I might be the only ones who can stop him before he ruins everything Bailey has worked so hard for.

Addison is guarding the children, and it looks as if both Aly and Phoebe are sleeping, huddled together on the ground. The little boy is sitting on the rock, his hands out in front of him as he chants something over and over again. His eyes are glowing green, and a green sheen barrier is wrapped around the area the kids are.

Bailey said the girls' slumber would be connected to her, and they would remain in a state hovering between life and death until the ritual was complete. Looking at my granddaughter's lovely face, I pray it doesn't take long.

Fierce snarls are echoing around us, and a haunting scream breaks through, making the vampires hiss, knowing that the sound was one of their comrades, one of the scouts, being attacked by the wolves. The scout speeds back to be with the rest of us, blood dripping from his left arm and a nasty gash on his side.

"This is how it all started." Tony's face looked worriedly along the treeline. "Only the reverse. We were closing in on the Wolf clan, and the ritual to force their first shift was an attempt to stop the vampires. Now we vampires are trying to hold off the wolves to reverse the curse that has plagued their goddess for so long. It's poetic, really." He reaches out to squeeze my hand, "Let's save your daughter."

He rushes forward at the same time that a giant wolf with ferocious blue eyes breaks through the trees.

Axel.

He is snarling, steaming drool dripping from his canines. Those canines narrowly miss Tony as Tony ducks at the last minute, wrapping his arms around Axel's waist and bringing him to the ground.

"Defend yourselves, but do not harm the wolves! Not if you can prevent it!" Tony yells out.

Vampires are colliding with wolves all around. The wolves are thirsty for blood, but the vampires are trying their best not to hurt their attackers while keeping them away from the falls. One gray wolf collided with me, and I somehow maneuvered onto its back, gripping its neck to avoid its teeth. The wolf drops to the ground and rolls, but I hang on tight to its fur, not letting it throw me off.

From my perpetual vision, I see Tony's eyes glow, and soon most of the wolves are no longer attacking, they are crouching on the ground, whimpering with their tails tucked. Even the one fighting me stops and crouches down before me, whimpering before rolling on their back, exposing their belly. I don't know what image he is showing them, but it's making their attacks cease. The wolves are all submitting to the image that Tony is making them see.

Everyone but the Alpha and another large wolf I recognize as the Gamma. They have been trained to not succumb to these kinds of tricks. Their auras are too strong for this ability of Tony's. Casey is fighting with three vampires, Felix being one of them, and Casey still seems to have the upper hand. He looks focused on getting to the kids, but I know Addison. I've seen her at training. He won't have such an easy time getting past her.

He ducks under an arm that is coming around his throat, jumps over Felix, snapping at him in the process and tearing a huge gash down his face. He lands in front of Addison, and Addison flexes her hands at her side, preparing to fight.

"You don't want to do this, Casey. You will kill them all if you try to stop this."

Casey snarls at her, feigning in one direction then going in another. Addison is faster than him, though, and doesn't let him get any closer. He snaps his growling snout at her, but she easily avoids him.

"Rina!" Tony calls to me, barely holding the Alpha down now. Axel is thrashing in Tony's hold, his mouth barely missing contact with Tony's arms over and over again. "I can't hold him. Try to talk him down."

I rush over, bracing myself for whatever Axel may do if he gets free. Axel catches my movements and turns to snap his canines at me.

"AXEL!" I screamed, "SHE'S NOT GONE! YOU NEED TO STOP FIGHTING OR SHE WILL BE!"

He howls in agony, his head turning to the direction of Bailey and the fairy king on the cliff. I turned to see what he was staring at. Bailey is at the cliff's edge, lying lifeless on the ground. The king produced a silver dagger from his robe, the blade glinting in the moonlight.

"No," I whisper. What is that man doing? What is he doing to my daughter?

I closed my eyes, trying to replay my daughter's words over and over again in my mind. I need to trust her. I have one job right now, and that is to stop Axel from interfering. I don't know what that man is doing, but I will trust my daughter.

"Axel, please," I took a step forward, "Stop. He's trying to save her. He is breaking the curse."

"He says only Taegan can break the curse. He thinks you're lying," Addison yells at me. She is marked and has access to the mind link. I don't. I can only communicate with Axel one-sided. Addison is now having a hard time keeping the Gamma from getting any closer to the kids. It looks like they are dancing, they are moving so fast. Casey seemed to be gaining an inch at a time every few moves.

Please, Taegan. Hurry. If this lasts much longer, mistakes will be made that are irreparable.

While I am distracted, Axel breaks free from Tony's grip, leaping over me and sprinting to the hill leading up to the cliff. Tony gets up and tries to race after him, as do I, but Axel's determination overpowers our strength. He dodges us with every attempt to grab him, focused on one thing; getting to Bailey.

Tony releases his power over the wolves' vision below. He is using all his strength to try and catch the alpha. The warriors shake out their furry heads to dislodge the vision, then all of them instantly go back to fighting our men. Addison and Casey are barely a few feet away from the children now. This looks like a losing battle, one that will cost us all more than we can bear.

Just as we get near the king, Axel being less than a meter ahead of us and getting ready to leap to attack, three giant figures break from the waterfall's center. Three winged beasts, their riders all a sight for sore eyes.

Max, seeing his son, circles back and drops from the Pegasus he is riding, shifting to his wolf midfall, then lands right in front of his son, stopping his advance. The two giant wolves growl and snarl at each other, but I can see that Axel doesn't stand a chance in his maddened state of beating his father. He could if he was thinking rationally right now, but he's not, and Max has an ethereal authority about him, a radiance that can not be overlooked. He is under the goddess's authority, and his son can not overpower the goddess.

"Thank hell," Tony gasped, stopping beside me watching the two alphas face off with one another. "We weren't going to be able to stop him."

"No," I shook my head. I'm watching my grandson gracefully land his pegasus next to the king, dismounting it like a professional, not like a little boy. Max's glow and authority has nothing on

Taegan's. He appears to be a god in a boy's body. The way he carries himself is nothing like the little boy that left here weeks ago. He has an ancient wisdom rimming his youthful eyes. His head held high, with maturity and a divine supremacy that leaves me breathless in awe. He is shining in an icy blue hue, his face serious as he stares up at the king. The king bows his head to Taegan, and Taegan bows back, just as gracefully.

So much has changed. He is the answer to all of this. The only one that can bring my daughter back from the dead. I was uncertain if a boy could do it, but Taegan is no longer just a boy. He has power in him that looks like it could rival the goddess herself. It's oozing out of him in every way.

"Not thank hell. Thank the goddess. She just saved us all by sending us him."

2.44

Chapter 124 - He Stole My Heart, I Stole His Child

Max POV

Stop Axel. Stop Axel. Stop Axel. I recite the words over and over in my head. I don't know exactly how or the fucking pretense around stopping Axel, I just fucking know I need to stop Axel from getting to Bailey. Taegan said that the pack will be going crazy, misunderstanding what is happening to their Luna, and I have to stop my son before he ruins any chance of getting Bailey back.

Saying the pack will be going crazy isn't much in the way of helping me to prepare for what we're about to fly into. Stopping Axel is my only goal, and everything else will hopefully just fucking work out.

"Max," the goddess curls her finger, urging me to bend down to her level. I lean over, trying not to fall off Philos, and she kisses my head, then both of my cheeks, making my face turn a bright red for every-fucking-one to see, I'm sure. She chuckles lightly. "You will need this blessing. Focus on your goal."

Shit. My forehead and cheeks tingle for a moment, but then the sensation fades. What the fuck was that?

She walks to Thyra, doing the same to her. Thyra reacts a lot more gracefully than me, even smiling back like she was grateful for the woman's tingly kisses.

“Princess, I feel I must warn you that when you fly through the gate, your brother will be on the other side. Look at the ground instead of at him. Someone down there is waiting for you,” the goddess looks up at Thyra who is mounted on her flying horse. Her horse, not her father's. Nelly. I'm on the flying gluestick, but he's surprisingly obedient right now. His nostrils are flaring, puffing out steamy air, but he hasn't thrown me off, or even attempted to. I'd say that's progress.

Thyra's eyes go wide as she bites her lip, her beautiful eyes glistening, and my heart clenches for her. The goddess is smiling tenderly up at her, “I know the three of you will do well together. For now, protect him while he protects your granddaughter and future Beta.”

“Future Beta?” I furrowed my brows, “I thought you said it was a teenage vampire girl with my Aly?”

The goddess smirked, tilting her face to the side to study me. “Is there something wrong with a woman being the Beta of your pack?”

My face heats, and I'm muttering incoherently, trying to find the right response.

“Or maybe it's the fact that she is a vampire?” She quirks a brow.

“That's not kind, grandpa. I can choose who I want as my Beta, and the goddess already told me that Phoebe would be the one I pick.”

“Fuck,” I groan. “I was just asking.”

The goddess chuckles as she walks over to Taegan, grabbing his face and bringing it down to hers. “Taegan, my lovely and magnificent boy. I will miss you greatly. I will always be watching, and I know you will do great things. You take care of Conri. He will forever be my greatest treasure, and I am now trusting him to you.”

“I will goddess,” Taegan replies, his eyes glowing the faint blue that freaks me the fuck out. He leans down and kisses her head, making her eyes close and a soft smile to spread on her face. “Thank you for everything.”

She smiles sadly, rubbing her thumbs on his cheeks before she lets him go with a heavy sigh. “You three should be off. It's turning into madness out there. You have what you need, Taegan?”

“Right here,” he grins, patting his jacket pockets.

She nods, “Do well, my children. I will be with you in the ways I can as you go.”

With that, Taegan kicks the flank of Loreana, and she flies off with a leap, heading straight for the portal gate. Nelly and jackass take off after him, lifting us in the air, and lodging my stomach in my throat. Fuck, I hate these things.

Taegan disappears into the rainbow sheen of the portal gate, then my mate and her beast are next. Philos, the fucker, jerks forward, eager to join the others. When my skin hits the portal wall, tingles like little electrical currents shoot over my skin, making me grit my teeth. It fucking tickles like a bitch, and I refuse to laugh.

Breaking through to the other side, back into our world, nothing could have prepared me for the scene we just flew into.

It's a fucking battle, the scent of blood filling the air. Wolves are attacking vampires below, and the alpha in me wants to join the battle, taking charge of the mayhem. The grandpa in me wants to drop down, scoop up my sleeping granddaughter from the dirt-covered ground beside the water, and lift her to safety, away from the carnage happening before her. I can't do either of those things. I need to trust the goddess and my grandson and stick to the task I was given.

Stop Axel.

Looking at the cliff, I see Bailey on the edge. Her eyes are open wide, her pupils large, no color or movement of breath on her face. She's dead. It burns my insides to see, especially now that I can see how far along she was in her pregnancy. She is completely lifeless, and even knowing it won't be for long, I am filled with the sorrow of her passing, tears prickling my damn eyes. There is a man standing over her, a dagger in one hand and a glass cylinder in the other, a deep red substance staining its bottom. Blood.

The urge to protect my daughter-in-law's body rises up in me, the pack mentality trying to influence my thoughts. I don't let it. I bury that feeling down and search for my son.

When I saw him, I knew why Taegan and the goddess gave me this sole purpose. His eyes are mad, insanity from losing his mate driving him to kill. He was running up the steep, long hill leading to the top of the cliff, and he was almost there. Two figures are chasing him at lightning speed, but he dodges every attempt they make to grab him.

My mind doesn't need to process anything else. I know what I need to do. Stop Axel. That's my only goal. Stop my son.

I kick Philos's side, pulling on his mane, and to my surprise, he listens, circling around, heading for the cliff. When we are directly overhead. He dips down, and I leap off his back, the urge to shift overcoming me mid-fall. I landed heavily on my paws, crouched down and ready to fight, cutting off Axel's pursuit.

"MOVE!" He tries to command me, but his command holds no authority over me right now.

"STAND DOWN!" I growl back at him, blocking his path when he tries to go around me.

"THEY FUCKING KILLED HER!" He snarls, trying to snap at me. I dodged his attack, ducking down and getting hold of his throat in my jaw. I bring him down, holding him to the ground in a

submissive hold, letting my teeth dig in his flesh enough to not kill or fatally hurt him, but to let him know I'm not fucking around.

"They are helping her, son! They are bringing her back. Look! That is your son. He is there with that man. They will bring her back."

"SHE'S FUCKING DEAD!" He snaps back, his tone thick with madness. Nothing will get through to him. Nothing is going to break this fog of hysterical, homicidal rage except for Bailey.

Stop Axel. That's my only goal, and now I know why. I'm the only one that can prevent my son from dooming himself and the rest of us with him.

"Nate. Archie. Where the fuck are you?!" I called for my former Beta and Gamma in the mind link, straining to keep my son on the ground and he thrashes beneath me.

"Alpha?" Nate's voice echoes back, "Thank fuck you're back. Bailey, she's...."

"She's not staying dead. She's going to come back," I snarled, not wanting to argue with the both of them, "Where are you?"

"I'm on my way with the medics," Archie tells me.

"I'm the one who fucking stayed behind with Quinn and half the warriors to protect the pack in case the vampires attacked while we were vulnerable. They kidnapped Bailey and-"

I cut Nate off with a growl. "They kidnapped her to save her. I don't have time to explain this shit, but I need you both. Axel has the men here going fucking insane with his own rage. Addison and my mate are going to get themselves killed, along with every fucking vampire here. I have to focus on stopping Axel. I need you guys."

I can feel their apprehension in the link. They would have felt their Luna's death as much as the rest of the warriors here.

"Casey, Nate. You need to stop Casey before he hurts Addison and gets my granddaughter killed. Archie, we have injuries on both sides. Make sure you and the medics have the means to help the vampires too."

Nate sighs heavily. "On my way, Alpha. Fucking hell," he growls before pulling away from the link.

"Almost there," Archie tells me, breaking away too.

Axel's blood fills my mouth as he continues to struggle against me. My jaw is locked, preventing him from going anywhere. His claws are digging into my side, but I just grit through the pain, and hold on.


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## Thyra POV

The battle we flew into was the stuff of nightmares. Vampires and werewolves tearing into one another, snarls and horrifying hisses mixing with the stench of battle in the air.

I saw my brother on the cliff, and my heart stopped. My longing to go to him crashed over me like a crushing wave, the memories of only having each other for love and comfort in our childhood coming back to me.

“Look down,” a voice echoes in my mind, the only voice strong enough to force me to obey. Rieka told me to look to the ground, not at my brother. When I remember that, I see him. My son. Rian.

His hands are raised, magic flowing from his fingertips. His handsome little face is focused, reciting the spell I can only guess is for a shield to protect him and the girls lying next to him on the ground. He is stunning, and it makes tears come to my eyes realizing that he grew up so well under my brother’s care.

I circle down to the ground, sliding off Nelly, then sprinting the short distance to the shield my son is holding. I have to dodge several wolves and vampires attacking each other, but their focus isn’t on me, so no one intervenes. A beautiful vampire woman with a deep skin-tone and a powerful aura is tossing a giant brown wolf to the side. She looks familiar, but I can’t place her. She looked at me warily, but then her shoulder sagged in relief.

“You must be Alpha Max’s mate. Katherine said you would-”

Her words are just off with a grunt when the huge brown wolf lunges for her, narrowly missing biting into her shoulder with his drool-covered teeth. He does, however, start barrelling towards my son and the girls.

Rian smirks, as if he is welcoming the challenge, but then he sees me and his smirk falls from his face. His eyes go wide and the shield starts to flicker as he forgets to continue the chant.

“No,” I gasp, seeing the aftermath of what could happen if this crazed wolf gets any closer flickering through my mind. I hold my hands out and my magic flares out of me, shooting for the large wolf and entangling it in its currents. The green strands of my power look like lightening gripping his body, a half howl, half yelp leaving him as I drag him back, away from my son and the girls.

My eyes flame with my anger, and my mate mark is pulsing on my neck. I lift the wolf in the air, then toss him into the throes of his comrades, all in intense battles of their own with the vampires who are only here to protect their Luna.

“She isn’t the only Luna there,” I hear the goddess’s voice echoing in my head.

She's right. I am the mate to their previous Alpha, the only Alpha that has their head about him right now. Bailey may be temporarily dead, but that just makes my authority over them so much greater.

Many of the wolves turned their heads in my direction, wary of the magic slipping out of me in green smoke and lightning that had just overpowered one of their strongest and biggest fighters.

I hold my head high, my bond to Max pulsing inside of me. I take a deep breath, then yell out above the noise, above the madness, above all the carnage so everyone can hear, my magic amplifying my voice with the authority I hold over them. "SHIFT!"

The command washes over them like a wave, causing all the wolves to cower before, one-by-one, they begin to shift back. They are staring at me in confusion, most of them baring their necks and the others still cowering on the ground. The only one able to fight the command is the large brown wolf I just threw. He is snarling, his wolf face contorted, like resisting is causing him great pain, but he still doesn't shift back.

"Stand down," my eyes glowed, my anger almost getting the better of me. My fingers are twitching with the desire to force him to obey. The only thing stopping me is the look of worry on everyone else's faces. Whoever this wolf is, he is important in the pack. Even the vampire woman beside me is radiating nervous energy, worried about the brown wolf.

"Now," I took a step forward, pushing my will over him. He is struggling to resist, his back arching with the desire to follow through with the command, but just when I think he's about to finally listen, he snarls, lunging for me. I throw my hands up, ready to stop him in a fatal way if need be, but a huge gray wolf flies out of the thick forest and slams into the side of him.

The gray wolf is as big as the brown one, the same amount of authority lining the aura that surrounds him. He snarls at the wolf, pinning his body firmly to the cold, damp earth, and the brown wolf does a double take, looking back at me with surprise on his face.

He whimpers, communicating with the gray wolf, and for a moment I think we might be safe.

"Mom?" The hesitant question behind me made me turn, my eyes meeting my son's once more. "Mom? You...you came," he slid clumsily off the rock, watching me with wide, anxious eyes. He is so handsome, I want to cry.

"Rian," I whispered, both my hands cupped over my mouth. "My Rian," I sobbed, falling to my knees.

He makes a choking sound, then comes running towards me, barely giving me time to open my arms to catch him in my hold. He smells just as I remember, and the feeling of him in my arms is indescribable.

"Mom," he cried, his arms squeezing me around my neck tight. I can feel his heart hammering in his chest, and I'm sure he can feel mine.

“I missed you,” I whispered. “I missed you more than I could ever tell you,” I breathed out, my tears dripping onto his little shaking shoulders. He is crying against my neck, his tears falling down and soaking my shirt. This is the greatest feeling, having my son with me once more. I can't wait to introduce him to Max.

We don't have time to dwell on our reunion for much longer, because seconds later a piercing scream fills the night air, making both our heads jerk up in surprise. The shifted warriors, now all nude and in human form, are staring up at the cliff, looks of terror on all their faces. I followed their gaze, then gasped at the sight of the monster standing beside my brother.

It's a wolf unlike any I have seen before. He is tall, twice the height of Aengus, and he is standing on two legs. His body is more human than a wolf's, though it is still covered in black fur and his legs are more canine than man's. His abdomen and arms are strong and muscled, defined and contoured in the moonlight. His eyes are glowing an icy blue, and I instantly know who it is.

Taegan.

He is standing over his mother with a blood-soaked dagger in his hands, his mouth moving and a humming chant leaving him in a deep gravelly tone, carrying through the winds and echoing around us. He lifts the dagger in his claws, holding it high above his head, and when it finally registers what he is about to do, I have no time to prepare myself.

He sinks the dagger into his mother's chest, making everyone watching scream out in horror.

## 2.45 Kiss of Life

# Chapter 125 - He Stole My Heart, I Stole His Child

Taegan POV

“I recognize this place,” Conri exclaims excitedly in our mind. “It looked much the same during the first ceremony. The ritual to force the first shift was surrounded by hordes of vampires and demons. Now the wolves are the ones trying to interfere.” He huffs like he finds it comical, but I find nothing funny about watching my family trying to destroy each other.

“That is my pack down there. Our pack. And many of those vampires are family.”

“I'm amused at the irony. Not the fact that they are fighting,” Conri tells me. “I think this is tragic. We need to hurry.”

We do. I can see mom on the cliff, and I hate to see her like that. It hurts to look at her. Her belly is so big now with my sisters. When it was that big with Aly, she would always be kicking and moving around. Mom's belly right now is completely still, as unmoving as the rest of her.

I kick Loreana's side, making her turn around, then guide her to land next to the man I know is Grandma Thyra's brother; the fairy king.

When I landed, I slid off Loreana, whispering my thanks to her and patting her bottom before walking up to King Aengus.

He smiles cordially, bowing his head slightly as I bow mine in return. "Young Alpha. I have prepared the blood of the first vampire and my blood as well. We need the Alpha's and your wolf's, then we can begin."

I pulled grandpa's blood from my jacket pocket, offering it to the king before digging the spell book from the goddess from the inside of my jacket. While he pours the blood from grandpa into the large glass container, whispering the words to change the molecular structure of grandpa's blood to fuse with the others, I shuffle through the spell book to find the page Conri will need. This is the spell book that his original body used with the goddess to force the first shift, fusing his body with that of an alpha wolf. The result of which permanently separated the different species.

The goddess was given the right to take the book when she was banished to her realm with the curse, along with the enchantment from the divine beings who cursed her to fully satisfy the consequences of their actions. To rid the goddess's bloodline of the curse, the conditions have to be met perfectly, which they were by mom and dad being mates and having me. Now the spell that was cast to divide needs to be overridden by a new enchantment to bring the races together for good. My mom will be the catalyst for an everlasting unity for us all.

I set the spellbook on the ground, setting a small rock between its pages in case Conri's fat fingers can't turn the pages to find the right page again if the wind makes them turn.

"My fingers aren't fat. That's rude."

"They're fat. I think they're fatter than my sister's arms. You should eat more rice cakes. Mom said they are a healthy snack and you could use a diet."

"You, brat, should eat a tub of lard. You are the one that is too tiny."

"I'm 6," I huff.

"Excuses."

"What's your excuse for having fat fingers?"

He growls at me, making me smirk. He's fun to tease. Callum cries when I start picking on him too much. He always threatens to tell his dad with the weak face hair and ugly expensive shoes on me. Like the man-sized baby could do anything to me. My dad can beat him up. I could probably beat Casey up now. That's no fun. Conri is much more fun to pick on.

Speaking of my dad, I looked over to see grandpa pinning him on the ground, Dad's wolf, looking crazy with determination to get to mom. His eyes look frenzied and his face is drenched in his own globs of drool as he struggles to get free.

We need to hurry.

"You're scrawny and slow," Conri snorts.

"You're a beast with fat fingers, ear hair running down your back, and no neck," I snapped back. I started to undress so he could take over. I was meticulous in folding my clothes the right way, to prevent wrinkles, and found a dry, smooth rock to place them on so they wouldn't get too dirty. I hate dirt.

"There you go, getting jealous of my beautiful fur again. You can just admit you are at any time. I won't tell anyone."

"I'm going to have my sister shave you," I taunted him. "I'm thinking a reverse mohawk. Buzzed right down the middle and long on the sides. I'll admit your fur is beautiful all you want then."

He growls, and I snicker, feeling like the winner. I looked up at the king, standing in just my underwear. I know Conri is about to shred them, but I put an extra pair in my pants pocket for later. I didn't want to be naked more than I had to. It's too cold. goosebumps are covering my arms and legs.

"Are you ready, King Aengus?"

He nodded, taking a few steps back to give me room. He has the glass container in one hand, the dagger of the original fairy king that tore the fabric between our realm and theirs in his other.

"Are you ready?" I asked my Lycan.

"Let's save our mom," he responds, taking a quick glance at my deceased mom on the ground, our heart beating rapidly and my spine tingling, the urge to shift and save her overpowering everything else.

He pushes forward, while I retreat to the back of our shared mind, gritting my teeth as the burning power of his magic changes my body into his. It starts the same as before, my hands and feet being the first to change, then the heat spreads up my limbs, transforming me in its wake, leaving my chest and head for last, a powerful howl leaving his snout the moment it fully forms.

The moon glistens a shimmering blue on his commanding howl, its lunar glow fueling the power already surging inside his body.

Conri looks down at the king, holding out his left paw, offering it to be cut and bled for the last ingredient to the enchantment.

The king is looking at us warily, but takes a step forward to slit Conri's palm, quickly moving the glass cylinder to catch the blood flowing from the cut. The wound began healing right away, and in a matter of seconds it closed up, but it was deep enough to offer the proper amount of blood before it healed. The king lifts the container to check, then nods, his eyes glowing an eerie green as he chants and fuses my blood with the others.

Conri bends to get the spell book, his fat fingers flicking the rock off and barely able to hold the pages in a way where he can read the words written on them. I think about teasing him, but it's not the time to waste on that. Mom needs to wake up and get to dad quickly before he gets free.

Conri's eyes scanned the ancient language, whispering the words under his breath. When he has them down, he stands back to take the waiting dagger from the king, dipping it in the blood as King Aengus holds the container, coating it completely and humming the enchantment under his breath over and over again. The blue glow from the moon is intensifying by the second. The magic swirling inside us begins seeping out of Conri's fingers, making the dagger glow and absorb the blood of a Fairy king, the blood of an original vampire, the blood of the original alpha's bloodline, and the divine Lycan who has come to end it all. All that is left is to fuse the blood into the heart of the human woman, who is the descendant of the moon goddess herself.

King Aengus bows, wishing us luck and ducking back into the forest to give us room. We are on our own now. The responsibility lies solely on us to finish this for good.

Conri continues to chant, lifting the dagger in the air, standing to his full height as he walks to the edge of the cliff, hovering over our mother.

A scream fills the night, but it doesn't distract Conri from his task. This was what he was made for. What we were made for. Saving our mother and saving our bloodline from the curse that has been plaguing it for so long.

His voice steadily becomes louder and louder, the magic casting down on us from the moon amplifying his words with his power. I feel it, the moment the magic inside us reaches its tipping point, with only one way to expel it.

The muscles in Conri's arms and shoulders flexed, all his magic focused in his hands, pooling over the dagger dripping in blood. With one final chant, Conri brings the dagger down, dropping to his knees and lodging it into our mother's chest, his magic being poured out into her lifeless body.

She jolts on the ground, the power surging inside her like a bolt of lightning. Her still heart is the first to fully transform, our magic encasing it, forcing it to beat again. It starts slowly, absorbing

the blood from the dagger and all the power in it, then begins to beat faster and faster, pumping the powerful magic through her body, changing it, making it into something new. Something like Conri, divine and forcible.

We watch in fascination as the magic moves over her body, jolting in surprise when her swollen belly starts to move with life. Her lungs start to steadily take in and expel air, making her chest rise and fall. Her skin regains its color, along with a golden glow, making her skin appear to be shining with an ethereal radiance. Her cheeks turn a soft pink, tensing and making her dimples appear. The last to renew are her eyes, suddenly bursting open, a golden brilliance shining out of them, like beacons in the dark night sky. Her body slowly lifts from the ground, levitating in the blue-hued light cast down from the moon, floating until she is in its center.

Conri stands, fascinated as the woman who birthed me and raised me begins to transform from a human into a being just like him.

It starts in her chest, the dagger being pushed from her heart as it mends itself. Her hands and feet change into golden paws, then her limbs transform, glittering brilliant energy and protruding golden fur.

“Her fur is beautiful,” I whispered to Conri.

“So beautiful,” he agreed.

Gasps and people weeping can be heard below, and we no longer hear the sounds of fighting. I’m sure no one wants to miss the splendor of our mother before them, their Luna fully transforming into a species that is unlike anything they have seen before.

“I’m like nothing they have seen before,” Conri scoffs.

“You’re a fat-fingered beast. Of course you’re not. Mom is like the goddess if the goddess was granted a wolf too.”

Conri stares up at our mother, a tender smile spreading on his face. “Yeah. Our mother is what I had hoped the goddess could be. She really is like nothing I could have ever imagined.”

The bitter happiness in his voice made my heart clench. The goddess knew she would never become what the rest of her clan became. She knew she would sacrifice her life to eternal servitude as the moon goddess instead. I hope she is watching, and this makes her happy too, to see the glory of her sacrifice transforming my mother into a goddess on earth.

Mom is fully transformed, her Lycan body beautiful and sleek. Her chest is covered in thick, golden fur, her waist narrower than Conri’s, except for the hard bump of her belly, my sisters wiggling around inside of her. Her limbs are toned, but thinner than Conri’s. Maybe about the size of two or three of his fat fingers. Her face is stunning, her narrow snout accented by thick fur on her cheeks, and I could swear there are little indents at their centers where her dimples

would normally be. She begins to fall slowly back to us, the light of the moon dulling and going back to its normal white shine.

Conri opens his arms, catching her as she falls gracefully into them. Her face is tense, her eyes struggling to open. Conri dips his head, kissing both eyelids in a very human-like way. It's just like the goddess did for me when I was first fused with Conri. It's what I will have to do for my sister and Phoebe to wake them from their slumber. It's the kiss of life, something only I can offer. It's a gift bestowed by heaven, granted to us when we were fused together in Elysium. It's one of the many things that make us special.

Mom will have no counterpart like Conri. She will be a single soul, not needing to share her mind or body like Conri and I. None others will ever be like Conri and I. That is what will make us more powerful than any others. That was why the moon goddess had to train me for so long to welcome the Lycan into my body. We will be capable of magic far beyond anything this world has seen. My mother and sisters will not have to bear that burden. They will get the Lycan body, but can live normal lives like a normal werewolf if they want to.

Normal is something I was never destined to be.

My mother's eyes flutter open, her irises like molten caramel as she stares up at me. She squints, processing what was happening, then a wide smile spreads on her snout.

"You saved me, just like I knew you would. You saved us all."

Conri grins, running his tongue up the side of her face and making her giggle. I missed my mother's laugh. It's music to our ears, making us laugh with her.

Conri sets her on her feet, helping to keep her steady until she gains her balance on her new legs.

"Holy moly, I need to shave," she gasps, staring down at her wolf-like legs.

"Bailey?" I heard my dad's strangled whisper. Conri turns his head, and we see my naked father walking up the hill, grandpa following behind. "Is....is that you? Bailey?"

Bailey giggles, her wolf tongue slipping to the side of her mouth for a minute. "I think so," she says.

"Holy fuck, they can speak," grandpa gasps, staring up at us wide-eyed. "Taegan? Is that you in there, or did this monster eat you?"

Conri growls, but mom places her arms on his shoulder, making Conri stop instantly. "How do I change back?"

Dad is almost to us and she probably wants to be in her regular form when he gets here. "Uh," Conri thinks for a second, trying to find a way to explain. "You just do it. Here." He reaches out



his hand for hers. She takes it, and he uses our magic to help her shift back to human, while relinquishing his control and giving my body the ability to take over.

The second I'm back to normal, I'm freezing and want to go running for my underwear. Dad seems to focus on mom, so I decide to do it before he notices me too. I ran over to the spot where I left my clothes, found my underwear clean and fresh in my pocket and slipped it on. I pull on the rest of my clothes quickly, but I'm still shivering from the cold, wet air. I want to hurry up and get back home to my warm bed and video games. Heating and thick blankets sound so great right now.

Mom and Dad are having a moment that I really don't want to interrupt, sucking each other's faces like there is no tomorrow, which I guess dad thought was the case until about 10 minutes ago. I walk towards grandpa instead, who is still gaping at mom and how alive she now is.

When he sees me coming, he eyes me warily, probably scared of the fat-fingered, hairy beast inside me.

"Scrawny punk," Conri growls at me, making me snicker.

"We need to go to Aly and Phoebe," I tell him, smiling at my Lycan's insult but not responding.

"Why? You gonna stab them too?" he grunts.

I made a horrified face. I did that to my mom to save her. Why would I stab my sister? "That's a really bad joke, grandpa. I just need to kiss their eyes and help them to wake up."

"Kiss their eyes?" he repeats, not understanding. I sigh, taking his hand.

"Come on. I'll show you. You should probably meet Rian too."