

Chapter 71 - He Stole My Heart, I Stole His Child

Axel POV

“She’s stable, Alpha. The shock was just too much for her. She will wake up soon.”

I glared at the doctor, wanting her to tell me that she could wake Bailey up now. I need to leave, but I don’t want to leave without first talking to her. I need her to know that whatever it takes, I’m bringing our son home.

“Ax, we got her. I won’t leave her side. Casey will be right here too.”

Courtney is sitting on her other side, gripping Bailey’s other hand.

I need to leave. I need to join the search for my son, but my heart is torn in two. He needs me, but Bailey needs me too.

“If she were awake, she would tell you to go. Save him. We got her in your place,” Casey mind linked to me. My eyes met him across the room. He gives me a tight smile and nods. No joking or sarcasm. He looks fierce, and every bit the dependable Gamma he is. He won’t be leaving his Luna until I return.

I lean over my beautiful sleeping mate, pressing my lips to her temple.

“I’ll find him, baby. I’ll bring him home.”

If it’s the last thing I do, I’ll bring him home. I’d give my life to ensure he makes it back to her.

I don’t know how, but I managed to tear myself away from her side.

“You keep her safe. NOTHING gets to her,” I tell my Gamma.

“Nothing. Go get our little alpha back. Tear the fucker to shreds.”

That’s exactly what I plan to do.

I look back at my sleeping mate one more time, the doctor and Courtney adjusting her in the bed, and send a prayer up to the goddess to keep her and our unborn child safe.

The walk out of the clinic feels like a march to war, my adrenaline pumping and focus set on the task at hand. Find my son, then murder the fucker that took him.

~~~~~

Dad and Rick are searching deep in the wilderness, and Quinn has a team combing through the human towns.

We found a moving blanket deep in the forest that smelled strongly of Taegan. There were tire marks of a larger vehicle, but they were lost to the pavement.

I returned to the pack after hours of searching to retrieve Bailey's old phone. I had all the numbers not programmed into her phone blocked, along with Levi's numbers. After the call from the fucker's father, I bought her a new phone on my cell phone plan and took her old one, just in case.

I think it's time to unblock the bastard and see if he has any demands. I should have thought of this sooner. The blind searching isn't panning out, and I'm willing to do anything at this point to get my son back.

One hair, if one fucking hair on his head is out of place, I swear to the goddess he will die the most horrible death possible.

After I grab the phone from my office drawer, I head back out to rejoin the search, looking down at the screen as I unblock all the numbers.

I want to check on Bailey, but I don't know if I could tear myself away from her again if I saw her right now. I can feel she's awake now, and I can also feel her worry and sorrow. The drive to go to her and comfort her is great, but the drive to find my son and kill Levi is just as great.

My goal is set. I need to remain focused.

I'm so focused on my goal, I don't hear Addison calling out to me until she reaches for my elbow, pulling on my arm to stop me.

"Geez, Alpha. I was yelling at you. I need to talk to you."

"Can it wait? I need to head out to search for--"

"That's what it's about! My father just called. Alpha Max and the Betas are still gone, so I was looking for you. My father said he thinks they found where Levi is hiding. It's near the Luna's old home."

Holy shit. "Is he sure?!"

“They’re on their way to the location now. His assistant sent me the information. They used cell phone towers to narrow the search.”

She hands me her phone and I scan the pictures that were sent to her. She explains the details in each picture and how they found the data. I try not to let my irritation show that Lord Antonio and his coven disregarded my order for them to stay out of our business. I guess in this case, I should be happy they didn’t listen. I was shooting in the dark, here. Blindly trying to find a way to get my son back. Thanks to him, we might actually have a chance at quickly finding him.

I’ve never been to Bailey’s hometown, but dad has. If Levi is there, chances are my mother is with him. Dad will need to come with us to finish this once and for all.

“Dad. Head to Bailey’s hometown.”

“Did you find him? Is he there?” My dad’s voice is frantic in the mind link. I know he is blaming himself. It’s not his fault. It’s mine for leaving my son behind in the first place. I tried to tell him that, but he is still trying to shoulder all the blame.

“Addison got a call from her father. Seems they’ve been searching for the prick on their own. They got a location. It’s near Bailey’s hometown in a nearby nature preserve. It’s not far from their old house.”

“I’m turning the team around now,” he growls.

“I’m going to have Quinn’s team head back to the pack just in case. Follow my trail on your way in as you get close to the town. I’m going to take Addison with me so she can lead the way.”

Dad was silent in the link for a second and I almost cut it so I could talk with Addison before shifting. Right before I do, he adds, “If your mother is threatening that boy, don’t you hesitate. You always put your mate and child first. If I were to ever threaten your children or mate in any way, you better fucking kill me. You do the same with her, Axel. You fucking got that?”

Taegan, Bailey and all our future children will always be my priority. He doesn’t have to tell me that. I already know. I accepted that I would likely have to kill my mother by the end of this. As long as my children and mate are safe, I can live with that. I’ll bear that burden for them.

“I know. I got it.”

As the mind link cuts out, I start discussing the plan with Addison, calling several warriors to accompany us on the new mission.

As Addison is showing the others the map, Bailey’s old phone starts to ring in my hand.

It’s not his number, but the number of his father. Strange. Why would his father be calling Bailey’s phone the same day that Taegan was kidnapped?

I walked away from the group, all my warriors going silent at the murderous look on my face.

“Hello?” I answered, struggling to keep the snarl out of my voice.

“About fucking time a call went through. Fuck. You would think you cared nothing about this kid.” Levi. His sick, arrogant voice grates on my nerves like nails on a chalkboard. “Where is my Bailey? I’m sure she is missing me by now.”

“Where is my son?” I snarled, unable to hold my anger in.

“Your son,” he snorts, “Your bastard son is fine, for now. He’s being looked after by your dear old mother at the moment. If you want him to remain in decent condition, you’re going to have to do something for me.”

“What the fuck do you want?” I growled. I can guess what it is he is going to demand before he says it, but he reaches further than my expectations.

“I want you to stand down as Alpha, and hand your position over to me.”

“What?!” I snapped in disbelief. That wasn’t what I expected at all. I thought that he was going to demand that I bring him Bailey in exchange for Taegan. He wants my pack? What would he do with an entire werewolf pack? He hasn’t even been a fucking wolf for a full cycle of the moon.

“You heard me. I want your pack, and, of course, my fiance back, and then you can have your bastard kid to do with whatever you want. He’s not mine, so he no longer has a place beside Bailey anyway.”

“You want me to give up my mate and pack? Did my mother not tell you anything? That isn’t possible. The only way to take my title or mate is over my dead body. She is already marked and mine. You can’t fucking change that.”

Even if I was willing to give in to his demands, it’s not possible. That isn’t how the dynamics of being an alpha work. The only way to pass down the title if you are not born an alpha is through a challenge or death, and there is no way he would win in a challenge against me. He has to know that.

“Then that leaves you with one option,” he cackles sickly on the phone. “Kill yourself. If you kill yourself, won’t that free Bailey so she can take her place beside me? I figured this would be like a royal family situation, where you die and your Luna gets to choose another mate, and he would be the new alpha. Right? That solves both issues.”

I growl at the audacity of what he is asking of me. “Then what happens to my son? You don’t want him, or want him to stay with Bailey. You made that clear. What are you going to do to my son if I’m dead?”

“Oh, the details can be hammered out later. I won’t kill him if that’s what you’re worried about. Bailey would hate me if I did. I want to prevent that if I can. You give your life to save him, and I’ll send him and that old hag somewhere far from Bailey. They can stay together, alive but away from us.”

Psychotic is what he is. What he wants will never work. Not to mention, Bailey is already pregnant with another of my children. He would kill that child, and that's something I’m just not going to accept.

He’s going fully feral. His mind is becoming irrational; animalistic. He isn’t able to think things through.

He’s going to get himself killed, even without my help. I just have to get to him before he hurts my son in the process.

“Fine,” I muttered, “Where would you like me to meet you? I’m guessing you want to see me follow through in person.”

He laughs and the sound is hollow and demented. He’s carnal; feral. His mind is leaving him. It’s the final step before going fully feral as a rogue. I need to get to Taegan fast before he gets hurt, and I can only hope my mother is not as far gone as he is. I pray she won’t stoop so low as to hurt her own grandson.

“Meet me at the old hag's house. I’m sure you know where it is. You have until midnight, then I start passing time waiting by torturing the boy. Be fast,” he laughed menacingly, “I think those blue eyes of his should be the first to go if you don’t.”

With that last threat, he cuts the line, and I throw the phone against a tree, growling in frustration.

Taegan, my son. I need to hurry to save my son.

“Addison, call your dad. I know where he’s going to be.”

72 Grandmas

## Chapter 72 - He Stole My Heart, I Stole His Child

Bailey POV

When I woke up, the devastation of the news I heard before I fainted was heavy on my chest. My heart felt as if it was being ripped into two.

He got him. That asshole kidnapped my son.

That's how this all started. I had to run away because of his first attempt to kidnap Taegan, and even here, the place we should have been safest, Levi still managed to find a way to kidnap my child.

When will it end? Will he continue torturing me my entire life?

"Bailey, please calm down. This stress isn't good for the baby," Courtney coos to me from my side, holding my hand and rubbing gently on my arm as I sob uncontrollably.

How?! How do I calm down when it feels like my world is falling apart?

"Casey," Courtney stares at her mate leaning next to the door with his arms crossed tightly. Her eyes cloud over and I know they're mind linking. He nods at her after a few seconds and I'm left wondering what they were talking about.

I can't stop crying enough to ask, though.

I want Axel, but I can't bring myself to ask for him. I'm too scared they will tell me that Axel hasn't found him yet, and my world would feel like it's shattering all over again.

After what felt like forever as I drowned in my own sorrow, continuing to sob like crazy, a knock echoed on the door. Casey opens it, and on the other side is my grandma, escorted by Dusty and Chris.

"Is that my Bailey in there, sobbing like a fool? You would think someone had died with the way you are carrying on."

"Lucy, do you not-" Courtney starts to say, stress and concern on her face, but a look from grandma shuts her up.

"Of course I know what's happening. I may be old, but I'm not senile yet. I'm just wondering what is making my granddaughter carry on like this, like someone died."

"Grandma, he took," my voice started to shake, my emotions choking me. "Levi took him. He took Taegan."

Grandma nods solemnly. "Yeah, it's best to start mourning that Levi now. Get it all out of your system before your man gets back."

I stared at my grandma in surprise. "Mourn Levi?"

“Yeah! That has to be what you’re so down about. Heaven knows you can’t be sad for any other reason, because that man will be bringing our Taegan home to us. Both those men will. I figured the hopeless look on your face had to be for Levi, because he has no hope of surviving this. He signed his own death notice. Your man is just going to be the one to make sure it’s followed through.”

~~~~~

Harriet POV

Screeching tires drifting on the gravel startled my son’s child and me. We were sharing a can of fruit cocktail he found in the cabinets, and he was helping me take each bite between taking his own.

At the sound of the car, he drops the spoon he painstakingly cleaned after finding it at the bottom of a dusty drawer. He growled, not happy about dirtying it again.

I may not know his real name, but I know my grandson has a minor thing about dirt and being dirty. He had already found a washcloth, cleaned my face and hands as best he could, then cleaned the areas that he said smelled the worst around us in the RV before searching for food. I noticed it was all the places Levi lingered or sat.

I know I said I’d protect him, but it feels more like he’s the one looking after and protecting me.

Even now, hearing the car outside, after getting the dropped spoon and setting it on the counter with the canned fruit, he went to retrieve one of the big wooden spoons he had hidden around the RV and peaked out the window. Another fierce but adorable growl leaves his lips.

“Stupid Levi is back,” he mutters.

“In a car?” I asked in surprise. This little boy told me Levi left in wolf form. Did he kill to steal another vehicle?

“It’s bad grandpa’s car,” he growls.

Bad grandpa? Would that be Levi’s father? Did he leave to get something from his father? Some way or something to help him accomplish his goal?

“Levi is on the phone now,” he says.

I can hear Levi getting heated, but can’t make out the words. He must have found a way to get a call to go through to the boy’s mother.

“Don’t worry, Miss Harriet. I’ll protect you. Grandpa says that’s the alpha’s job and I’m the little alpha.”

Max. You've influenced this boy so much in such a short amount of time. We may have had an estranged married life, but I'm proud. If this little boy is like Max one day, he will make the pack proud.

"Child, I'm the one who should be protecting you. Come over here and get behind m--"

The little door to the RV opens with a loud bang, making us both jump.

The boy holds the spoon out in front of him like a sword, making Levi snarl. I pushed myself off of the bed and pulled the boy to me, trying to protect him with my feeble body.

"Alright, Taegan. Time to go. Your daddy is on the way," Levi says, then cackles sickly.

He shaved, showered, and tried to clean himself up, but it just made him look more feral without the extra hair and grime to hide the cuts and sickly tint to his skin tone. If he was trying to clean himself so as to not scare the boy's mother, I'm sorry to say it would have the opposite effect.

Taegan. That's what he called my grandson. His name is Taegan.

It's a beautiful name.

"I'm not going anywhere with you, Levi. Daddy's going to come get me and Miss Harriet right here. I don't want to go with you in bad grandpa's car. I don't like bad grandpa and I don't like you!" Taegan waved the spoon at him in a threat.

"You're wrong, you little shit. Bad grandpa is already dead if you are referring to my shithead dad. Had to kill him to get his phone and keys. Now, get over here," he pulls Taegan out of my hold momentarily, but I scream "No!" and throw myself forward, putting all my weight on Levi's arms until he lets go, then pull Taegan behind me.

"What the fuck are you doing?" He snarls at me.

"You are not taking him anywhere. Just leave him be. You got what you want if my son is meeting you now. Why do you need the boy?"

"You turning righteous all of a sudden, bitch? I need him because that's how I'm going to keep his fuck of a father in line. He's my bargaining chip. Who the fuck do you think you are to tell me what to do when you are the one that made me this way?"

I cringe at the truth in his words, but then Taegan yells back. "Mommy said you are responsible for your own actions, Levi. Mommy said you make your own choices. You make bad choices. Don't yell at Miss Harriet because you're stupid and mean."

Levi snarls sickly, reaching for Taegan again, but I quickly move to block him. He growls at me, his arm shooting out and gripping my throat. His claws extend, sinking into my neck and then he sinks the claws on his other hand into my abdomen, the searing pain making me scream.

I saw the crazed look in his eyes, and I knew he wasn't going to stop there. He was going to kill me. This was going to be my end. Either way, with the poison in my body preventing me from healing, I would die from the wounds I had just received. He was just going to make it faster than the slow death I faced with internal bleeding.

Before he could snap my neck, Taegan came around, growling so fiercely, I thought he was my son. Only an adult wolf could create a growl that is that strong and fierce.

He lifts the wooden spoon, his blue eyes shining bright, illuminating like they are glowing in the dim RV, and as the spoon comes down to Levi's arm, a blue light emanates from Taegan's hand, expelling Levi from me, throwing him backward to the front of the RV.

Magic. The boy had magic.

My son is a pure wolf. That could only mean....

It's maternal. That strong kind of magic is hereditary. His mother's side has witches, I'm sure.

Before I can crumple to the ground and before Levi recovers, Taegan takes my hand and screams, "RUN!" before pulling me out of the RV.

I don't know where I found the strength, but I obeyed, following the boy outside and over the rocky terrain, into the thick forest.

"We have to run and hide!" Taegan yells, pulling me along. It's like his hold on me is feeding me the strength I need to keep going. "Come on, Miss Harriet! Run! Run!"

I don't know how long we ran for, but eventually the sound of tires alerts us we are near a road. It sounds like there is more than just one car.

"The road," I gasped, pointing to the area I could hear the cars coming from. We don't stand a chance of outrunning him, but if we can get to the road and flag down a car to help, we might stand a chance. If there is more than one car, it can't be Levi. It must be someone else.

Taegan pulls me in that direction, and soon, we emerge from the trees and come face-to-face with two vehicles winding around rough roads in the forest. It's a van and a luxurious SUV.

I've seen that SUV before.

The cars stop, the tires kicking up gravel on the road.

The first to get out was Lord Antonio, and my heart dropped to the ground.

"Hello again, Luna. We've been searching quite extensively for you," he purrs, and though his voice is calm, I can feel the threat in it.

Taegan must too, because he stands in front of me, holding the spoon out again like a weapon.

“Who are you?! Are you bad too?!”

Antonio is stunned for a moment, and the passenger door to the SUV opens and out strides Katherine. Her mouth is opened in disbelief and her movements are hesitant until she reaches her partner.

“Is he....?” She stands by Antonio, wide-eyed.

Antonio eyed Taegan, his face softening and understanding crossing his features.

“Yes, my love. I believe this is your grandson.”

73 More Stupids

Chapter 73 - He Stole My Heart, I Stole His Child

“Grandson? Great. More stupids. I know you are not talking about me. Mommy said I only have Grandma Lucy and grandpa doesn’t have mates,” Taegan holds the spoon out like a weapon, the blue glow still emanating from his hands and eyes.

No, Max doesn't have mates. He lost two in his life, and one of those was me by my own choosing. I rejected him and the pack to prevent Levi from using me to do more damage. In my panic, while I was being kidnapped, while still on Lord Antonio's coven lands that are warded to prevent outside influences, I rejected the bond and my title. If I had kept it just a few minutes longer until we were past the wards, I could have alerted Max or my son, but I made a rash decision at the moment. I couldn't think straight from the influence of the poison and from my head and body being thrashed round in the hold of Levi's teeth. I thought he was going to kill me and I didn't want Max or the pack to feel the pain of losing a Luna to death.

Now, here we are. I'm back in the presence of the vampires who had tried to return me to my former mate and my son before. I'm sure they are here to complete that task. I'm doomed, but the boy will be safe.

Antonio is watching Taegan's movements, and doesn’t seem surprised by the magic present in the small boy.

Of course he’s not. He is ancient, and he imprinted on Katherine. He would have used all his resources to find out every aspect of her past. He must have known that there was magic in her

bloodline. The boy's father is my son, a pure alpha wolf. That means the magic in him came from Katherine's blood.

"Child, your mother may have told you that you do not have other grandparents, but it is not entirely true. The woman you are standing before is--"

"Stop!" Katherine cuts Antonio off. "It is not our place."

"My love," he gave her a questioning look, "I thought--"

"I do not want to give her more reason to hate me. It is not our place."

He looks conflicted, but after several seconds nods his head, "As you wish, my love."

Katherine moves her sharp look from Antonio to me. "Harriet, you need to unhand the child."

I nod, knowing that they will keep him safe until Max or my son arrive, and let go of Taegan's hand. When I do, the pain returns tenfold to my wounds and I fall in a heap on the ground.

Taegan's magic, and his desire to keep me safe must have prevented the wounds from manifesting into being life-threatening. Without his magic to keep the bleeding and pain at bay, I'm now bleeding out and the pain is unimaginable.

"Harriet!" Taegan yells, reaching for me with his small hands, unsure of how to help.

"Child, don't! She is--"

When Antonio reaches for him to pull him away from me, Taegan turns his glare on Antonio, growling menacingly and his eyes glow an eerie blue, his aura unbelievably strong for a child.

Antonio steps back in surprise, not ready for the power of the boy's magic.

"You stay away! Mommy said I don't talk to strangers, and I don't like you! You're mean to Miss Harriet. Grandpa is going to beat your," Taegan stops and looks around and, even in my pain-filled delirium, I know what he is going to say, and I want to laugh at his antics, "AZZ!" Taegan whispered yells, then growls again.

Antonio is staring at him, contemplating what to do now. I can see he wants to tear the child away from me, but he doesn't want to anger Taegan further.

"Tony, just call his pack. We can supervise and make sure he stays safe until someone gets here to retrieve them. We need to find the new wolf before he causes more issues as well," Katherine rests her hand on Antonio's shoulder, then looks at Taegan with longing.

Neither of us deserve this boy. She knows it as well as I, but he's leaning over my crumpled, dying body, protecting me with everything he is, even though I was the reason for all the bad things that have happened to him and his mother since they came back into Axel's life.

The irony is not lost on me that the grandmother that is here to save him, he is being wary of while protecting the one he should be resenting.

"Okay, my love," Antonio murmurs to her, then kisses her cheek before looking back at Taegan. "I will be calling your father or grandfather to come get you, now. I can see you won't let your guard down in our presence, but please do not run from us. We really are here to assist you in getting back to your parents."

Taegan growls again, and doesn't move from my side, blocking my body with his as much as he can. He still doesn't trust them.

Antonio told a group of his men to continue on the road, and to start searching for Levi. He pulls out his phone, then heads to the other side of the car to make the call.

Taegan reminds me of a dog that feels threatened, backed into the corner. He is still gripping the spoon, glaring between Antonio and Katherine, ready to attack if either makes a move he doesn't like.

I could do nothing but lie on the forest floor in agony, slowly dying while bleeding out from my abdominal wound. The poison is preventing any healing. Blood is trickling down my neck from Levi's claws that stabbed into my neck.

I'm dying, and I don't have much longer.

Please, Max. Hurry. I don't know how much longer I can hold out, and I don't know how Taegan will act if I pass before you get here.

~~~~~

Levi POV

I watch from the cover of the trees as the little shit and that bitch cower in the presence of the vampires.

Vampires. I don't want to get mixed up with them. The bitch said they were the reason she was dying, the bite from the hot bloodsucker poisoning her blood and slowly killing her.

The smell of blood is rancid in the air. It smells amazing. The carnal desire to tear and destroy living flesh flares inside me from the smell.

I can't get closer, though, without them detecting me, and I don't want to risk getting bit by a vampire. Not when I have a fight coming with that bastard that stole my place. I also don't want

to feel the electric shock, like high-voltage powerlines shooting through my veins from touching the kid again. I don't know what he did. Maybe it's a wolf thing I am unaware of. It hurt like hell and took me forever to recover from.

No, the vampires can keep the bitch and the little shit. They're not worth the hassle.

I was going to use the child, threatening him to force the alpha to submit and end his own life. I'm going to have to do this the old-fashioned way. Fighting.

My carnal side I feel growing stronger and stronger by the second. I can take the alpha on my own. I'm sure. Once he is out of the way, taking Bailey back and taking over the pack of werewolves will be easy. Just as easy as it was to kill my asshole father.

My father, who always tried to control every aspect of my life, threw a tantrum when I walked through the front door to his house, ass naked and filthy. I didn't realize it had been weeks since I left home. He made his usual tirade about how worthless and undependable I was. He kept telling me I was ruining my life and my future.

When I just growled and demanded his phone to try and call Bailey, he started insulting her, and even had the audacity to tell me that she had moved on with her life, and it was time I did the same. He was crazy, making it sound like Bailey was gone for years or something, and that she was with her husband, which couldn't be further from the truth.

That damn alpha first turned Bailey against me, and then my own father.

I can still taste my father's blood in the back of my throat. When he insisted that I was insane, and raised his hand to hit me, I snapped. I shifted and lunged for him, tearing his throat, then ripping him to pieces all over his office. The mahogany desk he had imported from Europe that he was so proud of, that he always showed off to women before bending them over it, was painted in red by the time I was through with him.

Good riddance. I hold all the power now. With him gone, all I have left is to take out the alpha; the bastard that stole my Bailey from me. Once he is gone, I will finally have it all. All the control, all the power and all the influence I could ever want.

I don't need the kid. I hope the vampires kill him. One less thing for me to take care of later.

I started to sprint in the direction of Lucy's home. It won't be too much longer and I can finally come face to face with my last obstacle. I want to be prepared.

## 74 Endings

# Chapter 74 - He Stole My Heart, I Stole His Child

Axel POV

I'm almost there. Almost to Bailey's old home.

Addison stopped our team a few hours back to let me know that her father had found Taegan and my mother. I let my dad know and he is going for them, but I'm going to finish this for good.

I'm tired of the games and waiting around. I want this finished so my mate never has to have this threat hanging over her head. He deserves death for all he has put her through and for the abuse he subjected my son to.

Death is his only future now.

Bailey feels calmer now in the link. I'm grateful to my cousin and Casey, because I trust them completely to keep her safe in my stead. Tearing myself away from her when she was in so much heartache was hard enough. I wanted to tell her that Taegan was safe, but I'm going to let Dad tell her once he gets to Taegan, on the off chance that some other shit happens before my father arrives.

It's night now, and the town's sleeping and quiet as we run the perimeter through the trees.

Not too much further.

"When we get there, you all wait outside. Surround the house and prevent him from running. He won't leave here alive," I tell everyone with me through the mindlink.

"Yes, Alpha," they echoed back together.

I can see the house. I know what it looks like from the pictures in Lucy's new home and our pack lands and the images provided by my lawyers' team when I first found Bailey and was trying to buy her grandmother's house.

The lights are all off in the small house, but I can smell his stench all around. There is a clear trail leading in, but I can't detect one coming out.

As we get closer, my team moves to circle the area. If he tries to escape after his delusions are replaced with the reality that he brought himself to, they will stop him. Addison is here, and I'm confident that she can outrun any of us, even me.

I slowly prowled around the house, looking in each window for any sign of him, but nothing but darkness was inside. I can faintly smell my mother at the door. I wonder if this is where they have been hiding out all along. I know she is with my son and the vampires, so dad will have to deal with her. My focus is going to be entirely on this asshole right now.

The hair prickles up on the back of my neck and a low growl emanates from my chest as I see something move in the shadows inside and at the front of the house. Xiomora, our witch member, rode on the back of her mate, and he sent me a quick mind link to let me know she had put the ward up. We are now in a concealed dome where the humans on the other side won't be able to hear or see what's happening on the inside.

Because of what I have planned for him, that's exactly what I need. His screams will be music to my ears and that house may not be able to hold all the carnage I have in store for him.

I crouch low, my muscles tight, ready to spring, then crash into the door, tearing it right off its hinges.

As soon as my wolf's body landed on the door, a knife stabbed into my side, and I roared out in agony.

My shift is automatic as I return to human form. Silver. The bastard stabbed me with silver. Before my claw fully recedes, I swipe in the direction the attack came from and a growl along with the sound of a sickening tearing of flesh alerts me that I got him.

I stumble back, growling as I stare at the asshole clinging to the side of his face who has been plaguing my life, and the life of those I love.

He was the reason my mate didn't find me when she learned she was pregnant. He was the reason for her being so hesitant and jaded when I found her both times, suspecting my cousin was a girlfriend when she called me and why she thought I was trying to trick her when I found her years later at the gas station.

He was the reason for Taegan's distrust and his strong protective nature over his mother. He is the reason my mate has low self-esteem and why she sometimes looks at herself in the mirror with a solemn expression. He is the reason for all the negative and painful memories for all three of us for the past several years, and it ends tonight.

"It's about time you showed up," Levi sneered, shaking his head as his wound slowly healed.

My background check pictures showed a clean cut, snobby looking man, but the man before me was wild and unkept. His hair is swept back in an attempt to look clean and styled, but it makes him look greasy instead. His eyes are wild, red-rimmed and with heavy bags and his skin is a sickly color.

He's feral. The crazed look about him suggests nothing other than a feral beast, with only blood and malice on his mind. He's like a dog with rabies, and he needs to be put down.

I pull the knife from my side, then toss it on the ground, the wound slowly heals itself because of the silver blade. Normally, a wound like this would heal in seconds, but it will take a couple of minutes with the silver.

“I found that in my father’s kitchen. Thought it could get more use than once a year when he used it to carve a turkey for staged campaign pictures. I noticed when I touched his sterling silver flatware it burned my hands. Thought it would do nicely to slice through you a bit. Burned like a bitch to hold, though,” he held his hands up, examining them.

“If you think that hurts, just wait,” I growled.

The crazed look shifts to me, like he is just now fully taking in my appearance. I almost smirk when his eyes land on my dick. His eyes are wide and a look of disgust and scorn crosses his features. He’s nude as well, and I am definitely the more blessed of the two of us. No wonder Bailey said she had never been a screamer before. It’s like comparing a vienna sausage to a kielbasa link. After me, she probably didn’t even feel the prick.

That train of thought brought a new bout of rage, and a fierce growl echoed from me in the empty room.

I’m sorry, Bailey, but your childhood home is about to be soaked in this vermin’s blood.

My wound is almost healed now, and I can finally shift when the time is right, but I want to speak to the prick first.

“So, what is your goal here, Levi? You can’t seriously believe that you are going to come out of this alive? My father is on his way to my son, who is safely being looked after by Bailey’s mother, whose lover just happens to be the Lord of the vampire coven you pissed off.”

His eyes went wide in surprise. “Bailey’s mom?”

I chuckled darkly, “You just had to piss off all the most powerful supernatural beasts you could.”

“Bailey doesn’t-”

“Have a mom? I would call her more of a birth giver than mom. Lucy, if anyone, earned that title. But, Katherine still cared enough to make her vampire boyfriend hunt you down. They found you even before you called. I was leaving to come here to end you and save my son anyway, then you had to call and piss me off further with your demented phone call. So what is it you think you’re getting out of this? My pack? My title? Or are you just hoping to kill me and claim my pregnant mate? Because none of those scenarios are going to happen.”

“PREGNANT?!” he snarls, hair sprouting up on his arms as I smirk. “YOU.....YOU FUCKING IMPREGNATED MY FIANCE AGAIN?!”



I choked out a disbelieving laugh, “I knocked up my mate. It isn’t the first time, it won’t be the last, I’m sure.”

He shifts, lunging for me, but I side step and kick him across the room, smashing the wall with his giant body and leaving a massive imprint. His wolf is big, but he is still no match for me.

I shift, and am on him in seconds, tearing at his throat. He tries to rotate his body to get on top, but my strength far overpowers him and he has no chance. Every bite, every tear of his flesh, I am running through all the ways he has brought this on himself. I’m replaying every wrong he has ever done to my family, which is fueling my rage.

It takes my father’s voice shouting in my head to break the spell of my fury. By that time, Levi is in shreds, just as I promised he would be.

Good riddance.

“You little shit, answer me!” My dad yells in the mind link.

“I was a little busy. Is my son okay? What’s wrong?”

“Taegan is fine, but your mother....” his voice breaks, and I can feel his heartbreak in his tone.

I took one last look around the room, amazed that it was able to hold all my beastly rage with the size of our bodies. Levi is dead, and my job here is done.

“I’m on my way,” I told my dad.

~~~~~

Max POV

When my son sent me a mind link telling me that Katherine and that leech, Antonio, had not only found my grandson, but my mate as well, I didn’t know what to think. I didn’t know what to fucking expect, but it wasn’t this.

Taegan’s entire body was glowing blue, his eyes shining bright in the night as he leaned over my former mate, telling her grandpa was coming and she was going to be okay.

His faith in me is endless, but I can’t fix this. I can’t fix her.

I could see by the amount of blood around her and by the look of her face that it was the end for her. Her shirt and pants are soaked in blood, and Taegan has her blood drying all over his knees, legs and hands. Even his face is smeared with it. My grandson, who likes to always stay clean, is covered in rotting blood, and he doesn’t care. His glowing blue eyes were watching Harriet like he was begging her to hold on for my arrival.

Katherine or Antonio could have helped her, but didn't. Addison said that Taegan wouldn't let them get close to her, and I think they thought dying was her fate anyway, so let it be.

Death was the fair punishment for all the pain she put Bailey and Taegan through by her actions, but now that I'm fucking faced with her death, I don't want her to die. I want her to live so I can make right all the ways that I wronged her over the years.

I should have been there for her when she was having doubts. I should have loved her, despite the doubts I had about myself. I should have communicated with her, talking through our issues instead of avoiding them. Now, she's dying and I'm left with all these regrets.

Katherine is watching Taegan with tear-filled eyes. Antonio said his men were sent to deal with a mess the fucker, Levi, made at his father's house.

I just got word before I got here from the warriors with my son that he is ripping the bastard apart, and the threat has finally come to an end. There are so many endings happening all at once, and it's choking me up knowing the end of my mate is one of them.

"Grandpa! Grandpa, help her! She's...." Taegan saw me as I walked through the trees to where he was crouching on the ground with Harriet. His glowing eyes are filled with tears, and he is gripping Harriet's hand in his.

"Miss Harriet is hurt, grandpa! She saved me but got hurt. She protected me from bad Levi. She can't die, grandpa. She's my friend! Can you help her? Can you save her?"

I fall to the ground on her other side, and she weakly turns her head towards me, a pained smile on her face. The veins under her skin are black, and she reeks of death. I'm surprised she is alive now.

I sent a mind link desperately to my son, and when I finally got through to him, I told him that his mother.....she's with me, and he needed to hurry.

I can't save her. Anti-venom can't save her. Nothing could save her at this point. All I can do is make sure her passing is more comfortable.

I take her hand, the one Taegan isn't gripping, and let my aura wash over her, softening her struggles and trying to comfort her in the only way I am able.

"Forgive me, Max. I know it's a lot to ask," she whispers in a broken, dry voice. "I messed up. I know I did. Forgive me."

"Harriet, please," I sobbed, resting my head on her blood-soaked shoulder. "I forgive you. I'll fucking do whatever, just hold on a bit longer. Please. Axel is coming now."

"I wanted to see you one last time," she continued, almost like she didn't hear me. "I needed to tell you I was sorry."

She looks at Taegan, and raises a shaking hand, resting it on his tear-stained cheek. “You listen to your grandpa. He is a great man, just like you will be.”

“Harriet,” I cried out, seeing in her hazy eyes that her death was near. “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry,” I sobbed.

I’ve done so wrong by this woman. I don’t deserve her forgiveness, but I want her to know how sorry I am.

I take her, pulling her into my arms, telling her over and over how sorry I am. I thought we were coming to fight her with Levi. I never suspected that we would come to find her like this. I know I told Axel not to hesitate if he needed to take her out to protect Taegan, but I never expected to find out that she was using the last of her strength to protect Taegan herself.

I cradle her against me, holding her tightly like I haven’t done in decades, crying like a fool as the last of her life leaves her.

I feel it. I feel it in my heart as she takes her final breath. Taegan must feel it too, because he falls in front of me, resting his head against her broken body and sobs with me, both of us weeping over the grandmother that gave the last of her life to protect him.

I don’t know how long we were like that before Axel came. He is bloodsoaked and stinks of the rough fucker, but that doesn’t stop him from falling on the ground and throwing his arms around us, weeping at the loss of his mother.

“Daddy!” Taegan turns and wails, wrapping his arms around his father. “She saved me. She was my friend,” he cries, which makes Axel and me cry even more.

“Of course she did,” Axel chokes out. “She was your grandma, Taegan. She saved you because she loved you, just like all of us.”

Taegan turns around on Axel’s lap, a new bout of tears streaming down his face.

“My grandma? Harriet was my grandma?” He asks me for confirmation. I nod weakly, and then Taegan falls down on Harriet’s body, clinging to her. “Grandma,” he whimpers, and the blue glow is back, surprising his father who stares down at his son in amazement.

“What is-?”

“I don’t know,” I whispered, my voice meek from sorrow. “He was glowing when I showed up.”

“That’s magic,” Axel gasps, holding his hand over the glow.

It looks like Taegan is trying his hardest to pull Harriet back from death, but that isn’t possible. She is gone. I feel it, and I know my son and grandson feel it too. I wonder if she held on as long

as she did because of Taegan's new magic. Looking at the wound in her stomach, she should have been dead long ago.

"Where did it come from?" Axel asks, wiping his eyes with the back of his hand. He then rests it on Taegan's back as he sobs against his grandmother's body.

"It's my Rina's father's blood. There is much I need to explain, it seems, for this may affect your mate very soon." Antonio pushed himself off the tree he was perched on and watching from and walks over to us. "I will have my men help prepare her for travel back to your pack. We can take the van as my men and yours clean the mess left in this town. We can talk along the way."

From the look on Katherine's face, I can see she is just as surprised as the rest of us by this news from her blood-sucking boyfriend.

I don't have enough brain capacity to think about that right now, or to fully comprehend what having a grandson with magic means.

I stare down at Harriet as she grows cold in my arms, then plant a final kiss on her stiff lips. "I'm sorry Harriet. I'm sorry for making you feel so unloved. You gave me my son, and just for that reason alone, I have always loved you." I will have to live the rest of my life with the regrets of this thrown away bond and the pain of knowing that I failed her.

75 Curses

Chapter 75 - He Stole My Heart, I Stole His Child

Axel POV

The first hour of the drive back was silent, except for Taegan's muffled sobs. I held him tightly against my chest, joining his sorrow.

She protected him. She gave her life for him, and I didn't make it in time to thank her.

My dad is in the very back of the van behind us, like he is guarding my mother at the back, her body resting behind his seat. Antonio tried to supply us with another vehicle to transport her in, but all three of us said no, wanting to keep her with us as long as possible.

Katherine, seeming pissed at her mate, helped as dad wrapped mom's body in a thick blanket recovered from the RV that Levi used when he escaped with Taegan.

Dad refused to let the vampires touch her, but for some reason, took Katherine's help. They worked together to gently wrap her in the blanket and then a plastic tarp before setting her tenderly in the back of the van.

I just held my son, much like I'm doing now, letting my grief for my mother and my relief for having my son back intertwine into a roller coaster of extreme emotions.

Eventually, I used Addison's phone to call Bailey. She was relieved I had Taegan, but worried about us being with the vampires, telling me to take care of our baby and get back to her soon. She sounded much better than when I left her. I could hear Lucy in the background, barking orders at someone.

With all threats gone, Casey and Courtney could both let down their guard and leave Bailey in the care of the doctors and nurses, but they refused. I knew they would. She is not just their Luna, but their friend. Courtney and Bailey have become great friends, and Courtney is insanely protective of her friends. The first time she met Quinn, she clung to her and wouldn't let Quinn ever feel alone.

She's tenacious. I knew she would never leave Bailey alone in a moment like this. I'm glad my mate has so many people loving and supporting her in my stead.

"Daddy, Miss Harriet was my grandma? Really?" Taegan asked in his rough but small voice, still thick with his tears. He rubbed his nose on my borrowed shirt and tried to hold back his crying momentarily.

He's so lost in his sadness he doesn't realize how dirty he is. My poor son. He connected with my mom in such a short time. Through hard and trying times, that's how life-changing bonds are formed. He formed a bond with her only for her to be ripped from his life before he could really know her.

I feel much the same.

She fucked up. There is no doubt about that. But...She was a good mother to me for the most part before the whole Stephanie and trying to make her my chosen mate thing started. She was nagging and had a manipulative streak, but I never doubted her love for me. Her protecting my son with her life is proof of that. You don't give your life for someone you hate.

I wish I could have told her I loved her one last time.

"Daddy?"

"Yes, bud," I rested my head on top of his.

"Is she....she's not coming back? She's like....she's like grandpa's other mates?"

My poor son. This is his first experience with death, and he's not handling it well.

“I’m sorry, Taegan. I’m sorry I didn’t get to you guys sooner,” is the only thing I can think of to say.

Taegan wipes his nose on my shirt again, then looks behind us and holds his arms out to dad.

“Grandpa,” he whimpers.

My dad doesn’t hesitate to reach for him, pulling him over the seat and holding him tightly against his bare chest as they sob together.

Katherine is in the row in front of me with a grieving look on her own face.

She thought my mom was her only real friend. And even though that might have been a ruse, that can’t take away 2 decades of friendship on her part.

She is staring at Taegan with such longing and sorrow, like she wishes she could comfort him while seeking his comfort in return, just like my dad is right now.

Antonio is in the front seat beside the driver, staring back at Katherine with his own hesitant longing. I think the two of them are fighting now because of all this. She has been treating him coldly since I got here.

I have a suspicion it’s because of Taegan wielding magic. The comment about her father and it being from his blood is what seemed to set her off.

“You said you’d explain what you meant by your earlier statement concerning my son’s blood, Lord Antonio. Care to start explaining?”

I can’t help the venom in my gruff tone. It’s not entirely his fault my mom is dead, but his withholding information has played a major part in all this shit.

Katherine turns her longing stare away from Taegan and glares at Antonio, making him cringe before looking my way.

He sighs deeply. “It’s as I said. Rina’s father was a witch. A pretty powerful one, but he chose to leave his coven in New York to live quietly up here in Canada.”

“How do you know?” Katherine glared at him. “How do you know something about my father that even I don’t know?”

“My love, I made it my job to know anything and everything about you. Plus,” he swallows nervously, “I have been aware of your bloodline for centuries, since the beginning of werewolf time. I needed to know how your father overcame the curse on your mother in order to find a way to save you.”

“Curse?” Dad pipes up behind me, still cradling Taegan, though Taegan is now staring ahead at Antonio with the rest of us, with the same look of distrust. “Her father was a witch and cursed?”

Antonio looks guilty as he meets dad’s gaze. “No, the curse is on her mother’s side. Her father just happened to be a witch and found a way around it. There is a curse on the women in their bloodline. Their lives are cut short because of the curse, and Rina’s father had to sacrifice his life in order to save her mother. I had to take Rina’s life and make her part of the undead to save her from the curse.”

He turned a softened stare at Katherine. “I know you are upset with me, my love. I kept you ignorant to protect you from the truth. I didn’t want you to feel the sorrow that comes from losing your loved ones.”

“You kept me in the dark to feed your god complex,” Katherine snorts. “You kept me ignorant because you wanted to keep control of me. That isn’t love.”

Antonio’s face falls. “My love-“

“Quit calling me that. This isn’t a small matter your sweet words and a distracting romp in bed can fix. You’re telling me that my daughter, the daughter I abandoned for you, is going to live a short life, and you knew all along. Were you ever going to tell me, or were you going to keep me ignorant until her death?”

“What?!” I snapped. “Bailey...my Bailey is going to....?” I can’t bring myself to even say it, and I don’t want to freak Taegan out more than he already is. The beast in me is fuming, though, that some impending curse is threatening my mate’s life. The hair on my arms is standing on end, and I want to take the anger and uncertainty out on him, but I still need answers.

Antonio looks between me and Katherine apprehensively. “It’s not certain. The moon goddess seems to have paired her with the alpha for a reason. I’m guessing it’s the same reason she originally paired Alyssa with the former Alpha.”

“My Alyssa?!” Dad snarled, surprising Taegan with the harshness in his tone. Dad quickly starts to rock him to comfort him, reining in the worst of his temper. “You’re saying this curse is what killed my first mate? You knew it, and didn’t warn me, or try to give us this information sooner?”

“I found out after,” Antonio states. “I didn’t look into it too much until I met Rina. I just knew the origin of the curse.”

“Which is...?” I asked as all of us looked at him expectantly.

He is silent for several seconds, appearing to be weighing his words before he speaks.

“The moon goddess herself. Because of the burden of creating your race, her female descendents are cursed and blessed. Blessed with special protection, but cursed with short lives, in order to sustain the goddess herself.”

I can’t believe what I’m hearing. “So you’re saying not only is there witch ancestry in my mate’s genes, but she comes from the goddess herself? You can’t be serious.”

Antonio nods solemnly. “I was there when the curse was placed on her, as well as the other races for the crimes of playing God. She had the worst end of the deal. The first vampires, like myself, were cursed with bloodlust in our quest for immortality and power. Witches were cursed with seclusion for tampering with the earth’s elements. The fae and all the races they embody were cursed with mortality for breaking the barrier between their world and ours, though their royalty seems to still live exponentially longer lives. The moon goddess, though, took all the curses upon herself and her bloodline so the rest of your kind could live in peace. Your mate’s bloodline still carries that burden today.”

Katherine’s face is pure horror. She does not any longer appear to be a mother who abandoned her child, but a mother horrified for her child and her well-being.

I’m horrified. I can’t live without Bailey. We just found out she’s pregnant. Now that is overshadowed by a curse I knew nothing about. No one knew anything about it. Only Antonio, and he kept that information to himself all this time for selfish reasons.

“You knew, and you were just going to let her die?!” Katherine said in a deadly whisper.

“My love, no. I was just-“

“I said, don’t call me that!” She yells. “You knew! You knew all this time, as well as knowing how I felt about her. The guilt I carried. Now this?!”

She shakes her head, her anger matching mine and my father’s.

“I will make this right,” he says, “I will stop at nothing to save her now, Rina.”

“Yeah, NOW! Now that the cat is out of the bag!”

“Is mommy going to die too?!” Taegan sobbed and both my dad and I growled, pissed this asshole revealed this in front of him.

“No, Taegan, she won’t. I promise you I will never let that happen,” dad tells him.

I glared at Antonio. “When we get back, you are going to tell me everything. Fucking everything.”

He sneers, not liking being ordered around, but Katherine quickly hisses at him. “If my daughter passes, I will never forgive you. The day she breathes her last breath will be my last day too, and

I'll be cursing you the entire way down to hell, so I hope you aren't thinking of not helping them."

He groans softly. "Okay, fine. Since it appears the stakes were just raised, I have no choice."

"No, you don't," she snaps.

Fuck.

One threat was just overcome by Levi's death, but now it seems an even greater threat is hanging over us now. I won't give up, though. I will never give up fighting for my mate's happiness.

Like a habit, I almost sent a prayer up to the moon goddess for guidance and strength, but I caught myself before I did. Now, I'm wondering if I should be cursing her instead.

76 Great Cost

Chapter 76 - He Stole My Heart, I Stole His Child

Bailey POV

Chris wheeled in another bed for my grandma, and she's currently snoring soundly in it. Courtney is lying beside me, her arm around me as our heads rest on each other. She told me stories of Axel from their childhood all night to keep me calm while I nervously waited for my son and mate to return.

"He's almost here," Casey growls, annoyed that both me and Courtney refused to sleep all night. He thought, since we were both pregnant, that we needed to sleep, but she seemed just as anxious as me for our family to return and neither of us could.

He had nurse aides come in with chamomile tea, and even had a doctor stop by to try and give us something to help put us to sleep. We both snapped at him and he grumpily gave up.

Upon hearing that Axel and my son were almost here, both of us jumped out of bed.

"Uh, uh. You, Luna, have to stay here. Alpha's orders."

I glared at Casey. "Alpha's orders my ass. I want to go get my son."

"I'm sure he will come straight here," Casey crossed his arms firmly over his chest.

I scoff and think about kicking him, but hold myself back. “There’s no danger any more. I think going out to the front of the clinic is safe, Casey.”

“If you faint again on the way out, then what? No ma’am. You can wait here.”

Courtney sighs beside me. She moves in front of Casey and wraps her arms around his waist. He’s untrusting, but eventually uncrosses his arms and moves his hands down to her waist. “He’s right, Bailey. Let’s just wait and see if they-”

She grips him tightly while he’s distracted and pulls him away from the door.

“GO, BAILEY! I GOT HIM!”

I snap into action, gripping the doorknob and running out into the hall while Casey is yelling for me to stop and for Courtney to let him go. Goodness, I love her. I’ll give her all of the leftover wall decals of porn star Casey after this.

Yeah, I could have waited for Axel in the room, but I want my son. Even seeing him a few seconds sooner is worth pissing off Casey for.

When I made it out front, ignoring the looks of nurses and doctors as I ran past them in the hall, a dark van was coming down the road towards the clinic, and I knew it was them.

Finally.

~~~~~

Katherine POV

“To the left on this road. My mate is at the clinic and the, uh, morgue is there as well.”

The young alpha points to the left, cradling his sleeping son against his chest with his other hand.

“The clinic?” I can’t help but ask. “Why is she in the clinic?”

Tony’s earlier revelation has been plaguing my thoughts, and hearing my daughter is in the clinic is making panic rise inside me. Why would she need to be in the clinic? Is the curse he spoke of already affecting her?

The alpha looks down at his son sleeping, then looked back up at me with a glower. “She isn’t hurt, if that is what you are afraid of. It was a precaution to keep her there while I was away.”

“Precaution? Is the rest of the pack not safe?” That new wolf did manage to kidnap the boy, my grandson, while he was on pack lands. Maybe this isn’t the safest place for-

“She’s expecting. I wanted her to be in the care of our doctors since she was stressed.”

The alpha is glaring at me disapprovingly, like it is none of my business.

I can't say I blame him. I lowered my gaze and turned back around to the front.

My daughter is having another baby. That's great. From this car ride alone, I can tell that the young alpha really treasures her and their son. Even Max seems to treasure Taegan. I was getting choked up watching Max holding the boy, wishing I could comfort him the same way he was.

Taegan loved both these men. He was so protective of Harriet too, even though Harriet did such horrid things. I can't help but hope that maybe one day he can have that kind of relationship with me as well.

Only if Bailey wishes for it, though.

I will not do anything to harm her or bring her more pain. The asshole I chose over going back to her has caused her family enough trouble, it seems. I caused her so much pain by trusting Harriet. I didn't want this life. I didn't want to be a vampire. I didn't want to leave her like I did.

As a human, my addictions ruled my life, and then I let myself be manipulated by everyone around me. I let my selfishness and poor judgment come before doing what was right, but not anymore.

When I looked back up, Tony was staring back at me, a pained look on his face.

He knows what I'm thinking and what I'm feeling. He always does. That's how he's been able to control me for so long, making himself the center of my entire world.

He knows what I'm planning to do. The anxiety that my resolution is bringing him is written all over his body.

I'm sorry, Tony, but you should have been honest with me from the start. I have a feeling that you knew Harriet was manipulating me, and you used that to your advantage. You knew I didn't want this life and I wanted my daughter, but you used Harriet's accusations about Max to make me feel like I didn't have another option. You kept secret after secret from me, even though you knew those secrets would harm my daughter.

I loved you, but I'm not an addict looking for a savior any more. I'm not the same lost and frightened human. I won't let you and your selfishness harm others, especially those I care about, anymore.

Looking away from him, I saw a small hospital coming up in the distance. Most of the houses and buildings here are rustic, made from logs or wood siding. This building, though, is concrete and looks sterile and clean.

Outside, a young woman with an adorable face and long brown hair is waiting out front, looking out of breath as she pants, slightly bent over. A bulky man with tattoos everywhere, and then a

skinny red-headed woman soon ran out to join her. It isn't until my mother comes out of the doors as we pull up to the front that I realize who the first woman is.

That's her. My daughter.

As the van comes to a stop, the alpha adjusts his son in his arms as he moves to get out. I'm sitting frozen in my seat, just staring at the woman I know is Bailey.

"Hey, little man. We're here," Axel whispers to his son, shaking him slightly.

"Mmh, mommy?" Taegan grumbles.

"She's right there waiting for you," Axel chuckled lightly at his son's sleepy expression as Taegan tried to force his eyes open.

Taegan looks around, then as Axel opens the door, his eyes finally land on his mother.

"Mommy!" he yells, then leaps out of Axel's arms into hers.

Bailey grips him tightly, squatting down and crying with him as they cling to one another.

I want to do the same for her. The longing is so strong, my body is itching with the desire. I just want to touch her and make sure that beautiful woman is real.

She's beautiful; everything about her. The way she is clinging to her son is how I should have clung on to her.

Max, as he scoots his large body around the tight row of seats, pats my back. "The way you are looking at her is the same way your mother is looking at you," he grumbles before getting out of the van.

When I look at my mother, tears are flowing down her wrinkled, aging cheeks. She is staring at me with so much love and adoration, it makes my non-beating heart feel alive again.

I thought she would resent me and scorn me for the mistakes of my past. I left her to raise my child, abandoning all my responsibilities to her after years of being a failure of a daughter in every other way.

The way she is looking at me, I can tell none of that matters.

"Katherine," she sobs, taking a hesitant step forward.

I'm frozen in my seat once again. I do not deserve her love or forgiveness, but I feel that she has already given me both. From her expression, I feel like she has never stopped giving me both.

I'm not her biggest disappointment. I am only her daughter.

“Go to her, my love,” Tony smiled sadly at me.

A tearless sob leaves my throat, and I launch myself out of the van into my mother’s arms as she opens them wide for me.

The whole world falls away, and it is just me and my mother. My mommy.

She cries as we cling to one another, and my throat grows tight with my own emotion.

“I’m sorry, mom. I’m so, so sorry,” I told her over and over again.

“My Katherine. Oh, my Katherine,” she repeats, her warm embrace melting all the years of sorrow and regret.

“I told you I’d bring her back to you,” Max mutters, smirking sadly, hugging the skinny red-headed woman who is crying uncontrollably against his chest.

“Oh, shut up you,” mom snaps at him, turning our bodies and rocking me back and forth.

He chuckles lightly, then a sad expression crosses his face as his eyes move to the back of the van.

Harriet.

He might have finally brought me back to my mother, but the cost of it was really great.

~~~~~

Bailey POV

“Mommy!” Taegan yells as he leaps out of Axel’s hold and into my arms. I catch him, holding him tight as my tears flow freely.

“Mommy, mommy!”

“Oh, my baby,” I sobbed. “I missed you so much.”

He’s back. Axel brought him back to me like I knew he would.

When I find the strength to stand again, Axel pulls us both into his arms, kissing my cheek.

“Thank you,” I whispered to him. His rugged face looks exhausted, and there is blood and grime all over him, but he still looks as beautiful as the first time I saw him in that bar.

“We’re home,” he smiled sadly, and I ran my hand down the side of his face.

He's home, but I know he and Max must be grieving heavily. Harriet is gone, and even though she deserved death, that doesn't change that she was his mother and Max's wife.

"I'm so sorry, baby. I'm sorry about your mom."

He smiles sadly, then kisses my lips. "She died protecting him," he whispers in a rough voice.

I look down at Taegan, and he has his head turned, staring up at his dad with teary eyes. "Grandma is gone," he whimpers.

Axel nods sadly, then rests his head on my shoulder, taking deep breaths of my scent, much like his son is doing too. They both needed the comfort and I'm glad in some small way I can help with their sadness.

The sound of my grandma's sobbing catches my attention, and I turn my head to see her clinging to a woman I've never seen before.

"Who's that?" I mumbled. Grandma is holding on to her like she is some lost treasure.

Axel lifts his head and looks in their direction.

"That's Katherine. Your mother."

77 Choices

Chapter 77 - He Stole My Heart, I Stole His Child

"Mommy?"

"Yes, baby?" I kissed his head as he lay beside me in bed.

This is the first time in weeks we have been alone. There is no need for guards or protection anymore, though.

Max and Axel both had to take care of Harriet's body. I offered to stay with them to help, but Axel told me it would be a greater help to take Taegan home and wait for him there. He said he wanted something to look forward to after he was done, and knowing his family was in bed waiting for him would motivate him to get it done sooner.

"Is grandpa going to be okay?"

I hum as I think of the right words to say. “Grandpa will be, because he has you to help him. When we see him next, we are just going to have to make sure he knows how much we love him.”

Taegan pouts and nuzzles his little face into my hair. “I wanted to stay with grandpa.”

“I know, but they still had work to do. I’ll see if he can spend time with you later.” I’d offer to let him spend the night with Max, but I don’t know if I’m going to be ready to spend another night without him for a long time. I don’t even want to let him sleep in his own bed. I’d rather keep him here in ours for the time being.

“Mommy?”

“Yes?”

“I liked Miss Harriet. I liked my grandma.”

I looked up at the ceiling, trying to hold in my tears. “I know, baby. I’m glad you got to meet her.” Though, I wish it was under better circumstances. If Harriet had accepted me and Taegan the day we got here, I can only imagine how her and Taegan’s relationship could have changed everything.

She made her choices, though, and the consequences of those choices affected everyone, not just her. I know she protected him in the end, but I can’t help but to resent her a little for making all the men in my life feel so much sorrow now. It shouldn’t have been like this, but she couldn’t let go of her pride until it was too late.

“Mommy?”

“Yes, Taegan,” I sigh.

“That other lady, her guy friend said she was my grandma too. She can’t be a grandma, though. Right? Grandmas are old.”

Katherine. I don’t know if I’m ready to think of the woman as my mother yet. Grandma clung to her desperately, but I couldn’t find it in me to care for her enough to do the same.

I’m no longer angry with her, but she’s a stranger to me. It’s far too late to consider her my mom.

It isn’t too late for Taegan to have a grandmother, though.

I’ll have to talk with Axel and see what he thinks. Just because I don’t want anything to do with her, doesn’t mean I should deprive my son of more love. That’s what Carli said. That was her reason for accepting her mom as a part of her kids’ lives. I don’t know if I’m in a place yet where I can do the same.

“She is my mother, in the sense she gave birth to me, but I don’t know her. I don’t have any memories of her. Grandma Lucy was always like my mom.”

“Hmm,” Taegan looks deep in thought. “So, she’s not my grandma?”

I bit my lip, wishing I could talk to Axel about this now. “Do you want her to be your grandma? She is technically, but....,” I don’t know how to fully answer him. For all I know, she will be out of our lives again after today. She seemed as desperate for my grandma as grandma was for her, but she is with the vampire lord. She might not be here at all after today.

Taegan shrugs, “I don’t know. She doesn’t look like a grandma.”

I chuckle dryly. “No, she doesn’t.”

She looks younger than me. I guess that's what happens when you turn into a vampire. Vincent said he wasn’t immortal, but was going to have a longer than normal life. I wonder if it will be the same for Katherine or if she will be immortal like her boyfriend.

“Why don’t we take a nap, and then we can talk about all this when your daddy gets home.”

He nods his head, nuzzling against me once more.

Now that the stress and anxiety has faded away, I’m exhausted, and it doesn’t take long for Taegan and I to fall asleep.

~~~~~

Axel POV

Dad insisted on carrying my mother into the morgue himself, laying her tenderly on the examination table, then asking us to give him a moment with her.

I wanted to stay with him, but he asked me to leave as well.

I can't imagine losing not one, but two mates in such a traumatic way. His first mate, Lucy’s sister, I didn’t know much about, but I did know that he loved her deeply. He and my mom might have been estranged, but that didn’t make her any less his mate.

Losing Bailey would kill me. That’s something I never want to experience, and dad has endured it twice now.

With the information that Antonio gave us, I’m going to have to use all my power to ensure Bailey doesn’t meet the same fate Alyssa did. To do that, I’m going to need more information.



Lord Antonio and his aide, Felix, are sitting in my office waiting for me. Katherine insisted on walking Lucy back to her house, then Dusty was going to escort her to my office as well. I'm just waiting for dad to finish his final moments with mom, so I can tell her my goodbyes too.

The door to the morgue opens, and my dad solemnly comes out, his face red and puffy, and his cheeks still wet from his tears.

"Dad," I stepped towards him and rested my hand on his shoulder.

"I'm okay, kid. Just got something in my eye."

~~~~~

After kissing my mom's cheek and telling her again that I loved her before wishing her eternal rest, I met dad back out in the hall, then we walked together to the packhouse. We walked in bittersweet silence, but dad started talking about halfway.

"Dusty let me know that Katherine is there, along with that filthy fucking vamp and his drone. You don't let them leave your office until you have every bit of information they have. I'm not going to let Bailey face the same fate as Alyssa."

"I know," I growled, suddenly pissed, thinking again about how Antonio kept vital information from us over and over again. I want to kill him, and I'm sure dad does too right now.

Because of the pack, and what killing him would lead to, we can't, but that doesn't change how much I want to.

I don't think he was aware of this curse being the reason my father's first mate died. It sounded like he didn't find out until he met Bailey's mom how they were related. Lucy was able to survive the curse, even if her sister wasn't so lucky, and I'm determined to find out how.

"Do you think Lucy should be here for this conversation?" I asked my dad.

Dad shook his head. "She doesn't know anything. She thinks her husband died in a logging accident when Katherine was just born. She genuinely didn't know shit about supernaturals or our world until she met me. If he was a witch, she didn't know."

I nodded, thinking the same. I'll just have to nonchalantly ask her about her late husband and his family to see if I can get any useful information without raising her suspicions. She's quite old, and I don't want her last years to not be peaceful because we revealed something unpleasant about her past.

Bailey, on the other hand.....

"Do you think I should have had Bailey stay?"

Dad runs his hand down his face and groans. “Not while my grandbaby is growing inside her. Lets get as much information as we can and come up with a plan before we start worrying her. I won’t let her die, Axel. We will find a way to overcome whatever freaky shit this is.”

Not telling Bailey doesn’t sit right with me. I get dad not wanting her to be stressed, but I’m going to have to think if that’s really the best choice. I don’t want to make the same mistakes as Antonio. I almost made the mistake in the past of not being honest with my mate, and when I finally came to my senses, Bailey took the news that I was worried about telling her better than I did.

She’s our Luna, and my mate. She has the right to know.

When we reach my office, the first thing I notice is the distance between Katherine and Antonio. She isn’t looking at him at all from where she is sitting on my couch, her eyes trailing around at the pictures of Bailey and Taegan I have everywhere. Antonio, though, is staring at her with great sadness. I guess their relationship is doing worse than I thought.

I go to sit in my chair, and dad stands behind me with his arms crossed, glaring menacingly at Antonio.

Before I could say anything, Katherine spoke.

“Alpha, before you start, can I say something?”

I leaned back in my chair, exhaustion weighing down on me. “What?” I wanted to get this over with so I could get home to Bailey and my son.

“Well,” she looks coldly at her lover. “Tony, I know you already know what I’m going to say, and hope you still cooperate with the pack, despite that. This is my daughter,” she looked down at her hands for a long time before looking back up at him. “I can’t forgive you right now, but if you ever want there to be a chance of my forgiveness, you will answer all their questions, tell them everything you know, and you will cooperate. If my daughter dies,” she bites her lip, looking up at the ceiling. She looks so much like Bailey while doing that, even my heart softens a little for her. “If she dies, I promise you that I will never forgive you.”

Antonio, if he could, I’m sure he would be crying right now. He looks completely heartbroken while giving Katherine a small smile laced with so much sadness and pain.

“I know, my love. I assure you that I will be doing everything I can to assist the young alpha. You will not be fighting this curse without my aid.”

She sniffs, nodding, then looks at me.

“Then, I have a favor to ask, Alpha.”

I probably would have turned down any favor she asked of me before, but she just guaranteed that Antonio would be cooperating with us. I can't turn her down now.

"What's that?"

She looks at Antonio, and he nods at her solemnly.

"Allow for me to stay in the pack for the time being. I would like to stay and look after my mother, at least until we find a solution to this curse."

~~~~~

Bailey POV

I feel the bed dip behind me, and my eyes flutter open, knowing it's Axel. My arm that had Taegan in it before we fell asleep is now empty. I looked around in a panic.

"Shh, shh. It's okay, baby. He's with my dad."

I go to protest, wanting him here with me, but Axel places his fingers against my lips. "I know, Bailey. I felt the same way, but my dad needed him. He's not doing too well right now, and Taegan wanted to go to him too."

I groan, but give in. I don't want to deny both of them by being ruled by my own fear. Max is going to be more protective than ever before after what happened. If it was anyone else, I would argue, but I won't deny Max.

"How are you doing?" I asked Axel, running my fingers over his scruff on his chin. I like the scruff. It makes him look even manlier. It's sexy.

"Not great," he murmurs, then lays his head against my breasts, snuggling between them.

I ran my fingers up and down his back soothingly, letting him use my body as a pillow.

"Did you get everything taken care of?" I asked.

He nods against my chest. "We have things we need to talk about later, but I just want to hold you for now if that's okay."

"Of course," I whispered, kissing the top of his head.

He's showered, and smells back to normal. I didn't want to tell him this before when he first got back, but he really stunk. Like hot garbage and rot. Taegan did too, but I gave him a quick shower before we laid down earlier.

“He’s dead,” Axel whispers after a while. “You can finally leave the pack lands. We should take Taegan to town tomorrow. Take him somewhere fun before we tell him about the baby.”

I want to celebrate hearing that piece of trash that stole my baby is dead. “Good riddance,” I muttered, making Axel chuckle, lifting his head to rest his chin between my cleavage. I seriously can’t tell if this man is a boob man or a butt man. I think he just likes any part of my body that is soft and cushy.

“Thank you for....well, for everything. You have had a hard past few days,” I told him.

“So have you,” he murmurs, then starts kissing and nuzzling my chest.

He has to be exhausted, but I can feel his need for me. He needs to lose himself right now, and I’m happy to give him that. I need him too.

“Come here,” I whispered, beckoning his lips with mine.

He wasted no time seductively crawling up my body, locking his mouth with mine.

78 Never Give Up

## Chapter 78 - He Stole My Heart, I Stole His Child

Axel POV

My heart was heavy after everything yesterday and last night, but that didn’t compare to how I felt after hearing all that Antonio had to say.

Dad was a wreck. He was already grieving for one mate, then the truth of what happened to Alyssa almost sent him spiraling.

She knew. She knew she was going to die, no matter what dad did. She knew, because Lucy’s father left behind a representative to check in on Lucy from time to time. This woman apparently met Alyssa just once, telling her what was happening to her at the beginning of her “illness”.

Lucy’s husband had her help with the magic he used to sacrifice himself in Lucy’s place, even covering his death as a work accident so Lucy would never know.

There was so much. So, so much that Antonio knew. He prevented Katherine’s curse from taking her by turning her into a vampire, essentially killing her himself and making her part of the

undead. She was dying anyway because of her addiction. He met the woman who acted as Katherine's father's representative once and she explained to him everything that had happened and how to save her.

If I were to change Bailey, it wouldn't stop the curse. She would still be alive. That's why Alyssa wouldn't let my dad change her. She knew. Alyssa knew that if she fully mated my dad and became Luna, she would still die, she would just hurt my dad and the entire pack in the process, and dad would blame himself more.

Now, we are going to have to find that woman. Thyra. I don't know how we're going to do it, but it's our best chance at saving my mate. If it comes down to it, I'll sacrifice myself for Bailey.

Katherine even asked if we could turn Bailey into a vampire like her, but it wouldn't work. She would have to become the lover of a vampire, tying her life to his, and he would have to be of high enough pedigree to be able to transform her in the first place.

I can see now why Antonio did what he did. I don't agree with it, but I understand. He would rather betray Katherine's trust and have her live, then tell her the truth and she sacrifices herself for her daughter, trying to mimic what her father did.

I'm going to have to tell Bailey, but I'm terrified. I just lost my mom. I can't lose her. I won't lose her.

Worse...what if we have a daughter? This curse is never ending.

We have to find a way to break it. That's the only solution.

When I got back home, dad came with me, not wanting to be alone. He wanted Taegan, and I wasn't going to tell him no. I have Bailey to comfort me. He needed Taegan.

Taegan was lying in his mother's arms, playing with her hair and staring absentmindedly at the ceiling. When I came into the room, he scooted off the bed and asked about his grandpa right away.

When I told him grandpa was waiting for him in the living room, he wasted no time running out to him. The way my dad enveloped Taegan in a hug, and the way his voice shook when Taegan asked if he could go home with him left me sure that letting Taegan go with him was the right thing to do.

After they left, I just stood next to our bed, staring down at Bailey, letting my tears flow as I imagined what the future would hold for her. I had hoped that after Levi was gone that she would be able to just live peacefully and happy with me. I never imagined we would be facing an even bigger challenge.

Eventually, I pulled myself away from the side of the bed and her perfect image and took a shower, pulling myself together under the stream of the water, washing away the filth and grime from yesterday.

After pulling on a pair of sweat pants, I just marveled at my mate once again. I'm not going to waste or take for granted a second with her from this moment on. I won't let this threat take away our happiness. Not while I still have her. Not while I still have hope.

As I crawled into bed, I woke her, watching in fascination as her eyes fluttered open. I was molding myself around my mate, and I let her scent soothe the anxieties in me. I love her softness, her smell, and her sweet voice and loving heart. She caved instantly when I told her how much my dad needed Taegan, and showed no remorse when I told her that Levi was dead.

How could I ever live without this amazing woman? How could I go on without her lighting up my life? She makes everything better by just existing.

I need her. I need her so much. I know I could never survive without her.

"Come here," she tells me softly, in a sweet, sultry voice, mistaking my need for her with other needs. That doesn't stop me, though, from going to her, molding my lips to hers, savoring the taste of her.

Every moment like this I will treasure. Every second with her is a gift, and I won't be wasting any of it.

My lips move fluidly against hers in their familiar, heated dance. Her soft moans and breathy whispers are flaming my desire for her. She is clinging to me with desperation, her small hands gripping my naked skin. The sparks are fueling my passion.

After all the shit of the past 48 hours, this is what I really need. To escape into my mate, while she escapes into me.

"Axel," she groans, her hands greedily pulling on the waistband of my sweats. I growl, my hands gripping the hem of her shirt and pulling it over her head. Her bra is one of her front hook ones, making ridding her of it so much easier.

As her overflowing chest bounces free, my eyes hungrily travel over their mass of softness and I lick my lips with desire. She giggles seeing my expression, making me growl once again with need.

My mouth is devouring her mounds as my hands work to rid her of her shorts and underwear, my fingers finding their way back to her perfect pussy, thrusting deep within her. She cries out, her hips moving against my fingers, my palm pushing against her clit, letting her find that sweet friction she craves.

Her thighs try to tighten, pushing together against my hand, but I use my weight and my hips to open her legs back up, planting myself between them so she can't keep closing them on reflex.

Her soft whimpers are filling the room, making me groan as my dick hardens more and more with each sweet sound.

Her skin tastes like she smells; vanilla, now with the added spice from being with child. My child.

The thought of me implanting my seed deep within her, creating a new life with her for the second time fills me with so much pride. She's mine, and I'm hers. I will find a way to save her from anything and everything, giving her every part of me, as she is giving me all of her.

"Axel, please! I'm...I'm about to-"

She explodes against my hand, her fluids gushing out, coating my fingers and my palm. Her legs are shaking as the rest of her body quivers. Her voice breaks as she screams out a mumbled attempt at my name, and it's all too much for me.

I push my pants down my thighs and swiftly enter her pulsing pussy, moaning loudly as I bury myself to the hilt.

"Fuck, Bailey. You feel so amazing," I groaned, thrusting and circling my hips, stretching her completely.

Her legs wrap around my waist, and I grip her ass with barely contained restraint. I know I'm leaving marks, but it's hard to hold myself back. I didn't realize how much I needed her. I needed this. I needed to get lost in every sensation of her.

Bailey's sweet voice is demanding more of me, and I'm giving it to her, pounding into her, hitting that spot deep inside of her that I know she loves. It makes her scream every time. Scream for more.

Her breath is washing over my face, overwhelming me, and my chest feels empty and full all at the same time.

I don't realize I'm crying until she grips my face, her own tears flowing from her eyes as she stares up at me with so much love and trust.

The overwhelming emotions choke me, and I rest my forehead on hers, my thrust slowing, my movements not so violent as I cherish her. I hope she realizes how much she means to me; how much I love her. She's my everything.

That's how we both find our endings; slow and sweet. Our tears mix together on the sheets, and we endlessly keep whispering affirmations of our love.

~~~~~

Katherine POV

Tony requested to walk me back to my mother's house, and I had no reason to refuse him. This isn't goodbye, but it feels like it. It feels like this is the ending of something. I'm just not sure what yet.

"I'm sorry, my love. I can never express how deeply I regret...regret the way I went about things. I can never bring myself to regret turning you into one of my own, though. I couldn't live in a world where you didn't exist. I thought I was doing what I needed to do to protect you and keep you happy. I know what you think of me now. I know how much you resent me, and I accept that. As long as you live on, I can shoulder all your disdain and scorn."

Fuck, he isn't making this any easier.

I do love him. I love him deeply, but I don't trust him. I don't know how we can continue like we were without trust.

I trusted him completely; naively. After learning the truth of everything, it made me hate myself, and the regrets his secrets have planted in me, I don't know if I can ever get over.

"I'm sorry, Tony. I just don't know how to face you the way you want me to now. I can't go back with you. I abandoned my child for you once, and I won't do it again. She may not want me as a mother, but I still want to stay here and try to protect her."

"I know, my Rina. I will never fault you for doing the right thing for your daughter. I have no right to. I, myself, am much in the same boat as you," he mutters, looking off in the direction of Mom's house.

I looked up and saw his daughter sitting on Mom's back porch with my mom and a red-headed woman, much taller and more built than the one I saw earlier. The one that was hugging Max must have been related to him. She kept mumbling 'Uncle Max'. This is the woman from the first meeting we had here on pack lands. She's Addison's mate.

Addison, seeing her father approaching the house, sneers in our direction, then gets up and walks inside by herself.

Tony sighs deeply. "I need to repair my own parental relationship as well."

"You could start with an apology," I smirked at him.

He scoffed, "I think the wounds are too deep for that. I'm going to start by sending her and her mate a congratulatory gift. Maybe a new vehicle or a generous sum of money."

I shook my head at him. “Your money can’t buy forgiveness, Tony. Start with an apology. That will go much further than a new car.”

“Even a Tesla?”

I laughed. He had been itching to buy a Tesla for some time now, but I told him it was a young person's car. He rarely even drives, and he would look ridiculous sitting in the back of one.

“Look around. Where on earth would she charge it? This pack isn’t modern like the mansion.”

He grimaces while looking around. “You’re right. I can’t believe I’m leaving both of you to live here. I should ask the young alpha if I can build a-”

“No,” I cut him off before he could finish. “I want to live with my mom. She took care of me, my aunt and my daughter, all on her own. I want to take care of her now while I can. Her house is cute and has extra rooms. She told me Max went above and beyond, giving her everything she needed and wanted.” She also told me not to tell him she said that. From what I gathered from their brief interaction in front of me was that the two teased each other endlessly. They squabble like siblings.

“Why would he put her in a house this far from your daughter, though? It would make better sense to have her close by, don’t you think?”

“She wanted to be out here, she said. She said the view is better here.”

“The view?” he looked around. “It’s the same all around this entire pack. The only difference is that big building right there and-”

Just then, a large group of wolves came running into the clearing right in front of the giant building he was speaking of, then one-by-one, they started to shift back into very naked and buff men.

Mom stood from her chair, whistling at them, waving her hands in the air. Many of the men start to chuckle while waving back

Gosh, mom. That’s so embarrassing. I can’t help but giggle, though.

Tony is definitely not giggling. He is glaring in the direction of all the men, and I sense he is fighting the urge to snap at them and tell them to cover up in my presence.

“On second thought, I think it best that I do request permission to build you both a new home on the opposite side of the pack, far from here.”

I chuckle lightly at his jealous nature.

Poor man. I know he is itching to take me back to his mansion, but he knows I will refuse. He would never force me to do anything I don't want to do. Manipulate me? Yes. Obviously. Use physical force on me? Never.

"I love you, Tony. I truly do. I hope we can one day recover from this," I whispered to him as we reached the porch steps.

He sighs, taking my hands in his and bringing them to his lips. "We will, my love. I would never give up on you. I will earn your trust back one day, and I hope when I do, you are ready to accept me again."

79 In a Name

Chapter 79 - He Stole My Heart, I Stole His Child

Courtney POV

"Oh, honey," Casey sings out as he comes into our house. He just got back from checking on Calum at my parents'. He was supposed to bring Calum home, but mom was baking with him and he threw a temper tantrum to stay.

"In here," I called back from our room. I'm sitting on our bed going through an old photo album with pictures of me and Axel from when we were Calum and Taegan's age.

Casey struts in with a mischievous smile on his face, pulling his shirt over his head. "I'm ready to taste the rainbow," he hums, making me chuckle.

"I'm tired. And I need a shower."

"You can sleep. I don't mind. I'll make sure to get you good and clean," he licks his lips, kneeling down in front of me and resting his chin on my knees.

I smile sadly, running my hand over his cheek, my fingers itching his beard.

He finally picks up on my mood and his playful attitude shifts to a concerned one. "What's wrong, babe? Are you not feeling well? Want me to run you a bath?"

I shook my head, setting the photo album down on the bed beside me. "It's been a long 2 days," I whispered.

“Well, it would have been shorter if you fucking slept at all during that time,” he had a hard time hiding his irritation.

I smirk, itching his beard again with my fingers. “I liked telling Bailey stories about my childhood, though. It helped me to remember the good memories, so I wasn’t dwelling on the crappy ones from the last few years.”

“You mean with your aunt?”

I nod.

“Fuck, I’m sorry, Court. I really didn’t think much about you losing your aunt. You guys weren’t exactly close.”

“Not since you and I met, but when I was little she took care of me a lot. She didn’t turn super crazy until Axel was in high school, really. Before that,” I shrugged, “she was Aunt Harriet. She was loud and a little gossipy, but she was a good aunt to me.”

She hated Casey, so she started to really distance herself from me even more after we mated. I don’t want to dwell on that, though. I want to keep remembering her as ‘Aunt Harriet’.

“Come here, baby,” Casey murmurs, picking me up and setting me on his lap as he cradles my head to his chest.

“I’m okay. Just feeling mopey and tired,” I turned my head up against his chest to smirk at him. “It’s your fault for knocking me up.”

He grins crookedly. “Damn straight.”

I giggled at his cockiness. “Want to take a bath with me?” I asked, not wanting sex, obviously, but wanting to keep him close for his comfort.

“Yeah. I do. Let me get it started, then I’ll come get you. Relax until then.”

“Okay,” I smile, kissing his lips as he lays me on our bed against the pillows.

I hope Uncle Max isn’t grieving on his own, but I’m sure Bailey and Axel aren’t letting him.

~~~~~

Taegan POV

Grandpa is sad, and I’m sad for grandpa. I was sad about losing my friend, but more sad for grandpa. I know he felt bad for his mates. I wish I had known Miss Harriet was grandpa’s mates before. I wasn’t nice to her at first.

“Grandpa?”

“Yeah, kid?” he asks, carrying me back to his house. I told him I could walk and I wasn’t a baby, but he said he needed to carry me, so I let him.

“Grandpa, can we watch movies and drink not-hot chocolate?” I remember telling grandma about watching movies with grandpa.

He laughs softly. “If you want to.”

“I want to. And don’t worry. I didn’t tell mommy about the ones you said not to.”

I did tell grandma, though. Grandma laughed, so I don’t think she minded.

She liked grandpa a lot. I know she did. She told me to listen to him and be a great man like him. I plan to. I’m going to be the best alpha there is, just like grandpa.

"Grandpa, I'm going to be just like you one day. Grandma told me."

He smiles, but his eyes still look sad. "No, Taegan. You are going to be a great man, even better than me."

I sighed, resting my chin on his big shoulder. "That's impossible."

"It's not, little man. You're already on your way there."

~~~~~

4 months later.....

Bailey POV

“She’s beautiful,” I cried as the nurse placed our daughter on my chest. She was gorgeous, and I could already tell she was going to look just like her daddy.

Axel is sobbing, resting his head beside mine and rubbing his thumb against my temple. I swear, he cried more during my childbirth than me.

He lifts his head and gazes at our daughter with tear-filled eyes. “She looks just like you,” he chokes.

I scoff, “She looks exactly like Taegan did when he was born. She’s going to look just like you.”

He chokes on a laugh, then kisses my cheek. The nurses lift our baby from my chest and take her over to clean her and get her length and weight. Axel shadows behind, not giving them much

space to work, but when they get the job done, they still hand her to him with a smile, congratulating him, and he walks back to me.

She looks even tinier, bundled up and being held in his massive hands. He holds her to his face, kissing her cheeks and whispering to her how much he already loves her over and over again.

After the nurses and doctor finish cleaning me up, Axel comes back to my side, resting our baby in my arms.

Our daughter is perfect, with all ten fingers and all ten toes. She's going to be fiercely protected by the men in her life. I can already see it. Especially with a big brother with witch powers and some curse hanging over our heads.

Max and Axel have been investigating the curse, even working with Antonio on trying to find some fairy woman that helped my grandfather break the curse on my grandma.

Katherine has stuck around, moving in with my grandma to help take care of her, so Antonio has been spending more and more time in the pack, using the excuse of helping my mate and father-in-law research the curse.

I was worried when we found out that we were having a daughter, but then a calm came over me about the time that Taegan started asking me about baby names. I feel in my soul that we're going to be alright. Me and this baby will both not be affected by this curse. It's unexplainable, but I have an inner peace about the whole thing.

I may be the only one. Axel's worry leaks through to me every once in a while, and Max almost seems frantic with his protectiveness of me sometimes. He doesn't want what happened to his first mate to happen to his son's mate.

"Taegan is giving Dad a hard time about coming in," Axel chuckles, breaking my thoughts.

"Gosh, I probably look like a mess right now," I said, pushing my sweaty hair behind my ear.

"You've never looked more beautiful," he grins, making my cheeks heat with his sincerity.

This whole pregnancy and even childbirth was wonderful with Axel by my side. He took care of me the entire time. He rubbed my feet every night, always had iced water for me and would constantly bring me snacks. He has Taegan trained to do the same. Max is worse than both of them. He would show up at my office during the day and tell me to take a nap, almost demanding I relax for a few hours in the middle of the day. He would come up behind me and carry me if he saw me walking by myself. He even went through a faze of carrying around a workout ball everywhere we went when I tried one at Courtney's house and said it helped with the pain in my hips. Even grandma's teasing didn't discourage him.

I've been spoiled beyond belief. This pregnancy was so much different from my first.

Nate and Casey treated Courtney much the same way. Nate could be found in the clinic the whole second half of Courtney's pregnancy, following her around like a puppy, doing all the work he could for her.

She and Casey had another boy. Conner. I guess they are going for a "C" name theme in their family.

As for our daughter's name, Taegan and I settled on the name we thought was best. We haven't told Max or Axel yet, and I'm worried about what they will think.

"Tell them to come in," I told Axel, biting my lip as I thought about Max's reaction when he hears the name.

Taegan comes running in, straight towards me, and Axel fluidly lifts him mid-run, then places him on the bed beside me, telling him to be gentle.

"Mommy!" he shifted on the spot beside me to get a better view of his sister. His eyes light up as he looks over her face, then he rests his head on hers gently, sniffing her hair. "She smells just like you, mommy."

"She does. Like warm vanilla spice cake," Axel grins.

"She's so beautiful," Max murmurs, coming to my other side.

"Do you want to hold her?" I asked, lifting her up towards him. I want him to be the first to hold her besides me and Axel. He's the best grandfather already, and I know he will be showering her with all his affection.

He gingerly takes her from me, smiling widely as he cradles her in his hands. He kisses her forehead, then slowly bends to kiss mine. "Good job, Bailey. She looks just like you."

I giggle, shaking my head, but don't argue with him. Axel and his dad just aren't aware how strong their genes are.

"Can we tell them now?" Taegan asks, bouncing excitedly beside me.

I chuckle at his eagerness. Her name was his idea. He'd been very adamant about it, and it was even his idea to wait to tell Max and Axel until we saw her, to make sure the name fit her.

"Tell them what?" Axel narrows his eyes while smiling.

"Her name! It really fits her. I just had to make sure," Taegan responded.

Axel laughs huskily, his deep voice filling the room, and lifts Taegan off the bed and carries him around to stand next to Max. He and Taegan are staring at the baby sleeping in his hands.

“So,” Axel pulls the pink swaddle blanket down so they have a clear view of her face as Max tilts her slightly, making it easier to see. “What name fits?”

Taegan looks at me, and though I’m nervous, biting my lip anxiously, I nod to him that it’s okay to continue.

“Alyssa Harriet,” Taegan states proudly. Max and Axel’s mouths both drop slightly as their eyes grow big in surprise. “She looks like an Alyssa Harriet to me for sure.”

Max looks at Axel and then to me. “Alyssa Harriet?” he repeats in a whisper.

I nodded hesitantly. “Alyssa Harriet Kissinger. What do you think?”

Max’s eyes start to glisten, and then he looks down at my daughter with an expression filled with awe, like she is the answer to a prayer.

“I’m going to call her Aly,” Taegan says excitedly.

“Aly,” he whispers. “I like that.”

“I like it too,” Axel smiles sadly, nuzzling Taegan’s cheek. “It’s perfect. When did you get to be so awesome?”

Taegan shrugs, “Mommy says I got it from you, but you said I got it from her. I think I’m awesome naturally though.”

I giggled. “You’re naturally really smart too.”

Max cradles Aly to his chest, rocking her side-to-side, sniffing roughly as if he is trying to hold back his emotions.

“My little Aly. Your grandpa is going to do everything in his power to make sure you are always safe and experience nothing but good things,” he kissed her little nose. “I love you Alyssa Harriet Kissinger.”

80 New Beginnings

Chapter 80 - He Stole My Heart, I Stole His Child

2 years later

“Gi-paw,” Aly’s high pitched squeal almost made me jump. I look up from my laptop at the kitchen [table](#) and see Max climbing the front porch steps through the open window.

Aly is like a Max detector, always able to sense when he is near. Judging by the way Taegan gets up and strains his neck to catch sight of Max, there is no way Aly could see him from where she is sitting on the floor.

Max doesn’t knock, not needing to since he’s family, walking right into our home.

Both kids yell their own versions of “grandpa” as he comes in, making his face light up and a broad smile appear.

“Taegan and Aly!” He chuckles loudly, bending over and lifting them both in his arms.

He sets Taegan right back on the ground after a brief squeeze. Taegan, now 6, says he’s too big to be carried. Aly clings to him, totally content in his hold.

He walks over to me, carrying Aly, bending to kiss the top of my head. “I’m here as a babysitter. Your mate wants you to be the first to see the renovations to the packhouse.”

For the last several months, the packhouse has undergone major renovations. We had to wait for a dormitory to be built before starting, since the members living in the packhouse would need somewhere to go.

Gone is all the dull gold and pink, the tacky wallpaper, and senseless walls with geometric cutouts. I worked with a contractor and designer to open it up, making it more functional and welcoming, but Axel wouldn’t let me see any of the work after they started.

He said it wasn’t good for my health, being extra protective since we still haven’t found any more answers about the curse. I feel fine, and there have been no changes to my body, but I don’t argue with him. If it helps ease his anxieties, working from home is fine by me.

He and Farak moved their offices to the warrior building temporarily, but I’ve just stayed home to work since the renovations started.

“Is he there already?” I asked, smiling as I watched Aly mimic the funny faces Max was making at her.

“He was putting the final touches inside, but he’ll be out front any second.”

“Okay. Taegan, listen to your grandpa,” I told him as he cleaned the mess of blocks on the floor he and Aly were playing with. He was building towers and she was giggling while knocking them down.

“I always do, mom,” he mutters, sounding slightly exasperated that I’m telling him to behave. I can’t help it. I still get anxious when he is away from me for any length of time.

Max gives him a look, and I know Taegan's going to get an earful about respecting his mother when I leave. I rested my hand on his arm and gave him a crooked smile.

"It's fine," I whispered, making his face soften. I'll have Axel talk with him later. Grandpas should be fun, letting the parents handle discipline. "And you, Miss Aly, give grandpa lots of hugs and kisses while I'm with daddy."

"Gi-paw mwah!" She squeals, kissing his cheek and making him blush.

She loves her grandpa, and he is wrapped around her tiny little fingers.

"Grandpa, can we go see the chickens?" Taegan asks.

"Yay, Gi-paw! Peeps! Peeps!" Aly chants.

Last Easter, he was reading a book about baby chicks with them, and was talked into building a chicken coop and buying a bunch of baby chicks. It's turned into a full-blown hobby between the kids and him.

"Go get your boots on," he tells him, then walks back to Aly's room to get her little boots designated for the chicken coop.

I sneaked out, and like he said, Axel was waiting for me at the front of the packhouse.

He has a big smile on his face, and opens his arms wide as I get close, and I walk right into them wrapping my arms around his waist.

"There you are. I was about to go get you," he murmurs, pressing his lips to mine.

"It took me, like, 5 minutes to walk out from the time your dad got there."

"Any amount of time away from you is too long," he husks, and despite the cheesy line, I still go weak in the knees.

He dips his face back to mine, making me whimper with the passion in his lips.

When he pulls away, I am breathless and dreamy-eyed, while he looks pretty smug with himself.

"Ready to go tour the packhouse? I need your final seal of approval, Luna, before I sign off on the final payment."

I smirked at him. "Well, Alpha, let's go check it out."

The packhouse looks much better. It's open, airy, with tons of natural light now that the unnecessary walls are gone. The finishes and fixtures are all matte black instead of the dull gold,

and the walls are an off-white color now. The exposed wood and beams have been restained, making them look new.

When we walked through the dining hall, I was happy to see all the upgrades. It looks less like an elementary school cafeteria in the 90s and more like an elegant and cozy dining hall, with natural wood [tables](#) and chairs, and an upgraded buffet station.

We check out the rooms and apartments on each floor, which have all been upgraded with new amenities and carpets. The furniture for the rooms will be delivered over the next week. The old stuff was moved to the new dorms.

Finally, we finish by walking through the office area. One change Axel was adamant about was us having connected offices. When I walked into his office, the first change I noticed was the new door leading to a private outdoor area. We wanted an area to spend time with the kids with a fence, just in case we ever took our eyes off them for a split second. We love having them come to work with us, but safety is taken much more seriously than before.

There is a picture of us on our wedding day above his desk, and pictures of us and the kids all over the rest of his walls. He took Taegan to the mining plot last summer, and a picture Archie took of Axel and Taegan by a campfire is on his desk, along with a picture of him grinning proudly as Aly gives him sloppy baby kisses at a festival held in town.

“I like your pictures,” I giggled at him, tapping one of him dipping me during our first dance as husband and wife. My dress had a low neckline, and he kept dipping me and twirling me around because he liked watching my chest jiggle.

“You should see my screensaver,” he smirks.

I gave him a skeptical look, then tapped the keys on his computer, making the screen light up.

It’s a picture of me from my boudoir photoshoot Courtney talked me into doing as a wedding gift for Axel. Needless to say, he liked the gift a lot.

“Axel! What if other people see this?!” I hissed.

“Who would touch the alpha’s computer?” he scoffs.

“Um, let me think. Your Beta, Gamma, your dad, Courtney, Quinn, your son. Do you want Taegan to think his mother is a porn star?”

“You fuck me like a porn star,” Axel mutters under his breath.

“Excuse me?”

“Nothing,” he smiles, pulling me towards him. “Fine. I’ll change it. You should probably change yours too.”

“Mine?” I looked at him in confusion.

He points to the door that's supposed to connect our offices with a deep smirk. “Go see.”

I released his waist and walked to open the door, then stood back and gasped with my hands over my mouth at the wall in front of me. “Axel! Change it!”

“Nope,” he snickers, “I promised Casey I would leave it up for at least a week, since another of his wall-sized portraits ended up in the men’s locker room.”

“You didn’t,” I chuckled.

“No, I didn’t, but I promised Courtney I wouldn’t tell him it was her.”

My wall has a huge portrait of Axel in nothing but a strategically placed tool belt and a work helmet. Neither are hiding much.

“You should see the picture he took for your screen saver.”

I tap the mouse, and a posed picture of Axel trying for a seductive look with a glove barely covering half his package fills the screen. I blush at the crude posing.

“I might keep this one,” I bit my lip lustfully.

“I thought you might like that,” he came up behind me and started kissing my neck.

“Did he take more?” I have to ask.

He nods. “Look in the file labeled ‘PORN SHOW’.”

I giggled, then looked around the rest of my office. It’s spacious and modern. Very new and clean. There is another wedding picture of us on the wall behind my desk, but this one has us holding the kids, and our family gathered around us. Even my mom is standing behind Grandma, smiling brightly while staring at me and not the camera.

Our relationship really hasn’t improved much over the years. Not from fault of her own. I just remain uninterested, and she gives me space when I visit grandma, respecting my wishes. I know she wants more, but I don’t feel I owe her that, and have no desire for more myself.

The other pictures are more of our family. There's a picture of Max holding both the kids on my desk, along with a candid picture of Axel and me at a dinner with everyone where we were just laughing together, just me and him, lost in our own world.

The picture of Taegan and Rosie at Disney World holding hands while walking towards the castle is next to one of me with all the girls at the packhouse in Florida. Carli is holding Aly, pouting at Parker to have another.

That was a fun trip. I had a lot of girl time while Axel and Taegan hung out with Casey, Parker and the warriors. Taegan wanted to hang out with the warriors whenever he wasn't with Rosie. There were these two in particular he seemed to always gravitate towards. Mitch and Mark Meyers. They were good sports about entertaining him and Calum, along with their nephews and many of the other litters in the pack. They were like everyone's fun uncles.

Taegan was enamored with them. He has a picture of them holding him during one of the morning training sessions in his room.

"Is this what you were doing?" I asked Axel. "Putting all these pictures up?"

"Yeah," he chuckles. "Casey just said the picture had to stay up for a week. If that week starts today, it will be over before everyone else starts moving back into the packhouse."

"Sneaky," I smirk.

"Hey, I wasn't the guilty party. I was the fall guy."

"And what did Courtney promise you for taking the fall?"

He smiles crookedly. "Another photoshoot of you."

Aww. I circled my arms around his waist and kissed his chin. "I would have done it for you anyway if you asked." Though, I do like the pictures I got of him from being the fall guy.

"I want Courtney taking them this time," he narrowed his eyes at me. "I didn't like finding out that it was a guy that took those other pictures."

I rolled my eyes and smirked. "Steve was gay, Axel."

"Sure he is. That's why he takes pictures of naked women for a living," Axel scoffs.

"He took our wedding pictures too."

Axel growls, and I know he's thinking of the pictures taken of me getting ready. I was in my wedding lingerie and a thin robe in most of them.

My poor possessive mate, I think to myself with a giggle.

"What's so funny?" he asked grumpily.

"You," I whispered and bit my lip to stop from laughing.

"Me, huh?" he asks mischievously before he starts tickling my sides, making me flail about in hysterical laughter.

“Stop!” I gasp as I fall to the ground, Axel chuckling deeply as he follows me down.

“Mmh, I love your laugh,” he husks as his fingers ease their assault on my ribs.

“And I love you,” I pant and giggle as I try to catch my breath.

The new carpet is plush and soft behind me as Axel rests his weight on mine, his lips passionately connecting to my lips. The sparks soon escalated to us dry humping on the floor, his hard length pressing deliciously against my heat in a fererent rhythm.

It doesn’t take long until we are christening both offices.

~~~~~

Max POV

“Gi-paw! Peeps! Peeps!” Aly squeals, running around the enclosed coop while trying to catch one of the chickens.

The damn birds are disgusting, but the kids love them. Taegan has a rooster under one arm, scolding him for pecking at his feet, and Aly is trying to get a fluffy white one to hug her.

I grabbed another, much calmer chicken, and carried it over to Aly so she could pet her with my help.

“Yay, Gi-paw!” she cheered as I walked over to her, like catching the chicken was some great accomplishment. Like a chump, I still end up blushing from the 2-year-old’s praise. She really knows how to pull on my heartstrings.

Suddenly, my beast is restless, and my senses go on alert. Taegan’s do as well, and his eyes glow blue as he uses his magic to help him detect what’s wrong. I lift Aly in my arms while scanning the area around us, and then hand her off to her brother, in case I need my hands free to fight.

“Grandpa, it smells like dirt. Like moss and a fresh dug hole,” Taegan whispers, sniffing the air.

“Fae,” is all I whisper back, though the scent smells sweeter to me. Like there are flowers and ripe fruit mixed with it. The scent is what is making my beast push to the surface, not in a violent way, but a possessive one, like my beast side knows that scent belongs to us.

It can’t, though. I have already found my fated mate, and she’s gone. Both of my mates are gone. This has to be some kind of fairy trick.

I mind linked warriors to meet us at the chicken coop, making sure Casey comes. He has the most experience with the fae besides Nate, and Nate is gone to the mines right now.

I scanned our surroundings again, and that's when I saw it. A gorgeous pair of deep blue eyes staring at me. No, not at me. At my grandkids.

I step in front of them, blocking her view, and when her eyes meet mine, I feel like my heart stopped. I'm immobilized in place, lost in a trance of her otherworldly beauty.

She is gorgeous. I can tell even from this distance. She is standing in the thick foliage of the darkest part of the forest, but it's like light is emanating from her. I can see the details of her face clearly, and she seems to be as entranced by me as I am by her.

Growling and the pounding of paws on the damp earth approaching breaks our gaze, and she looks towards the packhouse in a panic.

I reach out, as if to stop her, but before the words 'STOP' can leave my mouth, she is gone in a cloud of smoke.

Magic. She is not just fae. She is of high pedigree, maybe even royalty. The lower fae do not have teleportation magic.

"Who was that, Grandpa?" Taegan asked, staring in the direction the woman was just in.

"I don't know, kid, but I'm going to find out."