

Chapter 9 - He Stole My Heart, I Stole His Child

Axel POV

“Look at my skin compared to yours,” Casey snickers, placing his arm beside mine while I drive through town.

“Yes, yes. You’re so pretty,” I rolled my eyes. This idiot has been going on and on about his tan since he and Court got back from Florida last week. She burned, he got really tan. He looks like this every time he gets back from visiting his family.

“You’re jealous, aren’t you?” he smirks, “You’re so fucking jealous, man. You don’t have to say it. I know.”

“Jealous of what? Your skin tone? Seriously?”

“That and my good looks,” he looks at himself in the mirror, holding his chin and squinting at himself in the douchebag way tool bags usually do.

“What good looks?” I laughed, watching him check himself out.

“The good looks your mama can’t seem to get enough of,” he wiggles his eyebrows.

I scoff, “Can we not start with the mama jokes today?”

“Hey,” he continued like I didn’t say anything, “Your mama’s so fat, it took me two buses and a train ride to get to her good side.”

“Please stop,” I groan.

“Your mama’s so poor, she eats cereal with a fork to save milk.”

I can’t stop a chuckle from slipping out at that one, fueling his ego, egging him on more.

“Did you know that the world used to be flat? That was until they buried your mama.”

“Okay,” I suppressed another chuckle while glaring at him from the corner of my eye. “Too far, dude. That was way too deep.”

“It was, wasn’t it,” Casey looked down shaking his head, “That’s what your mama said last night to me when we were-”

I cut him off with an elbow to the shoulder, making him grunt in pain.

“How would you like it if I started talking about screwing your mom?”

He shrugs, “You can try it and see. My mom is a lot nicer than yours though.”

I grimace hearing that. It’s true. My mom has become a nagging hag over the last 3 and a half years. She is constantly pressuring me to take a chosen mate and settle down, insisting that the chosen mate be Stephanie.

Because of my mother, I don’t even live in the packhouse any more. I moved into the room I kept in town, only going back to the packhouse for work. She kept sending Stephanie to my room to cook me meals, do my laundry and anything else she thought might win me over.

She even sent Stephanie to me in the middle of the night a few times, dressed in the skimpiest of lingerie. You would think one of them would have eventually gotten discouraged, but mom has been persistent, and Stephanie goes right along with whatever mom tells her to do. I don’t think Stephanie really even likes me. I think she is probably just too scared of my mom to tell her no.

I don’t know why mom is so insistent on Stephanie being the next Luna, but it’s not going to happen. I still can’t stand the woman, even if my mate is still missing.

My mate....

There hasn’t been any sign of Bailey since she ran away. We sent out numerous search parties, Nathan Childes taking the lead on them. If Nathan couldn’t find her, it was an impossible mission. He was the best tracker we had.

Casey might have him beat now. I think Casey is part bloodhound, not just a wolf. He can sniff out anything and anyone in no time at all. He couldn’t find Bailey either, but he could find anyone else without an issue.

We had a band of Fairies kidnap a witch one of our warriors is mated to last week. They were criminals, wanted by their kingdom, and couldn’t return home to refuel their magic levels. They were trying to use Xiomora, our witch member, to harness more magic.

Casey found her in a matter of hours after Nathan and the rest of our warriors had tried searching for her for days. He and Courtney had just gotten back to the packhouse from their trip, and off Casey went all on his own. He called for us a few hours later, having not only found Xiomora, but a secret village for disgraced fae.

He is an asset to our pack, that is for sure. No matter how annoying he can be.

The man is a beast, too. I think he and I alone could have taken out the entire secret village. I could tell he was holding himself back, saying that Xiomora's mate deserved to be the one to exact revenge for her.

When I asked him how he found her so easily, he shrugged with a mischievous smirk on his face. I later heard him muttering something about a friend back in Florida and his friend's father, but he and Court still won't tell me. He's loyal to his friends on top of all his other redeeming qualities. I just can't stand his mom jokes. Or his non-stop cursing.

I think the cursing is Uncle Nathan's doing, though. Nathan curses non-stop too.

"I need coffee, ass hole. You promised me fucking coffee and skittles if I went with you to the lumber yard today. Where the fuck are my coffee and skittles?"

I lifted an eyebrow at him, "When did I promise skittles? I just said coffee, and they have a coffee maker at the yard office."

"Fuck, I don't want that sludgy shit they poison you with over there. I want real coffee. And skittles were implied."

"How did I imply I was getting you skittles?"

"It was in your tone."

"How can my tone imply I'm buying you skittles?"

"I don't fucking know! I just want them. Shit. Quit being a bitch and get me what you owe me."

"I'm about to owe you a broken fucking nose if you don't watch your tone with me," I growled at him.

He rolls his eyes, "Oh great Alpha, sir. Did you not say this morning when you called me that if I got my ass up to help you secure the broken perimeter at the lumber yard, you would get me coffee on the way?"

"Hmm," I rubbed my chin, "Did I say on the way there, though?" I smiled over to him, "You should have asked me to specify."

He growls at me, baring his teeth, "If I don't have real fucking coffee in my hand in the next 5 minutes, I'm giving the extra key to your apartment to your mother to copy."

"You wouldn't," I growled.

"Courtney makes me the best fucking coffee. She froths the milk and everything, you bastard. You cheated me out of morning sex, and Courtney coffee. I so would."

“Fine,” I groan. “You’re going to have to settle for gas station coffee. I’m not turning around to get it in town.”

“Oh, good. They should have skittles too.”

“Get your own fucking skittles!”

He pulled out his key ring, “It’s this one, right?” he asked, holding my spare key on his ring up in the air. “I wonder if I should save her the trip to town and just get the copy made for her.”

“You are so damn annoying. You know that, right?”

“That’s hurtful and rude,” he smiles crookedly at me. “I think I’m gonna need Reese’s peanut butter cups too to sweeten me back up.”

I sighed, shaking my head. “Fine. Ass.”

“King size,” he smiles, blowing a kiss at me.

“Fuck you.”

“No thanks. Your mama already wore me-”

I punched his leg, ensuring he had a dead leg before he could finish that sentence. Casey yells out ferociously, gripping his thigh, rocking his giant body back and forth in his seat.

I need gas too, so when I pull in, I just pull up next to the pump at the far end.

When I get out of the truck, ignoring Casey’s insults about my ability to punch and his endless cursing, I stand frozen for a few seconds, a scent I would recognize anywhere but haven’t smelt in years hitting my nose.

Vanilla. The sweetest, most intoxicating vanilla.

Is my mind playing tricks on me again? For years, every time I smelled vanilla I would think of her. I would end up going to bed, then have that same nightmare over again. The nightmare where I had her in my arms, then she suddenly disappeared.

Has that nightmare become hallucinations now?

The woman walking out of the gas station right now can not be Bailey. Why would she show up here after so many years of being lost to me?

It can’t be....

But it is.

The closer she gets, the more her scent overwhelms me, until I'm walking towards her, not making a conscious thought of doing so.

Her back is turned as she reaches for something in the back seat of her car. The passenger seat is loaded up with bags and clothes. Her trunk looks full of junk too. Is she moving?

She is a bit skinnier than I remember, but her curves are still deliciously evident in her leggings and fitted shirt. Those hips and thighs.... Looking at them, I can still remember the way they taste. Her beautiful brown hair was longer than before, swept back into a thick braid.

Her sing-songy voice is talking to someone, but my brain isn't able to register anything more than how beautiful she looks right now.

She is still the most beautiful woman I have ever seen in my life.

Her smile is breathtaking, and her eyes are shining with so much love and adoration at whoever she is talking to.

She speaks after the other voice asks her a question, then looks over at me, her chocolate brown eyes meeting mine, making my heart sing. She drops something, but neither of us stop staring at one another to pay it any mind.

It's her.

It's really my mate.

"Bailey?" I mumbled, making her gasp. She remembers me. I don't know if that is a good thing or a bad thing from the shock on her face, but to me, it's like the answer to a prayer. "Bailey," I whispered her name again as I was barely a foot away from her.

"Mommy! My shoe! It's going to get dirty." The other voice is a child's. She has a child? Is that why she ran from me?

She bends down to pick up whatever it was that she dropped, and when she does, the scent of the child faintly wafts over me, smelling....familiar.

I sniff the air a few times, then get closer and closer, until I am leaning in the car, just inches from Bailey.

Inside, the most beautiful little boy I have ever seen is staring back at me, making my mouth drop and my eyes go wide. The little boy smiles back at me, his little teeth and perfect nose making my heart contract as I finally register why he smells so familiar.

He's mine. Bailey had my son, and she has been raising him without me all this time.

Chapter 10 - He Stole My Heart, I Stole His Child

Bailey POV

“This is my son.”

I stood there frozen, just staring, not sure what to do. I for so long wished that Taegan could be Axel's, but it's just not possible. It doesn't add up.

“You had my child but didn't think to tell me?” Axel stood back up straight, looking down at me, no longer with awe and reverence, but with judgment and anger.

I shook my head, tears filling my eyes. How could I have been so stupid? Hope had flickered inside me when I first met his gaze and felt that deep longing once again. Now, he is judging me, and for something that is not even true.

“He can't be your child. The timing didn't add up. I didn't think I needed to tell the married man I once had a one-night stand with that I got pregnant when it had nothing to do with him.”

Surprise and pain flashed in his eyes, before his eyebrows, his thick, manly eyebrows, turned down in confusion. Gawd, why do even his eyebrows look beautiful to me? What is wrong with me?

“Married? I'm not married. Why did you think I was married?” he asked, taking a step toward me, gripping my shoulders as if he was scared I was about to run. His chest was right up against mine, and for a few seconds, I forgot how to speak.

“Hey! Don't be mean to my mommy!” Taegan yells, fighting the harness of his carseat to get free.

Axel ignores him, continuing to stare down at me. “Why did you think I was married, Bailey? Why? Did Stephanie say something to you? Did someone else?”

“Stephanie?” I looked at him like he was crazy. Taegan is trying to kick Axel, but is just a few inches shy as he yells at Axel to leave me alone. He was fine with Axel a minute ago, but that was before he thought the towering man was a threat to his mom.

“Taegan, baby, it's okay,” I glared at Axel, then pushed him away before going to unbuckle my son from his seat. He got the straps loose while fighting to get out, and his arms were completely

out from where they were supposed to be. “This man was just leaving,” I turned my head to throw another glare Axel’s way while unfastening the final clip.

Taegan latches onto my neck, clinging to me, scowling at the man. Axel crosses his arms, stubbornness etched in every perfect inch of his body as he scowls right back.

“I’m not going anywhere until you tell me why you thought I was married. I’m not and never have been.”

“Then who was Courtney?” I snapped at him.

Taegan, my ultimate little defender, echoes my question, even though he has no idea what is going on. “Yeah! Who’s Courtney?”

“My Courtney?” another imposing man said as he started walking up from behind Axel. Jeez, what do they feed the men in this town where they all get so crazy big? This new guy has a much more tan complexion than Axel, with darker features, but has a similar monstrous build. He looks more like a biker or thug with his longer, messy hair and tattoos everywhere, but still had the same air about him as my rugged Axel.

No, not my Axel. Axel. Just Axel. He is not my anything.

“Courtney talked to you and told you I was married?” Axel asked, his voice slightly raised, making me flinch. I regret flinching after worry and regret crossed his face. Even the other guy places a restraining hand on Axel’s chest, worried about my reaction. A normal person wouldn’t have flinched at someone slightly raising their voice, but after living with Levi for years, it’s a habit ingrained in my muscles. If he slightly raised his voice, that meant he was about to blow his fuse, and I was going to take a tongue lashing that felt like I was being physically abused rather than just verbally.

“I didn’t talk to anyone. I saw her calling you and the picture. Then her text telling you to get home because your daughter needed you.”

“My daughter? I don’t have a daughter,” he tells me in a leveled voice, trying not to scare me again, I’m sure.

“Who’s Casey, then?”

“Yeah! Who is Casey?!” Taegan parrots me, resting his head on my shoulder while he continues to glare.

The other man looks guiltily at me, then slowly starts to raise his hand. “Um, that would be me, ma’am. I’m the daughter you’re talking about.”

“You?” I looked him up and down in confusion, “Casey is a...”

“A girl’s name?” he smirks. He pulls out his wallet and ID, showing it to me. Even Taegan lifts his head to check out the little rectangular plastic, like he is trying to get to the bottom of all of this and find out what is making his mom so upset.

Sure enough, his name is Casey.

“Courtney is my wife,” Casey smiles at me, “And this idiot’s cousin,” he points his thumb in Axel's direction.

I scrunched my face in confusion. “But the picture. You looked like a couple in the picture?”

“This picture?” Axel pulls out his phone, then opens up the contact details for Courtney before showing me. “She’s my cousin. I promise. She took this and set it as her contact picture. That way, if I ever needed to ward off women, I could text her to call me, then use her as an excuse to get girls to leave me alone.”

I scoff, “Is that what happened that night, then? You had her call you to get me to leave without being clingy? It happened years ago, Axel. I’m...I’m over it. It wouldn’t have worked out anyway, since I guess I was,” I looked at my son for a second, seeing that he was hanging on to every word that was being said between us, and I sighed. “It just wouldn’t have worked.”

“It would have,” Axel took a step towards me, causing Taegan to lift his head, clinging to my neck tighter. “You had my child, Bailey. You not only ran away from me that morning, you ran away pregnant with my child, and you didn’t think of trying to find me again to tell me? Even if there was some kind of misunderstanding about my cousin and you thought I was married, how could you just not tell me that you had my son?!”

“Because he is not your son!” I yelled. A little growl startles me, coming from my son’s little body. He is baring his teeth, looking a bit feral and ready to leap out of my arms to tear Axel to pieces.

“I don’t need a dad like you who yells at mommy!” Taegan yells angrily, “Dad yelled at her and hurt her. I’m not letting another dad hurt her either! Leave mommy alone!”

“What?” Axel takes a step back, shock and disbelief replacing the anger on his face.

“Dad used to yell and hurt mommy, and even the police wouldn’t help mommy. We are going to find a new home where grandma Lucy can come live with us, and there will be no more dads! Dads yell and hurt! I don’t want a dad!”

“Someone hurt you?” Axel turned his worried expression on me. My tears started to spill from my heated eyes after hearing my small son trying to defend me so ferociously. Taegan is too small and too young to carry the burdens I placed on him. Grief overtakes me knowing I didn’t shield him as well as I thought I had from all the bad that was happening to me because of Levi.

I couldn't even bear to look at Axel or his friend, knowing there would be nothing but pity for me in their faces. I stare at the ground, then close my eyes to try and stop my tears instead as I take slow, labored breaths. Taegan's small hand is patting my back, trying to comfort me the way I usually try to comfort him when he is upset.

"Please just leave," I whispered. I need to get Taegan's shoes back on and figure out where we are going. If I can't find that secret hotel or figure out how to get a room in it, I should at least stop and get a room at the other hotel for a day or two, letting Taegan stretch out and relax while we recuperate. I need to talk with Taegan, and apologize for all the crap he has witnessed, even though I thought I was keeping it hidden from him for the most part for all these years.

I don't have time or energy to deal with an old fling, no matter how much my entire soul is crying out for me to just jump into his arms right now, like just touching him will make all the pain buried deep in me just go away. It won't.

I don't need a man to fix my problems. I need to figure this out on my own. I need to bury my own desires and just live for my son.

I feel electricity start buzzing beneath my skin, and Taegan starts to growl softly again. I looked back up just in time to see Axel, having closed the distance between us, wrap his arms around me and my child.

My soul either shatters or sings at his touch, I'm not sure which, and my entire body is buzzing with that same weird electrical current from years prior. The only time I have ever felt it is when I was in Axel's arms, and the feeling returned breaks down the rest of my resolve as I start weeping uncontrollably in Axel's arms.

Taegan is growling, trying to push Axel away, but Axel just clings on tighter, breathing us in like we carry on us the most heady aroma, kissing and nuzzling his head between mine and my son's.

"I'm never going to leave you, Bailey. And I'm not ever going to let you leave me again. You're home. You finally came home where you belong."