

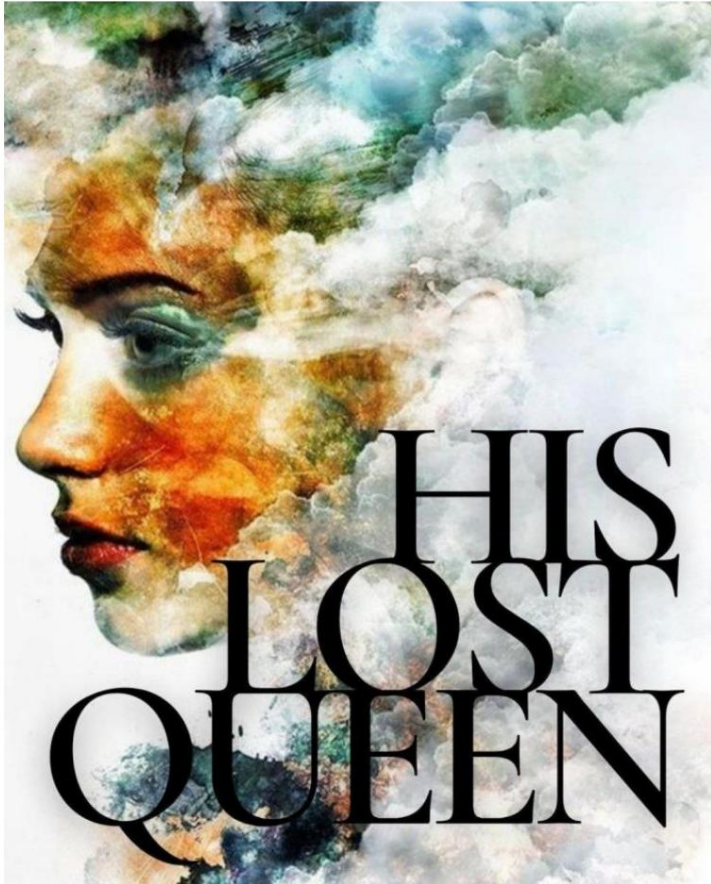
A movie poster for 'A Rainha Perdida'. The background is a dark, moody forest scene. In the foreground, a young woman with long dark hair and striking green eyes looks directly at the camera with a serious expression. To her left, a wolf's face is visible, also with green eyes, looking towards the viewer. The text is overlaid on the lower half of the image.

SEQUESTRADA
POR UM ALFA

A RAINHA
PERDIDA

Lost Queen (Book 2) –
Kidnapped by an Alpha.

Book produced by fans / Non-profit.



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Chapter 1

GRAYSON

My head was spinning.

Everything was a blur, my ears were ringing and my stomach felt like I was about to churn out all my intestines. What the hell had just happened?

I opened my eyes. Still disoriented, I looked around the room, trying to get my bearings, although it was very difficult.

One second I was in my room with Kyle and three red-eyed vampires, and the next, I was in a forest in front of hundreds of newborn vampires and Azazel, all of them determined to kill me and my pack members. .

I was relieved when I realized I was back in my room once more, lying on the hardwood floor.

Though my body was sore and weak – an effect of some kind of magic, I'm sure – the pain that coursed through me wasn't coming. And so on. My initial concern.

War.

Azazel's threatening words were fresh on my mind.

"Tell my brother to prepare. Alpha Grayson. Your time as king is over," he said. "We are coming."

I became aware that there were other people in the room, and once, the ringing in my ears stopped. I was able to register what they were saying.

They were arguing. One person in particular, looked like really upset. I recognized your voice.

"Do something!" Kyle's angry tone rang out. "Why are we standing still when my alpha just passed out? Minnie-"

"I assure you, he's fine, young beta," someone interrupted. Zagan. The king of vampires. Azazel's brother. "I beg you to take your hands off my body before I decide to rip them off."

"Oh yeah? I would like to see you try." Kyle challenged.
"You are not the only one in this room with vampire abilities."

I groaned and rolled onto my side, not wanting to hear any more of their incessant arguments.

All heads turned to me. Kyle was at my side in less than a second, using his newfound vampire speed to move in a single blurry motion.

He crouched down next to me. "Alpha," he sighed, "Are you okay?"

I shook my head and forced myself to sit up even though my body was weak. "I am fine. Disoriented." I looked at Zagan, who had moved to stand beside Kyle. "What the hell just happened?"

"You tell me," he replied in a deep voice. "What you saw?"

I got up slowly, grunting with the effort. My wolf growled. He didn't like feeling weak, especially

now, when so much was at stake. "Azazel," I said. "He is coming."

I heard Kyle catch his breath. "Have you seen Azazel?"

"When?" Zagan snapped, stepping forward with interest. "When is he coming?"

I shook my head. "There is no way to be sure. I don't know how fast your army of newborn vampires can run." My teeth grind together. "Soon, though. Tonight."

Zagan's eyes narrowed. Minnie and Casimir, real vampires and two of Zagan's children, looked at their father in shock. Her tension and anxiety were tangible in the air.

"Azazel Clan is back?" Minnie whispered. His already high-pitched voice seemed to rise an octave in fear. "Dad, did you know about this?"

Zagan nodded. "The beta informed me in his letter. That's why we waste no time in helping this bunch."

"We have to act quickly," I told Kyle. "Prepare the flock to battle. Let them know what happened."

Kyle was already halfway to the door. "In him!" his departing voice shouted as he ran down the hall.

I turned to the three vampires, watching them through narrowed eyes. It was a little disturbing how similar they all looked with their straight black hair, thin bodies and striking red eyes.

They were smaller than werewolves and therefore not as strong. It didn't matter, though. Vampire training focused less on strength and power and more on strategy and stealth.

It was as if their motto was: "Work harder smarter, not harder". And it worked for them.

As I studied his startling but dazzling red eyes, I couldn't help but glance in the mirror beside me, noticing that my own usually green eyes were also red at the moment.

However, unlike the three Mortar, mine were darker, clouded in darkness with the presence of my wolf. I could feel both my vampire and wolf pressing into my consciousness.

It wasn't intrusive as neither was trying to take over; they were just revved up and ready for battle, eager for any reason to break free.

I looked away from my reflection quickly, tensing with anger. The last time I saw my eyes that color was when Azazel took control of my body, showing his true eyes as he stared at our reflection.

I flinched, suddenly being pulled back into memories of being in my own personal hell. My mind involuntarily replayed a scene from the last few months.

I was watching my hand smack Belle, my mate, the love of my life, across her beautiful face, out of control, watching in horror as she flew sideways with force.

But the worst came after the strike. Belle looked at me, her blue eyes filled with embarrassment... and apologized.

She apologized to me. Even though it was my hand that had just scratched her skin, she thought that she was the one who had done something wrong.

Twice. Azazel had hit her twice, taking complete delight in the fact that she thought I was the one

was doing it. And every once in a while, Belle apologized to him.

Genuine apologies, too, were those which evidenced his repentance. I didn't know what she was ashamed of, but God, I could feel it. I could feel his unworthiness growing with each passing day.

She was so hard on herself, beating herself up and racking her brain over what she had done wrong. She wanted to fix whatever it was, not knowing it had absolutely nothing to do with her.

I was screaming inside my head the entire time, beating against the bonds that kept me trapped. It felt like I was drowning.

I struggled so hard trying to overcome the control Azazel had about me so I could go to my mate.

I knew she wasn't eating or sleeping. I knew she was being spat on by every member of the pack. I could feel how weak she was getting. But I couldn't do shit.

Every day, I expected her to leave and run away from here. But every day I still felt her in this house made me completely furious with Azazel for doing this to her.

I wanted to tell her to get out, talk to Kyle or Elijah or someone, anyone, and get the hell out of here. I couldn't understand why she stayed. Why the hell didn't she run away?

Of course, Azazel told her that he wanted her for the power she could give him, demanding that she stay because of it. But really, he wouldn't have noticed if she was gone.

And that's what killed me. If she was getting scared of being punished if she got caught, her fear wasn't necessary. Azazel's mind was occupied with other problems.

I knew this because I had spent over two months listening to his thoughts; I basically knew every detail about the former vampire king.

He wasn't impressed that she was human, and although he found her attractive – and I loved reminding myself – he wasn't really interested in having her around.

He only tried to sleep with her because he wanted to tease me and make me weak. But, surprise, surprise, trying to mate with an alpha male's female doesn't make them weak.

No, it had the opposite effect – it made me furious. I was so blinded with rage every time he laid a hand on her that, finally, my wolf was able to break out of possession and take over to care for our mate.

Azazel learned from that experience. Seeing my mate get hurt made me furious enough to break free of the hold he had on me.

He knew then that the best way to really weaken me was to stay away from Belle. And he did just that. He starved the mate bond. And when I felt my companion slowly diminish, I disappeared along with her.

It wasn't until two nights ago that Azazel tried to mate with Belle again. Only this time, it wasn't to insult or piss me off – although it definitely did both.

Azazel noticed that someone had tampered with his desk, which meant that one of my pack members knew about the letters he was sending to Azazel's Clan.

It was the first time I felt him feel real fear.

Knowing that their war could happen sooner than he expected, he decided he wanted to complete the mating bond with Belle in order to be as strong as possible during the battle.

When Belle refused, to my absolute fucking relief, he didn't hesitate to kick her aside and pick another one.

Azazel was unaware that this was the decision that finally freed Belle. She was heartbroken, but at the thought that I didn't want her, she was finally able to force herself to leave.

And although it made me proud at the time, it made me physical pain thinking about how long it took.

Why didn't she leave before then? The door was wide open. God, why did she stay in this bloody gang house where she was being abused and treated like nothing more than dirt on the soles of someone's shoes?

Did she think she deserved this? Did she expect this to be her new life?

She was worth so much more than all of that, and I thought she'd know it, because hell, she's so much stronger than anyone could ever imagine.

She had been through so much. And yet, every time her life burned, she still managed to rise from the ashes.

I get it now though.

With each day that Belle continued to endure my abuse without retaliating, it became clearer that perhaps she had faced too many fires, that her life had burned too many times.

She became convinced that, after a certain point, fires were no longer coincidences or accidents. When fires follow the same person wherever they go, it is evident that that person has an affinity for starting them.

And so, Belle let herself be burned. My strong companion watched in defeat as the fire began to consume her more once.

Because, according to her, no matter what she did, the fires followed her wherever she went. She escaped only when the pain became too great, when the burns were too much to bear.

When she thought I had rejected her to be with other.

I had no doubt that the burns she suffered would leave scars. It wouldn't be easy to gain her trust again, but fuck if I wasn't up for the challenge.

I wouldn't give up until I had her back in my arms. I would never let her go again. Together, we would rebuild her until she remembered how strong she really was.

Chapter 2

GRAYSON

“Go with the beta,” Zagan told Minnie and Casimir after Kyle left the room. “Inform the wolves how to fight the vampires during battle.”

They nodded and headed in the direction Kyle had taken.

Once alone, Zagan and I faced each other. I didn't hide my narrow gaze. I wanted him to know that I didn't trust him. Not yet, at least.

How the vampire king ended up in my room, in front of the bed where my mate and I were supposed to sleep, was beyond me.

Never in a million years did I think I would allow this to happen. My wolf and I were on edge with all the situation. I was looking forward to leaving.

I didn't want to stay here with him, knowing I should go help get my pack ready, but I had questions that needed answering.

Zagan looked around as he approached me, surveying the large suite. He nodded in approval. “I have to say, Alpha, your pack house is very impressive.”

I almost scoffed. This was coming from the man who had lived in a castle all his life.

The royal family's palace was considered incredible, housing some of the most celebrated figures ever known in the supernatural world.

I couldn't tell if he meant this comment as demeaning or genuine. Anyway, I chose not to answer, crossing my arms over my chest in silence.

Zagan was unaffected by my obvious disdain. He laughed softly, shaking his head. "I just saved your life, Alpha," he reminded me. "There is no need for disdain."

I growled softly. I didn't like that he talked to me like I was one of his pouting kids. "You'll have to excuse me if I have a hard time trusting vampires right now." I answered.

Zagan nodded, his amusement fading slightly. "Yes, well, I suppose that's something I can understand." He paused, crossing his own arms to match mine.

He met my gaze with the same intense ferocity.

"I feel pressured to remind you that I am not your enemy. We share the same goal. We both have a lot to lose if my brother takes the throne."

The tension in my shoulders didn't ease with his words, although I knew there was an aspect of truth in them.

As leaders, we would both have the blood of our people on our hands if we failed. Thousands of people would die if Azazel succeeded.

But none of that meant I had to trust him. At that moment, I would only consider staying by his side during the upcoming battle.

This alliance was hard for me to get into, but I knew I had to do this for the welfare of my pack.

Kyle did the right thing by contacting Zagan Mortar. But if Zagan truly deserved my trust, not just my partnership, he would have to earn it. I wouldn't hand it over yet.

"How did Azazel get into my mind?" I asked, changing the subject to something useful.

Zagan raised his eyebrows. "What time? Right now? Or when he took over your body two months ago?"

I hated the fact that he had to ask for clarification on when a vampire had taken control of my body.

"Right now."

I knew how Azazel had taken over two years ago. months. I had access to your thoughts. He used dark magic the night the vampires entered my territory, the night that changed everything.

Azazel had practically planned every second. With Adalee's help, the vampires managed to distract me and my warriors just long enough for Azazel to slip into the territory unnoticed.

When I decided to go back to Belle, all alone in the forest without my pack members to help me, Azazel knew this was his opportunity to strike.

A few days before that, Azazel stole a dark potion from a witch. Made specifically for vampires, it allowed the user to enter the mind and take control of the body of anyone they bit.

All they had to do was find a piece of the object they wanted to possess and place it in the potion. Maybe a hair or a fingernail.

I was sure Adalee had helped with that part of the plan as well. The vampire would then coat its fangs with the potion and bite the person it wished to control.

Afterwards, they could enter their subject's mind and take over their body. Just like Azazel had done to me.

"I'm sure you've heard the phrase 'All magic has a price'?" Zagan began to explain.

I shook my head.

"Well, it looks like the price Azazel had to pay was forging a connection with you. You saw him with his army, am I correct?"

I shook my head again. "He was preparing them into battle."

"That it was a significant moment in Azazel's life, a turning point. He was creating a core memory which I'm sure is why you were pulled there."

"He left a piece of his soul with you when he left your body. It is not uncommon for this to happen with black magic." Zagan frowned.

"The piece of his soul he left with you wanted to be there for the significant moment in Azazel's life, the moment he started a war. Then you showed up."

My jaw clenched at the news. I didn't want any part of Azazel in me. "Will he appear for the creation of my core memories?"

"No. I believe the price you had to pay for participating in black magic, whether voluntary or not, was losing your mate."

I immediately felt my wolf and vampire stepping forward at Zagan's words. I snarled, showing him my fangs. "I didn't lose my mate. She is mine. She will always be mine."

Zagan raised his eyebrows in amusement, obviously not expecting my intense reaction. That only made my wolf angrier.

I snapped my teeth at him and rolled my neck. I had to suppress the desire to change. My wolf wanted control. He wanted control all night.

"I meant no offense, Alpha Grayson," Zagan said, watching me. His amusement was quickly fading as he seemed to realize how serious I was about protecting my mate.

"I've never been in the presence of an alpha wolf. Forgive me if I said something to upset you. I'm sure your partner okay, and you two will be together soon."

My wolf calmed down just a little, but it stayed at the forefront of my consciousness. He was furious to be reminded that we failed to care for our mate in her time of need.

My hands curled into fists. I had an intense urge to punch something. By the time this war was over, I would have Belle back in my arms, and everything would be fine.

Afraid I'd change my position if I was in Zagan's presence, I groaned and walked out the door, intending to find Kyle and help prepare for battle.

I could vaguely hear the sound of Zagan following behind me. I was glad he didn't talk. One more word out of his mouth, I could have done something I would have regretted.

Chapter 3

GRAYSON

The training ground—a huge lot just a five-minute walk from the pack house—was full of werewolves.

Most were already in wolf form. Some were fighting from a distance, but many were in a large group, listening to Casimir speak.

I wasn't surprised. Casimir was the second son of Zagan, a vampire prince.

I remember sitting with my father when I was young, listening to him tell me about the Mortar and the special abilities they gained.

They were an extremely talented family and had been like that for centuries. Depending on when they were born in relation to their siblings, each child that was conceived played a unique role.

As expected, the firstborn was the heir to the throne. They were born with natural leadership skills.

The firstborn Mortar became king or queen when they came of age. Azazel was the eldest son of his family, destined to be king.

The second son born into the Mortar family was a warrior, strong and agile. They would take command of the royal army when they came of age, leading them into battle whenever necessary.

Casimir was the warrior of his family. That's why I wasn't surprised to see that he took it upon himself to lead my pack in training. It was a natural role for him.

The third son was the most intelligent, born with an amazing mind and problem solving skills.

The Third Son Mortar were some of the smartest people in the world and were known for always having their noses in a book.

And then, finally, the fourth son born into the Mortar family was the clan's healer. They were born with magical properties in their blood that could heal any wound when consumed.

They were also kind and compassionate, easy to talk to. Minnie was the fourth born to Zagan. She saved my life with her blood.

Azazel had the throne before Zagan. Together, he and his wife, Queen Cordelia, would produce the next four Mortars destined to continue the family legacy.

The heir, the warrior, the scholar and the healer. However, that plan quickly changed when Cordelia died in childbirth, along with her eldest son and heir to the throne.

Azazel was overcome with grief after Cordelia died. Many believe that it was due to this pain that fate decided to pass the throne to Zagan, the second son of his family and a warrior.

Zagan was never meant to be king. It wasn't in her nature. However, he was a fair and just ruler, leading his people with a gentle but firm hand.

As I continued to study the scene in front of me, I noticed that Minnie was also in the werewolf pack receiving instructions from Casimir.

She didn't seem to be listening though, too busy studying the large wolves around him with obvious fascination.

As if she could feel my eyes on her, her head turned to look at Zagan and me. She smiled brightly.

In the blink of an eye, she basically flew across the big field and was at her father's side. He smiled at her as she wrapped an arm around him in greeting.

"Aren't they amazing?" she said in amazement to her father as she looked around.

Zagan nodded, assessing the hundreds of werewolves before us. Minnie's gaze snapped to mine. "At In fact, I've never seen a werewolf in real life, I've only read about them in books."

"But you guys are so much nicer in person! And so strong! I couldn't believe it when I saw one of you transform. Fascinating!"

I nodded once in response. I wasn't in the mood to please the overly excited vampire princess.

We kept walking until we were in full view of the entire training ground and all of my pack members. My body tensed as I watched them. Unexpected anger and resentment surged through me.

"What color is your wolf?" Minnie asked me, continuing with your chatter.

"Black," I grumbled.

An awkward silence fell over us, and for a moment I thought Minnie might have stopped talking. But then I heard her whisper to her father, "He's not a very happy fellow, is he? Are we sure we want him to be king?"

A growl loud enough to shake the earth left me. Everyone's heads turned towards us in shock, and the werewolves dropped to their knees and showed their necks in a sign of respect and submission.

I only saw Minnie's horrified face for a second before Zagan stepped in front of her protectively.

Intelligent.

I normally wasn't on edge, but with everything that had happened in the last twenty-four hours, my wolf and I had bonded. we feel ready to bite someone's head off. Minnie was one more smart comment away from being that person.

"Minnie, why don't we go help the wolves train?" Zagan asked.

I didn't hear her answer. However, a second later, I saw a blur of motion fly behind Zagan, and Minnie's small form appeared across the field.

Zagan nodded at me once before following her.

I looked at all of my pack members watching me with wide eyes, waiting to see what I would do next.

I knew they expected me to say something, maybe give an inspirational speech to prepare them for battle. But that was the last thing I wanted to do.

I was afraid that if I opened my mouth, I wouldn't be able to stop myself from shifting into blind rage. so instead

After speaking, I made a stiff gesture for them to continue with their training.

I didn't even notice when Kyle started to approach me, very consumed with rage. "Hey, Alpha," he said cautiously when he was within hearing distance, taking small steps towards me.

"How are you?" He obviously sensed my sensitive mood.

I growled in response.

Kyle nodded slowly and stopped beside me. He knew better than to push me.

We watched in silence as Casimir continued to direct the wolves. He proceeded to divide them into pairs, telling them to try to fight in the way he had just shown them.

Kyle scoffed as he looked down at Casimir with disdain. "That's not fair. The guy is taking my job."

Kyle was usually the one to lead the pack's warriors, having been the head of our army for years. He was good at it and would continue to be the head of my armies after this one.
war.

I knew Kyle understood that. He wasn't really worried about Casimir taking over his position. He was just trying to lift my spirits.

Only he didn't understand that I wasn't in the mood for his jokes.

"He knows more about vampires than you do, Kyle. Let it go," I snapped.

Kyle's eyebrows rose in surprise. "There", he said.

I did not answer. Guilt touched me for a moment, but it was quickly replaced by anger once more.

After a few more minutes of silence, during which I continued to glare at my pack members, Kyle spoke again. "Okay, seriously, what went wrong with your panties?"

He just didn't know when to let go, did he? I snarled and turned to him, baring my teeth menacingly. "I'm serious, Kyle. Forget it."

He raised his hands in surrender and took a step back, which was a smart thing to do. But the extent of his intelligence ended when he continued to push me, opening his mouth again to speak.

"Look, you can kill me for saying this, but I don't care. I don't know what's going on with you, and that's okay. You are going through this. I understand, but whatever it is," he gestured up and down at my heavy form, "it needs to stop. This is not the time. Your pack members are scared. They are being thrown into a war without any warning. They need their alpha, not that gigantic, scary, red-eyed thing you have.

About."

I sighed. "You're right," I said in defeat. I was letting my emotions get the best of me.

"Really?" Kyle asked in shock. His disbelief did not last long. A big smile took over his face. He looked very pleased with himself. "I mean... Of course I am. I am always right."

I rolled my eyes. I returned my gaze to the various pairs of wolves, evaluating them and their abilities.

Two wolves in particular were being especially rough with each other, snapping their teeth and trying to push the other to the ground.

The larger of the two wolves, Micah, was one of my best pack warriors. I had never seen anyone fight like him.

"You're frowning again," Kyle said. I looked at him, noticing only that he was studying me. "You look like you're about to kill someone."

Was I frowning? I hadn't even noticed.

"Do you want to tell me what's going on or why you were looking at Micah like he just killed your dog?" Kyle asked.

I sighed. I didn't want to talk about it, but Kyle really wasn't giving me a choice. "Azazel," I said after a moment. "He ordered all members of the pack to avoid Belle."

"What?" Kyle asked. "He did not order me to avoid the."

"Because you already knew her. Azazel knew you would try to fight it. Mortars can only control actions, not emotions." I crossed my arms over my chest, trying to contain my anger so I wouldn't change.

It wasn't getting harder with every moment we spent talking about it. "The pack members refused to speak to her and fought with her whenever she tried to reach her. She was terrified of them. I felt. She wouldn't even leave that damn room where she was freezing and alone because she was too scared to see anyone. She didn't even go out to get food. She was starving. "

Kyle inhaled quickly. "Shit," he muttered. "Fuck if, that's why I didn't see her."

"She was hiding," I agreed.

Kyle ran a hand over his face. "Why didn't she come to me? Shit, why didn't she call for help? Did she not know that I would have done anything to help her?"

"Azazel threatened her. He told her not to talk to you or Elijah after you tried to help her find food. Remember that? The day you brought her into my office?"

Kyle nodded.

"He hit her right after and told her to stay away from you and Elijah. She was absolutely terrified. She didn't know what to do."

I could feel her emotions now, even though she was so far away. She was in pain, scared and devastated. She was also determined to keep me out of her mind, so I couldn't figure out where she was.

Normally, I could sense its general presence and use that to pinpoint its general location. Now, however, she was completely closed off to me.

She had built walls in her conscience, and try as I might to break them down, she wouldn't budge.

Kyle looked pale. "So that's why you're looking at your pack members? Why did they mistreat the moon?"

"Yes." I growled. "I think so."

Kyle didn't say anything for a long time as he processed what I had just told him.

After a few minutes of silence, he finally said, "You can't blame your pack members for what happened to the luna. They didn't know what they were doing. Just like you had no control over what you were doing."

I looked at Kyle. The idiot somehow always managed to be the voice of reason.

Kyle glanced at the horizon, squinting at the sun. "If you're going to be mad at someone for hurting their mate, be mad at Azazel. He's the one responsible - and he's coming here now. And you decide how he dies."

Chapter 4

GRAYSON

I stood stoically on the edge of the training ground while watching my pack members train.

After my talk with Kyle, I needed some time to process things, so he left me alone and went to train with the others.

Something small suddenly wrapped itself around my leg. My first instinct was to kick the thing away from me, but then I looked down. It was Zoe.

Zoe was only five years old and one of the youngest young wolves. unruly of my pack.

I wasn't surprised to see that she had somehow managed to escape the pack house where all the pups were supposed to be. Zoe was always finding ways to get into trouble.

She didn't say anything as she hugged my leg like some kind of monkey. She simply watched the werewolves in front of us with wide eyes full of wonder. interest.

I always liked Zoe and she seemed to like me. She was one of the reasons I wanted to have kids.

We formed a bond a while ago as soon as she started talking and we ended up spending a lot of time together.

She would often sneak into my office and ask me what I was doing, constantly taking an interest in pack business.

I had a sneaking suspicion she'd become a high-ranking member of a pack someday, maybe even an alpha.

She showed all the signs of being a great leader, except for his disobedience and inability to follow orders.

I sighed. "Zoe, what are you doing here? You should be at the pack house," I said, reaching down to pick it up.

Zoe looked away from the warriors. Her brown eyes widened when she saw me. "Your eyes are red," she told me matter-of-factly. Her voice dropped to a whisper. "You looks like a demon."

I couldn't help but crack a smile. I didn't even realize my vampire was at the surface of my consciousness, turning my eyes red. It was probably due to all the rage that I was feeling.

I was surprised that, instead of being scared, Zoe seemed interested in my red eyes. "That's because I have a vampire inside me now, just like you have a wolf. I have both species."

Zoe nodded. "Yes, I know," she said, shrugging her shoulders nonchalantly, as if it were the most normal thing in the world. "My mother told me. She says you're very strong because you have a vampire and that it's good to have you as an alpha. This is also why you became a giant!" She spread her arms wide, trying to express how big I had gotten.

I laughed. "Yeah, I got really big, huh?"

Zoe grabbed my shoulders, inspecting them. "Yes, you are basically the greatest person I know."

I chuckled, but before I had a chance to respond to her statement, Zoe placed her palms on either side of my face. "Your beard is rough," she said. "Like my father's."

I shook my head, amused at how quickly her thoughts leaped. "Good-

"Hey, your mate is pretty. I saw her," she interrupted.

I immediately tensed at the mention of Belle. Zoe must have seen her some time before she left. My wolf whimpered in my chest. "Thanks," I replied. "I also think."

Zoe frowned, pushing her messy brown hair out of her eyes. "She was sad. That's why your wolf is sad and why you look so angry."

It was hard to believe this five year old was calling me shit right now, but here we were. "I guess you're right."

"I know. But it's going to be okay because we don't have to be mean to her anymore!" she said excitedly, smiling widely at me. "So now you can be happy, right?"

I shook my head. "Right." Once I had Belle back in my arms and explained everything to her, I would be really, really happy again.

Satisfied with my answer, Zoe looked over at the people training. "What are they doing?"

I followed his gaze, watching the various packs of wolves fighting each other. "They are training. There is a war coming."

"Yes, my mother told me. But you're going to tell them to go away, right? You can do this, right? Why do your eyes get red and stuff?"

I paused, thinking about it. Was she right? I could use my new powers to stop the war and defeat Azazel?

"If only it were that simple," said a voice behind us. I turned to face Zagan.

"There is a special type of stone that one can place in one's ear that blocks any type of command coming from a Mortar. Works like an earplug. I have no doubt that Azazel made sure all of his warriors had them."

Zoe gasped. She cupped her hands around her mouth and then placed them at my ear. "Did you know you are a real-life vampire, Alpha Grayson? You can tell by the teeth."

"I think it's time for you to go back to the packhouse, Zoe. Where you're supposed to be," I told her. Even though he knew Zagan wouldn't do anything to hurt Zoe. I still didn't want her near him.

I put her down. "Brent!" I called one of the pack members close by. He was in front of me in an instant.

"Are you going to take Zoe back to the pack house? And make sure someone is watching over her so she doesn't run away again."

Zoe complained and fought with me for a while, but it ended yielding to Brent.

Zagan looked amused when I turned to him. "I would never have expected the great Alpha Grayson to have a soft spot for children."

“Is there a reason you came here, King Zagan?” I asked, changing the subject. “Is there something you wanted to tell me?”

“Yes, actually. I thought it would be a good idea to warn you before I bring an army of vampires into your territory.”

My wolf and vampire surfaced. "What?" I growled.

Zagan lifted his chin toward the horizon. “See for yourself same.”

I snapped my gaze to where he was looking, taking a deep breath when I saw hundreds of vampires, all in battle gear. costume, approaching us. I felt a gust of wind near me. Kyle.

“Uh...Say, Alpha, do you see the scary group of vampires closing in on us? Or is it just me?” he asked.

“They are definitely not the newborn army we are preparing for.”

They had to be the real army. “Do you mind explain?” I asked Zagan.

Zagan smiled. “You didn't think I would leave you and your pack alone, did you? It is my brother we are about to fight. Therefore, it is my battle as much as it is yours.

“And I have a perfectly good army waiting to be used.” In the blink of an eye, Zagan was across the field, meeting the leader of the army and who I could only assume was his firstborn son.

Kyle laughed. “Well, shit. This is going to be interesting.”

Another hour of training passed in a blur.

Casimir continued to lead my pack members, putting them through different drills and scenarios to ensure they were prepared for any kind of trick a newborn vampire might pull on them.

Only now, on top of that, we had real vampires fighting with us. Zagan's army was well trained and lethal.

After the initial shock of seeing thousands of vampires enter my territory, it was clear how useful these vampires would be during battle. I was grateful to have them here.

I watched from afar for most of the training, assessing the different abilities of all my warriors.

Under normal circumstances, my pack army consisted of the biggest and strongest members of the pack, both male and female.

However, due to the severity of the upcoming war, nearly all of the able wolves over the age of eighteen had volunteered to be here and were working hard for the good of the pack.

People would come and go on breaks or to get food, but for the most part, we spent the entire day training. I have never been more proud of my pack in my entire life.

I ended up joining them in training, wanting to test my own fighting skills, especially now that I had a new breed of vampire inside me. I was surprised at how easily the movements came back to me.

I haven't exactly had a lot of time to train these past few months. Although I had been an exceptional fighter before, I found myself moving faster than ever before.

It felt like I was moving in slow motion, even though I knew I was really moving so fast it was basically a blur in the wind. Every one of my actions was graceful and well thought out.

I've always enjoyed training and testing my skills. Even now, I've poured all the anger and aggression I've felt over the last few months into training exercises.

It helped that even though I tried to stop it, my mind was filled with thoughts of Belle.

I expected the constant images of her running through my head to be distracting, but they weren't; they did the opposite. They helped me.

Seeing your pretty face in my mind fueled my rage against Azazel and made me fight harder.

None of my crew members stood a chance against me, even when I was fighting ten of them at once. Neither do vampires.

The new strength I had, thanks to the vampire inside me, was unbelievable. I was basically unstoppable.

"Fine, Alpha," Kyle told me right after I'd simultaneously taken down three of our army's finest warriors.

He approached me with a look of determination in his eyes. "Lets do this."

I raised an eyebrow, sensing an amused smile. take care of my face. "Do you want to fight me?"

Kyle shrugged and then turned his head to snap his neck, getting into a proper fighting stance. "Yes. I can see how big your head is getting. I think you need to lower a few points."

I laughed. "And do you think you're going to be the right person to do it?"

"I'm the only other hybrid here, aren't I?" Kyle responded.

I shook my head. "Fair." I got into my position fight. "Let me know if you need to quit, Beta."

Kyle chuckled, throwing his shoulders back. "Not likely."

"Alpha!" someone's frantic voice shouted from behind us, interrupting Kyle's and my battle just before we started. One of my pack members was running toward us, eyes wide with panic.

I was out in a second, meeting him in the middle of the field.

"Azazel's Clan," he gasped. "I saw them. Just beyond the horizon. They will be here soon."

The group around us fell silent, all looking at me to see what to do next.

I nodded once. "Then it's time. You all know what to do."

Everyone around us fled nervously, everyone preparing for battle.

"Is ready?" I addressed Kyle.

He wasn't looking at me. Her gaze was glued to something in the distance, her eyes narrowed in confusion. "Elijah?" he asked.

I followed his gaze. Sure enough, Elijah was walking towards us. My heart immediately dropped. No no no no. He was supposed to be with Belle! What the hell was he doing here?

Kyle and I took off running. Kyle reached Elijah first, hugging him to his body and inspecting him to see if he was hurt.

"What the hell are you doing here?" Kyle yelled at his mate. "The battle is about to begin!" He looked over his shoulder to see our pack members and Zagan's army preparing.

We still couldn't see the Clan of Azazel, but we hadn't doubts that this would change very soon.

Elijah looked at me nervously. "Um..." he started.

"Where is Belle?" I demanded. "Why the hell aren't you with her?"

Kyle growled, pulling Elijah closer to him.

"I-I've looked everywhere, Alpha. I promise," Elijah tried to explain. "Couldn't find her."

I took a menacing step forward, about to kill everyone in sight. "What do you mean?" I growled.

"She is not in Minneapolis," Elijah continued. "She left hours ago based on your scent."

I could hear the sound of footsteps in the distance and knew it was Azazel's Clan approaching us. "So where the hell is my mate?"

Chapter 5

GRAYSON

"I'm sorry, Alpha," Elijah continued. "I followed her scent the as far as I could. Stopped at a bus stop."

"Fuck you," Kyle said. "Fuck, that means she could be anywhere."

I looked to the horizon where the Clan of Azazel was approaching quickly, hundreds of vampires out for blood.

Part of me was torn apart, wanted to protect my pack, go fight with them and lead them, but another part – maybe the biggest part – wanted, needed to find my mate.

I was nothing without her.

"Alpha?" Elijah asked. "What do you want me to do?"

I knew I had no option. My voice came out rough and deep, more wolf than man. "Change. We have some vampires to fight."

We do not approach Azazel's army. Instead, we let them come to us.

It felt like they were moving in slow motion, even though they were running towards us, looking angry and bloodthirsty, snarling and showing their

fangs.

I was sure it was meant to look intimidating, but it just made them look messy and untrained. Azazel didn't know how to lead an army - not the same way his brother did.

My pack, along with Casimir's army of vampires, were out in the field, their posture rigid and prepared for the violence we knew was to come.

I stood at the front of the pack, in wolf form, Kyle at my side. A chorus of low growls sounded behind me.

My wolf was the most furious of all. He wanted revenge - revenge in the form of broken bones, spilled blood and torn flesh.

All of his instincts were telling him to vent his fury and worry about his mate on Azazel, determined he wouldn't live to see the morning.

My vampire was also on the surface, ready to fight. I had no doubt that my eyes were a dark red in the presence of both creatures.

I was still getting used to having both inside me. me and the new strength that came with them.

I was by far the biggest wolf here, the only other one who could compare to being Kyle, who was still significantly smaller.

I was confident in my new abilities and knew that when it came to a fight between Azazel and me, I would win without any difficulty.

But Azazel was known for his cowardice. Even now, he wasn't at the front of his army as you would expect a leader to be.

He was hiding behind his army, just as I predicted he would be. But that wouldn't stop me from finding him. He was close by; her scent was in the air.

His blood would be on my hands by the end of the night.
Of that I was sure.

Azazel's army was close now, so close that their smell of blood and sweat was almost suffocating. My pack began to advance. We wouldn't wait any longer.

And then the fight started.

Everything happened so fast. We faced each other – wolves and vampires clashing with such intensity I was sure it could be heard across the large field.

It didn't take long for people to start falling.

I took down vampires one by one easily and efficiently. One bite to their neck was all it took for their heads to come off their shoulders and roll on the floor.

I had no mercy on these creatures that were created only to kill and wreak havoc, who stood between Azazel and eu.

I made my way through the crowd, knowing I would find Azazel at the back of it, watching the destruction and chaos he created.

I was a man possessed, fueled by rage and the need for revenge. The death of Azazel's clan meant nothing to me.

A howl sounded behind me. I immediately knew what it meant. Kyle was trying to get my attention. It was the only thing capable of interrupting my concentration.

I looked back, trying to locate Kyle, when a vampire lunged at me, sinking his teeth into my neck. I snarled and threw him off me just as another vampire bit my leg.

I kicked away easily, my fury only growing. I
I was out of the crowd now, no one around me.

Kyle howled again in the distance. my eyes the
found themselves fighting directly in the thick of the battle.

As if he could feel my attention on me, I heard him speak in my mind. "Are
you seeing what I am?" he asked me.

I looked around, my eyes scanning the crowd. "What?"

He jerked his head toward the pack's grounds. "There is something
preventing Azazel's clan from entering pack territory."

I looked back, suddenly realizing exactly what he was talking about, though
it was hard to make out. It looked like a giant, glowing dome stretched over the
pack lands.

Several wolves and vampires were standing on one side of her, snarling at
the vampires on the other side. I narrowed my eyes at them, frowning.

Were they hiding behind the protective field instead of fighting?

Then one of Azazel's vampires – a younger boy, no older than seventeen
or eighteen – ran towards them, obviously looking for a fight, but as soon as he
made contact with the barely visible wall, he fell to the ground.

He screamed in agony and rolled around for a few seconds, writhing as if
he'd been electrocuted and fighting back.
what felt like intense pain before finally stopping.

Dead. He was dead.

"What the hell is that?" I asked Kyle.

There was a protective field around the pack to keep out outsiders, but this was a far cry from that. That field didn't kill - it just stopped unwanted guests.

Several other vampires ran towards the field without thinking, focused on attacking the few on the other side, only to meet the same fate as their friend.

Their screams were louder than anyone else's, echoing in my ears with their intensity as they touched down on the field. Then, suddenly, it made sense.

The pack members on the other side weren't hiding or being cowardly; they were using the death field as a way to kill Azazel's clan. They poured into the force field like insects to a moth catcher.

Little by little, more of my pack members began to realize what was happening and took action. They entered the shimmering dome with ease, some crawling and some to get to the other side.

Azazel's clan didn't catch on so quickly. The new ones Vampires were young, untrained, and hungry for blood.

They were desperate for a fight and willing to do anything to sink their fangs into something with blood, be it a wolf or another vampire. Some were attacking each other to others.

I knew this bloodlust was supposed to work in Azazel's favor. It didn't matter who they were killing, as long as they were rabid enough to take down my army in the process.

But as more and more of my army began to retreat behind the deadly force field, Azazel's vampires began to attack each other.

They were killing each other, ripping out each other's throats, running into the force field. Azazel's army would not last a lot more.

Kyle knew what to do without me telling him. His voice filled my mind, yelling at the pack members to get behind the force field.

It didn't take long for Casimir to understand or start yelling at members of his army to stay behind the force field.

We were going to win this battle. But I hadn't gotten what I wanted.

I looked back at the trees, scanning them for any sign of Azazel. I knew he was out there, hiding in the shadows. I also knew he wasn't going to leave.

He was losing. There was no way around it. His army was dwindling with each passing second. Azazel knew that too – he knew there was nothing he could do to prevent his defeat.

He was panicked, cowering in the shadows.

It didn't matter, though. I was going to find him. I would hunt him down and make him pay for what he's done.

"Alpha?" Kyle spoke in my mind. "What are you doing?"

I growled, running for the tree line. I knew Azazel was out there. I could feel him close by, could practically smell his fear.

My bloodlust grew to an all-time high as my wolf took over, my instincts telling me to avenge my mate.

"I'm going to find that son of a bitch and I'm going to rip him to pieces," I said.

Chapter 6

BELLE

Evergreen, Maine, the town sign said. the most place Earth delicious.

Yes, delicious my ass.

I was sitting on the bench by the side of the road, watching the people passing by. My suitcase was next to me on one side and my backpack on the other. Why the hell did I come here?

This was never my plan. In fact, I hadn't planned on going anywhere, actually. When I took a Greyhound bus in Minnesota, I had no idea where I was going.

to stop.

All I knew was that I wanted to get as far away from Grayson and my old life as possible. And I had exactly that.

I sat on that bus for hours and hours, watching as we drove through city after city, state after state. I changed buses whenever we arrived at a new station, always choosing to go north.

I had gone as far north as I could without crossing into Canada until, finally, I ended up where I was now, in a small town in Maine, as far away from bad memories as I could be.

Evergreen was beautiful and picturesque. It was also a tourist destination – a pleasant destination, catering to wealthy families looking to spend their holidays at the seaside.

Its main street, where all the shops and restaurants, overlooked the Atlantic Ocean.

And if you turned in the opposite direction, there were mountains and a huge, fancy ski resort that I was sure was extremely busy during the winter.

The beaches were full of tourists sunbathing and swimming, enjoying the warm summer sun.

In the main part of the city, the shops were all uniform, occupying both sides of the streets, attracting people with their beautiful windows and expensive items.

Street lights illuminated the picturesque cobbled roads and everyone seemed to know each other. I passed families and smiling faces everywhere I went.

At first, I considered myself lucky to have ended up here. This was the kind of town I could really see myself settling down in, starting a whole new life where no one could find me.

I felt like Lorelai Gilmore, walking into Stars Hollow for the first time, ready to break with my toxic past.

But after spending almost an entire day here, I quickly realized that Evergreen was nothing like Stars Hollow.

Sure, the town looked like it was straight out of a Hallmark movie, but the locals would be better suited to take part in an episode of *The Twilight Zone*.

The only way I could think of to describe them was...weird. It was like they somehow knew I wasn't another tourist they could suck money out of.

They looked at me as I walked by like I was some kind of zoo animal on the loose in their quaint town.

I continued to hear them whisper behind my back, and when I turned to look at them, they quickly looked away, acting like they weren't looking and talking about me.

It felt like my every move was being watched as I walked down the street, and I didn't know how to feel about that.

I knew I looked out of place.

I was wearing the same old, wrinkled clothes I'd been wearing when I left Grayson, my hair definitely could have been brushed a bit, and my face was still recovering from Grayson breaking my cheekbone several weeks ago.

Okay, so displaced might not be the best way to describe my current state... I was a mess. I might as well have "I just got out of an abusive relationship" written across my forehead.

Based on the looks I got from the locals, you'd assume I had three heads or something.

My priority today was getting a job. So far, however, that hasn't been going too well. Every time I walked into a store, restaurant, or business of any kind, the employees started acting weird around me.

Most avoided my questions, while others brushed me off without even giving me a chance to speak. Some people even avoided me completely, as if they'd seen me come in and assumed I had the plague.

It didn't matter, though. They could look all they wanted. I had decided that I was here now and I would make the best of it. I deserved to settle down in a city as good as this one.

I deserved to have a good life, one where I didn't think about Grayson every two seconds. And as much as I tried to make that happen, I was starting to realize that this was easier said than done.

The more I tried to push him and the memories of what he'd done to me out of my head, the stronger they seemed to invade my mind.

It was almost as if I was unable to think of anything other than my former partner, the man who ripped my heart out of my chest and tore it into a million pieces.

The pain was the worst part. My entire body ached.

My muscles felt like I had just run an entire marathon with no prior training and then I kept going even after I was finished, pushing my body beyond the limit until I was on the verge of collapse.

My feet dragged with every step I took and my shoulders slumped with exhaustion.

Grayson's mark on my neck burned like it did when he'd first given it to me months ago, and I'd locked myself in a hotel room to get away from him.

It seemed to have become infected as well, turning red and blotchy.

I knew it was only going to get worse. I wasn't sure how I knew that, but I could tell it was our mate bond trying to bring us back together.

He didn't understand that Grayson was no longer my mate, that he had chosen to be with someone else over me.

And that he made me fall in love with him, only to destroy myself in the most painful way possible and throw my love back in my face.

But as bad as it was, none of it compared to the throbbing inside my head. Before that, I had never been one to get headaches.

From time to time, I would feel a dull pain when I was about to get my period, but it was never anything like that.

I felt it for the first time on the bus leaving Minnesota; the pain had been sudden and piercing, making me double over with its intensity.

It felt like a wild animal was flailing around in my brain, tearing at the walls of my skull with its claws, trying to break free.

I was tempted to stab something sharp in my head just to relieve the pressure. It had to be the worst migraine in the history of the world.

The pain in my head came in waves, never going away but occasionally getting more intense, making my vision blur and the mark on my neck burn like it was on fire.

The only thing to do was grit your teeth and try to get through that.

I couldn't help but wonder if this was Grayson's way of punishing me.

Because even though he'd mated with someone else, even though I'd felt the pain that almost killed me, indicating he'd officially given up on me, I still felt this strange connection to him.

But here's the thing: I let him go. I blocked him from my mind and did everything I could to make sure he was no longer connected.

So I wasn't the one holding us together. It was Grayson.

It made me furious. He didn't want me. He made that perfectly clear.

During the time I lived with him he only spoke to me to tell me how inconvenient I was or when he was trying to force me to have sex with him.

I was just a tool for him, a way for him to gain more power. He never really cared for me.

And yet he was trying to invade my mind. It reminded me of the feeling I had when we were in Paris and I ran away from him to see my mother. He had found me so quickly.

It must have been because of that connection we shared with each other. And when I dropped him off in Minnesota, I made sure he couldn't see into my mind like he used to.

Honestly, I didn't think he cared. But I had the strangest feeling that this intense, terrible, overwhelming headache I was feeling was Grayson trying to watch over me.

Is that what it was? He wanted to know where I was and what what were you doing if you decided you really wanted me?

Yeah, well, fuck that. Under no circumstances would I let you back in my mind.

The worst part of it all was...I loved him. He made me love him. He used fake compliments and empty promises of a life with him that felt like something out of a fairy tale.

It was that love that made me want to get over his faults and the way he treated me and...run back to him. Yep that's right despite all the horrible things he did to me I still wanted to be with him.

I kept wondering if I'd made the right decision leaving him, trying to convince myself that he hadn't treated me so badly.

Hanging out in that freezing basement room and being shunned by everyone around me, even my own soulmate, would be worth it if I got a little closer to him.

I wanted to forgive him.

But I couldn't, I wouldn't. Even though it made me feel like I was going against my very nature, I knew I had to get rid of him.

I deserved better. When the time came, we both did. Grayson deserved better than being with someone he really didn't like to be around, that he only wanted me to make himself more powerful.

And I deserved better than to yearn for a man who never would see me as nothing more than a body to warm his bed.

He made me question my worth. He made me question whether I deserved love. And I hated it. I hated that he made me think of all the people in my life that I pushed away, that left me.

My mother left me to raise a new family in a fantastic new country, far, far away from my father and me. She never liked being my mother. She resented me for some reason.

My father died of cancer, leaving me alone.

And even though I knew it wasn't anyone's fault, a part of me still wondered if I could have worked a little harder to contribute.

with the medicine

If I had spent a little more time with him in the hospital instead of hanging out with friends after school, would he still be alive today? Would I still have my father?

He was needed...

Even Kyle and Elijah – two people who have come to mean a lot for me in the last few months – left me in the end.

I tried to remind myself that it wasn't their fault. I knew they would have stayed with me if given the choice. But still, ultimately, they chose their alpha over me.

And finally, there was Grayson. I wasn't even good enough for my own soul mate. God, if he couldn't see past my faults enough to love me, who would?

As much as I tried to stop myself from thinking that way, trying to convince myself that all those people left for their own reasons that had nothing to do with me, I just couldn't.

It was hard not to rummage through my memories and analyze all the possible things I could have done wrong.

It made me want to scream. And cries. The last few days had been, admittedly, a gigantic pity party.

Why hadn't I been good enough? Why did everyone I cared about leave me? What did I do to make Grayson hate me so much?

I hated that Grayson had made me think that way. manner.

He made me feel like my entire worth depended on what other people thought of me when in reality the only love I needed was my own.

I would be the one to see past my flaws. I would be the only one to love myself... even when memories of Grayson telling me I wasn't good enough made that nearly impossible.

So yes, he could beat inside my skull as much as wanted. I would never let him in. I was alone now. And that's how I wanted it.

Chapter 7

BELLE

“I learn really fast and I never get sick,” I told the woman behind the counter in the cute little boutique. “And I could start as soon as possible, even now, if you wanted.”

The friendly shopkeeper – Loretta, her name tag said – was studying me with a sympathetic gaze.

I could feel his eyes slide over my dirty clothes and disheveled hair before finally settling on the bruise on the left side of my face.

I knew I must look extremely out of place in the immaculate boutique. Loretta was dressed head to toe in famous brands, with manicured red nails.

There wasn't a single strand of hair out of place on her blond head, which perfectly framed her heart-shaped face. She looked expensive. Mature. Beautiful. She really looked like she belonged in this town.

I was nervous when I first walked into the store. I didn't expect to get a job. I'm sure all of Loretta's employees were like her—well dressed, with their lives together.

I was none of those things. But I was desperate.

Loretta hesitated a moment before answering.

And smiling with regret. “I'm so sorry, honey. I would love to interview you, but we just don't want to hire anyone new. right now.”

I looked behind me at the front door, and the “Now Hiring” sign was flashing. It was the only reason I'd walked into the little boutique.

Loretta followed my gaze. “We filled the position this morning,” she explained hastily.

The hope that had been swirling in my chest quickly dissolved.

“But I would be happy to take your information and let you know if anything happens.” Loreta continued. she tried to smile again.

I appreciated her kindness and the fact that she was trying to offer me some comfort even though we both knew I didn't stand a chance.

I shook my head. “OK. I would appreciate it. Thanks.”

This must have been the fourth or fifth business I went into today, looking for a job. I needed a job, and I needed one ASAP.

At least Loretta was kind to me instead of rushing me back to the streets as the other shopkeepers had done.

I could tell she was a good person. She looked genuinely sad that she couldn't help me.

“I'm going to be very honest with you, honey,” she continued right before I headed for the exit.

She looked around quickly as if to make sure that no one could hear what she was about to say.

The only other person in the store with us, an older woman with a very expensive-looking bag slung over her shoulder, had just left. So we were completely alone now.

"I'd love to hire you," Loretta hastened to say. "I want to help you. I can tell you need a break. But I can not."

She hesitated, her hands restless in front of her. "You won't get a job in this town. We are not allowed to hire people from outside."

My eyebrows rose. "Outsiders?"

She nodded. "It's hard to explain, but... This is a close-knit community. And the head of our community needs to approve everyone who can join."

"The head of the community? Like the mayor or something?"

"I think so. Our mayor."

"So I have to talk to the mayor before I get a job here?"

She sighed. "Well, not exactly. I'm afraid you can't get any jobs at Evergreen. No one will hire her."

I didn't understand what she meant. I had never heard of a city that only allowed business owners to hire from locals.

All I knew was that I was tired. And oppressed. And in a lot of pain. I didn't have the mental capacity to understand what she was saying to me. I didn't even want to try.

I was glad she'd told me, though. That way, I wouldn't continue to make a fool of myself by interviewing for jobs I had no chance of getting.

"Okay," I said slowly. "Do you know if the next town have the same crazy rules?"

"Woodhurst?" asked Loreta. "No. They do not. But I
I wouldn't be there if it were for you.

"Why not?"

"It is degraded. And there is a lot of crime. It's just not a good place to be."

The corners of my lips lifted. "I grew up in
Minneapolis. I think I can handle a small town in Maine."

Loretta looked worried. She studied me, frowning.
worried eyebrows. But she didn't say anything else.

"Thanks for your help. And for telling me about the whole job thing." I
grabbed the strap of my backpack and grabbed the handle of my suitcase.

I started to make my way to the door. "I will leave your
way now."

Loretta stopped me right before I left. "Wait, honey," she yelled.

I paused and turned to look at her. She bypassed the
counter, approaching me with hesitant steps.

"Is there anything else I can do for you?" she asked.

I made a face. "What do you mean?"

She looked around us. "I just don't feel right sending you out into the cold,
especially in your condition."

I shifted my weight, feeling uncomfortable and a little embarrassed. I didn't
look so bad, did I?

"Are you running away from someone?" she continued in a low voice.
"Perhaps the person who put that bruise on your face?"

My discomfort increased as I took a step back.
I couldn't believe a perfect stranger was asking me that.

I appreciated his desire to help, but the last thing I wanted to do was talk about what I had gone through with my old partner.

Even thinking about Grayson made my chest tighten painfully, sucking all the air out of my lungs. My mark burned into my neck, and I shuddered.

"Ah, my dear," said Loretta, obviously noticing my reaction. "I'm very sorry."

The pain subsided a little after a few seconds and I was able to breathe again. I brushed my hair out of my face, my hands shaking. Exhaustion coursed through my veins.

"Everything is fine. I am fine." I let out a sigh deep. "I mean... I'll be fine."

Loretta didn't look convinced. "Do you have a place to stay tonight?"

I am not. But I wasn't going to tell her that.

In all honesty, I didn't want her help. In my experience, people say they'll be there for you and then stab you in the back the moment you start trusting them.

Human beings are inherently selfish. I promised myself that I would do things alone. I needed to pull myself together without depending on anyone else. That was the only way I could survive this.

"Yes. I have a place to stay tonight," I told Loretta, my tone firm.

His eyes narrowed a little. It was clear she didn't believe me. It didn't matter, though. There was nothing she could do about it.

"I should go," I said before she could continue to question myself.

"Wait a second." Loretta ran back behind the counter. She took out a sticky note and a pen, writing something on it.

When she finished, she approached me once more. She handed me the paper. "This is my cell phone number. If you need anything, anything at all, don't hesitate to call me or the boutique."

I looked at her phone number and then back at her. I didn't understand why she was so eager to help me. What did she hope to gain from it?

I put the piece of paper in my coat pocket, knowing I would never look at it or think about it again. Besides, I didn't even have a phone. "Uh, thanks.

I will keep that in mind."

Loretta nodded and smiled once more. She still looked worried, eyeing my form warily and wringing her fingers in front of her.

"Thanks again," I said. So I opened the front door and
leaves.

I threw the phone number into the nearest trash can.

Chapter 8

BELLE

After leaving Loretta's boutique, I wandered the streets some more, not caring how ridiculous I must look as I carried my suitcase behind me, turning heads everywhere I went.

I was beyond the point of exhaustion by now and could barely think.

I wanted nothing more than to take a shower, change into clean clothes and curl up in bed, sleep until I couldn't sleep anymore.

Unfortunately, however, this was not a possibility in the time.

I was hoping to get a hotel room for the night, assuming that a city that could only prosper on rich tourist money would have a few options for places to stay.

You can imagine my surprise when none of the hotels I passed had vacancies. I had no idea why a random little town in Maine was so popular to visit in mid-March, but I figured it was the place to be.

be.

So, once again, I found myself on a roadside bench, lying with my backpack under my head, trying to breathe through all the stress and pain I was fighting.

I had no money, no job, no place to stay, and the throbbing in my head seemed to be getting worse.

Yes, my life sucked.

And what was worse, I missed Grayson. Even though thousands of miles separated us, I still felt this cosmic connection with him, like there was an invisible rope tying us together.

I couldn't get that stupid, stupid, stupid face off from my mind.

I put my hand over the mark on my neck, moaning and squeezing my eyes shut as it burned with white-hot pain. Everything was a mess.

I was so absorbed in my thoughts that I noticed when a car stopped in front of me.

"No!"

I jumped, my head snapping up. I winced as a new wave of dizziness hit me.

I met the eyes of a guy who looked about my age. He was driving a red jeep and leaning out the open window, smiling at me. A girl was sitting next to him in the passenger seat, looking at him.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to scare you," continued the young man. "I couldn't help but notice how lonely you look sitting in this bus stop alone. Had to stop and see if you want some company."

The girl next to him sneered and rolled her eyes, obviously finding his poor attempt at flirting just as pathetic as I did.

He ignored her and continued to watch me, his charming smile growing with each passing second. He was very handsome, and the expression on his face told me he knew it.

He had short, curly brown hair and honey-colored skin. His jaw was sharp and his facial features were symmetrical and undeniably pleasing to look at.

Then there were his eyes, a warm hazel with flecks of gold and green that reminded me of the forest.

He seemed like the type of person who could succeed based on his looks alone rather than his talents or abilities.

The girl next to him looked extremely similar, making me wonder if they were related in any way. She had the same hair. Only hers was twisted into long braids that cascaded down her shoulders.

She had the same eyes and the same angular facial features.

The only difference I could find between the two – besides gender, of course – was that she had a small, button nose, while the boy had a long, pointy one. They were both beautiful though, that was for sure.

I sat up, trying to tidy up my appearance a bit. Before I could say anything, however, the girl groaned. "Liam, come on! If we're late for dinner again, Daddy will kill us!" she said quietly.

So they were related. I mentally congratulated myself on my insight.

Without looking at her, Liam the boy clapped his hand behind him dismissively. His gaze focused on me, running up and down my body in one long, appreciative take.

I couldn't help but cringe, immediately wishing I were somewhere else.

"You're not leaving town anytime soon, are you?" Liam asked, pointing to the bus stop where I was sitting. "You just arrived."

My guard immediately went up. How did he know I did you just get here? Was he watching me?

The girl slapped her brother hard on the back of the head.

"There!" Liam yelled, finally looking at her. "For what the hell was that it?"

"You look like a stalker," she told him, exasperated.

She looked at me, offering a gentle but strained smile. "News travels fast around here. We've all heard about the beautiful brunette, walking around town, trying to find a job."

I felt my face heat up. The whole city was watching fail at getting a job all day?

"You're not leaving, right?" Liam asked. He was starting to sound a little desperate. He was obviously interested in me.

I would have been flattered if I hadn't just given up on men for the rest of my life.

"No. Not yet, anyway. Maybe tomorrow though," I muttered. I would have to move on if I didn't get a job here, which was starting to look like a real possibility.

So much for believing that I deserved to settle in one place as good as this, right?

Liam's brows furrowed, obviously not liking my answer. He leaned forward, ready to speak, but his sister cut him off before he could.

"Too bad," she said, aggressively pushing Liam's back against his seat so she could see me better. Liam looked at her. "We have to go now. It was nice talking to you. Drive the car, Liam."

He made no move to do as he was told.
"Let me know if you change your mind about the whole leaving thing. from the city. I could show you around." Liam told me, his smile growing again.

I shook my head awkwardly, pursing my lips.
"Uh, thanks."

"Great, now let's go," the girl snapped.

Liam rolled his eyes. "Wait a second, okay? I neither I even gave her my number yet."

The girl looked like she was about to cut off his head, his skin perfect starting to show signs of redness underneath.

"Uh, there's really no need," I interjected. "I am not I have a phone, so giving me your number would be pointless."

Liam's eyebrows rose. "No phone?" he asked. "Isn't that kind of dangerous? What if some stranger tries something on you and you need to ask for help?"

I shrugged. The thought had occurred to me on more than one occasion, but there wasn't much I could do about it. No money meant there was no way to buy a phone.

"I guess I should probably avoid chatting with strangers then, huh?" I proposed, raising my eyebrows at him in a challenge.

"You know, it's a great idea," Liam's sister said. "Let's leave her alone and go on our way. There are no more strangers in your way."

Liam leaned forward, completely ignoring her. "You know...this whole weird thing can be sorted out pretty quickly, beautiful."

The girl faked a joke, whispering, "Puh-lease," softly.

"Uh..." I managed to say, not knowing how to respond. Not many guys had hit on me before. I didn't know what the proper protocol was. Was there a right way to turn someone down?

"I'm Liam Blackwood, and this is my twin sister Laila," he continued before I could respond.

"Once you tell me your name, we won't be strangers anymore, will we? Then we can talk as much as we want without having to worry."

"No we can not!" her twin sister, Laila, screamed. "I refuse to let this disaster continue! She obviously doesn't is interested in you, man, so please move on. We have places to go and a very angry parent to deal with. And guess what? You better believe I'm blaming you for this whole fiasco. You're going to have to listen to Dad give a lecture on the importance of time management throughout your meal, and you're not going to get any sympathy from me because this one is all about you, buddy. We would have made it on time if you hadn't spent an eternity looking at yourself in the

mirror before we leave. And then you prove, yet again, that you can only think with your cock and have to stop to talk to the cute new girl in town, even though you know we shouldn't be talking to her in the first place. So I suggest you put your ass in gear and drive the fucking car before I push you into the street and leave without you!"

Laila's breathing was labored and her cheeks were red. Liam, however, looked bored with her rant.

It was becoming clear that this type of fight was a regular occurrence between the two.

He stared at her for a few seconds. "You finished?" he asked.

Laila's jaw clenched, her entire rigid frame anger.

Liam looked at me and smiled casually. "You know, I think there are some people out there who could really benefit from therapy. Or anger management."

He looked back at Laila, who gave him a quizzical look. disbelief, throwing his arms up in defeat.

She leaned back in her seat. "I quit. Do whatever you want."

Liam turned to me again. "I'm not going to lie to you, new girl. I don't feel right leaving you here alone with no way to call for help if you need it."

I looked around us. There weren't many people on the streets now that it was getting dark, but those that were still out there looked like the least threatening people in the world.

It was mostly families and happy-looking couples. I raised an eyebrow. "Is your town known for its crime or something? I'm really not getting that vibe."

"You'd be surprised, actually," he said. I couldn't help but notice the way a muscle jumped in his jaw. "Do you have a place to stay tonight?"

I immediately shook my head, confused as to why so many people seemed to care what was happening to me. Where I come from, and I think in most cases, people minded their own business. "Yes. I am fine."

He looked at my suitcase and dirty clothes.

"Alright, well, on the off chance that your plans fail, there is a bed and breakfast around the corner that usually has vacancies."

"Tell them Liam Blackwood sent you, and they should be able to get you ready for the night."

My chest filled with hope at his words.

"Really?" Then, realizing that I had basically given myself away as a liar with no place to stay, I quickly continued on. "I mean, uh, thanks, but I'm sure that won't be necessary."

Liam reached into his pocket and pulled out some kind of wrapping paper, writing something on it with a pen he had in the car. He handed it to me.

"There should also be a phone there that you can use. Call me if you have any problems."

I looked down at the phone number in my hands. I was starting to get déjà vu, remembering the interaction I had with Loretta this morning.

I tried to give Liam a smile, hiding the number in my pocket. "I'm sure I'll be fine."

Liam didn't look so convinced. In fact, he looked more worried than before. After a few more seconds, however, his gaze shifted from me to the watch on his wrist.

"Hmm, you know what?" he said, pressing his tongue to the inside of her cheek. "I think we're going to be late for dinner. Laila, why didn't you say anything?"

He shook his head, looking at me with mock exasperation. "I have to do everything around here. Nice to meet you, new girl." He put the car in motion.

"Uh, yes, you too," I replied.

As they pulled away, I watched Laila's silhouette through the rear window of her car continually ram into Liam's head with more aggression than I'd expected from someone so small.

I had to hold back a laugh. I could still hear them yelling at each other as the car disappeared from view.

Chapter 9

BELLE

“Nine hundred dollars?” I demanded. “For one night?”

The smiling lady behind the desk at the inn Liam had recommended to me nodded. “This is a very nice establishment.”

It was also the only vacant seat in this godforsaken city. It was great that it cost an arm and a leg to sleep here.

“Are the sheets embroidered with gold or something?”
I asked.

The woman's gentle expression turned hard in a matter of seconds.

“No,” she snapped. “But each room has two king beds, an ocean view, a personal jacuzzi, beach access, and complimentary breakfast every morning.”

“Is there any kind of exception that can be made? Can I make an account and pay when I have the money?”

I hated the idea of owing someone, but I had no other choice. “Please, I have no other place to stay.”

“I'm afraid not, dear,” the woman replied, her tone feigning sympathy. I watched her study my appearance with distaste, stopping at my bruised cheek and then my stained clothes.

His nose even wrinkled. “There's a motel about an hour's drive from here that's a little cheaper if you want to try your luck there.”

That would be great if I had some way to get there. When I told her this, she just shrugged and turned away, obviously done with the conversation. I sighed.

“Would it make any difference if I said Liam Blackwood sent me?”

This got the woman's attention. She turned to me, surprise etched on her face. “Liam Blackwood? Did he tell you to come here?”

I shook my head.

“One second. Let me make a call.”

The woman disappeared behind a door that must have led to an office. She returned a minute or two later, her lips pursed.

“I'm sorry, the owner doesn't think it would be a good idea for you to stay here, despite your connection to his son.”

Suddenly it made sense. Blackwood Inn and Breakfast. Blackwood- as in Liam Blackwood. Liam's family she owned the place.

“Now, I'm going to have to ask you to leave,” the woman continued.

I bit my lip, feeling my chest tighten and my unwanted tears. I gave the woman one more pleading look, which was only met with a scowl that told me that under no circumstances was she going to budge.

Having no other choice, I turned around and scrambled to outside the inn.

Once outside, a new, unexpected wave of pain hit me like a ton of bricks. I immediately

I dropped my suitcase and backpack, doubling over and gritting my teeth to hold back a scream.

This was the worst it had ever gotten.

The pain lasted about a minute. I could feel Grayson's presence in my head, pressing against my conscience, trying to invade my mind so he could undoubtedly torment me some more.

I screamed as he thrust again, nearly breaking my walls. Why was he doing this? Why did he push to stay connected to me?

Was he really that cruel? So cruel that he would deliberately cause me more pain after rejecting me and putting me through hell?

If he thought I was going to let him take over any part of my life after everything he'd done, he had something else coming.

I just wanted him to leave me alone. Why didn't he do this?

Finally, I managed to gather my things and stagger to the side of the inn. I leaned against the building, slowly sliding down the wall until my butt met the grass.

I took a deep breath, calming myself, closing my eyes tightly and forcing myself not to cry. Did not work. I couldn't stop the tears from falling.

And just when I thought things couldn't get any worse, it started to rain. I looked up, groaning loudly. Of course... How lucky for me.

Not knowing what else to do, I brought my legs up to my chest and buried my face in my bony knee, letting my sobs overtake my body.

"Hey, new girl!" a familiar voice called out abruptly. I jumped, my head flying up. "What are you doing in the rain?"

Liam. Liam, the boy from before, was approaching me, with the hand raised over the eyes to protect from the rain.

-I wanted to scream at him to leave me alone. I didn't want him to see me like this and I definitely didn't want the help I knew he would try to offer.

But I just couldn't do my job.
I couldn't form the words.

Liam stopped as he approached, clearly seeing my pained and tearful expression. His face softened.

"Hey," he said gently. "Are you well?"

I shook my head, smoothing my wet hair.
"I am fine." I whispered. I hated how my voice sounded
Broken.

Liam didn't say anything for a few seconds. I practically he could feel the pity seeping out of him.

The pain in my head was finally starting to subside. I sighed deeply.

"I'm fine," I repeated. "You can go. Get out of the rain."

Liam shoved his hands in his pockets, never taking his eyes off me.
"Can I give you a ride somewhere? I'd rather not leave you here alone."

I shook my head. "I am waiting for someone to come to me search." I lied. "She will be here any minute now."

"Oh okay. Do you mind if I ask who she is
It is?"

I closed my eyes, not wanting to do this right now. "A friend childhood," I replied without thinking. "Sarah."

"Oh, Sarah," Liam said, shaking his head. "Sarah who? Sarah Martin? Sarah Paige? Sarah Lewis?"

I had to hold back a groan. Stupid small towns where everyone knows everyone else.

"Sarah Lewis," he replied dryly.

Liam's eyebrows rose in amusement. "Your childhood best friend is a 95-year-old woman with Alzheimer's?"

Shit.

"Oh. I, uh..."

Without saying another word, Liam crouched down in front of me. There was a moment of silence. "So bed and breakfast Didn't work out, huh?"

I was suddenly overjoyed that it was dark outside. If not, I'm sure Liam would be witnessing my face turn red as a tomato. I shook my head silently.

"Did you try to tell them I sent you?"

I nodded once.

"Shit," Liam said, running a hand through his wet, curly hair in frustration. Her eyelashes and skin were

splashed with raindrops. He was getting completely drenched.

"So... you don't have a place to stay tonight, then? And before I answer, I want you to know that there is no judgment on my part. I don't know your situation, I can only make assumptions based on the information you've presented to me.

You're sitting outside the only place you could spend the night, your suitcase by your side, crying in the rain alone..."

He shrugged. "I'm not really trying offend you. I just want to make sure you have a warm place to sleep tonight."

"I have a place to stay," I said firmly.

I knew deep down that Liam meant well. He was trying to help me, but I really didn't want to. I didn't trust him or his charming smile.

I wish this conversation was over so I could go back to being miserable alone.

Liam licked his lips. "Do you mind if I ask where? I could give you a ride."

"Okay," I responded quickly. "I'll be fine."

Liam nodded, apparently accepting my answer. I thought he would leave me alone. But then Liam sat on his ass in the wet grass right in front of me. He looked at me expectantly.

"What are you doing?" I asked after an awkward moment of silence had passed.

Liam shrugged. "Waiting."

"For...?"

"I'm waiting until I know you have a safe place to sleep tonight," he replied nonchalantly. "It seems you're not comfortable sharing this information with me yet. Normally, I would respect your wishes and leave you alone. "However, I kind of feel like it's my moral obligation to make sure you don't end up alone, sitting in the freezing rain all night, in a strange city where you don't know anyone. So I'm going to sit here until you tell me where you plan to sleep tonight."

I crossed my arms over my chest. "What if I refuse to tell you?"

Liam leaned back on his palms and stretched his legs out in front of him, crossing at the ankles. "Then I guess we're both going to be here all night."

I didn't know how to respond. My stubborn side was showing, remembering the promise I made to myself before coming here. I'm tired of putting my well-being in the hands of others.

So instead of answering, I ignored him and put my forehead back on my knees. I would just wait for him to leave. It wasn't like I had anywhere else to be.

A few minutes passed and I found my mind wandering, thinking about my other options. I could get back on a bus and try to get some sleep while it takes me somewhere else.

At least I wouldn't be out in the rain then. Or I could just start walking and hope to find a bridge or something.

"You know..." Liam said, snapping me out of my thoughts. "I have an extra bed in my apartment. You can stay there tonight. It wouldn't be a problem."

"No thanks," I replied, not even looking at him. "I don't stay in... strangers' houses."

Liam scoffed. "Are you scared I'm going to kill you or something? Do I look like a serial killer to you?"

I looked at him. He didn't look like a serial killer. But then again, neither did Ted Bundy until he had killed over twenty girls.

"I will not stay at your house. I barely know you. I'm not idiot."

"I never said you were stupid." Liam frowned. "Look, it would be much better than sleeping here."

I did not answer.

"I'll ask my sister to sleep here if it makes you feel better. Then you won't be alone with me. She passed out in my car on the way back to her house. I was going to drop you off at your apartment, but..."

"I appreciate your offer," I said, cutting him off, "but I promise you I'm fine. I'm a big girl. I can take care of myself."

Liam studied me for a long time. my jaw if squeezed. "And now?" I grabbed.

"It's just...you've been through a lot of shit," he replied. It wasn't a question. His gentle, nonjudgmental tone made me wish I could sink into the brick wall behind me.

"It's pretty obvious. You are closed because someone hurt you. And you're stubborn as hell. i can see how

these two things would create a big problem with trusted people. You want to do things on your own, to prove that you can take care of yourself without anyone else's help. I understand. I've been there too. But you should know that part of taking care of yourself is accepting help when you need it.”

I tried to ignore the meaning of his words. it was a thing extremely difficult to do.

I kept my gaze on my hands as I swallowed back a few tears.

“I promised myself that I would be more independent when I was gone.” I finally whispered.

Liam stood up, offering his hand to me. "Let's go. You can be independent from my house.”

When I continued to hesitate, Liam rolled his eyes and gripped my arm tightly. Before I knew what was happening, I was being pulled to my feet, staggering forward.

“There's no shame in accepting help,” Liam reminded me as I regained my balance and looked up at him. My world spun briefly, remembering that I still hadn't eaten today.

Before I could protest, he grabbed my bag in one hand and slung my bag over his shoulder. “Especially when that someone means well and is extremely handsome.”

He winked before walking away with my things.

I ran after him, quickly taking my suitcase out of his hands and pulling my backpack away from him.

“Don't touch my stuff,” I told him with a frown. “And don't get any ideas. Just because I'm spending the night at your place doesn't mean anything is going on between us. Keep it in your pants, buddy.”

Liam chuckled and held up his hands in surrender as I continued on to where I assumed his car was located.

“I am glad to hear that you have finally accepted my invitation.” He said with a charming smile that I'm sure would make the girls swoon. Normally

“And I have no expectations for tonight.” He leaned in so his mouth was close to my ear, his breath fanning my hair. “You?”

My stomach twisted. An image of Grayson's face flashed through my mind, and the pain in my neck worsened, burning like someone had just run a hot iron into my skin.

I swallowed hard and grabbed Grayson's mark. I stumbled away from Liam, hoping the space between us would lessen the terrible pain.

Would it be like this every time a boy came on to me?
Would I think of Grayson and be consumed with grief?

Liam's steps faltered. “Hey, are you okay?” All humor was gone from his tone. “What is that on your neck?”

Forcing myself to regain my composure, I slowly straightened up and adjusted the collar of my shirt so that Grayson's mark was no longer visible. I swallowed. “Is nothing. Don't worry about that.”

My words came out harsher than I intended, but I couldn't feel guilty. It was none of his business.

Fortunately, Liam didn't ask any more questions. We approached his car, which was parked down the street, in awkward silence.

After putting my things in the trunk, Liam opened the door for me, motioning me inside. I looked in hesitantly. Her sister, Laila, was fast asleep in the passenger seat.

I looked back at Liam.

He smiled. "She is a deep sleeper. Don't worry." He motioned for me to get inside once more before walking around the front of the truck to the driver's side and sliding inside.

When I still didn't move, he turned and raised an eyebrow at me.

Trying not to think about it too much, I walked in and closed the door.

Chapter 10

BELLE

Liam shook Laila awake after we pulled into the parking lot of his apartment building. She was confused but didn't argue when Liam asked her to stay the night because of me.

She was so tired that when we walked into his apartment, she immediately threw herself on the couch in the living room and went back to sleep.

I walked around his apartment in awe. "Do you live here alone?" I asked.

His house was good, very good. It was huge, with a full kitchen and a large living and dining room.

To my left was a long hallway that I assumed led to several bedrooms and bathrooms. I couldn't help but notice that it didn't look like the home of a young man in his early twenties.

It was too organized, too mature, and too big for one person. It also didn't escape my attention that Liam had pressed the button for the top floor when we were in the elevator.

He lived on the top floor, his living room facing an incredible view of the sea.

Liam sighed. "I know. It makes me look like a rich idiot."

"No! No, that's not what I meant," I rambled on quickly, pulling my eyes from the incredible sight to meet his gaze. "It's just..." I looked around again. "It's kind of.."

"Big. And chic," Liam finished for me. I was surprised to see a frown on his lips as he

he also looked over his apartment. "I did not choose. My father gave me this apartment for my eighteenth birthday."

It stopped me. Exactly how much money does the family did this guy have?

"Wow. Eighteen," I muttered. "This is not a slap in the face? 'Happy birthday, son. Move.'"

Liam tried to smile; it didn't reach his eyes. "Eighteen wasn't soon enough if you ask me. I would have moved out of his house years ago if I could have."

I suddenly felt bad for bringing up the subject. There were obviously some tender feelings surrounding Liam and his father.

Trying to move attention to something else, I said, "Well, where do you want me? I would sleep on the couch, but it looks like it's already taken."

I smiled at Laila, who was drooling over Liam's beautiful cut of leather.

"I have a guest room where you can stay. Follow me." Liam answered.

The room he took me to was just as nice as the rest of the place. It had a queen-size bed, a dresser with a TV on top, and a closet.

It was decorated in neutral colors, all in gray, white and blue, and had floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the beach. It even had its own bathroom.

"Wow," I breathed. "This is amazing."

Liam nodded, shoving his hands in his pockets. He looked uncomfortable. "Yeah, well, it's all yours."

Standing in that immaculate room was starting to make me feel incredibly inadequate in my dirty clothes. I hadn't even showered since leaving Grayson.

"Are you sure it's okay with a stranger?
staying in your extremely nice apartment?"

"I insist. Just don't steal or break anything, and we're fine."
He looked at me, smiling. "You seem like the type to steal and break."

I rolled my eyes. "Thanks, Liam. Serious. You have no idea
of what a lifesaver you are."

Liam smiled softly. "You do not have to thank me.
I'm always happy to help a damsel in distress."

I hated that he could call me that and that it actually applied and made
sense. The last thing I wanted was to be dependent on someone else.

"You need anything? Soap? Toothbrush?" Liam asked.

"Some soap and shampoo would be great if you have it."
I put my things on the floor at the foot of the bed.

Being in this immaculate room made me realize just how dirty I was. I
haven't had the opportunity or motivation to shower since leaving Grayson. "Is it
okay if I use your shower?"

Liam nodded. "Clear. Can I get some ibuprofen too?"

I made a face. "Why?"

"Other than the fact that you have a black eye and you're clutching the
side of your neck like someone stabbed you in the carotid artery?"

My face heated up. I didn't realize it had been so bad at hiding the fact that he was in pain.

"Um, okay," I said. "Thanks."

"Anytime," Liam replied as he walked to the door.

"Hey, Liam?" I asked him right before he left.

He turned to me.

"I'm Belle, by the way."

Her lips curved. "It is a pleasure to meet you, Belle."

I fell asleep the moment my head hit the pillow.

And then the dreams began.

I was in a field of red poppies, the wind ruffling my hair and the long white dress I was wearing. It was peaceful here...serene.

But for some reason, I wasn't calm. I was on edge, my heart fluttering wildly against my ribcage like a captive bird. Something felt... *wrong*.

I turned, looking, though I wasn't sure why. All I could see were poppies, an ocean of red and green. They were everywhere, surrounding me and traveling far beyond the horizon.

Clouds rolled across the sky, blotting out the sun and making everything suddenly very dark. I could barely see ten feet ahead of me.

My panic rose, forcing me to run forward, pushing flowers out of my way as I tried to find my way out of the overwhelming sea of poppies.

But no matter how much I ran, I was trapped, trapped in this endless field.

The movement caught my attention. I changed. Two small lights glowed bright red in the distance, almost blending in with the flowers. They were close to the ground and closing in on me.

I squinted, trying to see what they were through the darkness, but it was almost impossible.

I took a step forward. Then two and three. Something was pushing me closer to the moving lights. I had to know what they were. They were getting brighter and easier to see in total darkness.

It was about ten feet away from me now. I realized with a start that the red lights weren't really lights. They were eyes. And they were connected to a beast that roamed beneath. A wolf.

Panic spiked the walls of my throat and clogged my windpipe. I recognized this wolf. It was huge, almost the size of a horse and covered in thick, midnight black hair. It was Grayson's wolf.

I should have taken comfort in that fact. Same when Grayson was horrible to me, his wolf wasn't. Your wolf always wanted me, always cared for me.

However, if his dark red eyes and evil mannerisms were any indicator, this wasn't the wolf I remembered.

He bared his teeth at me, growling deeply, keeping himself low to the ground, never taking his eyes off me.

Grayson's wolf was hunting me.

Without thinking twice, I turned and started running in the opposite direction. I tripped over the flowers and the hem of my long dress in a panicked run.

Pollen from the surrounding poppies traveled up my nose, congesting my lungs to the point it almost felt like I couldn't breathe.

I looked over my shoulder, my heart beating in a blur against my ribcage when I saw Grayson stalking me, staring down at me with his determined, mischievous blood-red eyes.

I had no doubt he would get me – and soon. He was toying with me now, allowing me to run ahead, even though we both knew he was more than capable of catching up whenever he wanted.

Was his plan to tire me out? Or maybe he was enjoying making a game of me?

My feet got caught abruptly in the flowers, causing me to stumble and fall to the ground. I let out a scream of terror.

I turned onto my back and watched in horror as the wolf rose to its hind legs and began to change into something else. Her bones cracked and the skin on her face stretched and tore.

Within seconds, a human was standing over me. Grayson was looking at me with a natural smile that took up his entire face.

His eyes still burned red, unlike the usual deep green or black I was so used to.

"Grayson," I gasped. "Please do not." I wasn't even sure what I was begging for.

His smile only grew at the sound of my tearful voice. And it was then I noticed them. There were long, pointed fangs poking out from under his curved upper lip.

"You can't escape me, Belle," he said. not the voice it was his; it was thinner and sounded more like a long hiss.

He pounced on me.

I woke up screaming. My entire body was shaking and covered from head to toe with dripping sweat. My heart was beating rapidly in my chest. I couldn't see anything.

Was I still in the field? Grayson was here to kill me?

My mark was burning so hard I could have sworn it was on fire, and my head was throbbing like someone was hitting the inside of my skull repeatedly with a hammer. My stomach churned with nausea.

My muscles ached.

Suddenly, the bedroom door opened. Liam came in running, closely followed by Laila.

"Belle!" Liam screamed. I could tell he had just woken up. He was only wearing his pajama bottoms and had an alarmed and confused look on his face, as if he'd woken up with a shock.

"Hey, hey, you're fine! It was just a dream! Everything is fine!"

I realized that I was still screaming. But I couldn't stop. The intense terror coursing through my body made that impossible. My lungs begged for air I was unable to give.

When Liam tried to approach me, I screamed louder, pressing my body against the headboard in an effort to get away from him.

Someone grabbed my hand. Laila was on the other side of the Liam's bed, looking at me with wide eyes.

When I tried to pull my hand away from her, she just held on tighter, then placed it on her chest so I could feel her heart beating under my palm.

My eyes met her golden brown ones. My cry faltered.

"Breathe," she whispered. She took a deep breath as if to demonstrate, her chest rising and falling under my hand. "You're safe, Belle. Nobody will hurt you. Just Breathe."

I listened. Air filled my raspy throat and traveled into my grateful lungs.

"Good," Laila said calmly. She continued to breathe with me, grounding me once more.

My mind cleared until I remembered where I was and what I was doing here. I was in Liam's apartment, thousands of miles from Grayson. Grayson wasn't here. He couldn't hurt me. It was all just a dream.

After a few more moments, I was finally calm enough to speak. I looked from Laila to Liam. "I- I'm so sorry," I whispered. I wiped away the tears that were streaming down my face. "Nightmare."

Everyone was silent for a few seconds. Then Laila laughed softly. She sat on the edge of the bed. "Are you well now?"

I shook my head, running a hand through my messy hair. I couldn't help but wince at the pounding in my head. "I am fine. I-I'm really sorry I woke you up."

I looked out the window. It was still extremely dark outside. "What time is it?"

Laila took her phone out of the back pocket of her jeans. "They are three in the morning."

I shuddered. I was a terrible houseguest. "I'm really sorry, guys."

"You have nothing to be sorry for-"

"What the fuck was that?" Liam asked me, interrupting his sister and shocking me with the bluntness of his question. "I thought you were being murdered or something. Has anything like this ever happened before?"

I shook my head. "No, never. I... I think it was just a dream, but it felt so... real."

“It was a night terror,” explained Laila. “They can look really real. They are usually a sign that a person has experienced trauma.”

They both looked at me expectantly, obviously expecting some sort of explanation. As if I would accompany them through my traumatic past in the middle of night.

“I’m fine now, I promise,” I said instead. “Honestly, I’m more embarrassed than anything else. Seriously, I feel terrible for waking you two up. You should go back to sleep.”

They exchanged worried glances.

“Are you sure you’re okay?” Liam asked. “You is holding your neck again.”

I removed my hand from Grayson’s mark. I didn’t even have I realized I was holding it.

“I’m fine,” I said once more, placing my hand by my side.

“Do you want one of us to stay here with you?” Liam me He asked. “In case something like this happens again?”

Laila nodded. “I would be happy to stay here with you, Belle.”

My cheeks turned red. I was starting to feel like a kid afraid of the dark. “I think you’ve done enough for me, but I appreciate the offer.

I’ll be fine sleeping alone.”

It just took a little more convincing before they both reluctantly agreed to leave me alone and cautiously started to leave the room.

Liam stopped in the doorway, looking at me. "I'm down the hall if you need anything, okay?"

I shook my head, giving him the best smile I could muster.
"OK. Thanks."

He nodded once, then pursed his lips.
"Do you want me to turn off the light?"

I was about to say yes, but I hesitated. "Is it okay if we leave it on?" I asked. So maybe I was a kid scared of the dark.

"Of course," Liam replied, taking his hand off the switch. "Goodnight."

"Goodnight."

He gave me one last concerned look before leaving the room.
room and close the door behind you.

As I lay my head on my pillow, Grayson's words from my dream flashed through my head.
one and another time.

"You can't escape me, Belle."

I woke up extremely early the next morning. Unsurprisingly, I couldn't sleep again after my nightmare last night.

I spent the entire night tossing and turning, trying to get Grayson's face and voice out of my head. It was like he was haunting me.

I knew he would laugh if he could see me. he would find joy in the pain and confusion it was still causing me.

Every horrible thing he's said to me, every lie he's ever told me, kept replaying in my mind.

"What did I do in my past life to get stuck with you?"

'I didn't even realize how pathetic a human can be until I met you.'

'Can't you do anything right, you piece of shit?'

'The only reason alphas want their mates is for the power they give them. You are here to bring me pleasure and power. And that.'

'And worst of all: 'I am physically incapable of causing you pain.'

What a lie.

Pushing those thoughts away, I quickly got up and made the bed. I couldn't stay in bed any longer. however exhausted Whatever it was, I had to get up and move. I had to find a job and a place to stay tonight.

It must have been around five in the morning. Hopefully Liam and Laila were still asleep so I could just leave them a note and get out of here without causing any more trouble.

Once my backpack and suitcase were packed, I silently made my way out of my bedroom and into the living room. I was suspicious of the fact that Laila was probably still sleeping on the couch in the living room.

I paused when I looked at the couch and saw that it was empty.

"Good morning," said a voice.

I jumped and let out an embarrassingly high-pitched squeak. I turned around, coming face to face with Laila. She was leaning against the kitchen counter, a mug of something steaming in her hand.

His lips curved into a smile. "Sorry, didn't mean to startle you," she said.

I held my breath and looked down the hall from where I had just left, hoping I wouldn't wake Liam with my scream.

"Don't worry," said Laila, following my line of thought. "Liam won't wake up for at least another three hours."

I shifted my weight restlessly, feeling awkward. "Actually, I was leaving." I tightened the backpack straps around my shoulders.

"You could thank your brother for letting me stay here? And sorry again about the whole...nightmare thing."

Laila waved a dismissive hand. "What's the rush?" She walked over to one of the cupboards and grabbed another mug. "Do you like coffee? I'm sure you could enjoy it after the night you had."

I watched her uneasily. Coffee looked good, but I had already decided to take the first bus there so I could continue my job search. "All good. I really should go."

Acting as if I hadn't said anything, Laila picked up the coffeepot and filled the mug to the brim. She looked at me. "You need a job, right?"

My eyebrows drew together. Had she read my mind? "Uh... yeah."

"Well, you are in luck." She pushed her coffee cup across the island so it was in front of me. "There is a restaurant

out of town I know needs a new waitress. I hear the owner is a bit of an idiot, but it might be what you're looking for. Interested?"

"Really?" I asked. I took a step forward, my heart pounding anxiously in my chest. "That would be amazing. How did you know about that?"

"Liam and I eat there a lot. It's one of the only places around here that our father doesn't own. We go there to escape watchful eyes and watchful ears."

So your dad owns basically all of Evergreen?"

Laila nodded, taking another sip of coffee. Your eyes they seemed distant. "Everything and everyone, it seems."

I hesitated. "Is he like... the mayor or something?"

She looked at me. "Basically, yes. may well to be."

So he was the reason I couldn't get a job at Evergreen. "Well, thanks for telling me about the job. You have no idea how much this helps me."

Laila leaned against the counter behind her. "Glad to help." She smiled sweetly. "I can take you there later today if you like. I don't have anything else going on. But we can wait an hour or two. I don't know what time it opens."

I finally joined her on the island, sitting on one of the stools. I wrapped my hands around the mug. "I would appreciate it. Thanks. Truly."

Feeling a little more relaxed now that I had a plan, I took a sip of coffee.

Laila studied me for a few seconds before laughing. "You know, I don't think I know your name yet."

I paused to think about it, realizing she was right. "Oh. Oh right. Damn, I'm sorry. My name is Belle."

His smile grew. "Nice to meet you, Belle," she said.
gently.

I was starting to really understand just how polar opposites Laila and her brother were. Liam was loud and energetic, while Laila was quiet and calm. They evened out.

I smile back. "It is also a pleasure to meet you."

"You know," Laila continued, leaning her elbows on the counter in front of her, the mug still in her hands, "now that we know you're probably going to stick around, I'd love it if we could be friends."

"Friends?" I repeat. I had never had a friend before. I never had friends before. Not since I was little. I didn't have time after my dad got sick.

"Yes, if you want to. Everyone in this town is either boring or two-faced liars." She wrinkled her nose. "Or did they leave from here and went to a better place. Unfortunately I'm stuck here. Liam too."

"Stuck here? You are kidding?" I looked around the amazing apartment that had been provided by his obviously very wealthy father and out the living room window overlooking the absolutely amazing view.

"Evergreen is beautiful. I would love to live here."

"Trust me, it's not as amazing as it sounds. He can look like an amazing hideaway from the outside, but inside..."

She shook her head as if trying to clear a bad memory. "Just... not everything is what it seems around here."

"Oh," I whispered. "Well... anything is better than where I came from."

I could feel the way Laila's gaze roamed over the large bruise that was still taking up half of my body face.

"Yes, I bet."

I expected her to ask more questions, but I was extremely grateful when she didn't insist. Instead, she went to the kitchen cupboard next to the sink, got out some ibuprofen, and handed it to me.

She didn't ask if I wanted it. He simply handed it to me, followed by a glass of water.

"Thanks," I mumbled. I didn't argue before swallowing the pills.

We spent the next hour or so talking. I learned that Laila and Liam were basically like royalty at Evergreen. The Blackwoods were the hierarchy, and your father was the king.

Laila didn't act like royalty, though. In fact, it looked like she didn't much like talking about her father or all the money her family had, just like Liam did.

She was extremely nice. She made me comfortable and never pressed me for information about my past.

In fact, she was so sensitive about what she was saying that I began to suspect that Laila might have a past of her own.

There was a kind of cloudiness to his eyes – a look that told me something else was on his mind, haunting me.

a.

“Wait, you can't be serious.” I laughed.

Laila laughed with me. “I wish it weren't. It scarred me for life. You can imagine? Liam and, like, eight of his friends – in custody at the station, all soaked and in their underwear.”

“Oh my God, this is horrible! How could they do something so stupid?” I asked, unable to hold back the big smile that took over my face.

“I asked them the same question. It was one of the hottest days of the year, but we still live on the beach, for God's sake! There was no reason for them to use the country club pool. And then undress and accidentally lock yourself in there with no clothes on? They were just being idiots, I swear.”

Someone moaned behind us. “You're never going to let me forget this, are you?”

I turned, seeing Liam standing at the entrance to the hall, looking at the two of us with a pained expression on his face.

Laila smiled. She stuffed one of the grapes in her mouth, stolen from his fridge. “No.”

Liam shrugged and walked over to us, snatching the grapes from Laila's hand and taking them for himself. “It wasn't even my idea. Anous is just an idiot.”

I almost choked on the coffee. “Are you friends with someone named Anous? This cannot be real.”

He popped a grape in his mouth. “Oh, it's true. he gets shit every day. Apparently, it's a family name.”

"Worst family name ever," he added.

There.

"Like I said," Liam continued, "Anous is an idiot."

I laughed so hard that for a second I forgot all about Grayson and the pain I was feeling. It was good.

I wish it could have lasted forever.

Chapter 11

BELLE

THREE MONTHS LATER

My feet were killing me. The heels my boss made me wear definitely didn't provide enough support for a busy restaurant shift.

It probably didn't help that I worked every day this week without a break.

I was exhausted.

I sighed, pushing my hair out of my face as I carried a tray of food to a table of drunken men who hadn't stopped staring at my ass since they entered.

They all gave me dark looks as I set the food on the table. I asked if they needed anything else before quickly leaving.

Thanks to my uniform, I was used to this kind of behavior from men. It only took me a week to learn how to fight wandering hands.

When my boss handed me the short red dress, white apron and black high heels, I almost thought he was kidding – that is, until I saw that the other waitresses were wearing the same thing.

But I accepted without complaining, just happy for the work.

Pom Pom's, the place Laila had recommended I get a job, was a diner on the outskirts of

Evergreen. They hired me right away, barely having time to interview me.

They obviously needed help. Though I wasn't sure I considered myself lucky to work here.

It was run down and understaffed and had paint peeling off the stained walls.

It served hamburgers made of questionable meat and attracted customers of an even more questionable character.

The only good thing about working here was that my boss was happy, even giving me as many hours as I wanted, which was good because I needed to make a living somehow.

My brand throbbled on my neck as I walked behind the front counter. I quickly put down the tray I was carrying. I breathed through the pain, leaning against the wall behind me for support.

It was really bad today for some reason. wave after wave of Agonizing heat shot through me, nearly knocking me over.

I couldn't hold back the moan that escaped my throat or the unwanted tears that started to well up in my eyes.

It was just getting worse. Every day that passed away from Grayson it was becoming more torturous than the previous one.

The mark Grayson left on my neck all those months ago used to be just two small dots where his fangs pierced me.

The stitches were slightly raised and healed with scar tissue – hardly noticeable unless you were looking for them. Now, however, it looked absolutely awful.

Were red and irritated, surrounded by a rash
rash that spread across my neck, shoulder and chest.

The two puncture wounds from Grayson's teeth gaped open and bled
constantly, staining whatever I wore even though I tried to keep it covered with a
bandage.

The tag itself was slightly swollen, looking like I had a small tumor under
the skin. It throbbed with pain as if it had a life of its own. I could practically feel it
draining the energy out of me every day.

Part of me had just accepted this as mine.
new life. Just as I had to deal with my period every month, I would have to deal
with the agonizing pain of being rejected by my soul mate.

Just normal stuff, right?

At least the constant headache I'd been suffering from for the last three
months – the one I knew was caused by Grayson trying to get into my mind so he
could know where I was and watch over me – was starting to fade a little.

It meant that my ex-partner was slowly worrying about me less, forgetting
about me and moving on with his life.

Even though I knew it was for the best, my heart still squeezed at the
thought. Soon he wouldn't think of me anymore – I would be just a distant memory.

Grayson would never be that to me.

I would always cherish the time we spent together in
Paris, sitting under the twinkling lights of the Eiffel Tower as we talked for hours,
holding hands as we

we walked through the Louvre and waking up in each other's arms every morning.

Although we had a rocky start to our relationship, he quickly won me over and made me realize that all I wanted in life...was him. he was mine

House.

And now... he was forgetting about me.

Shit, why was I thinking about that?

You don't want him, Belle, I told myself. You don't may want it.

"Belle!" someone shouted.

My head snapped. My boss, Jerry, had just walked into the restaurant. He was wearing his white T-shirt stained as usual and jeans with slippers on her feet.

His bald head was glistening with sweat and his yellow teeth were bared with the constant sneer
in your face.

"What the fuck are you doing just standing there?" he demanded. "Back to work!"

I had to stop myself from arguing with him and demanding that he not talk to me like that. The restaurant was now dead. I had just given food to my only customers.

It was a surprise that they were here, as it was almost eleven at night, and the restaurant was usually empty.
now.

"Sorry," I replied, trying to ignore my pain and looking for something to do.

I grabbed a white cloth and started wiping down the counter, even though I'd wiped it down ten minutes ago. I winced as my mark began to pulse again from the movement.

I had no idea what Jerry was doing here. I knew he owned Pom Pom's, but he spent so much time here that I wouldn't be surprised if he had a bed set up in the back.

And yet he didn't act like a boss except when he was yelling at us to get back to work. Usually he just sat around counting his money or hanging out in his back office.

I had no idea what he did all day because it definitely wasn't running his restaurant. I neither I thought of him as my boss, since I hadn't spoken to him more than a handful of times since he hired me.

Whenever I had any kind of problem, I went to my manager, another waitress named Brenda. She was in charge of schedules, salaries, and keeping everyone under control.

She was also a great friend and knew what it meant to struggle in life since she was a single mom trying to raise two kids on a waitress' salary.

I felt like I could talk to her about anything, and she wouldn't judge me.

It was a shame I wasn't working with her tonight. I was the only waitress here. The cook was in the back, but he almost never came out.

It would have been nice to have someone to hide behind to avoid Jerry's wandering gaze. He was always a little too comfortable around me.

He proved my point as his eyes traveled up and down my body appreciatively, licking his lips.

I subconsciously tugged at the bottom of my skirt, wishing for the millionth time that it was about three inches longer.

Fortunately, Jerry didn't say anything else. He moved behind the counter, heading straight for the cash register and opening it. I frowned, wondering why he needed money so late at night.

My attention was drawn from my boss's shrewd behavior when a figure walked through the door. Liam's angry gaze found me immediately. I swallowed a groan. I was definitely in trouble.

Liam approached me immediately. "What the hell, Belle?" he asked. "I just went to your apartment to see how you were doing, and you weren't there. You told me you weren't working today."

I looked over at Jerry to see if he was listening, but he was too busy taking money out of the register and stuffing it in his pockets. Then he turned and walked to his office.

"I didn't think it was," I said as I grabbed a bunch of ketchup bottles from under the counter, getting ready to refill. "Brenda's son got the flu. She asked if I could take her shift tonight."

Liam liked to drive me home from work, even though my apartment was only half an hour's walk from here. He always got upset when I wouldn't let him take me.

Ever since I'd known him, he'd been overprotective to the max, and I had no idea why.

Now, don't get me wrong, I was grateful for Liam and everything he had done for me. If he hadn't let me stay with him three months ago, I would have been sleeping on the street.

But I had left his house over a month ago, moving into a cheap one-room apartment near the diner, so I no longer needed his help.

I thought my relationship with Liam would slowly dissolve into nothing after I moved out, but he still walked around with me like he thought he was somehow responsible for me.

I considered Liam a good friend of mine. I enjoyed being around him and got very close to him while I was in
your home.

But there were times when he didn't act like my friend, he acted like my bodyguard. I didn't understand. I still remembered how upset he was when he found out I was moving out of his house.

He just didn't seem to understand that I wanted to be independent. I didn't need another possessive alpha male coming into my life, trying to control me and tell me what he thought was best for me.

“Why didn't you text me?” Liam continued to be angry. “You know I don't like you walking down the street alone, especially at night.”

He gave me a phone just a few days after I met him. His and Laila's numbers were programmed into the contacts the moment he handed them to me.

I tried to deny the expensive gift, but he continued to insist, So I ended up accepting it reluctantly.

And now that he couldn't keep an eye on me from his apartment, he demanded that I text him whenever I went anywhere.

I didn't look at him as I continued to fill the ketchup bottles. "I can handle myself, Liam. I don't need a nanny. I'm not a child."

"I don't think you are a child. I just prefer you whole over stabbed or decapitated. Or with your body lying in a dumpster somewhere because some deranged idiot thought it would be fun to kill you while you were walking home alone."

I looked at him then, my expression shocked and a little troubled. "I think you might be the deranged one. That was seriously dismal. I can promise you that I was perfectly fine walking alone this morning. No killer in sight."

"This morning?" Liam demanded. "How long have you been here?"

Shit, I shouldn't have said that. I looked away, choosing not to answer.

"Are you telling me that it opened this morning and is now closing?" He continued.

I sighed. "I took Candice's shift this morning. She had an emergency. It is not a big deal."

I didn't mention the fact that the emergency was that she was a little bit hungover from the party last night and literally begged me to cover for her.

Liam's eyes seemed to darken. "You've got to be kidding me," he muttered under his breath. "You've been here since five in the morning? That's great?"

I was about to respond when my neck suddenly exploded in pain. I froze, squeezing my eyes shut. It passed a few seconds later, and I took a deep breath, feeling suddenly dizzy and nauseous.

"Are you well?" Liam asked, his tone gentler now. All the anger disappeared from his tone and was replaced by genuine concern.

I nodded, licking my lips. "All good", I bit.

"I wish you would just let me take you to my doctor. You've had this thing for months." He nodded to my mark. "It's only getting worse."

He was right that going to the doctor was probably a good idea, but how do I explain my brand to them?

Oh yeah, my werewolf soulmate bit me to magically bond me to him forever and then slept with someone else, leaving this thing on my neck that I think might be slowly killing me. Anything you can do to help?

Yes, I had a strange feeling that it wasn't going to go very well.

"I don't have the time or money to go to the doctor, and you know it," I replied.

Liam opened his mouth to argue, but I cut him off instantly, already knowing what he was going to say.

“I won't let you pay for a doctor's appointment. You've done enough for me, and I still owe you for the months you let me stay in your apartment.”

I looked down at the ketchup bottles in my hands. "In addition other than that, it's not that bad. I'm just being dramatic.”

Liam's jaw clenched. I knew he didn't believe me one bit. “I already told you, you won't pay me for staying with me. Now, how's your head?”

I rolled my eyes. I wish I'd never told him about the stupid headaches Grayson had given me. It became very difficult to hide so much pain all the time. I couldn't keep avoiding their questions.

“I'm fine, Liam,” I said again. “I'm healthy as an ox. I officially give you permission to stop worrying about me. I'm sure you have better things to do.”

He obviously didn't agree because he kept asking me questions. “When was the last time you had a good night's sleep? Are you still having night terrors?”

Embarrassment tightened in my chest, remembering all the times I woke Liam in the middle of the night with my screams. It still happened almost every night and had been since I left Grayson.

“I don't want to sleep,” I said. “I'd rather be here.”

It was true. I hated going back to my apartment, where I only had my thoughts for company.

Sleep was even worse. If I somehow managed to fall asleep, despite all the pain that constantly coursed through my body, nightmares would torture me through the night.

They always consisted of Grayson teasing me, stalking me, glaring at me with his glowing red eyes. I would wake up screaming, covered in sweat and tears streaming from my eyes.

I couldn't remember where I was or how I got there, only that Grayson, my soulmate and the only person in this entire world I really cared about, hated me.

Didn't want me. I'd rather be with someone else and have fun torturing me.

After each dream, I would spend the rest of the night awake, staring at the ceiling, feeling empty, hopeless, and afraid.

So yeah, working at Pom Pom's might not have been a dream, but it was better than going home.

Liam glared, about to say something else, when the cafeteria door opened. And a very upset Laila marched in.

"Liam! Why are you ignoring all my calls?" she screamed. "Are you seriously thinking about having a party at Dad's house tonight?"

Liam groaned, his head dropping. He gave me a pleading look, probably asking to support him one way or another, but I just smiled and shrugged.

I decided right then and there that dealing with her sister would be her punishment for pestering me.

He turned on his stool to look at her. "Hey sis," he said casually. "Can I buy you a cup of coffee?"

“Do you have some kind of death wish or something?”

Laila chattered away, hands on her hips. “If Dad finds out you're having a party at his house, he'll kill you!”

I didn't know much about Liam's relationship with his millionaire dad, but knew they loved pushing each other's buttons. Liam would do anything to upset his father.

“Calm down,” Liam replied. “He won't be home until late tomorrow night, and I'll clean the place up well before then. Besides, it's just a few people.”

“That's not what Chelsea Matthews said when I met her at the mall. She said our entire senior class of high school would be there!”

Liam smiled, shrugging. “And? It will be fun! Relax.”

“I wasn't told about any parties,” I interrupted, trying to divert their attention from killing each other.

I'd witnessed enough of Liam and Laila's fights to know that they usually ended violently, and I didn't need that in the restaurant tonight, especially since my boss was here right now.

“That's because you weren't invited,” Liam replied without hesitation.

Ai.

Liam watched my face fall. “Shit, Belle, I didn't mean that-”

“It's okay,” I said, interrupting. I had never met Liam or Laila's friends before – not that I really wanted to.

I just thought it was a little strange that they were always talking about them, but I had never seen them around. I assumed it was because they didn't want them to know they were hanging out with someone weird like me.

My presence in their lives was kind of hard to explain.

I looked down, wishing the ketchup bottles I was holding would fill up faster so I could snap out of this conversation and do something else.

I didn't want Liam to see that what he said hit a nerve. Though I probably wouldn't have gone to the party even if I'd been invited, being left out still hurt.

Laila looked at her brother. "You're an idiot."

Liam ignored her. "Belle, really, I'm sorry I didn't mean that. I just didn't think it was your kind of scene. My friends are a bunch of idiots. I don't want you near them."

"Everything is fine. I understand," I said. I could not look at it.

I hated the fact that I was sad that I wasn't invited to a stupid party. I had to remind myself that this was what I wanted.

I would be independent and work from the bottom up without anyone's help. That meant a lot of long shifts at the restaurant and no time for friends.

But even though that was what I wanted and needed to do, it still sucked sometimes. I had absolutely no life.

Just then, Jerry emerged from the back. "Hey," he said to Liam and Laila. "Either ask for something or get out. I'm not paying her to talk to people."

I looked back at my friends. Liam was shooting daggers at Jerry with his eyes.

“Fine,” Laila replied quickly, always the most calm. “Let's get some coffee, please,” she said.

I shook my head and turned back to the coffee pot, pouring them each a mug of coffee. I placed the glasses on the counter in front of them. Jerry narrowed his eyes at us before turning and walking out the front door.

The table of men across the cafeteria nodded to me, probably needing refills or something.

“Belle,” Liam groaned as I walked past him. “Please don't think-”

I turned to him, pinning him with a heated gaze. “Why don't you just do us both a favor and stop treating me like I'm some fragile idiot who can't do anything on her own. I can make my own decisions. I'm not stupid, Liam. Stop treating me like I am.”

Liam blinked. “I know you're not stu—”

“I have to get back to work,” I interrupted. I didn't want to hear whatever stupid excuse he was thinking.

“Coffee is on me. Have a great rest of your night.”

I turned and walked away from them.

Chapter 12

BELLE

The rest of the day was a blur. That was a good thing work in the cafeteria; keeps you busy enough that time passes quickly.

There wasn't a single moment when I didn't have something to do. I was grateful for that, even though I was exhausted at the end of the day. It kept me distracted from my own thoughts.

It was already dark and it was after 10 pm. I groaned as I looked at the clock. I still had two hours left of my shift.

I wouldn't mind being the only waitress on the floor if I was with Tommy - hardly anyone arrives after eight - but Bert was a different story.

He always knew just what to say to get me off uncomfortable.

His favorite thing to talk about with me was my appearance – how I looked in my uniform, that I would look better with makeup on, that I looked like one of his ex-girlfriends, and so on.

Today had been, “I wish you would smile at me the way you do with customers. Come on, give me a smile, beautiful.”

I ignored him and continued working.

I think it pissed him off because the food was coming out considerably slower after that, leaving it to deal with

with hungry customers who had been waiting over 45 minutes for their food.

I was beyond exhausted. Sighing, I sat down in one of the booths I knew Bert couldn't see from the kitchen and laid my head against the cool table.

I was glad when the diner's only two customers left, leaving the place completely empty. I needed a break. I was on autopilot all day. Had I stopped for lunch?

It didn't matter. My stomach has been churning all day, probably due to my mark, so I doubt I'd be able to keep anything down anyway.

My body ached from being on my feet – in heels, though – for ten straight hours yesterday and then again from running fourteen today.

Ugh, why do I do this to myself?

Well, actually, I knew why, and it wasn't just because I needed the money, although that was the main reason I put myself through this hell.

But really, I didn't have much else to do with me. same.

If I wasn't here, I'd be in my extremely bad apartment, trying to sleep, and my nightmares never allowed me more than a few hours of unconsciousness before I always woke up screaming every night without fail.

At least work kept my mind busy and gave something productive to do.

I rested my head on my arms, still resting on the table in front of me. The guilt was eating away at me. I hated that I had yelled at Liam this morning.

He and Laila left after our argument and didn't said one more word to me.

I even checked my phone several times, the one Liam gave me, hoping to see at least one message from him, but there was nothing.

After everything he and his sister had done for me, I couldn't believe I'd told him that. Sure, maybe he deserved it, and it felt good to say it in the moment, but right now I felt terrible.

Liam and Laila were my friends, they cared about me and wanted the best for me. And whether or not I wanted to admit it, I didn't want to lose them.

I liked having friends, even if they didn't want me at their parties.

I was about to pull out my phone, ready to text Liam and apologize, when something stopped me. Someone was sitting in front of me.

I screamed and jumped so high out of my seat that I was taken aback when I didn't hit the ceiling.

-There was an older woman sitting across from me in the cabin, smiling the kind of smile you'd expect from your grandma.

She was wearing a thick blue coat and a bandana over her head, making her look like the kind of rich old lady you see in Hollywood movies...

The kind who drive old convertibles with a top, drink expensive cocktails, and often daydream about killing their husbands.

She was elegant and beautiful, probably one of the most beautiful women I'd ever seen with her silver blonde hair and porcelain skin.

She was absolutely breathtaking. and very out of place in this old crappy restaurant.

"Oh my God," I said, placing a hand over my chest. to calm my racing heart. "You scared me."

She smiled sweetly. "Sorry dear."

I shook my head. "No I'm sorry." I started to get up, returning her smile even though I wasn't feeling it. "I was just resting. I didn't know there was anyone here."

I was surprised when his hand shot out and grabbed my arm, stopping me. "Why don't you sit down and have a meal with me? I would like a big cheeseburger and some decent conversation."

I stopped. I wasn't sure how to respond to that. I never had a customer ask to eat with me before.

"Oh, um, thanks for the offer, but I really should get back to work-"

"Bert!" the woman yelled, cutting me off. She never let go of my arm, keeping me firmly in place. "Could you be a sweetheart and make us two cheeseburgers and two strawberry milkshakes?"

"It can leave!" he spoke back automatically. He had more enthusiasm in his voice than I'd ever heard him use before.

My mouth opened slightly in surprise. she knew Bert? "As-?"

"I come here all the time," the woman provided, answering my question before I asked it.

That was hard to believe. I was working here almost every day for three months and I hadn't seen her once.

If she was one of the regulars, I would have noticed, especially if she looked like this every day. Her beauty was very hard to miss.

"Oh, my dear, you look weary," she said, comforting me, her kind eyes searching my tired face. There was something about that look that made me feel strangely comforted and at peace.

That's why I didn't stop her when she took my hands in hers and squeezed them gently. "And I can't even begin to imagine the pain you are feeling."

My eyebrows drew together. "Sorry?"

"Your bond is starving. Oh how you must miss him."

I blinked. Was she talking about...?

She cocked her head to the side as if she knew what I was thinking, revealing her neck. I sucked in a breath when I saw the two puncture wounds right where her neck and shoulder met. A brand. The mark of a werewolf.

"You're a-a-" I stammered, not quite able to get the words out.

“Yeah, I know all about werewolves,” the woman said, waving her hand like it was no big deal. “I am mated to one, just like you.”

My gaze darted to the kitchen, looking to see if Bert could hear something of our conversation.

I didn't know if Grayson would mind if I told anyone about the werewolf world, but I didn't want to take any chances. I couldn't have him tracking me.

At the thought of him, a sudden burst of pain overtook my senses. I swallowed hard and squeezed my eyes shut. I braced myself when a great wave of fire started to spread from my mark, about to take over my body...

But then it stopped.

My eyes flew open. Most of the pain from my mark had just disappeared, leaving me with a perfectly manageable throbbing sensation. I would have screamed in relief if I wasn't so confused.

I looked at the woman. She didn't meet my gaze, looking lost in thought. Your grip on my hands increased.

“Wow, you're in a lot of pain,” she whispered, her eyes much wider than before. His body felt tense, rigid. She looked at me. “I will hold it for now.”

“What?” I asked. “You you-”

She nodded. “I took your pain, yes. I'm sorry to say I can't keep you much longer, however much I would love to give you that relief.

“Unfortunately, your pain is your burden. But I can hold it for a few minutes and give it a little rest.”

I looked at her. "I don't understand," I said.

She pursed her lips, thinking. "Yes, that must sound confusing." Then she shivered slightly. Her eyes were filled with pain as she looked at me. My pain.

"Your bond is starving," she muttered.

"You need your mate."

I hesitated. The last thing I wanted to do with what little time I didn't have in agony was talk about Grayson. "My partner rejected me to be with someone else. He does not want me. He never wanted to."

The woman looked me up and down before smiling widely. "I find this extremely hard to believe."

Bert approached us then, carrying our meals. I was shocked when he didn't complain about being forced to do my job or having to cook for me.

In fact, he didn't say anything. He just put our food on the table and went straight back to the kitchen. He didn't even look at us.

"Do you like cheeseburgers?" the woman asked me when Bert was out of sight.

My eyes fell on the food in front of me. I loved cheeseburgers. And I haven't had one forever. I received an employee discount for food at the restaurant, but I never used it.

I needed to save as much money as possible for to be able to continue renting my apartment.

I shook my head.

"Please eat," said the woman, already picking up some fries. "The meal is on me."

There was something about her soft tone that made me want to do as she told me, made me feel like it was okay to sit down and take a little break, even when I should have been working.

I grabbed the burger in front of me and took a big bite, my stomach fluttering with gratitude for the food. It was the first time I had been able to eat in peace in such a long time.

I finally got up for air after gulping down half my meal, only to see the woman looking at me with amusement. My cheeks lit up.

"Sorry," I whispered, wiping my face with a napkin. "Hungry."

"I'm sure you are." She pointed at my food, her gentle smile never leaving her face. "Please eat some more."

She needn't have said it twice.

Somehow, this unnatural situation felt completely normal. She reminded me of my grandmother. "How are you my dear?" she asked me a few seconds later.

I swallowed the food in my mouth. she was talking to me like you know me. "I'm, uh... I'm fine."

"Why don't I believe you?" she answered. "You can be honest with me. Being away from your partner is hard. Especially when their connection was as strong as yours."

"Do you know who Grayson is?"

She laughed. "Of course. Alpha Grayson Stoll is one of the most powerful men alive. Anyone who is part of the supernatural realm knows who he is."

“Oh,” I mumbled. “So that explains why you know who I am.”

She nodded. “You are Belle Dupree, the mate of Grayson Stoll.”

“Ex-partner,” I corrected softly, lowering my gaze. I needed to change the subject. “Are you a werewolf?”

“Oh, God, no. I grew up in a pack though. And I am mated to a werewolf.” She offered me her hand to shake. “My name is Evangeline Viotto.”

Chapter 13

BELLE

The name seemed to have some unspoken meaning because chills covered my body. I leaned back in my seat after shaking his outstretched hand.

"Well thank you for the meal, Dona Viotto. I really appreciate this."

"Oh, please call me Evangeline. never been called from Mrs. Viotto. I'm not even sure I would answer that."

"Evangeline, then."

She considered me for a few seconds before continuing.

"I want you to know that I don't intend to tell your mate where you are. I think you have every right to hide after everything you've been through."

My heart jumped in my chest. I hadn't even considered the fact that she might give Grayson my whereabouts. "Thanks," I sighed. "It is very important that he never find me."

His smile faltered, turning serious. Before I knew what she was doing, she reached across the table and took my hand, squeezing it.

"You have a long journey ahead of you, dear Belle. AND it will not be easy."

"What do you mean?"

"I want you to know that power is not a bad thing when it's in the right hands. It may seem daunting at first to move into your true potential, but you are more than capable of handling it. You do not need to be afraid ."

She was speaking in riddles, and I had no idea. "How do you know all this?"

"You remind me a little of myself at your age. I was also afraid of my companion."

"Really?" I asked. I hated it. Amazing this kind woman went through a situation similar to mine.

"I don't understand. Why are werewolves blessed with soul mates if they just take advantage of them? My mom is terrified of her mate too. He abuses her...just like mine did."

"My mate didn't abuse me, honey. He did the opposite. He took care of me when no one else did. He saved me from a cruel fate."

"Then...why were you scared of him?"

"It's hard to explain. On the one hand, werewolves are terrifying creatures. It's okay to hesitate around them at first, especially when they claim to own you. People from my past also made it difficult for me to trust anyone. I didn't know what he wanted from me, and it was scary. But I don't know what I would do without him now. He is the best part of my life."

The genuine love in his tone made my throat hurt. As much as I hated to admit it, I was jealous of what she had. There was a moment when I convinced myself that Grayson and I would have a life like that.

I pushed down the sudden, intense desire to be with my mate. What was wrong with me? He hated me. He hated me. God, why did that make me want to cry?

I swallowed the lump in my throat as I somehow managed to keep my tears at bay.

"I would like my mate to love me the same as yours. Grayson slept with someone else and told me he only planned to keep me around for the power. I really hope I never have to see him again."

Evangeline gave me a sad smile. "You didn't mean it like that."

"Uh, actually, I-"

"No. You do not feel. You miss him. Terribly.

He is your mate. Your soul mate. That's why it's also okay to hate him for what he did to you. No one you love should treat you that way."

I wasn't sure why she was saying all this to me. Why did she care how I felt or how I was dealing with my mate's rejection?

"Give me your number, honey," she said before I could ask.

I found myself handing over my phone without thinking.

She typed something quickly. "You call me if you need anything, okay? I'm here for you. And I have a funny feeling you're going to want to talk to me again."

When she gave me my phone back, her number was programmed.

"I" I started.

"What are you doing, Belle?" someone said to me interrupting.

My attention swung behind me. Standing in the doorway to the kitchen was Bert, looking at me with a confused expression on his face.

“Oh, I, uh, was just having a meal with”
When I looked at the seat in front of me, I was shocked to find it completely empty.

“Where she...?” My gaze scanned the diner, but
Evangeline was nowhere to be seen.

“Are you eating some random people’s leftovers?” Bert continued.

I looked at the half-eaten meal in front of me. “What? No. You did this for me and the woman I was sitting with.”

Bert's eyes landed on Evangeline's untouched plate of food and on Evangeline's empty seat, raising an eyebrow.
“I think you might be losing control, honey. I have not received any orders in the last three hours.”

“But... No, I swear there was this woman...”

“Look, I'm honestly too tired to care. It makes no difference to me. Listen, I promise not to tell the boss you're stealing from the kitchen if you agree to close the restaurant on your own tonight so I can go home.”

“Do you want to go home now?” I asked. “But the cafeteria doesn't close for two hours. I don't think I'll be able to serve as a waitress and cook...”

My voice cracked as I looked at the big clock hanging from the kitchen window. He read 2 am.

I backed off. I've been talking to Evangeline for two hours? This couldn't be right. It felt like half an hour tops. I didn't even have time to finish my meal, for crying out loud.

"I. Uh..." When I turned to Bert, he was looking at me like I had a screw loose.

"Talking to people who aren't there, eating leftovers from random strangers, hallucinating about what time it is. It's three for three, honey. I think you need a good night's sleep because you're not functioning properly."

Maybe he was right. Maybe I was missing out. All my sleepless nights and time spent missing my ex-partner must have taken a toll on me.

"So will you close for me?" Bert questioned again.

I found it a little funny that he was just saying how much sleep I needed but then asking me to stay late for his benefit.

I ran a hand over my face, trying to clear my confusion and exhaustion. "Yes. Clear. I can close tonight."

It wasn't like I was going to get any sleep tonight anyway. Best to avoid my red-eyed Grayson-filled night terrors for as long as possible.

He smiled widely. "You are a doll."

I didn't even realize he was ready to go until he was marching out the door, leaving me completely alone.

I sank down on the table I was sitting at, looking down at Evangeline's untouched plate of food.

I was still extremely confused about what the hell had happened, but honestly, I just didn't have the energy to think about it too much at the moment.

All that mattered was cleaning up the diner and kitchen so I could get home and at least try to get some sleep since I had the diner open tomorrow morning too.

I groaned when I realized I would have to be back here in less than five hours.

I guess anything was better than sitting in my rat-infested one-bedroom apartment with nothing to do but try to ignore my pain and not think about it.

Speaking of pain, for the first time since realizing Evangeline was gone, it occurred to me that I still wasn't experiencing the agony that came from my hungry mate bond.

My body felt at peace for the first time in months, with no blinding aches or headaches. Evangeline said she took it from me, but how? And would you go back?

She said she could only hold it for so long.

Deciding to take advantage of the situation while I still could, I got up and started cleaning my table and the others that still needed to be washed, then walked to the kitchen to do the dishes.

I sighed when I saw that Bert had left me with all the dishes. Didn't he say that he hadn't received any orders in the last few hours? What the hell was he doing here all this time?

Well, it looked like I was going to be there for a while longer.

Chapter 14

BELLE

I was practically dragging my feet as I walked down the sidewalk back to my apartment when my shift was finally over, almost completely overcome with exhaustion.

My eyes closed and my body ached. I needed sleep more than anything, but who knew if I would be sleeping.

Guilt ate at me about how things had gone down with Liam earlier. After all, he was just trying to be a good friend, right? He was trying to take care of me.

I just hated that he had taken over his friends and I wouldn't get along. Was I so horrible to be around?

It was cold and the June air pinched my bare legs, forcing her to tighten her coat tighter.

In fact, I wish I had Liam's hot car to ride instead of driving home alone in the dark. Too bad I had screwed up.

I felt weird. Something was wrong. A dull tingle crept up the back of my neck and I had the strangest feeling that I was being watched.

But I pushed it away, convinced I was just paranoid after my conversation with Liam earlier today.

Then the wind picked up and something sounded behind me, making me jump. My mark tingled and a sudden pressure started to build in my head. I groaned in dismay.

I knew what that meant. Grayson was trying
get into my mind again.

A loud noise coming from behind me. I turned around but didn't see
anything.

Head pounding, I kept walking, moving a little faster now. I was suddenly
very anxious
to get home.

There was another loud bang. My nerves only grew
when footsteps started behind me, obviously following me.

So Liam was right, I thought bitterly. I'm about to be murdered.

My walk turned into a run.

"Beeelllllee," a singsong voice said at the side of my head.

I shook and bit back a scream, turning my head to the side to look for the
source. I found an empty alley full of garbage cans.

I bit my lip and ran faster, pulling my coat closer.
tight around my body.

It's just the wind, Belle, I told myself. Everything is good. You
you're just being paranoid.

Right, wind that sounded exactly like my name.

The throbbing in my head increased as Grayson tried harder to break
through my mental barrier. I clench my teeth together. Because now?

It was like he knew I was in a situation
stressful and thought it would be fun to mess with me more.

"Fuck you, Grayson," I whispered as if he could hear. "Get out of my head."

The knocks only got worse.

Suddenly, I heard a high-pitched laugh coming from above me. My head snapped up.

Crouched on top of a building, like some sort of imitation Spider-Man, was a hooded figure. The person was looking at me, but I couldn't make out any facial features in the darkness.

"Grayson can't help you right now, Luna," the person said.

Um, so yeah, fuck it.

I turned on my heels and started to run away. My earlier exhaustion was long gone, replaced by adrenaline and fear.

I had no idea who that person was, but there was no way I was going to stick around to find out. The moment the words "Grayson" and "Luna" left their mouths, I knew I had to go far, far away.

Without any warning, a hand wrapped around my hair, pulling it back into a dark alley. I screamed in terror. My hands gripped my assailant's arm, digging in my nails.

It did nothing to loosen its grip on me.

"Oh, come on, Belle," the voice said, pulling my hair harder so I was forced to loosen my grip. "No need for that. Let's play well."

Everything happened so fast. Faster than I could comprehend, I was slammed into a wall, grunting as my head hit the hard concrete.

I finally managed to see the face of the person holding me. My eyes widened. "Adalee?" I whispered.

She smiled. "Surprise." She grabbed my head and slammed it back. My whole world spun and searing pain exploded in the back of my skull.

"I must say, I'm a little shocked that you remember me, considering the fact that we've only met once," Adalee continued, her tone laced with sly amusement.

I struggled against it, but my dizziness made it almost impossible. "W-What are you doing here?" I asked.

She looked at me with pitch-black eyes, telling me her wolf was on the surface. "I thought it was obvious." His smile grew. "I came to kill you."

His hand flew to my throat, gripping it tightly and cutting off my airway. I grabbed his arm, digging in my nails and trying to pull him away from me while panting.

"You look awful," Adalee continued, unfazed by my attempts to break free. "I think being rejected by your partner is really as horrible as they say."

"D-let me go." I struggled to talk about your grip in me.

"No, I don't think so." His hand tightened even more, making me gasp. "Tell me, Belle, how does it feel to know your mate doesn't care about you? You don't even mind if I kill you?"

My brand burned at his words like someone was forcing a hot iron into my skin. I tried to scream, but it came out more like a gurgling howl.

Adalee's expression was filled with sadistic glee. "That Really, Luna," she spit out the title as if it were an insult.

"Your mate doesn't give a shit about your miserable life. In fact... he's tired of being tied down to you. Remember of that other wolf he mated with? He needs you dead so he can finally be with his true mate without you getting in the way."

Every word she spoke was like a knife in my heart, agonizing and sharp. She had to be lying, right?

Grayson might hate me, might not want me as his mate, but I never thought he would consider killing me.

My head exploded with the worst blinding pain I've ever experienced. I screamed. Grayson. I knew it was Grayson. He had never tried so hard to get inside my head.

Adalee squeezed my neck so hard that my vision faded for several seconds.

When I came to, I was coughing and wheezing, his grip on my throat just loose enough that I could take several deep, wheezing breaths.

And then something amazing happened. Warmth, sweet and comforting, filled my form. The burning in my neck subsided a little.

Even my head stopped hurting for the first time in months, although I could still feel blood trickling down the back of my neck from where Adalee had pushed my skull against the hard wall.

I felt...relief. I felt safe. I felt that everything was going to be fine.

"Are you reaching your mate?" the mocking voice of Adalee said to me, snapping me out of my stupor.

"That is good. Let him feel your suffering. Let him know how you felt – all the pain, all the fear during the final moments of your pathetic life."

I was reaching out to Grayson, I realized with a shock. When I lost consciousness a few moments ago, I wasn't able to continue blocking him from my mind.

My mental walls finally came down. He was in my brain now, scrutinizing my emotions. It wasn't like I could hear him or his thoughts, but I could feel him.

I felt their terror, anger and stress. The part of me that still had feelings for him reached out to him, wanting to comfort him even though I knew it was wrong.

His beta was here to kill me, and he didn't care. He'd rather I die than have to think about me again.

Boy, did it hurt to know.

It didn't matter, though. All that mattered was the peace that washed over my frame, even as Adalee scoffed at my face and squeezed my throat once more.

I stopped fighting her, dropping my hands. Feeling that connection with Grayson made it easier to accept what I knew was coming. There was no fighting it.

My vision started to crumble. Strangely, I could feel Grayson's panic building more and more every second I stood there, waiting for my life to end.

I couldn't help but wonder why he cared. That was his fault. None of this would be happening if it weren't for him.

And yet, I still clung to what little comfort Grayson offered me through what was left of our broken bond as if it were my lifeline. At least I wouldn't die still fighting him. at least i could

die in peace.

Through my teary eyes, I could see that Adalee's expression was filled with pure anger. It was the kind of hatred that developed through betrayal and pain.

I didn't know what Grayson had said to her about me or why she looked at me with such hate in her gaze, but I wanted to tell her I was sorry.

Whatever I did to make her look at me that way it must have been evil. There was no other explanation.

And just as I thought it was all over for me, my miserable life was coming to an end, she left me.

I fell to the floor, panting. I tried to breathe, although I still found it extremely difficult. I coughed, tasting the metallic taste of blood. My head landed on the wet floor.

Through my hazy vision, I could see someone standing over me. Hope filled my chest.

"Grayson?" Tried to whisper but nothing but breaths breathless came out.

Liam's face appeared as he crouched down next to mine. front. Horror immediately seized me.

Liam's mouth was covered in blood, running down his chin and neck. Fangs, sharp and long, were poking out from under his upper lip.

He looked exactly like the Grayson from my nightmares.

I dragged my gaze to the body on the floor next to him. It was Adalee. She wasn't breathing.

His eyes were vacantly looking at me, his throat open, blood flowing from the gaping wound and pooling around his body.

Dead. She was dead.

I looked at Liam, who met my gaze with concern and trepidation.

The last thing I thought before passing out was:

Vampire.

Chapter 15

GRAYSON

ONE HOUR BEFORE

My wolf was being a jerk. He kept pushing himself against my conscience, trying to take control and change. He was upset. Livid.

He kept reminding me that our mate was alone, completely unprotected and in extreme danger, and we weren't doing anything about it. As if that wasn't the only thing on my mind.

"Are you okay there, Alpha?" Kyle asked me from his seat in front of me. "You are not looking very well."

I ignored his question and continued to pace the head of the table with my fists in my hair, barely holding.

Of course I wasn't fine. I was the furthest thing from okay. I barely ate or slept, unable to focus on anything but finding her.

My Belle.

The millennial wood of the table in front of me was completely covered in papers and documents, all pertaining to any clue as to where Belle might be.

I had some, and all the information I could find about my mate spread out before me.

Where she went to preschool, her first job at fifteen, the name of her fifth-grade oboe instructor, and the doctor who treated her father for cancer.

I even managed to get all the pictures from her yearbook.

I contacted anyone who might have known her in Minnesota, but no one had heard from her since before she left for Paris to visit her mother.

I went to his old apartment and took the opportunity to visit his father's tomb to pay my respects, thanking him for raising and raising the woman with whom I would spend the rest of my life.
eternity.

So far, though, all I knew was that she'd boarded a Greyhound bus in Minneapolis. That was the last time she used her credit card.

She didn't have a cell phone or anything that could be used for tracking, and her scent was long gone. Belle was very smart. She was avoiding me at every turn. And it was making me lose my fucking mind.

My wolf used to tell me he thought it was all stupid. He was convinced he would be able to find her if I let him out.

He would simply run and search every inch and crevice of this land if he had to. That's why I haven't changed in almost three months.

I knew the moment I let him out that he wouldn't give me back control until he found Belle, and, as smart as my wolf thought he was, the only thing he'd be able to do was prance through the woods while our mate suffered.

A big drawback to keeping my wolf indoors, however, was that I was extremely nervous. I moved with my pack to the Mortar palace in a complete trance.

I was only here a few weeks ago and there was already proven to be the worst king in all of supernatural history.

Zagan Mortar, the former king, realized very quickly the mistake he had made in sending my mate alone while I was still unconscious.

I would beat up anyone who bothered me or bothered me in the slightest and had no interest in ruling – or doing anything, really – until I had Belle by my side again.

She was my only concern. Zagan made up for his mistake by continuing to assume many of the king's responsibilities. I didn't have it in me to be grateful, though. I didn't have it in me to be anything.

The only thing that kept me from completely freaking out was the fact that I could feel Belle and know that she was alive and well. She was in pain and felt incredibly uncertain and afraid, but it was fine.

She missed me. I could feel her wanting to come back to me every day, and I wished with every part of my being that she would, even though I knew she wouldn't.

The worst part was, she hated herself for it. She thought it made her weak and pathetic to still want me after everything she thought I'd done to her, and it broke my heart.

I wanted nothing more than to pull her to me and tell her that there was nothing wrong with her and that it was

It's completely normal to want to be with me. I was her mate.

My heart squeezed painfully in my chest at the thought that she would ever hate herself for something as natural as loving her mate.

I spent the last three days in the room I was in now. It was conceived as a conference room.

Sometimes I stopped to think about all the important, influential, historical characters who stood in my shoes.

The room was huge, with dark wood walls carved with intricate designs, bookshelves of ancient literature surrounding us, and a fifty-foot-high ceiling made entirely of stained glass.

It was a work of art, the stained glass window, that told the story of Evangeline and Elijah Viotto, the former hybrid king and faerie queen of the supernatural.

Its breathtaking windows bathed the room in deep, rich color throughout all hours of the day.

Even at night, the moonlight was shining and covering the surrounding space in a blanket of iridescent light, making me feel like I was in a painting.

As beautiful as it was, I often found myself looking up at the stained glass above me after throwing my head back in frustration.

Only to face it even more angrily when studying, seeing the unfortunate way Elijah and Evangeline's story ended, with both of them dying at the hands of the first Mortar to take the throne, Damian Mortar.

Even now, my hands clenched into fists as I looked at him through dark red eyes.

Some said that Belle and I were Evangeline and Elijah reincarnated, as we were the two who, according to the prophecy, should take on their same roles, as king and queen of the supernatural.

I resented it. I would take the throne at Belle's side, but it wouldn't have the same ending as they did.

I would not allow myself or Belle to meet the same fate as Elijah and Evangeline did. Azazel would not be ours
Damian.

But I had to find Belle first to prevent that from happening. Fuck, why couldn't I find her? Where the hell was she hiding?

If she would just open her mind to me, I could track her down and explain everything. But as stubborn as ever, she continued to block me.

As much as it killed me, I stopped trying to break through the surprisingly strong mental barriers she put up because I knew it only caused her more pain and reminded her of the horrible things she thought I had done to her.

So I would hold back until I had more information.

A fierce form of remorse coursed through me as I thought of the wasted opportunity presented to me during the battle on my pack's grounds three months ago.

Azazel's army of vampires had lost - more than lost, they had been brutally defeated, in their attempt to kill my pack members, while also

tore apart in a savage, untrained hunger for blood.

The fact that his army was defeated did not quench my own need for blood, however – Azazel's blood.

Nothing and no one was going to stop me from hunting him down and killing him slowly and cruelly.

Breaking every one of his bones, tearing flesh, bringing him to the brink of death and then starting over and over again until I was completely satisfied with the amount of suffering I put him through – if that was possible.

My wolf salivated, and my vampire's fangs and claws were released involuntarily, both of them as tempted as I was by the thought of torturing Azazel for decades.

But Azazel escaped before I got to him, proving once again what a coward he was.

I had ripped through the trees around where he was hiding in wolf form, using my vampire speed, but found he was nowhere to be seen, the only remnant of him being the faint scent he left behind.

He'd obviously fled when he realized he'd lost, leaving his clan of new vampires to fend for themselves against my ravenous wolf pack.

He knew what I would do to him if I found him and it was smart to run.

Azazel was behind her. I could feel it in the marrow of my bones. He was looking for her with the same intense determination that I.

He wanted to kill her as brutally as possible in a last ditch effort to bring me down. He knew as well as I did that I would be nothing without Belle by my side.

The only thing keeping me going now was the knowledge that Belle was somewhere in an incredible amount of pain and danger. I had to get to her before Azazel did.

And time was running out.

"Alpha, why don't you go get some sleep?" Kyle asked me in a hesitant tone. "You haven't slept more than an hour a night for the last week."

Was he right. It was almost impossible to sleep without Belle sharing a bed with me. I could tell Kyle wanted to get back to Elijah and probably get some sleep.

He put his whole heart and soul into this quest and was there for me every step of the way. Elijah too. Both were as determined as I was to find her.

"I don't give a shit about sleep." I growled. "I need to find my mate. You can go to bed if you like. I will stay here."

"Alpha, I hate to break it to you, but all you've been doing the last few hours is growling and pacing around like some kind of possessed zombie. I don't think you'll be doing much more tonight. And Luna needs you at your best if you want to find her."

My head turned to look at Kyle, my eyes narrowing red. "It is not me

I was interrupted by the drastic change in Belle's emotions through the mate bond. She was already not having the best day – something that tore me up inside.

Something happened to upset her this morning, and that bad mood stayed with her all day. But whatever she was feeling right now was more than just sadness.

It was sheer terror.

My entire body froze. Something was wrong. Very, very wrong.

"Alpha?" Kyle asked.

I held up my hand, silencing him. "Something is wrong with Belle," I told him.

Having no other choice, I immediately tried to enter his consciousness, even though I knew that this would add pain to his fear.

I just needed her to know that I was here for her. I needed her to let me in so I knew what was going on, why she was so scared and how to protect her.

Anger forced through the bond when Belle realized what I was doing. I don't give a shit if she was mad at me. I needed to know what made her so scared.

My hands gripped the back of the chair I was standing in front of so hard I could hear the ancient wood starting to splinter under my grip.

"Fuck you," I yelled when she still wouldn't let me in, but clearly I was still very scared. "Cum!"

"Alpha, what's wrong? What is happening?" Kyle he demanded, rising from his chair.

'Belle is in danger. Belle is in danger. Belle is in danger.' It was the only thing that kept repeating itself in my head.

Then, suddenly, it was like a door opened in my mind. And even as a wave of calm washed over me as the bond emerged between me and my mate, Belle's pain and fear was even more intense.

Belle's walls came down.

I could barely hear Kyle calling my name because I was already running out the door.

"Where the hell are you going?" he called me.

"Maine," I growled back.

Chapter 16

BELLE

My eyes fluttered open, blinking in the bright light on the ceiling above me. Memories of what happened last night surged through my consciousness like a freight train.

I was disoriented and sleepy from passing out and had no idea where I was or how I got there. And though exhaustion was forcing me back to sleep, panic gripped me like a vice, forcing my eyes wide.

Adalee tried to kill me.

Grayson didn't care if I was dead.

Liam was a vampire.

My hand went to my throat, touching the spot where Adalee's hand was around my neck.

I whimpered as my fingers connected with the soft wound there, my throat squeezing with horrified tears.

I struggled to sit up, fighting the pain that coursed through my body. My fight-or-flight instinct was telling me to get the hell out.

I looked around, realizing for the first time that I was in Liam's apartment, back in the room he used to let me stay in. I felt a tiny bit of relief. I knew this place. I could get out of here quickly.

"Fuck you," said Liam's voice outside my door. "I think she's awake."

I moved faster, practically jumping out of bed – even though my body was screaming at me – and looked around for anything I could use as a weapon.

I reached for the nearest object, a lamp, but was stopped before I could grab it.

"Hey Hey hey." Suddenly, Liam was beside me, gently pushing me by the shoulders onto the bed.

I blinked at him. How did he get here so fast? He moved in a blur. I had just overheard talking na sala.

"Easy there," he continued. "You're not fully healed yet. You need to take it easy."

I flinched away from his touch as if he'd burned me. Visions of him covered in Adalee's blood assaulted my consciousness.

Vampire! Vampire! Vampire! Vampire!

Liam was clean now, no blood on his face and he was wearing clean clothes. He looked like his normal self again.

It didn't make me any less terrified of him.

Liam's eyes softened as I pulled away from him and withdrew his hand from me slowly.

Laila appeared beside me too, looking at me with concern. "You shouldn't be awake yet. We thought you'd sleep for hours after everything you've been through."

She tried to offer me a gentle smile that I'm sure was meant to be reassuring. "But you were always a hell of a fighter, weren't you?"

I barely understood what Laila was saying, unable to stop looking at Liam, feeling betrayed by the man I had trusted. He lied to me.

What did I expect though? Everyone I cared about has turned their back on me at some point or another. They all had secrets they were getting ready to use against me.

"Don't look at me like that, Belle," Liam pleaded, his tone pained. "You know I would never hurt you."

"You hurt Adalee," I growled. My voice was raspy and raspy, but not as bad as I'd hoped considering everything that had happened to me. "You killed her. How do I know you won't do the same to me?"

"I saved you. That werewolf was trying to kill you, Belle. I wasn't going to stand back and let you die. I had to do something.

So he knew Adalee was a werewolf.

And he was a vampire.

What the hell has my life become?

I remembered hearing Grayson tell me about a war between werewolves and vampires that had been going on for centuries. He said vampires were horrible, treacherous creatures who only thought about themselves.

It can't be Liam, can it?

My eyes filled with unwanted tears. "You are um- um-" I asked Liam.

He cut me off before I could get the word out. "I am a vampire." He looked at Laila, who was biting her lower lip.

She nodded her head once. "We two are. All... All Evergreen is kind of full of vampires."

And that was all I needed to hear.

I practically flew out of bed, planning to run for the door. I should have known my efforts would be futile.

Liam grabbed me and forced me back onto the bed once more. My exhausted, aching limbs protested, making my jaw clench.

"Stop it," Liam ordered. "You're going to get hurt. You it is not fully healed."

I fought him, trying to push his hands away from me. I wanted to scream in frustration. I was so tired of people using their preternatural strength to stop me.

After a few more seconds of struggling, I reluctantly gave in and lay down in defeat. I looked at Liam, feeling tears running down my cheeks. Embarrassment reddens my face. I hated that I was crying in front of them.

"And?" I demanded, angrily wiping away my tears. "Did I just join a crazy vampire cult or something?"

Liam frowned. "We prefer the term clan. Not cult."

As if that made everything better.

Laila touched my hand. My head lifted to look to her, and I pulled away from her touch.

"You have nothing to be afraid of," she told me. "You've lived with werewolves before, haven't you?"

My jaw dropped. "H- like you"

"We all knew you came from a werewolf pack the moment you arrived at Evergreen. You reeked of them. In addition

Plus, you have a werewolf mating mark the size of Canada on your neck," Laila told me. "Did you really think we wouldn't notice that?"

I didn't know how to respond. I touched my mark gently, shuddering as it burned with heat. I wish I could just rub the thing off so no one, including me, could see it again.

Laila sighed. "Look, I know this is a lot to take in, but I promise you, if you can handle werewolves, then you can handle vampires."

"At least we don't turn into monsters whenever we're in a bad mood," Liam grumbled. "We're not that scary or dangerous."

Was that supposed to make me feel better? nothing they say would make this situation less confusing.

I'd escaped a pack of werewolves who hated me only to run straight into a vampire coven who probably wanted to eat me for breakfast. Talk about getting out of the frying pan and into the fire.

"Werewolves don't kill people," I retorted.

Liam scoffed. "I wouldn't be so sure about that, honey."

We held each other's gaze for several long moments. A silent challenge. I was the first to look away.

Even though I hated him at the moment, a part of me knew he was right.

Liam definitely wasn't the biggest monster.

I had already faced him.

"I'm sorry, Belle," Laila said. "I wish I had told to you. We wanted to, I promise."

"Then why didn't you do it?" I whispered.

"Our father wouldn't let us. He didn't want us to partner with a werewolf's mate.

Especially one with a brand the size of yours," Liam said.

"Your mate is dangerous, isn't he?" Laila questioned.

"Isn't it true that the bigger the mark, the more powerful the werewolf?"

I shook my head stiffly. "He wasn't the friendliest person." That was the understatement of the century. "So this is why I couldn't get a job at Evergreen? Did your father not leave me?"

"Yes," Liam grumbled, actually looking pissed off. therefore. "He was being a jerk."

I tried to keep my breathing even, even though my chest was tightening more and more by the minute.

"So, when you told me that your father was the leader of the city... what did you really mean is that he is the leader of... of a vampire clan?"

Liam sat on the edge of the bed next to me. "Yes," he said slowly. "Our father may or may not be one of the most powerful vampires in the world."

"Because why wouldn't he be? It makes perfect sense." Of course I left one of the most powerful werewolves in the world just to live with the son of one of the most powerful vampires in the world.

"And let me guess he hates me because I was mated to a werewolf, right? Is that why he wouldn't let me get a job?"

Liam and Laila hesitated for only a second before both agree.

I couldn't help the bubbly laugh that escaped my lips at the irony of the whole situation. "Well, isn't that just a peach?" I laughed.

"We tried to convince him that you wouldn't be a problem, but he didn't want his partner, whoever he is, to come to our town," said Laila.

I changed. "Would you do something with him if he came? You the would it hurt?"

"We didn't kill anyone," Liam cut in, sitting on the edge of my bed. "Yesterday was the first time I took someone's life."

"But then how..." I swallowed hard. "Like you-"

"If you're trying to ask about our diets," Liam provided, "we drink blood. That they got right in the movies."

"Human blood?" I asked quietly.

He nodded slowly. "Yes. Human blood."

"But we didn't kill them," Laila interrupted. - They they don't even remember anything after we draw their blood.

"They might feel a little disoriented for a few days, they might even think they have the flu or a hangover or something, but otherwise they're unharmed.

"Vampires have evolved to be able to inject our victims with a toxin into our fangs that can make

forget everything if we want. Not all vampires bother to do this, but we do.”

All the nights I spent here came to mind. I had no idea I lived under the same roof as a blood-thirsty vampire.
blood.

I didn't remember Liam touching me, but...
Is it possible that he drank my blood without me knowing?

“Nobody touched you,” Liam said suddenly, as if reading my thoughts.
“No one in this town, including us, has fed on you. I made sure of that.”

“He is not kidding.” Said Laila. “He nearly killed a few people, so you wouldn't become someone's next meal.”

I winced at her choice of phrase.

Suddenly it all made sense. “So when you kept insisting on driving me to and from work, saying you didn't want me murdered while I was walking home alone.”

“I was literally making sure you didn't get murdered,” Liam explained, sounding more than a little defensive.

“I can tell people not to feed on you when you're at Evergreen, and they have to listen to me because of who my father is. But the moment you moved to Woodhurst and started working in that stupid diner, I lost all authority over you.

Anyone could have gone there and done whatever they wanted to you, and I wouldn't have been able to do anything to stop it.”

“And when I didn't invite you to that party, it was because I knew someone would try something on you if you were there. Your blood is especially attractive for some reason. It's more likely because you're a werewolf's mate, and vampires are programmed to kill and harm werewolves.”

“So even though I warned people to stay away from you, I never wanted to risk leaving you alone for too long.” His fists clenched at his sides. But you were always so persistent about being independent and not needing anyone's help; it was like you wanted someone to kill you”

“Liam is strangely protective of you,” Laila interrupted, giving her brother a look. “I really do not understand. Nobody understand. Since you came to town, you're all he thinks or talks about. He gets really upset if you're alone.”

I shifted uncomfortably at this revelation. “That and truth?” I asked Liam.

Liam ran a frustrated hand through his curly hair. “I do not know how to explain. It's not a romantic thing, so don't get the wrong idea.” His jaw tightened, looking frustrated as he looked me up and down.

“Well, okay, maybe it was when I first saw you sitting on that park bench alone. I mean, look at you.” He pointed at my body.

I blushed.

“But then I saw the mark on your neck and...well, I knew you had a mate and it was off limits. The last thing I wanted was some monstrous werewolf thing trying to kill me because they thought I touched you.

“So I don't want you to think that I did all this because I'm hoping that you want to be with me in a romantic way, because that's not the case.”

I didn't miss the way his eyes dropped to the bruise around my damaged neck.

“I should have left you alone after I found out you had a mate. But just look at her bruised face and tear-stained cheeks and... I don't know. Something in me changed the day I met you; some instinct took over. I couldn't leave her after that. I needed to protect her. I needed to know you were okay the whole time.”

I studied him for a few seconds, trying to process all the crazy things he was saying to me, but I couldn't make sense of it all. None of it made sense.

That explained his strange behavior and his need to control my life, but I still didn't understand why. Why did Liam feel he had to protect me? Why did he care?

I wasn't your responsibility. And seriously, the last thing I needed was another possessive, overprotective supernatural creature claiming it had some magical link to me, connecting to me.

“Well, thanks for taking care of me, I guess, but you don't have to anymore. I'm leaving town. I can't stay here anymore.”

“What?” Laila practically screamed.

“Are you leaving? Why?”

I snorted. “Other than the fact that I've unknowingly been living alongside a vampire coven for the last few months? I can't leave

no one gets hurt because of me. If Adalee could find me, I'm sure other people can too. I need to get out of here before it's too late."

"It has something to do with who the hell put that around your neck, doesn't it?" Liam looked at Grayson's mark. "Your partner."

My brand burned as if it knew who we were talking about. I nodded once.

A hiss came from Liam's chest. My eyes widened. I had heard that sound before when I lived with Grayson.

Grayson had made that noise the first night we'd slept apart from each other, right after he'd pushed me out of his bed for refusing to have sex with him.

Then he did it again when he hit me for talking to Kyle about our relationship, and once more before I turned him down one last time, and he mated someone else.

Liam's hand touched my shoulder, pulling me out of my arms. thoughts.

"That's who you're running from, isn't it?" he asked. "Now that you finally know everything, we can be honest with each other. Was he the one who hurt you?"

My throat was suddenly dry. I didn't want to answer. I didn't want to talk about Grayson or all the horrible things he'd done to me.

Laila handed me a glass of water that I hadn't even noticed was on my bedside table. I drank, grateful for the feel of the cold water on my aching throat.

Setting the glass back down, I realized with a start that my wounds didn't hurt as much as they did when I woke up.

There was absolutely no pain in my head – not from Grayson trying to force himself into my mind, not from Adalee slamming my skull into a wall several times.

I tentatively reached out and touched the back of my head. I wasn't sure what I was expecting, but all I found was a slight bruise and dried blood.

It was a similar case with my neck. Bruises that I was pretty sure were in the shape of hands wrapped around my throat, but the pain was nothing I couldn't bear.

I had definitely been through worse.

I vividly remembered Adalee's hand crushing my airway last night. That should have left me dead or at least in the hospital.

And I wouldn't be surprised if the wound on the back of my head from causing internal bleeding or brain damage.

When Adalee threw me against that wall, I could I swear I felt my brain rattling around in my skull.

I should be dead by now – it was the only thing that made sense after the trauma I went through.

How was it possible that I was sitting here, feeling almost no pain after the beating I received last night?

My gaze returned to Liam and Laila, giving them a questioning, dumbfounded look. They looked at each other, neither of them looking like they wanted to give me an answer.

After another moment of hesitation, Laila was the first to speak. “We gave you the blood of Amelia Mortar. He has

healing properties. It's the only reason you're alive now."

I looked at her. "Yes, I'm going to need you to go back there for one second. You gave me whose what?"

Laila stirred restlessly. "Blood of Amelia Mortar. She is the healer of the royal clan and the daughter of the vampire king, Zagan Mortar. Your blood can heal someone on their deathbed with just a few drops. Fortunately, she packs it and gives it to clans all over the world. We had some saved for times like this. Advantages of being related to our father."

"One of the only perks," Liam grumbled.

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. "You me injected with the blood of some vampire princess?"

Liam shook his head. "It's not in your bloodstream. You took it orally."

I moved slowly, testing my limbs. Everything looked completely normal. "And that's why I feel good now? Is that how I healed so quickly?"

Healing wasn't the only difference I noticed. I felt better than I had in months.

"You're not fully healed yet. You still have a nasty bruise around your throat, and the cut on your head is going to take a little longer to close." Said Laila.

I pushed my hair out of my face in frustration, needing a moment to try to process all of this. I squeezed my eyes shut. A lot of information was thrown at me very quickly.

"Are you well?" Liam asked in a calm, even tone. "How is your head?"

My eyes flew open. I touched the wound. "All good. Well, better than okay, actually. I can't remember the last time I was able to think clearly."

Liam still looked worried. "So that migraine you've been dealing with for the last few months is finally gone?"

I sighed. "That wasn't a migraine," I told him dryly. "My ex-partner was trying to invade my consciousness so he could watch over me. He finally got it last night when Adalee nearly killed me.

Even though I blocked him again, I don't know what information he got from me while I was passed out. He might know where I am. He might come after me."

I thought about how I accidentally let him into my mind last night while I was unconscious and felt embarrassment rising in my throat.

I clung to the comfort he gave me during what I thought were my last moments, even though I knew it was him. who ordered me to be killed.

The embarrassment made my heart race and my palms sweat. I could only imagine what Grayson had thought of me.

"But he marked you," Laila said, confused.

"I don't know much about werewolves or their fated mates, but I thought that once they marked their other half, the wolves would bond for life. You don't want him to come after you? Don't you miss him?"

"I found him in bed with another woman," I explained, the words tasting like vinegar in my mouth.

"It doesn't matter if I miss him or not. I can't keep him. He rejected me. He mated with someone else. He does not want me."

There was a long pause. Nobody knew what to say.

"I'm sorry, Belle. I can't even imagine what that must be like," Liam said.

He hesitated before continuing. "But if that's the case, you have nothing to worry about, right? He won't come after you if he doesn't...want to mate with you anymore."

I looked at him. I could feel the tears starting to pool in the corners of my eyes again, threatening to fall the more we talked about Grayson.

Liam was right, though. What the hell was I scared of? Grayson wouldn't come after me. He hated me. He didn't even care if Adalee killed me.

I shook my head, wiping under my eyes. "Yes, you are probably right."

"Besides, there's no safer place for you," Liam continued. "If he comes here, you have a bunch of vampires willing to back you up."

Laila grabbed my hand in hers. "So are you staying?"

I gave her a small smile. "I'll think about it. I mean, what's the worst that could happen?"

Chapter 17

BELLE

After leaving Liam's apartment last night, he gave me a ride back to my place so I could shower and change out of my bloody clothes.

He wasn't happy when I walked out of my bathroom dressed in my waitress uniform.

"You are not working today," he stated. "You need to rest."

"What I need is to earn money so I can pay for my apartment instead of being forced to live under a bridge like some kind of troll. My shift starts in twenty minutes."

I brushed past him, grabbing my shoes at the front door and sliding on my feet.

Liam looked huge in my tiny apartment. Though I suppose it wasn't necessarily a difficult thing to do. Anyone would look great here. Hell, I looked big in here.

The entire space consisted of a single room with a sink, a few cupboards, a chest of drawers, a small round table and three chairs, and just enough space for the single mattress that was on the floor in the corner.

There was a community bathroom just a few doors down.

So yeah, the apartment wasn't much, but it was mine. I was happy to be living alone instead of depending on someone else.

"Belle, it's four in the morning. The sun hasn't even risen yet!" Liam continued to argue.

"You opened and closed the cafeteria last night. They do not they can expect you to stay that way. It's not healthy. Or cool. You are working too hard."

I rolled my eyes. He was so dramatic. "I think I can deal with that."

He looked at me, clearly not wanting to let the subject go. "I'll be fine, Liam. I feel great – the best I've had in months. I'm still a little scared with everything that happened last night. But I'm not in any pain, and I feel well rested for the first time in a long time. That vampire blood you gave me really is magic. Even my mark doesn't hurt that much."

It was a miracle, really. Grayson's mark on my neck still looked awful – I think it might have gotten infected by now – but it didn't hurt as much as it used to.

The pulsation deep under the skin had significantly subsided and it no longer burned. It made me want to cry with relief.

Was it possible that I could actually enjoy my day instead of being crippled by horrible pain?

Or maybe, just maybe...it meant that Grayson had finally decided to leave me alone after feeling what I'd been through last night. Maybe he thought I was dead.

But that was probably just an illusion.

"I don't care," Liam continued to pester me.
"You only slept two hours last night. You need to rest. Especially after everything you've been through."

I laugh humorlessly. "Yes, no, thank you." Sleep meant nightmares, and nightmares were the last thing I needed right now. I wanted Grayson out of my head, thank you very much.

Liam continued to argue with me for another ten minutes. He finally relented when I walked out the door without him, threatening to go to the diner alone, which I knew he would hate.

He followed reluctantly, leading me to his car and muttering under his breath about how I would work myself to death one day.

The cafeteria was full today. I was grateful for the distraction. Saturdays always brought a big crowd, making time go by faster.

When we got to Pom Pom's, Liam reluctantly followed me, still muttering under his breath about how I hadn't slept last night and needed more time to settle down.

heal.

When I ignored him, he found a table in the corner and sat down to order breakfast.

"What is the matter with you?" another waitress, Candice, asked me about 20 minutes past breakfast time.

"What do you mean?"

We both took food from the cook's window to put on trays and take to our customers.

It was still early in the morning, and the general chatter of breakfast morning added to the pleasant atmosphere around us.

The sun shone through the windows, painting the walls a warm glow.

Candice smiled at me. "You are smiling."

I gave her an odd look. "Are you implying that I don't normally smile?"

Candice shrugged, picking up her last plate of food. "You're happy, that's all." She lifted the full tray of food over your shoulder. "Take a good look at yourself."

I watched her walk away, a warm, fuzzy feeling spreading through me. I was happy. With each passing second, I felt better and better.

I sighed in contentment, picking up my own tray of food and carrying it around the counter, making my way over to a table of high school students.

Before I got there, though, the diner's front door burst open. The glass door slammed into the wall, shattering, covering the glass floor.

Everyone in the diner jumped, some gasping in surprise, before turning to look at the man standing in the doorway.

My gaze collided with my ex's red eyes partner.

Grayson.

But, no, this wasn't Grayson, was it? Could not be. Everything about the man standing in front of me was bigger, more refined and much, much scarier.

His huge muscles strained against his black shirt and casual jeans, bigger than I ever remembered them. He was at least a foot taller, barely fitting in the doorway.

His eyes stared at me from across the room, dark red and swirls of black, as his chest rose and fell. with breaths that were mixed with low, mischievous growls.

His arms were full of dark hair, and his entire form shook intensely, making it clear that he was close to changing.

No, this wasn't the Grayson I remembered. If his red eyes and gigantic frame were any indicator... this was the Grayson of my nightmares.

"Belle," he said. His voice was deep and rich, yet somehow strained at the same time. "My Belle."

I couldn't think, speak or react. I was paralyzed with petrified fear. Sweat beaded on my forehead and on the palms of my hands. My heart was beating fast in my chest.

A loud crash sounded at my feet, and I realized I'd dropped the tray of food I'd been holding. The dishes shattering the moment they hit the floor.

Voices murmured around me, but my eyes remained glued to the monster in front of me.

This wasn't happening, right? I was in one of my nightmares.

He started to move. He took several long strides towards me, his steps only faltering as I stumbled back in terror.

I couldn't let him get to me.

His expression hardened and he immediately began to approach me with even more determination. I didn't have time to react or come up with a plan.

All of a sudden, all the pain I'd been feeling for the last few months came back, only now it was somehow ten times worse than ever.

I doubled over, letting out a horrified scream.

I knew this intense pain was my body's way of pushing me to go to my mate. My subconscious recognized him and knew he was close.

The bond was pulling me toward him, promising relief if I made contact with him. And, oh God, I wanted to go to him.

I wanted to run to him and wrap my arms around his big form until I was sure there wasn't an inch between us, and then never let him go.

However, even when my body demanded that I give in to the bond, my mind – the most logical part of me – I was going into complete panic.

I could feel the terror setting in as I watched him, almost as if he were in slow motion, getting closer and closer to me. I knew I should move, get away, do something, but all I seemed able to do was stay there.

My chest tightened. I couldn't breathe. oh god i couldn't breathe. My lungs refused to breathe.

Memories of the last time I saw him surfaced in my consciousness. Suddenly I was back in the pack house with him on top of me as he tried to force himself on me.

I was standing in his room, watching his huge fist swing towards my face. I was opening the bedroom door to find him and another girl about to do

sex in your bed.

What was he doing here? What more could he want from me? Didn't he already take everything?

A terrifying thought entered my mind. Was he here to play with me some more? Take it back to your packhouse and cause more turmoil to my already broken heart?

I didn't think I would survive if that was the case, especially now that he was so much bigger, so much scarier than he used to be.

My heart was beating too fast, drowning out all other sounds around me until all I could hear was the sound of my own furious pulse and wheezing in my ears.

The edge of my vision started to darken when I started to hyperventilate. Oh no, oh no, oh no.

I was barely aware of someone stepping in front of me, blocking my view of Grayson and his path towards me. I registered the person's dark hair through my blurry, swirling vision.

Liam. Liam was standing in front of me. Why? I could barely make out what he was saying, but I knew he was yelling something at Grayson.

He was holding out his arms, trying to protect me. I almost laughed. He wouldn't be able to do anything to save me. The monster had found me.

And if he wanted me, no one could stop him from taking me.

Their voices disappeared. I leaned against the counter behind me, my legs suddenly too shaky to hold on.

I held my throat, willing it to open and let in the air he so badly needed, but it didn't help.

My legs suddenly gave out from under me, and I slid down until I was on the floor between two bar stools, my back against the wall.

Just as I was sure I was about to pass out, I registered two huge arms wrapping around me.
me.

I was pulled onto his lap, legs on either side of him, my body being placed against someone's huge, hard chest. Delicious, familiar, explosive sparks danced across my skin everywhere I touched him.

Era Grayson.

At first, I struggled with it. Having him near me only made my panic worse.

I gasped and gasped and slammed my fists against his chest, trying desperately to get away from him. My terror increased when I realized it wasn't working. His grip was unyielding.

He had me. Oh God, he had me under his control again. He was going to take me with him and do to me again what he had done the last time I was in his packhouse. I struggled more.

I was surprised when Grayson allowed me to hit him, sitting up and taking everything I had to give him. He never let it affect his control over me, but he also didn't fight back or try to dodge any of my punches or slaps.

At some point during my tantrum and panting, my body started to slow down, running out. I could feel Grayson breathe a sigh of relief when he, too, acknowledged my surrender.

It was then that he tightened his grip around me, bringing me so close that I was safe in his chest and unable to do anything but lean into him, giving him my full my weight.

One of his hands gently cupped the back of my neck and placed my head on the warm spot where his neck and shoulder met, nuzzling his face into my neck.

He held me there, holding me even as my labored breathing turned into heartbreaking sobs. I started to cry, soaking his skin and shirt with my tears.

The happiness of being embraced by my partner began to get installed. My body recognized his and wanted him.

My heart jumped in my chest, filling with love and adoration for him again, almost as if nothing had happened between us.

I gave myself into his embrace, melting into him, accepting the affection my body so badly needed and he seemed so willing to provide.

I knew it was wrong. So, so wrong. But I didn't care. I was suffering too long to deny your comfort.

My breathing and heart rate slowed, and my vision cleared even as I continued to cry. The blood stopped pumping in my ears, finally allowing me to hear again.

It was amazing how he was still able to calm me down after all this time, even though he wasn't my mate anymore. It also terrified me. It proved how much power he still had over me.

I was in his presence for mere minutes and I was already reduced to putty in his arms.

Jesus, what was wrong with me?

Relief, pain, and misery washed through me as Grayson rocked me against his form. I felt pathetic for reacting to seeing him like this, but the floodgates were open and there was no closing.

I allowed myself to cry into his neck, clinging to him as if he was my lifeline.

The last time I cried in front of Grayson, he reacted by yelling at me and calling me pathetic. I almost expected him to react like that again in this scenario. But he didn't.

He simply continued to hold me and stroke my back in one smooth up and down motion, leaving those familiar sparks everywhere he touched.

I was completely baffled, but I didn't have the heart to acknowledge my confusion at that moment.

All the emotions I've been holding back for the last three months were slipping out of me, leaving me unable to do anything but cry my eyes into the man's chest that I loved, but that never loved me.

"Shhh, baby...I know. I am really sorry. God, I'm so sorry, Belle." I heard Grayson whisper against my hair. His voice sounded hollow and pained.

He moved his hands up and down my back, rocking back and forth in a consistent rhythm, keeping his head in the crook of my neck. "Everything is fine. I got you. Everything is fine now. I'm really, really sorry."

Shock flooded my system. Did I hear right? Had he just... apologized to me?

I didn't have time to worry about it. Though the rest of my body calmed down the moment Grayson touched me, the mark on my neck only seemed to get worse.

I was already in his lap, every possible inch of myself touching him, but the mark wanted more; I wanted to be even closer.

As if Grayson was reading my mind, I felt his lips press to the part of my neck where he'd bitten me, leaving a gentle kiss there.

I let out a breathy sigh. My shoulders loose. Then, very slowly, her tongue ran over it,

licking. My entire body was immediately filled with fire.

I swallowed and moved closer to him, arching my back against him. Grayson growled, and the sound only heightened my needy moans.

He didn't hold back. His mouth clung to the tender mark, kissing and sucking.

My arms seemed to develop a mind of their own and wrapped around his neck, tangling my hands in his hair and pushing it closer to my skin.

I slumped in relief that, for the first time since Paris, my mark didn't hurt. There was no throbbing, pain or tremors. My whole body was at peace.

I was at home.

But this isn't your house, I reminded myself. Never more can be.

He rejected me and then slept with someone else. Even though he was here, holding me and apologizing, nothing had changed. He had still abused me. he was still mated with someone else.

These thoughts only made me cry even harder.

Grayson let me cry into his chest for God knows how long. He just held me, alternating between telling me how sorry he was and kissing and licking my mark.

Eventually, my crying slowed to a stop. I took a slow breath, finally able to process things now that my body had calmed down from its panic attack.

My anguish was quickly replaced by awareness. I peeked over the skin of her neck, looking around us.

The cafeteria was empty. Grayson and I were completely alone.

Everyone's food was still on the tables and their coats scattered in the tents, forgotten. He told me that everyone left in a hurry. I don't blame them.

If I hadn't been overcome by my panic attack, I would have run too.

Grayson's nose pressed into my hair and he inhaled deeply, taking in my scent. He sighed in a way that mimicked ecstasy and relief.

Relief over what? Find and ruin my plans to stay away from him forever?

His hand trailed down my back and along one of my bare legs, peeking out from under my skirt on either side of his massive body, straddling him.

I took a deep breath, enjoying the sparks he left behind everywhere he touched. I could feel myself getting hot as he started to slowly lick my mark again before kissing and nibbling it.

It felt intimate. Very intimate for a man who was in a relationship with another woman.

That thought brought me out of my trance like icy water being poured into me. What the hell was I doing?

This man has ruined my life, and I was simply allowing him to hug and kiss me as if nothing had happened between us!

Grayson must have noticed my change in demeanor because his whole body stiffened and his arms tightened around me.

My heart rate skyrocketed. My mind was racing with scenarios of why he was here. None of them were good.

He has a mate! I thought bitterly, shuddering as my heart squeezed painfully. *He hurt me, he broke me. Why is he here, holding me like this?*

And, even worse, why am I leaving?

Without loosening his grip on me, Grayson leaned back until his eyes met mine. I expected to see his terrifying red eyes again, but instead I met his green eyes.

Looking up close, I noticed for the first time how tired he looked. His beard had grown out a bit, leaving him with a dark, scruffy face, and there were deep circles under his eyes.

Somehow, though, he was still gorgeous – by far the handsomest man I'd ever seen, even in his obviously exhausted state. But I couldn't let myself be taken in by his beauty or the sweet way he held me.

Grayson was able to change his personality to be whatever he wanted - correction, to get what he wanted. He might look sad and sincere now, but there was no way he could really feel that way.

He was putting on a show. Why he was doing this or what his goal was, I wasn't sure. But I knew I wasn't going to stick around long enough to find out.

He finally spoke.

"Belle." His voice was just a whisper. He looked sad.

Desperate.

The complete and utter anguish in his voice tugged at my heart. Even though he had treated me so horribly, there was still that instinct that drove me to comfort and make him feel better when he was in pain.

But that didn't matter. I was moving on. I was getting better. Your presence here was a big step back for me. He didn't deserve my consolation or pity after everything he'd done for me.

And he especially didn't deserve that when he had a perfectly good mate at home, probably wondering where he was.

"Let me go." I whispered.

He shook his head, his arms just squeezing. Flashbacks of him holding me down on his bed and holding me with his crazy strength raced through my mind.

I swallowed hard and pushed harder against his arms, trying to break out of his iron grip even more ferociously.

"Belle, please," Grayson said, fighting me. "You don't-"

"Let me go!" I screamed. I could feel panic rising through my chest all over again with each second that he continued to hold me back. "Let me go now!"

Grayson's grip finally loosened and I was able to break free of his arms. He whimpered as I pulled away from him and ran across the room.

The sound came from deep in his throat, telling me it was his wolf. My body stiffened. I lost your wolf. Even when Grayson didn't want me, his wolf did. He fought for me.

But that wolf was trapped inside the body of a monster.

I got up and walked away from him. My arms automatically wrapped around my waist as if I could somehow shield myself from the undeniable pain I was about to endure.

I wanted to appear strong and unaffected by his presence, but that was impossible to do. I took a deep breath as my mark started to throb in pain again even though I was only a few feet away from him.

Shit, what the hell was wrong with me?

I closed my eyes tightly and took a deep breath, still standing on the opposite side of the room, putting as much space between us as possible.

It was tough though. He was like metal and I was the magnet. I was attracted to him.

After a few more seconds of silence, Grayson spoke. "Belle," he whispered. "I'm very sorry."

My eyes flew open. So I had heard it before. He was apologizing to me.

"Wh-what?" I asked, my voice cracking. "What you did you just say?"

Grayson got up but didn't approach me. "I'm really, really sorry. You have no idea how much I regret what I put you through. You have to believe me."

Something strange happened to me then. Hope filled my system. I hope maybe this nightmare is over.
Maybe Grayson wanted me back.

I swallowed that feeling down quickly, completely disgusted with myself for having that thought. I wouldn't let this man ruin my life again. I would not live with afraid of him.

And I definitely wouldn't let him into my life and trying to apologize for something that was simply unforgivable. I would never let Grayson be part of my life again.

Grayson opened his mouth to speak again.

"No," I snapped before he could continue. "Skirt."
I pointed to the door.

Grayson's eyebrows rose in shock. "What?"

I continued to point toward the door, never losing my composure. "Get out!"

Grayson's confusion was replaced by panic. "I know you're upset, Belle, and you have every right to be. But you don't understand what really happened-"

"And I don't care," I interrupted. "I don't know why you're here, and I don't care. I don't want you here. I never want to see you again."

"No, please don't say that. Belle, please, you have to listen to me..."

I swallowed back the scream of rage that threatened to bubble up in my throat. Was he seriously making demands of me?

"I don't have to do anything!" I screamed.

"I don't know what you're doing here, but the fact that you think you have the right to just come back into my life after everything you've done to me confirms that you are some kind of insane person. I don't owe you anything, not even a conversation. Then go away." I declared. "Now."

Grayson looked at me for a moment, but he didn't he stirred, his eyes gleaming with something unrecognizable. Was it anger?

A tiny bit of hesitation filled me, worried he might attack. I tried not to let that affect my confidence.

I told myself I owed him nothing – not my heart, not comfort, not even my time. I was in control now. And I wasn't going to let him boss me around anymore.

"Okay," he finally said. I could tell he was trying to reign in his wolf, his eyes changing from their normal green to a deep black. "You are right. You do not owe me anything. You are not obligated to listen to me."

I crossed my arms over my chest, not knowing what to say. I am not I expected him to admit defeat so easily.

"But I'm not leaving," Grayson continued. There it was. "I'm not leaving this town until you know what really happened between us. I will be one step behind you wherever you go, protecting you, making sure your pain is as little as possible."

He licked his lips, looking my body up and down, pity filling his eyes as he took in my battered form. I wanted to punch him in the face.

"And when you're ready, if you're ready, I hope you'll let me explain."

I blinked. "But-"

Grayson was suddenly in front of me, moving so fast he was a blur. I almost screamed in terror, but he grabbed my face and crushed my lips to his, silencing me.

I screamed in shock. He started to move his mouth against mine the way he had so many times before.

For a moment, I forgot where I was, and all that mattered was Grayson's lips against mine. I kissed him back, the desire in my chest too painful and persistent to ignore.

His tongue swept across the seam of my lips, and I automatically opened for him, letting his tongue enter my mouth. His taste exploded across my taste buds, and a needy moan left me.

Grayson growled and pulled me closer, wrapping his arms around me. Heat flooded my system and pooled in my core. My legs pressed together as the most intimate part of me began to throb, yearning for attention.

After a long moment, he carefully removed his mouth from mine, even though I tried to pull him back to me. He kept his hands firmly placed on either side of my face.

My breath caught when his forehead found mine, and he looked deep into my eyes.

Maintaining eye contact, he murmured, "Please don't make me go away. Not after meeting you again."

I studied him, memorizing every part of his face so I could remember him after he was gone.

"You broke me." I whispered.

His huge body shook at my words. "I know."
His thumb wiped away a tear that was running down my face. I hadn't even realized I was crying again.

"But please just listen to what I have to say. I need you. I need you, Belle."

More tears started to well up in my eyes even though I tried to stop them. "No, you do not know." I replied, trying to step back and break away from him, but failing when his grip on my face only tightened.

It wasn't painful, but it was relentless and final. "You never needed me."

He shook his head, keeping his forehead against mine.
"Yes I need. I need you. So much. I love you, Belle," he said.

My heart jumped in my chest. "And I know I don't deserve your love in return, but I need you to know that.
I love you. There is an explanation for everything. Please, if you just let me..."

I pulled away so suddenly that Grayson was caught off guard and wasn't able to catch me. I pushed his hands away from me, suddenly completely furious with myself for giving in to his touch so easily.

He knew that physical contact with him was my weakness and he was taking advantage of that knowledge. I couldn't believe I had let him go this far. I let him kiss me.
And I kissed him back!

"Do not touch me!" I screamed. "I won't let you explain because there's no explanation good enough to excuse what you did to me. It was unforgivable." I took a deep breath. "You do not love me. People who love each other don't treat each other like you treated me. They... They just don't." My voice cracked, which only made my fury grow. "That's why, if you ever approach me again, I won't hesitate to call the police. I will get a restraining order if I have to or do whatever it takes to get you out of my life. "I want you out of my life, Grayson. You understand me? I never, ever want to see you again."

He took a deep breath. His hands balled into fists at his sides, and for a moment I couldn't tell if he was holding back from comforting me or attacking me.

At this point, I wouldn't be surprised by either one, which terrified me.

"I won't leave you," he finally said. "Call the police if you want, but you're not going to like what happens when they get here. No one will take me away from you. I'm here, and I'm not leaving unless you're by my side. You're mine, Belle, like it or not. And sooner or later, you will listen to me."

"No." I shook my head, swallowing my endless tears. "Get out now."

Grayson watched me for a few seconds in silence before nodding stiffly. "I love you, Belle. Please come back to me soon."

He turned and walked out of the diner.

Chapter 18

BELLE

The moment Grayson left me, a sharp pain started. I shouldn't have been surprised. My body knew he was close and it was punishing me for sending him away. I wanted him so much by my side.

I sank into one of the booths next to me. Tears got out of me. I dropped my face into my hands and wept.

I could feel Grayson's eyes on me, his gaze feeling like a warm blanket against my skin. Sparks danced along my body, calming even though I'd never admitted it.

He was close by, probably watching me from somewhere. I didn't allow myself to look for it, though.

After a few long moments, I finally got my crying under control. I breathed through my pain and went to get my phone.

My hands shook as I pressed Liam's contact and brought him to my ear. I had no idea what had happened to him.

I knew Grayson was intimidating, but I still didn't expect Liam to run away when he showed up.

I remembered him standing in front of me, trying to protect me when Grayson tried to grab me, but he disappeared after that. And Grayson got me anyway.

What if he had done something to Liam? And if he had bruised?

After ringing for a minute, it went to Liam's voicemail. I hung up and looked at my phone in confusion.

My concern increased. What the hell happened to him?

I sent a quick message telling him I was so sorry for what had happened, that I was fine and to call me ASAP.

My eyes looked around the empty cafeteria in discouragement. Did everyone run away when Grayson showed up? How did he clean the place like that?

I sighed and grabbed a broom before going over to the broken door, starting to sweep broken glass all over the floor from when Grayson walked in.

I needed a distraction, and cleaning up this mess would have to do.

"What the fuck is going on here?" a voice shouted from suddenly.

I jumped, turning to look at my boss, Jerry. He came through the broken door I was cleaning, his face furious.

His eyes scanned the broken glass door and then all of the empty booths before settling on me. "What the fuck did you do?" he demanded.

Before I could respond, my mark burned with pain. I sighed. I immediately looked to the window, knowing Grayson was the cause. I couldn't see it, but I could definitely feel it. My brand could too.

Jerry waved his hand in front of my face, getting my attention once more. "Hey, I asked you a question! What the fuck did you do in my diner?"

My eyes widened. "H..." I slowly got up on shaky legs. "Some, uh, guy came along and broke down the door."

Okay, not the best excuse, but it was the best I could come up with given my current state.

"Some guy? Did this guy chase away all my customers too?" asked Jerry. He looked a little restless and nervous. "As he was?"

"He... He was my ex." I swallowed. "I don't know why he was here."

Jerry's eyes narrowed. "You stole from this guy or something like this? What did you do to make him so mad?"

"I don't know why he was here," I repeated. "But he won't do it again. He won't come back."

Jerry didn't look convinced. "Can you promise that?"

I hesitated. No, I really couldn't promise that. In fact, I shouldn't say that if everything Grayson told me was true. I could only hope that he would stay away from me like I asked. "Well no-

Jerry scoffed.

"But I'm going to work for free for the rest of the day." I quickly continued. "To make up for any profit that was lost."

That made him stop. "The next two days," he demanded. "To make up for lost profit and for breaking the door. Or you can kiss your job goodbye, baby doll."

"Okay," I agreed. I had to bite my tongue so I didn't say anything about his new nickname for me. "The next two days."

Jerry grunted before pushing past me. "I want this all cleaned up before I go back.

"And go fix your makeup or something before the customers come back," he said, pointing to my puffy eyes and tear-stained face. "You look like a mess."

He shook his head before disappearing behind the kitchen doors.

My relief was strong. Grayson may have come back into my life and insisted on ruining it, but at least I wouldn't lose my job today.

"The piece on the corner table is looking at you," Candice whispered to me as she placed her tray next to mine behind the counter.

"He's been looking at you since you walked in. He even asked to be placed in your section."

I didn't need to look up to know who she was talking about. I felt his presence the moment he came in.

God, Grayson, why can't you just leave it alone?

An hour has passed since Grayson found me and turned my world upside down. Customers came in quickly after that, some returning from before, although they looked disoriented.

I don't blame them. Grayson was a very scary guy, especially now that he looked like a giant on steroids.

When I asked Candice what happened, she just shrugged and said she had no idea what I was talking about. I thought it was strange, but I didn't have time to think in that.

Now we were just as busy as ever, and while this was what I thought I wanted when my shift started, I was finding it hard to keep up now.

All my previous energy was gone, probably because Grayson was around.

It was pretty obvious now that I was so happy this morning because the mate bond was growing stronger as Grayson approached me.

But now that he was literally less than twenty feet away from me, my body was trying to give me the final push, pressing to go to him, causing excruciating pain that I knew only Grayson could end.

I hated that my brand burned once more, worse than ever and that my body ached like I'd just finished a vigorous workout.

I tried my best to smile politely at Candice. "You know what? I give you full permission to sit at his table if you think he's so cute. He's all yours."

"He is sure?" Candice squealed, her voice rising an octave with excitement. "He seems a lot more interested in you than me. Don't look now, but he's literally looking at you like he wants nothing more than to play you."

her at one of those tables and do what she wants with you.
Definitely Christian Gray vibes.”

My cheeks turned bright red. I knew that Grayson could hear every word Candice was saying and probably found it all very amusing.

I would bet money he would be wearing a huge smile and cocky in the face if I turned and looked at him now.

“How much time do you think a person needs to spend in gym to look like this?” Candice continued to dream.

“I've literally never seen a more perfect person than him. He's skinny but huge at the same time, and oh my God, those green eyes! I could get lost in those eyes.

“And I bet he has insane abs under the shirt he's wearing. Just look at the way he's stretching his muscles. I would love-”

“OK!” I cut her off before she could tell me exactly what she wanted to do with my ex-mate's abs. I hated the uncontrollable jealousy that threatened to consume me.

It almost made me regret giving her Grayson's desk. “No need to elaborate. You obviously like him, so go ahead and grab his desk.

I'll get yours.”

“No,” someone mumbled behind me. I turned to look at Jerry, who I hadn't even noticed had approached us. How long had he been standing there? “Without changing tables,” he said.

“Why not?” Candice asked, her voice coming out whiny.

“Because Belle needs to prove to me that she wants her job,” Jerry replied. “What it means to deal with difficult customers.”

I gave him a strained smile, even as my palms started to sweat at the thought of having to talk to Grayson again. “Okay,” I replied stiffly.

“Lucky bitch,” Candice whispered in my ear, smiling as he passed by me.

Jerry was still watching me as I walked over to Grayson, who was sitting at the corner table. Every step I took toward him made me feel hot and fuzzy inside, and I hated it.

“What the hell are you doing here?” I demanded when I finally reached his table. I was sure to keep my voice low so no one around us could hear.

Grayson raised an eyebrow. The hint of a smile appeared on his lips. “Come sit down, beautiful.” He patted the seat next to him. “Have breakfast with me. You need food.”

I looked at him. I knew this act. Grayson could be charming and affectionate when he wanted to be. I wasn't falling for it. “I'm working,” I replied. “And I thought I told you to leave me alone.”

Grayson leaned back casually, crossing his massive arms over his equally massive chest. “And I thought I told you I would never let you out of my sight again.”

“So you've been watching me,” I accused.

Grayson smiled. “The mating sparks dancing along your skin at my gaze feel good, baby?” Your voice was smooth

like butter. "I know I'm enjoying the feel of them right now."

My hips abruptly hit the edge of the table I was standing in front of. I looked down, realizing I was unconsciously gravitating towards him.

The only reason I didn't fall into his lap was because of the huge metal table that separated us.

My attention returned to Grayson. I felt my cheeks go red, hoping he hadn't noticed what I had. But, of course, he had.

His eyebrows raised, his eyes looking into the my hips, licking my lips.

"Stop this!" I scolded, shifting uncomfortably.

Grayson's gaze lazily roamed my way before meeting my eyes once more.

My fingernails dug into my palms, extremely close to punching Grayson's stupid grin into his stupid face.

"What did you do with Liam?" I demanded.

Grayson's casual expression quickly turned into a frown. "Who?"

I rolled my eyes. "You know who I'm talking about. Liam, Liam Blackwood. My friend. He disappeared after trying to protect me from you. Tell me what you did to him."

Grayson shook his head, a muscle jumping in his jaw. "I have no idea what you're talking about. But any man who catches your eye shouldn't be around you anyway."

My nostrils flared. He was acting too casually to be telling the truth.

"If you hurt him," I began, "I swear I'll kill you. I don't care how big and intimidating you got. I will not allow you to hurt the people I care about."

His eyes narrowed at my threat, automatically darkening. "Care?" he repeated. "Exactly what is the extent of your feelings towards this man?"

I knew in that moment that I had said the wrong thing. I didn't want Grayson to have any more reason to hurt Liam.

"Like I said before, he's my friend. Just it. And I would like to know what you did with it."

"I didn't do anything to harm your friend," Grayson replied. "I think it's a good thing this man isn't around anymore. I don't like other men around my mate."

My temper rose, hot and sharp. I was extremely close to picking up the silverware on the table and stabbing his hand.

"I am not your mate. You have absolutely no right to act possessive of me. Did you give up."

A low growl left his chest, making him take a step back. "I did no such thing. You're mine, Belle. You always were and always will be. Now, sit down and have breakfast with me. You look exhausted, and I can hear your stomach rumbling from across the room."

"I already told you I'm working." I glanced quickly over my shoulder, relieved to see that Jerry was no longer watching me.

"And if you think I'm serving you, you're very, very wrong. I'd rather eat glass."

His expression softened. "I don't want you to serve me, Belle." His voice was much softer than before. "I just want you to eat. When was the last time you really ate?"

"That is none of your business."

"It definitely is," Grayson retorted.

My jaw tightened. "Seriously, I don't understand why you care. You didn't care when I couldn't get food from your packhouse. I was starving, too scared to get food for me and you –

you....."

I swallowed hard, remembering Grayson hitting me and telling me I was more trouble than I was worth after he found out I wasn't eating.

"I don't even know why I'm telling you this. I will not eat with you. I will not serve you. I will never do anything to you again. Now leave me alone."

I turned to leave but was stopped when Grayson grabbed my arm. He stood up, looking at me with determined eyes. His grim expression only softened as he focused on the unshed tears welling up in my eyes.

I quickly cleaned them up.

“You don't have to serve me. You don't even have to eat with me, but I'm not going anywhere. As long as you're here, so will I be. You are my mate. With pain. The closer I am to you, the better for you.”

"I am fine." I bit back. I pulled my arm from his grip, taking several long strides back to prove my point.

What I didn't tell him was that my mark burned brighter and brighter with every step I took. "I've spent several months without you and I'm doing great."

Grayson looked at the new space between us. “You don't have to lie to me, Belle. I can feel your pain through the bond. And I can see it in your eyes.”

He took a step forward, gently placing his hand on my arm. His thumb stroked the skin gently. “You are not alone,” he said quietly. “I am in pain too.”

I knew I should take his hand off me, but the sparks that came from his touch felt too good. "You are?" I asked.

Even though I was mad at him, something inside me hated hearing that. I didn't want him to feel pain. I mean, I wanted him to jump off a cliff, but...

Grayson nodded. "Of course I am. I may not be experiencing the same thing you are because I'm not human like you are, but I'm still hurting so much. You have no idea how much it kills me to be away from you. And it kills me right now to be this close to you and not be able to touch you to comfort you. Our mate bond is starving.”

“Keep working on that whole 'no touching' thing,” I told him, pulling my arm out of his grasp once more, even as my body screamed in opposition.

“I have to get back to work. Leave me alone. I am Talking serious.”

I didn't look at him as I walked away and luckily he didn't fight me as he watched me go.

Chapter 19

GRAYSON

My jaw clenched as I watched Belle run around the cafeteria, working hard.

It was physically painful to stand in my seat while my mate, the absolute love of my life, pushed her body beyond its limits right in front of me.

And there was nothing I could do about it.

I was sitting there for hours. The only reason I hadn't already attacked her and dragged her ass back home was that I understood where she was coming from.

I was there; I witnessed everything Azazel did to her. And she thought it was me. She had every right to be upset. She should be upset.

This was a shock to her. She needed time to process that I was back in her life and that I still wanted her.

She needed to see that I wasn't going to push her, that I was willing to work to regain her trust and let her come to me. This whole situation was in your hands.

But that didn't mean that your constant rejection of me it didn't frustrate me like hell.

I was sorely tempted to use Mortar power to convince her to listen to me, but I knew it wasn't the right thing to do. It wouldn't solve anything. She needed to be in control.

I needed her to decide to come to me and listen to me. I couldn't hope to gain her trust back by using my powers to force her to listen to me.

But being away from her was killing me. Not holding her in my arms, easing her pain, tending to her mark, telling her how much I loved her – I wasn't sure how much more I could take.

I couldn't get the way she looked at me when I found her out of my mind. There was so much fear, so much pain in those beautiful blue eyes. I never wanted her to look at me like that.

And then the panic attack started...

I knew she saw my red eyes that I couldn't hide when I walked into the diner. I couldn't keep my vampire back no matter how hard I tried.

He wanted to see our mate and fought to the front of the my conscience to do so.

Thankfully though, Belle didn't ask about my change in appearance or red eyes, and I was able to hide them before she saw them again.

Perhaps she thought she imagined them, although that it was probably just wishful thinking on my part.

The moment Belle started to panic, I ordered everyone out of the diner, using the power of the Mortars, telling them not to come back until I left the diner.

It did them no harm; in fact, they wouldn't remember anything.

The only person I haven't told to get out of my way immediately it was the vampire boy. Liam Blackwood.

I knew who he was right away. Jeffery's son Blackwood is a powerful vampire in his own right.

He also knew who I was. I saw the recognition in his eyes as he stopped in front of my panicked mate, trying to shield her from me.

To his credit though, he didn't look that scared. how much I expected him to be.

It still took everything in me not to rip his heart out and shove it down his throat when he tried to keep me away from my Belle.

The only reason I didn't exactly do that was because I could smell Belle on him and his on her. They were obviously friends.

Or used to be. I wouldn't allow him near my girl ever again.

That's why I told him to walk to Canada. Maybe it was an odd order, but I needed him away from her, and it was the only thing I could think of.

He was a vampire, so he must have been less than a quarter of the way there now.

Yes, I lied to her when she asked me if I had done something for him. But she would have liked the alternative much less.

He wouldn't be back for days, giving me enough time to gain Belle's trust back and get her as far away from here as possible without causing a scene by killing her friend in the meantime.

Murder probably wasn't the best way to get her to talk to me again, although it was becoming increasingly difficult to convince my wolf and vampire side of that fact.

I looked for Belle for months. I didn't think of anything else. How could I? She was my mate, and she was missing.

I had no idea where she was or if she was safe because she had her damn mental barriers up the entire time.

All it took was my former beta trying to kill her for her to break down her walls and finally let me in to find out where she was. And now...

Now she was right in front of me, and I had to force myself to stay away from her.

She was in pain. She was moving slower and looked exhausted, with huge bags under her eyes. I could tell she wasn't sleeping. Wasn't she eating too?

I watched as she took an order for two women at a table on the other side of the diner, my fists clenching under the table as I noticed for the hundredth time that she had lost considerable weight.

She was still as beautiful as ever, no doubt, but she was no longer healthy. My wolf was buzzing in my chest, furious at the fact that our companion was not well taken care of.

Male werewolves took great pride in providing for their females, and I was completely failing mine. It was killing me.

The little outfit she was wearing didn't help to hide all the weight she had lost either. It also didn't help to fuel the fire that was building inside me.

The short skirt ended just below her ass, and the blouse she wore hugged her breasts like a second skin.

The white apron she wore helped to accentuate her already generous-looking curves, matching the white curves of her feet that elongated her legs. God, she was beautiful.

But, unfortunately, I wasn't the only person who noticed her beauty. Every time I caught another man's eyes

lingering a little too long on her, an uncontrollable fury consumed me.

I couldn't even stop myself from snarling at them, baring my fangs and red eyes, barely satisfied. when they fled in fear. They were lucky I didn't kill them on the spot.

But then again, I didn't think killing people was a good way to regain Belle's trust. It was tempting, though. Extremely tempting.

I watched with an unyielding gaze as Belle hurried behind the front counter to submit an order she had just taken. After handing it to the kitchen, she made a move to turn around but stopped abruptly.

I stiffened, watching as her shoulders rose and fell with a deep breath, and her entire body slumped forward, leaning slightly against the counter in front of her.

She was exhausted. She had been working non-stop since I got here this morning, and it was late now – almost 5pm.

It was clear to me that my partner wasn't sleeping, she wasn't eating, she was in more pain than I could understand why I was here, and to top it off, she was working herself to the bone.

I didn't know how much longer I could just sit and watch this.

I came extremely close to breaking my promise to myself not to use my alpha tone or Mortar power on her and force her to listen to me so we could end this whole mess and I could have her in my arms again.

But I forced myself to be patient.

Belle tried to turn around but fell forward, tripping over her own feet. Luckily, she managed to grab the counter next to her so she didn't fall. She looked disoriented and tired.

I was on my feet and across the room in seconds. I stayed behind her, pressing myself against her in case she needed to lean on me. I carefully placed my hands on her waist.

Her body tensed and her breathing quickened.

"You need a break." I growled in her ear.

She squeezed her eyes shut. "You can't come back here," she whispered back to me, making sure her voice was low enough that no one else could hear her.

She nudged me with her elbow, but her attempts were weak and useless.

"You need a break," I repeated.

"I'm fine," she fumed, as stubborn as ever. "Me leave it alone."

His angry curses were adorable.

"You've been working for nine hours straight without stopping to eat or drink water. And don't even get me started on the damn shoes you're wearing, if you can call it that."

I looked down at the white heels hugging her feet. "You need to sit down, eat a little and rest. I'm not asking."

She tried to get out of my grip, but I wouldn't let her. She looked around at all the customers. their heads

they were turned, watching our interaction. "Please, Grayson. You are making a scene."

I do not care. "You won't like the scene I'm going to do if you don't do what I say."

"I would be more than happy to put you to sleep right now and throw you over my shoulder the same way I did on that plane to Paris, if that's what it takes for you to take care of yourself."

His eyes locked with mine, widening. "Y- you put to sleep? As?"

"You became a member of my pack the moment when I laid eyes on you. I used my alpha tone on you to calm you down when you were panicking."

"I haven't used it since, but I would have no problem using it now as it's a health issue." I didn't bother to mention that I now had the power of the Mortar as well. All in due time.

His eyes flashed with anger. "How do you dare? You don't have the right to control or take advantage of me in this way."

She pushed at my chest but stumbled back as another dizziness hit her from lack of food.

I growled and grabbed her before she could fall, pulling her against my chest. I prided myself on how his body relaxed against mine, forced to give in to the mate bond even as his mind still struggled.

"I would never use it to take advantage of you, just for your own safety." I squeezed her as close to my body as I could before bending down and softly kissing her infected mark.

I needed her to calm down, and kissing that spot did just that. She melted against me even more, letting take the full weight of it with a heaving sigh.

And then the sweet scent of her arousal filled the air around us.

I held back a moan as I breathed her in, loving the effect I had on her and the way she squirmed against me, trying to get closer.

She was always so receptive when it came to my touch, and I couldn't get enough. Obviously wanting more, Belle cocked her head to the side, her small hands clutching my shirt.

It was extremely unusual that we, as a mated couple, had not completed the mating process yet. His arousal was the mate bond pushing us together.

And now that I had her, it was only going to get worse until I took care of her. the way she needed.

But now was not the time for that. she needed rest, don't get excited.

With great difficulty, I managed to lift my lips from her mark and look at her. She was obviously still a little disoriented from the kiss. Her eyes were bright and her pretty lips pursed.

My own body was humming from his touch. My wolf howled in my mind, urging me to continue with what we were doing. I was tempted to follow your orders.

It felt so good to finally hold her again, even under the circumstances.

But the exhausted look in Belle's eyes and the way she her body swaying, barely able to support itself, was enough to hold me back.

We could do all that later and only when she was ready, not when the bond was putting pressure on her. Now though, she needed me to take care of her.

"You're exhausted, Belle," I whispered to her, passing my nose against her temple.

She was slowly starting to come out of her trance. Realizing what I had just done to her, her expression turned into a frown, accompanied by a sweet blush. "Let me go. I am fine."

I shook my head and then ran my thumb over the dark bags under her eyes. "You are not. You needs rest and food. And I won't leave you alone until you get it."

She studied me for a moment, deciding what to do. Finally, she said, "Why do you care?"

I turned back. "What?"

"Why do you care?" she repeated, her voice tired and calm as she looked around us again. People started to lose interest in what we were doing, but she still looked wary.

"You didn't mind when I was starving in your pack house. Or when you sent me to sleep in a cold basement room. Or when you left me to fend for myself while all your pack members ignored and avoided me. Oh, and do I even have to mention the time you hit me so hard you broke my cheek?"

She laughed bitterly. "You don't care about me, Grayson. You're just trying to get on my good side so you can take me back to your pack and use me for power. I'm not falling for it. I don't believe for a second that you don't have some ulterior motive in all of this."

Hearing about everything Azazel put her through made my blood boil and my wolf surge, turning my eyes a deep black.

I was grateful the vampire side of me seemed to have better control of its emotions and chose to stay inside, worried about scaring our mate while she was in such a fragile state.

A loud growl reverberated in my chest before I could stop it. If customers weren't looking to us before, they definitely were now. All conversation ceased, leaving the restaurant in complete silence.

None of that mattered to me. They could look all they wanted. The only thing that mattered to me at that moment was how Belle's expression changed from enraged to terrified in a matter of seconds.

I didn't want to startle her. I just needed her to know that what I was about to say next was serious.

"I care because you are mine." I growled in a low tone. "And if you let me explain what really happened in my pack house, then you would know about it."

I grabbed her waist, pulling her ass against my front. "You're lucky I don't throw you over my shoulder like a caveman and drag you back home.

Especially since I had to watch you walk around in this little outfit all day, showing skin in places

Chapter 38

BELLE

Grayson couldn't keep his hands off me in the morning following.

I kind of loved it.

He had woken me up extremely early with gentle kisses on my signal.

He had been getting constant updates from the pilot of his private plane all night, and the moment he knew it was close, he wanted us to get up and moving.

We took a quick shower and then got dressed. Of course, Grayson got all snarly when I put on Laila's black leggings and a T-shirt instead of her oversized clothes.

Laila even let me wear a pair of sneakers too, which I was extremely grateful for.

"Fucking vampire scent," Grayson continued fuming under his breath once I was dressed. I rolled my eyes. He should be grateful it was Laila's clothes and not Liam's.

We were about to leave the room when hurried footsteps began to approach.

"Belle! Belle!" someone yelled.

I ran to the door and flung it open before Grayson could catch me. prevent, coming face to face with a panicked Laila.

"My father is a traitor," she said, her words spilling out before I could even react to the large tears streaming down her cheeks. his face.

"Liam is holding him, but my dad told Azazel where you are. You need to get out of here. Now."

Grayson had me in his arms before she even finished speaking. I didn't even have time to process what was going on or what Laila had just told us.

My companion hugged me close to his body, pressed my face into his neck to protect my eyes, and then he ran.

The intense wind made my hair fly in all directions as it ran at a speed that made everything pass us by. I tried to look up, but Grayson's firm grip kept my head forced down.

I expected to be there like this for a while. But just a few seconds later, we came to an abrupt halt, Grayson's entire body moving forward. I yelled in surprise.

"Grayson?" I asked when he didn't move for several seconds. I could feel her heart beating rapidly in her chest.

The sound of car wheels screeched in front of us. One door opened.

"Come in." Relief filled me at the sound of Liam's voice.

He was fine. Or at least it seemed like it was.

Grayson finally let go of my neck, allowing me to look up as he carried me to the passenger side door of an absolutely amazing blue Lamborghini.

"Liam!" I exclaimed when I saw him in the driver's seat, a frown painted over his handsome features.

I didn't have time to ask any questions or try to figure out what the hell was going on because, the next

The thing I knew, Liam backed up, not even waiting for Grayson to close the car door all the way.

Grayson pulled me onto his lap in the passenger seat and wrapped his arms around me, acting as my seat belt. security.

I screamed as Liam burst through his dad's driveway gates – nearly hitting an oncoming car and swerving the car so he was speeding down the street in front of his dad's house.

“Azazel knows where you are,” Liam hurriedly explained once the car was stable. “He knows about the plane and your plan to take Belle back to Croatia with you. He's coming after you.

“He will try to stop you two.”

It was then that I got a good look at my friend. My mouth went dry. “Liam,” I said uneasily, “you're covered in blood.”

He had red spots on his arms and chest.

The fact that he was wearing a white T-shirt only made the bright blood color more pronounced, and with his eyes to match, he looked like something out of a horror movie.

Liam wiped his hand over his mouth – which I now noticed had blood at the corners – and ran his tongue over the sharp fangs. “Is not mine.” He growled in response.

I could see his muscles tense under his skin and his dark brows coming together.

“Then whose is it?” I asked carefully, fearing already know the answer.

He hesitated for just a moment before answering.

"From my father. He is dead. I killed him."

"Liam..." What do you say to the person you just killed the father himself?

"Motherfucker earned it," Liam continued, his voice coming out as a hiss. "He has been in contact with Azazel since the day that Adalee appeared. He was going to take him to the house. Ambush you both."

I put my hand on Liam's knee. Grayson stiffened beneath me, but he didn't stop me. "I'm sorry," I said.

"Whether he deserved it or not, what you did couldn't have been easy."

Liam suddenly swerved the car, quickly changing lanes. I hadn't even noticed that we had turned onto a highway. He was passing all the other cars. Blaring horns followed behind us.

I swallowed. -Liam, are you okay?

"I'm fine," Liam replied. "My only priority is get you out of here."

Grayson grabbed my wrist – I didn't even realize I was still holding Liam's leg – and placed his hand in mine.

He held me closer.

"Where is Azazel now?" Grayson asked.

Liam's eyes darted to the rearview mirror, looking back. "He's coming after you now. I wouldn't be surprised if he was in one of the cars behind us right now.

"We need to get you on that plane and in the air."

"How long until the plane gets here?" I asked Grayson.

"The plane hasn't arrived yet?" Liam fired. "You got to be kidding me."

"Should be landing now," Grayson growled through gritted teeth.

"So does that mean you can go slower? Please?" I asked. Grayson's thumb began to graze my arm, trying to calm me down. His chest vibrated with silent purrs.

Liam shook his head. "We can't let them get to us."

At the speed we were going, there was no chance of that.
to happen.

Liam reached down and grabbed something from under his thigh. My eyes widened when I saw what it was. A weapon.

Grayson snarled, ready to destroy the threat, but Liam quickly placed her in my lap before he could do anything.

"This is for you." Liam explained grimly.

Without taking your eyes off the road. "I got it for you a week or so ago to keep in your apartment, but it never got around to giving it to you."

He met my eyes for half a second. "In case you need to defend yourself."

I looked down at the gun in my lap. I had never used a gun before. I wasn't even sure I'd seen one in real life.

They honestly terrify me one of the only
tools made exclusively to kill and injure, so easily misused.

Grayson took it. "Do you know how to use it?"

I shook my head.

He explained it to me in a gentle tone, probably feeling my nerves, showing me the safety and how to hold it correctly.

After double-checking that the safety was on, he slipped it into the waistband of my leggings, tucking my T-shirt over the top so it was out of sight.

After the scariest car ride of my entire life, we were stopping at Machias Valley airport.

"Keep driving," Grayson told Liam. "Get on the track."

I screamed as Liam ran over a curb, causing the entire car to bounce. My head nearly hit the ceiling.

Grayson pulled me closer to him and rubbed his huge hand over my leg. His arms were so tight around me it almost hurt. "Try not to kill my mate, Blackwood."

With such a good car I was shocked at how reckless Liam was driving. Although I was sure the Lamborghini belonged to his father. Guess he wouldn't need it anymore, would he?

"Is this really cool?" I asked. We were on the runway now with several planes around us. The long runway was almost empty, however, with no signs of planes getting ready to take off.

Liam scoffed. "Your boyfriend is the king of the fucking world. Everything is cool."

Before I had time to process this, Grayson spoke. "This is the plane."

I followed his line of sight. In the distance, there was a plane that had just stopped, the same one that had taken us from France to Minnesota.

I knew because it had a big blue stripe on the side and it was smaller than all other planes.

When we stopped next to the plane, the stairs to board were already going down. Grayson carried me out of the car before pulling me to my feet and leading me up the stairs.

"You know," a familiar voice began from inside the plane. He rounded the corner, revealing his smiling face. "Private planes are very bad for the environment."

My heart leapt in my chest. "Elijah!" I exclaimed.

He looked fine. I was relieved to see that it was the same old Elijah I had known before. He hadn't grown a foot or appeared to be taking testosterone.

Grayson released me, and Elijah met me halfway down the stairs with open arms. I practically threw myself at him, more than happy to see him again.

"Fuck, it's good to see you again, Luna," Elijah said against my shoulder, pulling me closer to him. "I was so happy when I heard the alpha found you. You have no idea how worried I was."

I leaned back to look at him, smiling brightly. "I missed you. I've been worried about you too."

"Fine, that's enough," Grayson growled. I hadn't even noticed him coming up behind me. He grabbed my elbow and pulled me down a step.

I had to stop myself from pushing him down the stairs.
trying to get away from my friend after not seeing him for months.

If your wolf hadn't been so close to the surface, I probably would have.

"Sorry, Alpha," Elijah said immediately, tilting his head to the side in submission.

Grayson grunted in response, dismissing his apology.

"What are you doing here?" I asked Elijah.

"You'll have time to catch up once we're back in the air," Grayson said before Elijah could respond. He took me inside the plane.

"We need to resupply, Alpha." The pilot appeared from behind from the cabin door. "It will take about an hour."

"No," Grayson replied. "We can stop at another airport, but we need to get out of Maine."

The pilot didn't hesitate before nodding vigorously. "Yes, Alpha. Can we take off in ten minutes?"

Grayson's nostrils flared. "Make five."

The pilot nodded once more and then took off running.

"Eeek!" another, more feminine voice called out. everyone's attention he turned toward the back of the plane, where the voice was coming from.

Without warning, a small black haired body came flying towards me. But before she could reach me, Grayson reached out, stopping the person.

"Minnie," Grayson said in a dismissive tone. He had his hand extended to the girl's forehead, holding her away.

me like a parent would a misbehaving child.

“Would you try not to flatten my mate?”

The girl, Minnie, looked at me with the brightest smile I had ever seen. I knew right away that she was a vampire due to her glowing red eyes that matched Liam's.

“I am so excited to meet you.” Minnie said to me. She was practically bouncing with excitement.

“I've heard so much about you. I can't wait to have another girl in the palace to talk to. Well, I mean, I have my sister, but she always has her nose in a book.

“Did you bring Minnie?” Grayson asked, directing his question at Elijah. He took his hand off her forehead, allowing Minnie to jump.

“Try telling her not to do what she wants,” Elijah replied. “It's not going well. She wanted to meet Luna. I was just lucky that she was asleep halfway through the flight, so she didn't say much to me. I think we woke her up.”

Grayson glared at the small vampire.

Minnie scoffed, apparently not at all threatened by the intimidating hybrid twice her size. “Your mate doesn't like me. He is an extremely grumpy person.”

I automatically knew we would be friends. A laugh escaped my mouth. “Don't take it personally. He really doesn't like anyone,” I told her. I looked at Grayson. “Except me, I guess.”

Grayson's eyes turned their normal forest green for a single second as he looked at me. He ran his thumb over my jaw lovingly.

When I looked back at Minnie, her eyes were wide and her lips were curled over her mouth as if she was trying hard not to speak.

"You two are so cute," she finally blurted out. "AND good to see King Grayson at peace."

Elijah, who was beside me, leaned in to whisper something.

"Who is the tall, dark, brooding character over there? AND are we aware of the fact that he is covered in blood?"

I looked at Liam. He was standing in the doorway of the plane, looking away with a deep frown on his face.

"This is Liam," I said quietly.

Elijah's eyebrows rose. "Hang on. You mean Liam, as in Liam Blackwood?"

I nodded once, surprised that he knew his name. There was so much about the supernatural world I still had to learn.

"He's cute," Minnie whispered to me, eyeing Liam up and down like he was a piece of meat.

My lips curved. "He can probably hear you too." Liam didn't react. But I knew he had incredible hearing and listened to everything we said.

She smiled. "Oh, I know."

"Blackwood." Grayson growled. He looked like he just remembered that Liam was here now that we were talking about him. "What the fuck are you doing on my plane?"

"Do you think I'm going to leave Belle alone after being the only person taking care of her for months?" Liam answered as if it was an obvious explanation. "Not going to happen, werewolf."

"Are you the protector of the moon?" Minnie asked him. "Oh, my God, you must be! I didn't think she would find him so soon. But I think you came when she needed you most, just as the prophecy said you would."

"Minnie," Grayson interrupted, irritated. "What the hell are you is talking?"

Minnie frowned. "What do you mean?"

"Liam is no Belle," Grayson snapped, his voice deepening.

Minnie took a step back. "I think you could be wrong about that. He has all the qualities of the Queen's Guardian."

Liam walked over to us, suddenly interested in the conversation. "The queen's guardian? What is that?"

Minnie giggled. "It's completely you. You are the protector of the moon." She turned to Grayson.

"Didn't you read the prophecy?"

"What prophecy?" I asked.

"The prophecy that said I would be king," explained Grayson, looking at Minnie for bringing it up. "Of course I read it. I'm Belle's protector, not some random vampire."

"It is not how it works. You won't be able to be by your mate's side all the time when you're king. The prophecy stated that she would have someone to protect her, just as Queen Evangeline did."

Queen Evangeline? Another name I didn't recognize.

"How do you know that?" I asked.

Minnie looked slowly at Liam, a small smile playing on her lips. "I can feel his soul. is full of kindness, bravery and good will. He will be the perfect guardian."

Liam shifted, looking at Minnie with humble discomfort.

"That and the birthmark on his arm," added Minnie.

Everyone's eyes fell on the large birthmark that took up half of Liam's left arm. It crept up the top half of his bicep and under the collar of his shirt.

It was barely visible, just a shade or two lighter than her normal skin. It was the first time I had realized this in the several months I had known him and spent time with him.

"It's the same one that Queen Evangeline's guardian had," murmured Elijah in awe. "It's amazing. Except hers wasn't a birthmark. It was a scar from a burn."

Liam, who was also looking at the birthmark as if seeing it for the first time, looked up. "Then this does that mean I can stay on the plane now?"

Chapter 39

GRAYSON

I had to keep reminding myself not to hold Belle too tightly as I held her against me during the flight to Zaweth. I pressed my nose into her hair, inhaling her scent into my lungs.

I was crazy. For more than one reason.

I was mad that Liam Blackwood was on my plane, following us back to the supernatural realm. I was mad that Azazel Mortar was hunting my only reason for living.

And I was angry that I had continually failed to be Belle's mate.

She didn't deserve any of this. But to hell if I didn't try to make it all worthwhile.

Belle was sleeping on my lap, my arms wrapped around her. She had passed out halfway through the flight after Minnie had been babbling in the seat across from us.

I could tell that Belle liked Minnie, and that pleased me. She was going to be a good friend to my Belle. I could already tell.

I felt a slight sense of regret in my stomach for the way I've treated Minnie since I've known her.

Liam was in the seat next to Minnie – keeping a I look over at us as usual – and Elijah was in the seat next to me and Belle, fast asleep.

The plane was starting to descend. And the closer we got to the ground, the greater my anxiety grew. That was

starting to feel a little too much like the night I lost Belle – the night Azazel took over my body.

I wasn't going to let anything happen to her ever again. USA would protect from any threat. Even if this threat was eu.

Belle shifted against me, her eyes fluttering open. She looked at me.

"Are you well?" she asked. His hand cupped my chin, running his fingers over it. "I can feel your thoughts racing."

I made a face. The last thing I wanted was to wake her up. Or let her worry. "I am well my love. You should go back to sleep. I didn't mean to wake you up."

I could tell by her expression that she wasn't buying any of my shit. "You didn't sleep at all last night. You also need to rest, you know?"

"I will rest when you are safe."

His lips curved, not liking my answer. "You are always so concerned about taking care of me," she said. "You've been through a lot. Someone needs to make sure you're okay."

I kissed her forehead. "I'm fine as long as I'm with you. You are all I need."

Someone made an exaggerated gagging noise next to us. "Is it too late to leave?"

When I looked to my right, Liam, eyes still closed and arms crossed over his chest, was looking disgusted.

"We can all hear you."

"There are fifteen seats on this plane," I snapped. "Find another place to fucking sit."

The fact that Liam was on this plane now was a miracle. It took everything in me not to throw the cocky bastard out the window. I didn't give a shit if he was Belle's "guardian".

It wasn't until Belle explained Liam's strange need to care for her when she arrived at Evergreen that I really began to consider how valuable he could be.

Try as I might, I wouldn't be able to take care of Belle 24/7 when we got to Zaweth. It might be helpful to have someone protect her when I couldn't.

I just hated that it had to be him.

One thing was for sure though I would read the prophecy at least a dozen more times once we reached Zaweth.

Until then, though, I planned to ignore it. it was the only way to preserve my sanity.

Minnie giggled. His red eyes were looking at us and a little jarring in the dim lighting. I hadn't even realized she was awake. "I think it's sweet. He loves her."

Belle's lips curved a little as a sweet flush crept over her cheeks. Liam snorted and turned his body towards the wall of the plane, going back to sleep.

"So... how long before we land?" Belle asked me. I could hear the nervousness in his casual tone. She was trying to hide how anxious she was, as if that were possible.

I tucked a loose strand of hair behind her ear.
"About an hour."

She nodded. "OK. Excellent. That is great." I didn't miss the way she dropped her gaze.

"You have nothing to worry about, Belle. I will be with you all the time."

"You said that last time."

"There was an evil vampire waiting to take control of your body last time," Elijah muttered, stepping out of the room.

your sleep.

"I thought Zaweth was full of vampires," Belle pointed.

"Not the evil kind," said Minnie, smiling brightly. "We are cool."

Belle didn't say anything in response.

"This time is different," Elijah began, "because you know how to protect yourself. You know how to run away or call for help if something happens."

"But nothing will happen," I said. "I won't let anything happen."

Belle didn't say anything as she settled into my lap, her back pressed against my chest. She grabbed my arms and wrapped them around her as tight as they would go.

I could feel his heart racing against my skin.

I picked her up and carried her to the back of the plane where no one was sitting. I adjusted her in my lap so that she was straddling me, our faces inches apart.

Belle looked at me with her big, beautiful blue eyes.

"What is it?" she asked.

She smelled so good. So, so good. She was my aphrodisiac guys. My already hard cock jerked in my pants.

I could tell Belle felt it underneath her because her scent sweetened, and she moved her pretty ass against him. gently. The movement was innocent.

She wasn't trying to tempt me, but that didn't change the fact that if it weren't for the other people on this plane, my fingers would be deep in her pussy, pushing in and out until she screamed my name. Against my lips.

"Grayson?" Belle said, trying to get my attention.

Christ. I shouldn't be thinking about that right now. The urge to mate with her was getting intense. That was starting to dominate all my thoughts.

I clenched my jaw as I leaned forward, laying my forehead against hers, breathing in her mouthwatering scent.

"I love you." I whispered. "I love you so much. I am so happy for having found you. I'm so glad you're coming home with me. And I'm so grateful for the confidence you're giving me after everything that's happened. You know that, right?"

She nodded, her fingers sliding into the hair above my neck. "I know. I love you too."

I gently tipped her head up by her chin so my lips could fall on hers. belle

automatically leaned into the kiss, our tongues intertwined.

A small growl came out of my chest as his hips started to move against me. It wasn't like she knew what she was doing. His movements were small and not thought out.

It was the bond. Telling her what to do. Pushing to mate and connect with me completely.

I held her hips, trying to slowly rotate them to a stop. I needed to get this over with before either of us went too far. "Mmm, Belle..." I said against her lips.

"Not here, sweet girl."

She pulled her mouth away from mine. His eyes opened and a sweet flush crept over her cheeks. His hand covered the mouth, which was probably tingling with sparks the same way mine was.

"Sorry," she whispered. "I don't know what it was"

"Hey, it's okay." I gave her a reassuring smile.

"I would love to continue, but I don't think we want an audience for this."

She looked at the other three talking quietly where we had left them. Well, Minnie was talking to Elijah and Liam was pretending to be asleep.

Belle looked at me, shaking her head. "Yes, you are probably right."

Her sweet blush nearly killed me. I could feel her slight embarrassment through the bond. Did she think she was the only one experiencing this intense attraction and need for...more?

I wish I could have told her that it was just the bond that held us together, but I didn't want to confuse her or, for the sake of my own insanity, encourage her.

With my hand on her head, I guided her head to mine. chest. "Take a rest. I'll wake you up when we get home."

"Home," she repeated, settling herself against me once more. "Home sounds good."

I kissed her forehead. "That's right."

As long as I don't go crazy with desire first.

Chapter 40

GRAYSON

I was going crazy with desire.

Nearly a month has passed since we arrived in Zaweth with Belle. Everything was going so well.

For a little while, that is.

My pack accepted her with open arms, just as I knew they would, expressing their deep regret for the way they had treated her without hesitation.

Belle had been wary of them at first, nervous around the werewolves who'd mistreated her for so long, but eventually, she'd started to get along with them and even fit in.

She befriended everyone she met, remembering names and faces better than I could. She cared about them and took it upon herself to get to know everyone, even check in on them.

She was a natural moon. She took her place as mine queen with grace and poise.

We both lived in our own wing of the supernatural palace in the center of Zaweth. I had it built especially for us when I took office as king.

It was more of an apartment than anything else, with our own kitchen, dining room, living room, two bathrooms, and two bedrooms.

Belle loved it, which made me happy, especially knowing from the dump where she had been staying for the last few months.

My favorite part about our ward was that it was far from everyone else and isolated.

That was good because we weren't the only people living in the palace – it took up about five hundred preternatural square meters in total and I wanted to make sure we had complete privacy.

Only I could hear the sound of my mate's pleasure.

My favorite activity was seeing how many times I could get her to scream my name in one night while I ravished her pussy with my tongue for hours and hours. With and as much as I enjoyed it and boy did I enjoy doing it – I also did it out of necessity. It was the only way to keep my wolf contained.

It was the only way to keep myself away.

During the day, though, I eventually decided I needed to keep my distance. Being around her for too long always amounted to an all-consuming arousal that ended with the two of us in bed, me on top of her.

So it took everything in me not to part her legs, shove my cock into her sweet pussy and sink my teeth into her beautiful neck, ensuring that the mating bond was finally completed and she was bound to me forever.

And then I would fuck her some more.

Yes, my self-control was hanging by a thread.

So I found other ways to occupy my time that didn't include Belle, which killed me.

But it was better than pinning her to whatever nearby wall there was and fucking her until next week like I wanted.

I'd leave her early in the morning to train with my pack – where I'd try to work off some pent-up energy – and then head out to meetings for the rest of the day.

Sometimes Belle would come with me. I preferred it that way for a while. I wanted her close. But the attraction quickly became too much. For us both.

Soon, it became difficult to be in the same room with her. The smell of her constant arousal was too much.

When Belle wasn't exploring the kingdom and finding ways to keep busy, she was hanging out with Minnie. daytime.

She helped her make home visits to the sick. She really liked it. She came home each day with stories of the people they met and helped.

She loved being with Minnie – they became big friends, just as I predicted.

At first, I was nervous about Belle leaving the palace every day without me by her side.

I hated the idea of her sitting in our wing of the palace alone every day, but I hated the idea of her being unprotected even more. That's when Liam volunteered to go with them.

I said no. Of course I said no. I hated that one motherfucking vampire with every fiber of my being.

But Belle begged me to let him go.

And begged.

And when I still said no, she did it anyway.

My strong, stubborn, small companion.

Liam was lucky to have earned a little bit of my trust by killing his own father and protecting Belle from Adalee. Or he would be six feet under by now.

I felt extremely tense as I walked around the gym early in the morning. Belle was still asleep when I left her, and I had to literally tear her body away from mine to get out of bed.

She was always very affectionate at night, but since I started to put off mating with her, she started to wrap around me like a vine while I slept.

Her body craved the closeness of her mate that I wasn't providing her with while she was awake.

Normally, I wouldn't mind. usually i would encourage close contact.

But her writhing her little body against me for hours and hours, rubbing her face and lips against my chest and neck as she slept, was starting to drive me crazy.

Belle was confused. The strength of the bond was strong. Relentless. She was getting desperate to mate and oh boy was she making sure I knew about it.

She hadn't told me directly, but I could smell it every time we were together.

When I walked into our room last night, she was wearing one of my shirts. Completely covered in my scent, which she knew drove my wolf and me crazy.

No bra and painfully red thong visible through the white fabric of my shirt.

I also found her sitting cross-legged on our bed with the crotch of her panties so beautifully on display.
for me.

I could smell her mating pheromones all over the hall, which made it painfully obvious what she was waiting for.

The moment I walked into the room, my own body heaved with crippling lust as my eyes traveled up and down her form. Even looking at her made every part of my body come alive.

Well, some parts more than others.

I made her come. Several times. For hours. I threw her on the bed and devoured until she begged me to stop.

I spent so much time licking her sweet cunt I could still taste it on my tongue now. It wasn't what either of us wanted, not really, but it was all I could do.

We were both slowly going crazy. And everyone to those around us knew that. My gang members they stared every time I left our wing of the palace, knowing I was close to my breaking point.

They knew I hadn't fully mated with Belle and they could feel the lack of connection with their luna. I'm sure everyone wondered why I was taking so long. They craved the connection too.

I couldn't mate her, though. Not yet. Not until I had all the information on how changing to a faerie would affect her.

She was human, and whether or not to admit it, she was fragile. I I wouldn't be the only one to hurt you.

I tried to convince myself that I wouldn't have to wait much longer.

Kyle put me in touch with a warlock who was apparently related to Evangeline Viotto and was willing to talk to me about the Fae.

I came extremely close to telling her about the prophecy so many times. She deserved to know why I was avoiding her, why her body was reacting to mine the way it did.

But I knew if I told her, she'd try to convince me it wasn't a big deal. I knew her and I knew how desperate and selfless she was.

She was well aware of how strict I had been the last month and how much I wanted her. She just didn't understand why I wasn't taking her.

She would gladly risk her life if it meant finally being fully connected to me and giving us some relief. And I just couldn't have that.

Elijah looked up from his weights as I passed him in the gym. I didn't miss the way the corners of her lips lifted a little. "Good morning, Alpha," he said, amusement leaking out of his tone.

"Elijah," I croaked back in greeting. I turned and crossed my arms over my chest, sizing up my pack – or should I say kingdom as they sparred.

I was still getting used to it. just like with Belle, taking on the role of alpha king came naturally to me. I fell into the role with ease, without even flinching for a moment. time.

Elijah approached me slowly, coming to stand beside me, facing the large gym as well. "Kyle will be here soon. He wasn't planning on being late, but he said he needed coffee."

Not surprised. "Sounds like Kyle," I muttered. The coffee didn't even make anything with him now that he was a hybrid, but he still claimed he did. He drank about fifteen full mugs every morning.

"Right," Elijah agreed. He was avoiding eye contact with me. There was something he wasn't telling me.

"Do you have something to share with me, Elijah?" I asked him slowly.

I wasn't in the mood for games this morning, or any morning, really, since I had to wake up and leave a dissatisfied, sexy-as-sin mate every day.

He changed. "Well, uh...I feel like it's my, uh, moral obligation to warn you that Kyle is going to give you a bunch of shit when he gets here."

I let my gaze slide to him. "Care to explain?"

He opened his mouth to respond, but before he could, someone spoke. "Holy shit, Alpha, would you point that thing somewhere else? You are capable of plucking out my companion's eye."

Kyle walked over to us with the biggest shit-eating grin I'd ever seen on his face.

I looked down. Christ, he was right. I suddenly understood what Elijah was trying to warn me about. The simple gym shorts I wore did nothing to hide the huge erection I was sporting.

I hadn't even thought to hide it or take care of it this morning, he just needed to get away from Belle as soon as possible.

I quickly and unobtrusively readjusted it so it was less noticeable.

"Ignore it," I growled, crossing my arms over my chest and looking away from them.

Sensing my sensitive mood, Kyle placed a quick kiss on Elijah's lips before sending him away. Elijah found a spot on the other side of the gym to finish his workout.

Kyle turned to me, elbowing me. "Hey, if I don't care about you, then who will, Alpha?"

I growled. "I would prefer nobody. Perks of being king."

A moment of awkward silence passed between us. "So... You and Luna...?" Kyle prodded.

"None of your business."

He nodded in understanding. "Getting so bad, huh?"

"Kyle..." I warned in a low tone.

He rolled his eyes and let out a deep sigh. "Yes, yes, none of my business. I know you'd like to believe that, but you make it all our business every second that passes without fully mating with Luna and fulfilling the prophecy. And when you walk around smelling so strong of mating pheromones I could choke on the smoke."

My mischievous companion definitely knew she shouldn't be here. It was dangerous for her, a human, to be surrounded by bloodthirsty vampires.

I told her countless times that she wasn't allowed to leave our ward without proper protection – especially when Azazel was still out there.

Azazel hadn't caused any problems lately, but I would almost have preferred he had. Then I would at least know what he was doing. He was quiet now, very quiet. And it was making me nervous.

"Oh shit." Kyle chuckled as he lifted his hand to cover his nose. He shook his head with a smile. "You two are worse than teenagers, I swear."

Thankfully, he pulled away before I had to beat him to death for smelling my mate.

All my previous thoughts about keeping a safe distance from my little companion went out the window as I started marching towards her, ready to give her exactly what she needed.

Chapter 41

BELLE

I woke up in bed alone. The place where Grayson had slept was cold, and a deep desire was rooted in my chest, making my breathing difficult.

Normally, I would just take it. I was a girl grown up who could spend a few hours without my boyfriend.

Codependency? Yes, I don't know.

But today was different. The last few days weeks actually were different. I wanted to be close to him all the time.

I craved his presence, his heart melting smile, his very deft touch. He was like a drug I needed to survive.

Which was why, I somehow found myself walking towards the gym's gazebo at six in the morning, looking for at least a glimpse of my mate.

I knew I shouldn't be here. Liam would be at my door in the next hour, and then we'd meet Minnie.

Today we were going to visit an older witch apparently turned into a cow and didn't know how to get back to normal.

I had no idea what Minnie could do to help her, but I definitely couldn't lose. So I would have to be quick. I just needed to be close to him for a few minutes, and then I'd be fine.

I waited.

My eyes found him the moment I entered the lookout. He was at the back of the gym, talking to Elijah and Kyle, arms crossed over his massive chest.

His muscles flexed against his black shirt, and sweat trickled down his face and neck, making him gleam under the fluorescent lighting.

God, he was hot. He was truly perfect in every way, way and manner. Part of me thought it wasn't fair, but the other part of me was content to look at him and his perfection.

I sat on one of the two large leather sofas, watching my companion very closely. It was crazy how much peace came over me just being near him, watching him. It was the mate bond.

He was the other half of my soul and I wanted to be with him as much as possible. At the beginning of our relationship, this would have terrified me.

My dependence would have made me flee, run for the hills like a coward until he inevitably came and hunted me down. Now, though, it felt natural. In fact, it was incredible.

I loved him. He completed me. And after months of hesitation, trust re-establishment between the two of us, and just general pain from everything that happened, it was an amazing feeling to have.

A giggle escaped my mouth when I noticed the deep frown on Grayson's face as he talked to Kyle.

Kyle had obviously just said something that pissed him off, which, to be fair, wasn't hard to do these days. He was grumpy with everyone but me.

It was extremely amusing to witness him being all sweet and affectionate with me when we were alone and then all moody and territorial the moment we were in public.

Plus it definitely made me feel special. And loved. I was the only one who really knew him.

I suddenly wished I was down there. I wanted to touch him, put my arms around him and press my lips to any and all exposed skin I could get my hands on.

I wanted to beg him to take the day off damn the king's duties — and pass with me.

Knowing him, he'd probably get up, throw me over his shoulder, and carry me back to our ward, where he'd sweep me from head to toe until I was a puddle under him.

I shifted unconsciously rubbing my legs together as a deep throbbing sensation began in my nether regions, causing a small gasp to escape my lips.

The fire inside me that I thought he'd put out last night when he spent half the night with his head between my legs had officially reignited. And it was stronger than ever.

Before I could stop myself, my hand reached for the button on my jeans.

Oh God, I shouldn't be doing this right now. Not when someone could walk in and see me. Not when Grayson could find out and punish me for jerking off.

He once caught me touching me in the shower and got so angry, so close to shifting, I almost pissed myself.

“That sweet pussy is mine, Belle,” he said, his hand gripping between my legs with an unyielding grip that had my mind spinning and my breath coming out in gasps.

“If you need to come, come to me. Come to your mate and let me take care of you the way you need it. Only I can make that pussy throb with pleasure.

Did you understand?”

Needless to say, we don't spend a lot of time sleeping. at that night.

I hadn't touched myself since then, and that was weeks ago, just a few days after arriving in Zaweth. Fortunately, I didn't have to. Grayson took care of all my needs and then some.

All it took was one seductive look from me, and he was throwing me into any nearby surface and tearing my clothes.

But recently it was starting to look like it was everything we did. It was all I ever wanted to do.

I couldn't be in the same room with him for more than an hour without feeling wet heat start to build up between my legs. And it was never Grayson who initiated our...activities.

He was always more than happy to participate, but he always required a little more initiative from me. It was almost like he only wanted to be intimate with me if I wanted to.

I was starting to feel needy. And sticky. And maybe even a little naughty.

Don't get me wrong, there is absolutely nothing wrong with an active sex life, but I was starting to

questioning if Grayson really wanted to be with me this way or if he was just placating me.

Was he getting annoyed at how often I wanted him between my legs lately? And God forbid he starts thinking that's all I wanted from him.

And the worst part is that we hadn't even had sex yet! We'd done every other thing you could imagine, but his glorious cock had never actually entered my body.

I knew Grayson was trying to take it slow so I wouldn't lose my mind after everything that happened between us.

I couldn't blame him for that and I even appreciated it at first.

Especially since I was still a little traumatized from when Azazel – in Grayson's body – told me that my only job as his mate was to give him pleasure and power, right before he tried to force himself on me.

But a lot has happened since then. My trust in him and my role as his mate had been restored.

Our relationship has evolved, blossomed, and turned into something completely different than it was during our time in Paris less than a year ago.

The love between us was so substantial, so deep, it was all-consuming. It was real.

Without warning, his eyes lifted to meet mine. A tingle immediately shot through me and I gasped, nearly jumping off the sofa I was sitting on.

My hand came off the button of my pants as if it had me burned. He couldn't be looking at me, right?

The other side of that window was a mirror. I had seen with my own eyes the last time I was at the gym.

I was sure of it, I wouldn't have walked in here with the intention of watching my mate without him knowing otherwise. I was sure.

So how the hell was he looking straight at me now?

My heart was pounding against my ribs, almost turning upside down when his nostrils flared, taking a deep breath before narrowing his eyes.

He said something to Kyle and then started to march on. my direction.

Oh shit.

I squealed, jumping off the couch and immediately turning around. to flee to the door behind me.

Grayson never told me I wasn't allowed here, but he said to stay away from vampires. And there were a lot of vampires down there.

And I've been so close to masturbating, so close to sayings vampires. Will he be mad at me? I already knew the answer.

Holy shit, what if it really was a window and not a fake mirror like I thought? What if people could see me?

Shit, shit, shit.

Before I even reached the door handle, it swung open, revealing my still-shirtless companion. I let out an embarrassing cry of surprise. Holy shit, he was fast.

I thought he must have used his vampire speed to get here so quickly. It literally only took a few seconds.

He looked at me as he stood in the doorway. He inhaled deeply, taking in my scent. His eyes sparkled.

"Oh. Hey." I waved awkwardly. "And there?"

I took several steps back when he started to prowl toward me like a predator stalking its prey.

His lips curved into a smile, telling me he found my discomfort amusing. "You shouldn't be up here, mate." His tone was deep and rich, and my body reacted.

I swallowed hard, my throat suddenly dry as a desert. "Oh yeah. No, you are probably right." I tried to look casual but completely failed. "Well, I guess I'll go back to our ward then."

I intended to get past him, but found I couldn't. some reason. I couldn't get my feet to move.

I didn't want to leave him.

Grayson's eyebrows rose and his smug smile widened. He closed the distance between us with a big stride, looking down at me. But he didn't touch me which was the only thing I really wanted.

"Do you need anything, Belle?" he asked, his voice low and amused. He leaned in so his nose was running over my hairline.

I shifted, dragging my feet. "I, um... No, not exactly," I replied pathetically.

"Then why are you here?" His lips were so close to my ear. I could feel his breath on my mark. Warm tingles ran down my body to my toes.

"I...I wanted to see you," I finally admitted, a flush deep up my neck. "I missed you."

He started to purr, and I couldn't help but lean into him, putting my cheek against his hard chest to better feel the vibrations. They flooded my body like a hot wave.

He finally wrapped his arms around me, and I collapsed against him in relief. This was what I needed. I needed him.

"I didn't think you could see me here through the glass," I said softly as I nuzzled his chest. He smelled so good.

"I can't," Grayson replied, his voice low and deep. He grabbed my head and tilted it up so I was looking right at him.

"But I can smell you." He paused, nuzzling my hair. "I could smell how wet you were getting."

"What?" I screamed.

As much as I wanted to avoid the embarrassment, I wouldn't even try to deny the fact that I was getting turned on by watching him train, knowing it would be pointless trying to prove his incredible sense of smell wrong.

So instead I said, "Does this mean everyone else can smell me too?"

He growled and pulled me closer. "I'd kill them if they smelled what's mine. Only Kyle and I have heightened senses."

My forehead dropped to his chest as I moaned. Well, this is embarrassing. At least it was just Kyle and not the entire pack. Though I was sure Kyle would bug me about it later.

With his fingers cupping my chin, Grayson tilted my head up, and I was looking at him. He studied my face with his dark red eyes.

It occurred to me that I couldn't remember the last time I saw his eyes their natural forest green. Was this something I should be concerned about? I was starting to miss them.

After a few more seconds, Grayson growled. "Fuck, you're beautiful. I'm lucky as fuck."

I smile at him. I would never get tired of your incessant need to praise me. When your soul mate was as beautiful as mine, it was nice to hear there was a chance compare.

One of his hands traveled down my body and over my ass, cupping it in his rough palm. His purr increased and took on an appreciative tone.

"I didn't mean to interrupt your training," I mumbled, trying to regain control of my body so I wouldn't do anything stupid.

I needed to change the subject – think of something other than the good feeling of having her body pressed against mine like this. I had already made a fool of myself.

“I'm sorry if I interrupted. You shouldn't have to run to me whenever i need you.

He shook his head. “I could never be mad at you. Especially for needing me.” His hand ran through my hair in a reassuring gesture.

“Actually, I'm proud of you for following your instincts.” His fist bent down to grab my hair and he tilted my head to the side just enough to see the mark on my neck. He licked his lips. “Such a good companion.”

My mark had been improving since I arrived in Zaweth and spent more time with Grayson. It was still a little red and a little sore, but it didn't hurt as much as it did when he found me in Maine.

And it was all due to Grayson's adamant insistence on "taking care" of her, as he called it, daily or basically any time he was near me and could put your hands on her.

That meant he'd park his mouth on the mark for hours on end, kissing, licking, sucking and nibbling until my brain was almost mush and my pussy was so wet it could put the Pacific Ocean to shame.

I often woke up in the middle of the night to Grayson pushing my head to the side and licking my sensitive skin with his sinful tongue, sometimes as his fingers traveled between my legs to play with my throbbing clit.

I had just convinced him to stop taking care of mine marks in public, thank God.

“My instincts?” I repeated, breathlessly.

“Something was telling you to come see me, right? I'm glad you followed those instincts and came looking for your mate. I'm glad you're taking care of your needs, letting me take care of your needs.”

I didn't like how precise his words were. Something was telling me to go see him like I was a magnet and he was – metal. And now that she was here with him, she didn't want to leave.

Okay, so maybe we know codependency...

Before I could comprehend the words coming out of my mouth, I found myself saying, “Can I stay with you today?” The question came out in a rush, sounding desperate.

Grayson's eyes softened and I was suddenly embarrassed. “I know you're busy, but maybe I could just hang out with you during your meetings or something? I wasn't kidding when I said I missed you this morning.”

The corner of Grayson's lips lifted. “As much as I loved that, I thought you were excited to help Minnie out today. You didn't stop talking about it last night.”

Oh right. I had completely forgotten about it. Damn, what was wrong with me? A few minutes in Grayson's presence and I was ready to drop everything just to spend more time with him.

My shoulders slumped a little. “Oh yeah. You are right. I should probably go with her. A once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and all.”

Grayson must have seen the disappointment on my face, because he quickly continued, “How long before you have to find Minnie and Liam?” His gaze grew heated.

"A half hour. Liam picks me up at eight."

The next thing I knew I was being thrown over his shoulder and carried out the door.

Chapter 42

BELLE

Forty-five minutes later, I was sprawled across Grayson's bare chest, completely out of breath as sweat trickled down my still agitated body.

Grayson's fingers – the same fingers that had been inside me just moments before – were running up and down my back in lazy strokes, leaving pleasurable shivers in their wake.

He had just given me two of the most intense orgasms of my entire life. He was getting so good at me make fun that badly had to try harder.

He just played my body like a violin, knowing exactly what to do to make me soar into the heavens over and over again, as many times as he wanted, without any mercy.

But something inside me still nagged - nagged even in the last few weeks.

No matter how much time we spent in this bed, or in the shower, or against the kitchen counter, or on the living room floor, pushing each other to new heights, it was never enough.

There was a constant need inside of me that grew stronger with each passing day, becoming nearly impossible to ignore. I wanted – needed – him in a more intimate (naughty) way.

I wanted more than just the orgasms we gave each other with our hands or mouths, or desperately rubbing each other in the middle of the night.

Lifting my head, I rested my chin on his chest and looked down at my mate. He was looking up at the ceiling with a blank look on his face, lost in deep thought.

He was so lost in thought that he didn't even notice when my hand started to wander lower, along his pecs and over his hard abdomen.

We threw a sheet over our bodies, covering our lower halves, but Grayson was still wearing his gym shorts.

And from the outline of his hard cock that was deliciously visible even with the sheet and his shorts covering it, he wasn't as satisfied as I was.

I bit my bottom lip nervously as my fingers dipped under the edge of the sheet to play with the waistband of her shorts.

I felt his body stiffen under mine, but he made no move to stop me. Unlike Grayson, I had few opportunities to pleasure my mate, and not for lack of trying.

That's how things used to go between us: he'd spend hours giving me pleasure, but when it came to his own, he'd always find a reason to stop me.

So you can imagine my surprise – and delight – when he didn't try to take my hand this time.

Slowly, carefully, I wrapped my hand around his rock hard cock. I paused again, but he still didn't move. Instead, he closed his eyes and I began to stroke him with long, deliberate strokes.

I felt him harden even more under my touch, and a deep satisfaction coursed through me. It was proof that I had the same effect on him that he had on me.

I knew it was ridiculous, but sometimes I worried about that.

“Fuck, Belle,” he groaned as I ran my thumb over the tip before moving my hand down. “You have no idea what you are doing to me right now.”

I pressed my lips together to keep from smiling. I pressed them to his neck. “Oh, I think I have an idea.” My hand tightened on the base, and her hips bucked. He let out another deep groan.

Vertigo took over.

He really let me do it.

GRAYSON

Belle's perfect little hand was wrapped around my cock throbbing, stroking up and down.

Her bare breasts were pressed against my chest, hard nipples pressed against my skin, sweet lips kissing and sucking my neck.

My wolf paced around in my head, loving every second of what was happening and encouraging with deep growls that I'm sure Belle could hear. She probably thought they were a good sign. But she shouldn't.

I couldn't do it.

Frustration was building within me as I said, "Belle..." I placed my hand over hers to stop her movements. "Maybe we should-"

"No!" she instantly snapped, leaving me in shock. Before I could comprehend what was happening, Belle was on top of me, straddling my stomach.

Her wet pussy was pressed against me, it definitely didn't help my situation.

"Please let me do this, Grayson," she continued.
"Please let me make you feel as good as you make me feel."

Fucking Moon Goddess, help me.

My mate – the sexiest babe on planet Earth was sitting on top of me, completely naked, eyes pleading, begging me to let her stroke my cock until I came. And I couldn't let go.

I just couldn't. Not without losing control. Not without doing something I would regret.

She must have been able to read my expression because her face fell. All the confidence she displayed just moments before was suddenly gone. Her shoulders slumped and her chin dropped slightly.

"I-I mean-" She looked away. She looked so unsure and shy it almost broke my heart. "Only if you want. I don't want to pressure you or... force you or anything. I never intend to-"

"Force me?" I interrupted. I sat up slightly, propping myself up on my elbows. I couldn't believe what I had just heard. "Do you think you have to force me?"

Her bottom lip started to tremble slightly. "I don't know, Grayson." She crossed her arms over her bare breasts to hide from me, still avoiding my gaze. "Sorry. This is all stupid-"

She made a move to get off of me, but before she could move, I grabbed her hips. Did she think I was going to let her go after what she had just said? "Oh no. You are not going anywhere."

Belle squirmed in embarrassment but couldn't get away from me. I don't think she realized she was rubbing her wet pussy across my abdomen, covering my stomach with her arousal.

I was very aware of how easy it would be to tilt your hips down so that her swollen clit was pressed against me. Christ, I would love to see her come as she rubbed herself on my belly.

Suddenly it was all I could think about. I bet it only took a few minutes before she started panting the way she always did before she started screaming my name.

I could already imagine how beautiful she would look from this angle.

And it would be so easy to move her back so that her throbbing pussy was on top of my cock.

My hands unconsciously squeezed her hips, getting ready to give him another orgasm.

"Grayson?" Belle asked me, her calm voice snapping me out of whatever lust-induced hypnosis I was in. Jesus Christ, I was going crazy.

My eyes locked with hers. my wolf was scratching at the walls of my subconscious, huffing and snarling with impatience and anger.

He didn't understand why I wasn't taking this perfect opportunity to mount my mate and finally make her mine once and for all.

He was even sending me mental images of Belle open to me in different positions, my thick cock thrusting inside her over and over again...

Shit, shit, shit, shit, shit!

I wanted to bang my head against the wall. I needed to stop thinking about it. This was exactly why I needed to put distance between us.

My mate was trying to voice her concerns to me, and all I could think about was fucking her and all the different ways I could make her come.

I could feel my body growing, dark fur sprouting on my arms as my wolf stepped forward to take control.

"Are you well?" Belle continued when I still didn't respond. She studied my changing body with wary eyes. "Did I say something wrong? Did I disturb your wolf?"

Fuck, was she really asking me if she was the one in the wrong here? How could she not see it was me? I was the one who took her from her old life and then destroyed her heart.

So I brought her back only to, once again, put her in danger by being with me. I was the problem in this relationship, not her. Never her.

"You know what? It doesn't matter," she said. "I didn't want to start anything." She swallowed hard. "And now I honestly feel a little embarrassed. I should get ready."

Cheeks red and humiliation seeping into our bond and encircling my heart like a boa constrictor, Belle covered herself with a blanket.

She couldn't even look at me. "Liam will be here soon, and I know you probably need to get back to work."

I let her crawl away from me because there was nothing else I could do. I needed to get my wolf under control before I let anything else happen.

If I let her continue, I couldn't promise I'd be able to stop. I would take her here, now, my intent to protect her from the potential danger of turning into a Fae be damned.

If she laid her hand on my lips, or, fuck, if she even breathed on my cock in the next few minutes, and I didn't take the chance and mate her, I knew my wolf was too turned on not to shift.

He wouldn't hurt her, he would never do anything like that; no, he would do it purely out of anger. Because he didn't know what else to do.

Because he was just as frustrated and nervous as I was.

Because Belle was making it clear that she was willing and deliciously aroused, and I couldn't do the only thing I could do.

it would give you some lasting relief without also potentially causing any lasting damage as well.

And I couldn't let that happen. And I sure as hell couldn't change into a wolf when she was in this state. That would freak Belle out, and she was already so shy and insecure when it came to sex.

But I couldn't leave her like that either, thinking that she I had done something wrong. No, fuck that.

I got to my feet, not even bothering to cover myself as I walked behind her. She had fled to our closet to hide.

Her eyes widened when she saw me. I'm sure he looked as angry as I felt.

My muscles were rigid and flexing with the effort to maintain control while my wolf was still trying to get me to shift, making my already intimidating form appear larger and more menacing.

In addition to that, my almost purple and still very hard cock rose and fell with every step I took, slamming against my stomach with heavy impacts.

I didn't say a single word before I grabbed her by the chin and crushed her lips to mine. She cried out in shock but didn't resist the kiss, instantly giving in to me and opening her mouth to invite my tongue entry.

This was not a sweet or loving kiss like the ones we usually share.

I kissed her fully and aggressively, pushing my rock hard cock against her stomach, leaving her speechless.

doubt about how much I wanted her and what effect she had on me.

After a few minutes, I finally pulled away and found great satisfaction in the way Belle let out a needy moan and tried to pull me back to her. She was fucking beautiful.

"I want you, Belle," I told her, my grip on her chin remaining to keep her eyes on mine instead of looking away in discomfort as I knew she wanted to. "I want you so much it hurts."

I couldn't even believe that my will for her was something I had to guarantee. The fact that she had any doubts at all was simply unacceptable.

His damn lip started to quiver again, threatening to bring me to my knees. "Then why...?"

"I'm already late for a meeting with Zagan." It was a lie, but an innocent lie. One that saved her from falling into a hole of doubts about our relationship that just weren't necessary or true.

"I would love nothing more than to let you do whatever you want to me, but I know I wouldn't be able to hold back if that happened. Things would inevitably go forward because I can't handle you touching me like that without needing more. *A lot more.*"

Her mouth opened with his deep breaths, the scent of her already overwhelming arousal becoming even more concentrated.

My wolf sent me an image of me pushing her against the wall before taking her roughly and sinking my teeth into her neck.

I paused, gritting my teeth as I pushed the image out of my head.

“And I'm going to have a busy day,” I continued after a moment. My voice was so deep and laced with growls that I was surprised she could understand me. “I can't start something I couldn't finish. And nothing between me and you will ever be in a hurry. You deserve my full attention when we finally take that step so I can adore you for hours and hours until you beg me to stop.”

Belle nodded, but her eyes were dilated, and her chest it rose and fell with every shallow breath she took.

Hmm, maybe telling her I was barely holding back from having sex with her wasn't the right thing to say. His arousal was so strong now that I could practically taste it.
no ar.

All the relief I gave her with the previous two orgasms was completely eradicated.

“But then, why were you mad? Why did it look like you were about to transform?”

“Because I want you. I had to stop my wolf from changing because he wants you so much.”

That answer seemed to relax her a bit and alleviate some of her doubts. “Oh,” she whispered.

When she didn't say anything else, I pressed my lips to hers, sweetly and tenderly this time.

She melted against me as usual, and I was reassured by her reaction. She wasn't trying to break free, and the sense of awkwardness through the bond had begun to ease.

Seconds later, I pulled away. "Now, go take a shower before Blackwood arrives. Only I can know what your wet pussy smells like, and I know you made a mess down there."

Her blush was back. "Oh, God, what time is it? Liam will be here soon!"

"Then you better go. Because there's no way I'm leaving you leaving our ward looking like that or smelling like that."

She squealed and ran to the bathroom, dropping the sheet she'd rolled up halfway.

The sight of her hot little ass swaying so seductively was the last thing I saw of her before she closed the door behind her.

Dear Moon Goddess, help me.

Chapter 43

BELLE

I couldn't stop swinging my leg while I was waiting for Minnie with Liam beside me.

It was a beautiful July day, so waiting for one of my best friends with another of my best friends outside a coffee shop, sipping an iced latte wasn't the worst way to spend my morning.

But I couldn't control my anxiety. I kept replaying over and over a constant loop in my head the conversation Grayson and I had in our room four days ago before.

The entire situation had been absolutely mortifying. Having your significant other send you out of the bedroom wasn't exactly fun.

And to make matters worse, I had barely seen my mate in the last four days. Of course, we spent the night together, but that was it.

Grayson left early in the morning before I woke up, so I didn't see him until late at night.

He told me after that day that this week would be extremely rush for him.

He had a lot to sort out after dropping the ball with his kingly duties because he was putting all his energy into finding me.

So I couldn't exactly blame him for not being able to spend time with me, but I missed him too. Desperately.

That, and I was really paranoid that he was avoiding me. after everything that happened.

Argh, I wanted to bang my head against a wall.

Fingers snapped in front of my face. "Belle!" liam he shouted, trying to get my attention. "Did you hear anything I said?"

I thought it was funny that Liam didn't call me Luna. He was the only one besides Grayson who still called me Belle.

And even though I knew Grayson would probably kill him if he heard him calling my name, I kind of liked it. It felt normal. It felt like home – a place I still didn't feel like I'd found.

When I lived in Minneapolis, nothing felt safe or stable. I was in and out of hospitals while tending to my sick father.

We lived in a house, then an apartment, and as money started to dwindle and medical bills started to pile up, an even smaller apartment, and finally on the couch of one of my dad's co-workers.

After my father died, I was alone and in a new home again. I was always running, never taking time off or stopping for breath.

Minneapolis didn't feel like home. And the pack house of Grayson in Minnesota definitely didn't feel like home.

The closest I ever came to feeling at home was the short time I stayed at Liam's apartment in Evergreen. Liam, Laila and I are a small family.

And even though I finally made the choice to move into my independence, I definitely missed it. I still miss.

I shook myself out of the fog of insecurities and looked at my friend sitting across from me. He was telling me something, and he was right; I hadn't heard a single word he'd said.

"Sorry. I'm paying attention now. Speak again?"

Liam studied me with concern and perhaps mild annoyance. "You've been out of sorts lately.

Did something happen?"

Yes, a few things happened, but telling Liam about my sex life wasn't something I wanted to do. Minnie was another story. I told Minnie everything.

I've spent the last few nights on your couch with a bucket of ice cream, giving her all the sordid details of everything that happened between me and Grayson. I just needed someone to talk to about all of this.

"No, I'm fine. I just didn't sleep well last night," I explained. "Tell me what you were saying."

Liam sighed. "I know you asked if we could hang out tonight, but I'm hoping we can reschedule. Something came up."

"Oh. Oh yes, That is OK. Don't worry"

"Oh, Luuunaaaaaa! I bought you a present!" Minnie leapt towards Liam and me, holding a

giant, pink, shiny bag that was almost half its size.

It was all wrapped up like a present, with colored tissue paper coming out of the top and a huge bow on the side. She handed the bag to me, grinning like a maniac.

"What is that?" I asked. It was heavier than I expected and filled to the top "Is there a celebration today I didn't know about?" I looked at Liam, who just shrugged.

"No silly!" Minnie laughed. "You said you had no clothes shower, so..." She shrugged, gesturing to her purse.

I grinned and began tearing apart what felt like an endless amount of tissue paper until its contents were revealed. My eyebrows rose. "So you gave me twenty?"

Inside were bathing suits of all fabrics, styles and imaginable colors.

"I just bought everything I thought would look good in you," Minnie explained, excitement never leaving her tone.

"Which also happened to be basically everything. But hey, a girl has to have options, right?"

I laughed. "I think they are enough options to last a lifetime entire. I mean, seriously, how much did you pay for all this?"

She waved a dismissive hand. "Don't worry. My father paid."

I shook my head in amusement and held out my hand for pick up the first thing I saw.

"Minnie." I said, smiling as I held it. "That's perfect!"

It was a black bikini top, simple and practical. And I also got to see the matching bottoms, it was exactly what I needed.

In fact, it was the only thing I needed, but I was so touched by Minnie's kind gesture that I wasn't about to complain.

Besides, it wasn't like Grayson and I didn't have space in our huge closet.

Minnie clapped her hands and jumped up and down. "Yay! I put this one on top because I thought you'd like it better. Continues! There is a lot more!"

She was right; there was so much more. Over the next few minutes, I pulled out costume after costume, exclaiming appropriate oohs and aahs at each one.

I wasn't a very fashionable person, especially when it came to something as abstract as swimwear, but I had to admit Minnie had good taste.

And as far as I could see, they were all my size too.

"I have a great eye for size," Minnie explained when I asked if she had secretly measured me at some point.

Liam watched us from the side with an expression of complete disinterest on his face. I even looked at him once and laughed when he looked like he was about to go to sleep.

I had just admired a blue bathing suit, the ninth outfit that I took it out of the bag, and thought I was done, but I gave an exasperated sigh when I reached inside the bag again and found more stuff hidden under the tissue paper.

"Minnie, did you mistake me for someone who lives on the beach?" I chuckled, pulling out the paper. "I don't know what I'm going to do with all this. You really gave me twenty, didn't you?"

His smile took on a mischievous glint. "In truth..."

I didn't have time to try to figure out what she meant. because I was already picking up the next suit.

And that's when I noticed all the lace on the other bikinis – and the lack of fabric on the bottom. I immediately closed the bag, my eyes wide.

"Minnie!" I screamed. "Please tell me you didn't do that."

I couldn't even look at Liam. I just hoped that he hadn't seen what was really at the bottom of the bag.

Minnie laughed, totally and completely unashamed. "I did!"

"What?" Liam asked, suddenly interested for the first time in twenty minutes. "What did she buy you?" He got up from his chair and leaned across the table to try to look inside the bag.

I turned away from him, holding the bag to my chest so no one could see.

"You know in Twilight when Bella and Edward were on their honeymoon and Bella puts on all those sexy clothes to try and make Edward... well, you know."

Minnie blinked so dramatically it almost looked as if was having a stroke.

"And that's my cue," Liam interrupted, pulling away from us. It seemed that he finally began to get the general idea of what Minnie's gift to me had been.

"If you need me, I'll be right there, far, far away from this conversation." He turned around, and in the blink of an eye, he was several blocks down the street.

I would have laughed at his reaction if I wasn't so ashamed.

I groaned. "Minnie, you bought it for me" – I looked around, lowering my voice so no one could hear me – "lingerie?"

"It's not a bad word, you know," she replied. "You don't have to whisper. I mean, come on. You're trying to get the most powerful man in the world to sleep with you and you can't even look at lingerie without blushing?"

"I just..." I slowly opened the bag, looking at everything she'd given me. As with the bathing suits, she had really done it all. Although, there were probably twice as many options.

"What do I do with all this?"

"Girl, I think you know what you're supposed to do with this. And if you don't, we'll have other problems."

She clapped her hands again, screaming. "The alpha will die when he sees you with this. Just wait, Ugh, I'm a genius!"

I wasn't so sure. Grayson saw me naked almost every day, and he didn't even blink anymore.

In fact, when I got dressed in the morning, I usually found him with his back to me, doing his own thing. I didn't think he was doing it consciously, but it kind of made things worse, didn't it?

It was like he was bored with me. how the hell
Would covering myself in bright pink lace help at all?

I must have grimaced because Minnie gave me a sympathetic look and said, "Okay, look, I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable. "You don't have to use any of this if you don't want to. I just thought you might like an option."

I sighed. Minnie had gone above and beyond to do this for me. My internal conflicts had nothing to do with her. I was being ungrateful.

"Thanks, Minnie. Seriously this is one of the sweetest things that someone has already done for me. You're the best."

She smiled widely. "I know." She shrugged and slipped her arm through mine.

"Now, let's call Mr. Angry over there and get the hell out of here. We have things to do and people to help. It's going to be a busy day."

"Sounds good to me," I replied. We put all my new bathing suits back in the bag before linking arms and starting our walk to Liam, who had somehow gone even farther than before.

I laughed. It made me wonder if he could hear Minnie and my conversation from where he was and he struggled to get away from us.

My hand gripped the bag's handles tightly as we walked, nervousness coursing through me as I thought of all the possible ways to use its contents. Anxiety gnawed at my stomach.

I looked at Minnie. "Do you have plans for tonight?" I cringed at how desperate my voice must have sounded to her.

I continued anyway. "I don't feel like being home alone and I know Grayson is working late."

Minnie hesitated. "I would so much like to go, but actually I have plans for tonight..."

My stomach sank a little.

"But I can always change my plans if you need to," Minnie continued quickly. "You are more important."

I smiled. Minnie was always putting other people before herself. "All good. I'll be fine. It will do what you planned. I'll be fine on my own."

When Minnie still looked uncertain, I quickly added, "Seriously, Minnie, I'll be fine. Do not worry about me. We've hung out the last few days anyway.

"I can't wait to have you all to myself every night."

"I promise I wouldn't have to stand down unless it was something important," she explained.

"Why don't you go to the hot tub and change into one of the new bathing suits I bought you? I can even lend you my copy of Twilight if you want! So you can really get into character when you decide to seduce your mate. Channel your inner Bella Swan."

I laughed. That wasn't really a terrible idea. The hot tub part, I mean. Although, I suppose reading Twilight wasn't a bad idea either.

"You are very obsessed with Twilight. You know that, right?"

Minnie scoffed. "There is no such thing as being too obsessed with Twilight. I mean, have you read the books? They are pure gold."

I couldn't even try to hide my amusement. "The last book came out almost fifteen years ago. Shouldn't you have found something else to read by now?"

She shrugged nonchalantly. "Art like that it just doesn't age."

Chapter 44

BELLE

“What the fuck are you wearing?”

I jumped at the sound of his voice, turning to meet the eyes of my mate, who was sitting on the couch in our bedroom. I didn't even hear him come in and I was surprised he was here.

He never came back so soon. I thought there would be one more night alone.

I had just walked out of our wardrobe after changing into one of the bikinis Minnie had given me. I planned to stay in the hot tub for a while. I was incredibly tense.

All I wanted to do was lie back and relax in some overly hot water for the next few hours until all my limbs felt like noodles.

I even had a copy of *Twilight* – Minnie insisted on lending it to me after discovering I'd never read it before – and I was more than ready to lose myself in a story about werewolves and vampires that wasn't mine.

And most importantly, I needed a distraction. One that kept me from obsessing over the man sitting across from me.

“Oh, hi,” I replied. I hated how hot and restless I got around him. Instant relief filled me just being in your presence.

I even found myself taking steps towards him without noticing the what he was doing. “I didn't know you were here.”

He stood up, approaching me slowly.

He was handsome today. Who was I kidding? He was beautiful every day. He wore dark slacks and a simple shirt, his muscles rippling with each of his moves.

“Answer my question, dear.”

I looked down at my plain black bikini. It was the most basic triangle top and bottom I had ever seen. There was absolutely nothing special about her.

But the way Grayson was looking at me, licking his lips as his eyes roamed my body slowly, had me thinking otherwise.

I swallowed. “A bikini?”

Once he was in front of me, he reached out and played with the drawstring of my top, just above my chest, rolling it between his fingers. His other hand landed on my waist new.

“Why?” he demanded in a dark, sensual tone that made my nipples harden to diamonds. Your eyes fell to my breasts, darkening when he saw them through the thin layer of my top.

His hand gripped my waist tighter. Your jaw tightened. And the sexual tension in the room rose.

Huh, maybe Minnie got something right with the whole lingerie thing.

“I was going to read in the hot tub for a while,” I explained calmly.

His eyes locked with mine, narrowing. “Wearing this?”

The way he said it put me on the defensive and a little insecure.

“Yes, wearing this,” I replied with my arms crossed over my chest. “After all, it is a swimsuit. Or do you prefer that I go the way I came into the world? I bet all you pack members would love to see that.”

Oops. I said the wrong thing.

Grayson growled, grabbing my waist with both hands and pulling my body against his. I sighed.

“No way. You're not going anywhere dressed like that.” He grabbed my hand and started pulling me towards the closet.

“It's not like anyone is going to see me!” I argued, trying to pull my hand out of his iron grip. “No one is ever using the hot tub. Also, I was going to cover myself with a towel until I got in the water.”

“No,” Grayson growled. “Were you planning on taking Liam with you at least, or were you going to go out alone, wearing basically nothing?”

I continued to try to break free of his grip. I knew it was no use since he was a million times stronger than me, but I wasn't going to let him take me down without at least trying to fight back.

“Liam is busy tonight. Also, would you seriously want Liam to see me in a bikini? Oh, maybe he could join in. Oh yes, that would be so much fun. Liam and I wearing next to nothing, sitting in the steaming hot water. I bet we would be really close after that.”

And once again, Belle, that was the wrong thing to say.

Grayson growled so loudly that the walls shook and objects fell off surfaces, crashing to the floor. I shuddered. My ears rang when he finished.

He grabbed my chin in his huge hand and brought my face close to his so we were only inches apart. "Go. If. To replace."

His voice was so rigid and relentless that I worried what would happen if I didn't do what he said. He was crazy. Really crazy. And I knew better than to challenge him when he was like this.

With pressure building behind my eyes from the tears I'd been holding back, I turned and walked to the closet, feeling like a dog with its tail between its paws.

legs.

I stopped at the door, looking around at all of our clothes. What would I do now? Dress in the same jeans and sweater as before?

I had absolutely nowhere to go and I knew Grayson wouldn't be here for long. He was probably just stopping by to check on me, like he always did before heading back to work.

So did that mean I should give up on having a non-pathetic night? Putting on my pajamas and crawling into bed just to think about how much I missed Grayson until I fell into a restless night's sleep?

It was the same thing I'd been doing the last few nights. I would fall asleep and immediately start dreaming about Grayson, his touch, his voice and his smile

I tossed and turned, so desperate to be near him it was all I could think about.

I would only receive relief when he finally got home and crawled into bed with me, wrapping me in his arms. I wasn't sure I could handle another night without freaking out.

Making up my mind, I huffed, grabbed a towel from one of the shelves and turned, intending to walk right past Grayson and out the door.

He couldn't just bully me into doing what he wanted. I was my own mother, damn it.

"What are you doing?" he demanded as I passed him. His voice took on a warning tone mixed with his deep growls.

"Going to the hot tub," I replied. I was proud of how stable and confident I looked, even though everything in me demanded that I submit to my mate.

Stupid, tiresome nature trying to make me give in to the dominant male's will. My instincts were screaming at me to go back to him and tilt my head to the side in a submissive gesture that told him I'd given in.

No, not this time, friend! Grayson could just go fuck himself and along with his masochistic ideals.

Another deafening growl came from his chest, and the next thing I knew I was being thrown over his shoulder and marched back to the closet.

"No!" I screamed, kicking him and slamming my fists against his back. "I'm not going to spend another night sitting in this room, waiting for you to come back like a housewife! Leave me! Put me down right now! You're a fucking idiot and-"

A ball formed in my throat that stopped me from yelling more curses at him. Shit, was I about to cry?

Grayson's determined stride stopped suddenly. His body stiffened, and I could feel his concern as he lifted me off his shoulder with gentle hands and gently set me on my feet in front of him.

I took several steps back, needing some distance from him.

I didn't miss the way he started purring at me, trying to keep it down, because he knew I hated it when he wouldn't let me feel my emotions and instead drowned them out with those numbing vibrations.

I covered my face with my hands. I couldn't look at him. I didn't want to look at him.

"Belle..." said Grayson. His tone was much gentler than before, and that fact alone was enough to make me want to cry.

Somehow I kept my cool, determined to breathe deep until the wave of emotions passed.

He stepped forward and grabbed both of my wrists, rubbing the skin with his thumbs in gentle circles, trying to encourage me to reveal my face. I shook my head, pushing his touch away from me.

"Belle, talk to me," he coaxed. "Tell me what's wrong."

I let out a shaky breath. I couldn't speak yet

"Come on, sweet girl. I need to know what's going on so I can fix it."

I finally let my hands drop. A few tears escaped my eyes, but I somehow managed to keep the tears at bay a little longer.

I didn't look at him as I spoke. "I know you said this week would be busy and I wouldn't see you much, but...but, um..." I hesitated, my chest tight. "I think I'm starting to feel a little claustrophobic."

That was a hell of an understatement. I felt like one addict locked in withdrawal.

Grayson cupped my cheek, wiping away a tear with your thumb. "Claustrophobic? What do you mean, baby?"

I sucked in a ragged breath. "I mean...all I do when I'm here alone at night is sit and...and think about you."

I gestured around me. "And everything smells like you, and I'm surrounded by all your stuff and..." I shrugged, feeling utterly pathetic. A sob left my throat. "I don't know what's wrong with me."

Big arms wrapped around me, pulling me into his vibrant chest. "Shhh, honey. Sorry. I'm very sorry. Do not Cry. Please, do not cry."

I accepted his hug with enthusiasm, giving in and crying silently against your chest for long minutes.

He held me through it all and purred loud enough that I could feel the sound travel down to my toes. I felt like Jell-O when I finally pulled away.

It was crazy how much better I felt after being in his arms for just a few minutes. He was able to calm me down so easily.

When I looked up at him and saw the look of concern written across his face, I couldn't help but laugh at my own stupidity.

Damn, I needed to get everything under control. Grayson probably thought I was crazy.

I sniffed, trying to clear away the evidence of my embarrassing breakdown. "Sorry. You look worried, and I didn't mean to worry you."

I took a deep breath. "I just miss you, that's all. But I know you're busy being king of the whole world and everything." I tried my best to put on a convincing smile.

"I'm not selfish enough to believe I should have you all to myself – even when I would like to."

My hands were still partially wrapped around his massive torso, and I played with the back of his shirt gently. nervous movements.

"It's just harder on nights when everyone is busy and I have nothing to do. And so I'm trapped in this room, alone, surrounded by his scent. I think I lose my mind a little."

His deep frown only intensified with every word I spoke. "I've been a terrible companion," he said, stroking the side of my face.

I immediately shook my head. "No. No, it doesn't. You are amazing and perfect. I'm just in need of your time. It's just because I like you or whatever." I smiled, trying to lighten the mood.

In fact, the last thing I wanted to do was make him feel guilty. Would I spend more time with him if he offered? Yes, in the blink of an eye.

But would I want him to sacrifice the welfare of his kingdom just because I was selfish? No way. If that meant seeing less of him, so be it.

When Grayson looked like he was about to continue arguing with me, I quickly continued, "Let's not talk about this anymore."

I waved my hand to dismiss the idea. "What are you doing here anyway? I thought you were working late tonight. I didn't even know you were in the palace."

He stared at me with a neutral expression, and for a second I thought he was going to try to get back to the subject of my crying.

But then, he pulled me closer so I was leaning against him but still able to look at him. The sound of their purrs increased a little.

"You're not the only one who misses your other half. I wanted to take you out to dinner before I go back to work..." He trailed off as his eyes scanned my nearly naked body one more time.
turn.

I almost forgot my state of undress, but I became acutely aware again when his suddenly heated gaze landed on my heaving breasts.

His jaw made a grinding noise as he gritted his teeth. "But right now, I think I want a nice hot tub with my girl."

My eyebrows rose in surprise, even as my stomach did an excited flip. Jesus, I was pathetic. I would do anything to spend more time with him.

"Serious? But you were telling me to change like two seconds ago."

He shrugged, his hand sliding down to play with one of the strings on the side of my bikini bottoms on each hip, which also happened to be the only thing holding the garment in place.

A mischievous look came over his face. "I changed from idea. I've had a long day, and seeing as how downcast you look, so are you. I would love nothing more than to spend an hour or two with you in the hot tub."

Chapter 45

BELLE

I couldn't hold back my moan of happiness as I sank into the hot, bubbling water of the hot tub. This was exactly what I needed. Why didn't I come here sooner?

This was so much better than sitting alone in our wing of the palace with nothing to do. And I guess it wasn't bad that Grayson was here too, giving me his full attention.

Okay, maybe that's the best part.

That and the fact that we were the only people in the pool area, so it didn't feel strange that my body warmed up as I felt his gaze watching my every move with rapt attention.

I had the odd feeling that Grayson had something to do with the lack of people here, probably ordering everyone to stay away while we were here. I didn't mind though. Not even a little.

I turned to look at my mate, who was still standing on the edge of the tub, looking down at me with an expression that made my lips turn up and my stomach flutter.

I was starting to really love this outfit.

The room we were in had an indoor pool with loungers, and I put my hands on the edge of the tub and let my legs float behind me.

I put my chin on the edge as I smiled at Grayson, taking in every glorious inch of exposed skin with my own heated gaze

Holy shit, he was hot. He was standing there in just his swimming trunks. All his muscles were on display and he was breathing heavily.

My stomach fluttered when I noticed the outline of his hard cock through the fabric of his shorts.

He didn't even notice I was staring. He was too busy studying me and apparently trying to control his wolf. His eyes were fixed on my ass as it floated out of the water.

He licked his lips.

My smile widened. It was getting even more fun than I had imagined.

“Are you going in?” I asked him. “Or are you just going to stand there, looking at me?”

Grayson's eyes met mine. He smiled. “Oh, I'm coming right in.”

He held out his hand to me the moment we entered the water. I laughed and swam away from him before he could grab me. He growled, narrowing his eyes playfully.

“Are you running from me, mate?” he asked, slowly moving towards me.

I smiled, pulling away from him with every move he made to approach. “If you want me, you'll have to work hard.”

“You're making a big mistake, honey. Run away from me only stirs my wolf's instinct.”

I bit my lip. We both knew he was more than capable of getting me whenever he wanted, but I liked that we were playing with each other, like a normal couple.

I looked forward to that kind of interaction with him.

"Do you think I'm scared of you?" I asked to him. "You are-"

I screamed when his hands were suddenly on my waist, grabbing me and throwing me over his shoulder. He spun me around in the air, and I laughed and screamed the whole time.

"Grayson!" I laughed, patting his back. "Grayson, stop!"

I noticed the way one of his hands gripped my ass, his fingertips dangerously close to the part of me that had been begging for his attention all day.

It made my entire body freeze.

I shifted on his shoulder.

Sensing the change in my demeanor, Grayson stopped abruptly, letting me slide slowly in front of him until we were eye level, one of his arms still acting as support under my back.

We were pressed against each other so completely I could feel his heart beating against my chest. Our breathing slowed until we were in sync, looking at each other.

"Whatever our souls are made of," I whispered as I ran my hand through his curly dark hair, "his and mine are the same."

"Hmm," Grayson chirped. He brushed his nose against mine lovingly, moving up and down the bridge.

"Did you just make that up?"

I laughed. "No. It was Emily Brontë. Wuthering Heights."

He smiled the way he did when he was genuinely pleased. "I liked."

I wrapped my arms around his neck, getting even closer to him. "I missed you. I'm really glad you're here. I'm really glad you decided to spend time with me."

He backed up until he was sitting on the bench built into the bathtub, with me sprawled across his lap, pressed snug against his chest.

I was glad we were in the water because everything inside I was starting to warm up.

"Me too baby."

Without much thought, I pressed my lips to his.

He moaned into my mouth, grabbing the back of my head and pulling me even closer, running his tongue over the opening of my lips, encouraging me to open my mouth for him.

I did, and his tongue immediately mastered mine, taking full control of the kiss before I could stop it.

He tilted my head to the side, deepening the kiss with more passion. His tongue entered my mouth repeatedly, making love to it and driving me crazy.

My hips started to move against his on pure instinct, and Grayson purred in response. Jesus, the sound of her purring made me feel drunk.

"Open your legs wider for me, Belle," he demanded against my lips.

He didn't need to say it twice.

My knees hit the bench he was sitting on, my legs opening to accommodate his large frame.

It was good that I was flexible, especially since one of Grayson's favorite ways to get me off was to watch me squirm in his fingers as I straddled his lap.

His thumb found my clit through the fabric of my bikini bottom and began to slowly make circles, massaging it. My lips left his as a satisfied moan left my mouth, my head falling back.

He stopped his movements momentarily to pull the fabric of my bikini bottoms to the side, and my back arched in pure bliss as his index finger made contact with my bare pussy, running along my folds.

"Filly, I can feel how slippery you are even in the water. Let me take care of you, beautiful. What about? This is what you want?" His tongue trailed over my mark and up the side of my neck.

A tremor my body. my agreement was embarrassingly anxious. "Yes. Please. I want."

Grayson smiled in satisfaction, and then his long middle finger he was inside me, caressing me.

He silenced my moans as he began to thrust him in and out of me, deep, rubbing my g-spot firmly with each movement.

That's when the fleshy part of his hand began to massage my throbbing clit, and he slid another of his

fingers at my already tight entrance that my lower body began to push against his, seeking more friction.

“That's it, baby,” Grayson growled against the side of my neck where he was sucking. “Fuck my fingers.”

With my hands on her shoulders for balance, my hips began to rise and fall in faster motions, blatantly pushing my pussy against her fingers.

Grayson leaned back to watch me, blatant desire etched into every line of his handsome face as he watched me collapse on top of him.

My nails dug into his shoulders as my orgasm took over. With my head falling back once more, I whimpered and moaned his name, the pleasure of those rhythmic squeezes taking over every part of me.

It took a while for me to come back. I didn't know why, but my orgasms were getting more intense and much longer.

At times it was so intense it almost hurt, and I would be shaking and mindless for several minutes afterward, unable to process what had just happened and how much pleasure I had experienced.

Not that I would complain, though.

Grayson stroked me through the entire process, taking control of the movements when I got too limp to do anything but wait for it to end.

As the last of the tremors passed through me, I collapsed onto his chest, panting, eyes narrowed. He took his fingers off

me and hugged me, taking the time to suck and pinch my mark.

"Mmm..." I moaned as her purr intensified. I loved to hear him purr when he was happy.

Grayson laughed. "Do you have any idea how fucking sexy you are?"

I smiled against the bare skin of her shoulder. "AND?"

"Holy shit," he swore. "Yes. I don't get tired of seeing you come for me."

"Hmm..." I could feel how hard he was beneath me. He was more than just a little excited. And that thought turned me on more than anything else.

My lips grazed her neck until they were right next to her ear. "I want more, Grayson," I whispered. "Can you give me more?"

he growled. "I think we can come to some kind of agreement." His hands started to move down my hips, intending to make me come again, but I quickly stopped them.

"Not like that. I was thinking we could do something a little different." I rolled my hips over his, lining up my core with his swimsuit covered cock so he was nestled between my folds.

I did it so fast he didn't have time to stop me.

Before losing the courage resulting from my intense orgasm, I said, "I want you inside me. I want your dick inside me. I want it so bad, Grayson."

"Shit!" Grayson's hips bucked at my unexpected request, and I gasped at the sensation.

Taking advantage of our momentum and Grayson's temporary lapse in judgment, I grabbed his face and kissed him with all the intensity and need I wanted him to know.

I almost cried in relief when he didn't try to stop me like I thought he would and instead pulled me closer, deepening the kiss.

His hands splayed over my ass, holding it, then his fingers fell into the crease.

My hands shook with anticipation as I reached down and started tugging on the drawstring of his bathing trunks. I thought he might be too distracted to notice what I was doing, but I was wrong.

He stiffened beneath me, and it was as if the spell that had kept him interested had suddenly been broken. His lips stopped moving against mine and the energy between us dropped significantly.

"Belle," he said. His deep voice sounded miserable and haggard. He pulled his lips away from mine and grabbed my hands to stop them. "Stop."

"Why? Why?" Panicking, I tried to pull his lips back to mine. "Kiss me, Grayson. Please. Just keep kissing me."

He groaned as if he couldn't handle my desperate pleas and pressed his mouth back to mine. I ran my hands through his hair, pulling at the strands, needing him closer, closer, closer.

Then they slid over his shoulders, down his pecs and abs. I grabbed the laces of his swimming trunks one more time, hoping he wouldn't stop me.

again.

"Belle," he moaned. He grabbed my hands, pushing away. "Sorry. You have to stop."

"No. No, please, Grayson," I continued to plead. I didn't even care if I looked pathetic. I needed that. We both needed this.

I tried to pull him back, wrapping my arms around his neck, but he quickly grabbed my wrists, jerking them away from him in one sharp motion.

I sighed. He had never been this hard on me before.

Then, loud and angry, he yelled, "Belle, I'm not going to fuck you the first time in a goddamn hot tub! *Stop. With. That.*"

I staggered back as if he'd just slapped me across the face, my heart plummeting so deep in my stomach it made me want to throw up.

I hated everything about what he had just said.

I hated that he obviously didn't want me the way I wanted him.

I hated that he had to yell at me to stop and realize he didn't want me.

I hated that he used such a vile word to describe something that was supposed to be beautiful.

I hated that he was rejecting me again.

Cum. He said he wasn't going to fuck me in a hot tub. Is this how he thought our first time would be? It looked dirty. It made me feel. *So dirty.*

Embarrassment washed over me and churned in my stomach like a ball of fire. I suddenly felt like I couldn't breathe.

God, what was wrong with me? Why did I keep throwing myself at him when I knew he would just reject my advances and make my heart feel like it was ripping in two over and over again?

I kept pressing. I kept begging. He had every right to be mad at me.

I wasn't mad at him, though. How could I be? It wasn't like he had done anything wrong. And it wasn't like what we had wasn't amazing, even without the sex. Intimacy wasn't all about sex.

It just hurt.

Quite.

The urge to vomit was getting stronger.

I shook my head, quickly looking away as tears unexpectedly started to fill my eyes. "OK. Sorry."

I rolled off him and hated it when he didn't try to make me stay. "I shouldn't have continued when you asked me to stop. Sorry."

"Belle...this isn't-" Grayson said as he watched me walk to the edge of the hot tub and climb out. He ran a hand through his hair. "Fuck, I'm the one who should be apologizing..."

"It's okay," I interrupted. I tried my best to smile as I picked up my book and wrapped myself in my towel.

"You were right. That's not... we shouldn't..." I with

I angrily wiped the one that landed on my left cheek. I was being ridiculous. "I think I'll go back to our room now. And you need to get back to work, right?"

I didn't wait for him to answer. I started walking to door, my chest tight and my cheeks hot.

"Belle," Grayson called after me, climbing out of the tub as well. "You don't have to go back to your room. I thought you wanted to stay here and read."

I waved my hand with mock casualness. "This isn't even my book. It's from Minnie. I don't want to get wet, you know?"

Suddenly, he was behind me, holding my hand. He turned me around to face him.

There was so much pain in his eyes. he was like that for me cause?

"Belle...I'm sorry." His voice was so gentle, so genuine. It made my heart jump in my chest.

God, I loved this man. I loved him more than I've ever loved anyone or anything. It wasn't worth fighting about. I just needed time to get over my embarrassment and then I would be fine.

I ran a hand over his stubbled jaw. "I'm fine, Grayson." A lie. "You do not do anything wrong." The truth.

I leaned forward and kissed his chest since I couldn't reach his lips without him leaning down. "I love you, OK?" The truth. Truest thing I've ever said.

He sighed and leaned in to press his own kiss. on top of my head. "I love you too. Very."

The truth. At least, true to some extent.

I leaned back. "See you when I get home from work tonight."

Neither of us said another word as I turned and walked away.

Chapter 46

BELLE

I felt totally pathetic as I walked up to Minnie's apartment later that night. I got a lot of weird looks on the way here. I don't blame pack members for staring.

I was soaking wet, barefoot, and only had a towel wrapped around me to cover my black bikini. In addition to that, I couldn't stop the tears that were streaming down my face. I'm sure it looked finished.

My hand was shaking with emotion as I raised it to knock on Minnie's door late at night. I knew she said she was busy tonight, but I expected her to make an exception given the circumstances.

I couldn't go back to my apartment alone after everything that happened. I just couldn't.

Whispers, muffled voices and giggles sounded from behind the door as I waited. I shifted anxiously, wiping my tears and averting my gaze as a pack member walked past me.

"Luna," he greeted. I smiled back even though I didn't look at them. This was so embarrassing. This was not how a queen was supposed to act.

I knocked once more. What the hell was taking so long?

Fortunately, the door opened a second later. I looked up, ready to fall into my friend's arms, only to find Liam standing in front of me.

“Belle?” Liam asked in shock when he took in my appearance. “Are you well? Why are you crying? What are you wearing?”

“W-what are you doing here?” I answered. I looked around, suddenly wondering if my state of sadness had led me to the wrong room.

But, no, Liam lived in an apartment on the other side of the castle, away from any royals – at Grayson's request, of course.

Minnie, however, lived in the Mortar wing of the castle, with her own apartment, as did Grayson and me.

Liam looked...disheveled. He wore a pair of jeans, but his chest was bare and he rose and fell with every hurried breath he took.

Her hair was messy and disheveled and sticking up in every direction. Her cheeks were red and a thin sheen of sweat covered her forehead.

“Luna?” another voice asked. Minnie appeared behind Liam, looking as disheveled as Liam.

Her bare legs were on display, and the only thing hiding her body was a black T-shirt that ended mid-thigh.

Well, at least we know where Liam's shirt went.

“Oh, my God, what happened?” Minnie walked past Liam and immediately grabbed me by the shoulders.

I would have been amused by the fact that she completely ignored Liam to get to me if I wasn't so pissed off. She examined my blotchy, red face from tears, her bright crimson eyes filled with worry.

"I-I'm sorry," I stammered, pulling my towel tighter around me. My eyes traveled between the two as I tried to process what was happening. "Are you two...sleeping together?"

Liam and Minnie exchanged a hesitant, slightly panicked look.

"Did that kind of...just happen?" said Minnie. "I feel a lot, I would have told you, I just..."

"We can talk about Minnie and me later," Liam broke off. "What happened to you?"

I hated that my lip started to quiver and my eyes filled with tears even more just thinking about bringing it up. I looked at Minnie and shrugged. "I-I, um..."

"Liam, out," Minnie demanded. She didn't even look at him as she spoke. She grabbed my hand and started pulling me into her apartment.

Liam didn't move. "What? I'm not going away. I-"

Minnie held up her hand, silencing him.

"Look, my friend needs me right now. We may be sleeping together, but you need to leave so I can take care of her."

Liam reached out to stop the door when Minnie tried to close it in his face. "I'm not going anywhere until I know Belle is okay. I am her guardian. I need to make sure she's not hurt."

I shook my head. "I'm not hurt," I explained through my tears. "At least, not physically. I am fine. I didn't mean to interrupt anything. I can go-"

"No," Liam and Minnie said at the same time.

"You don't have to go away..." Minnie started to say.

"Was that your fucking werewolf mate?" Liam demanded to know, interrupting. "Did he do something to you? I swear, if he hurts you, I'll hunt him down..."

"Grayson didn't do anything wrong," I explained quickly before Liam went and did something stupid. "It was all me. I just..... He just..."

And that was enough for me to start crying again.

I buried my face in my hands as I sobbed, barely noticing that Minnie had led me into the living room. I could also hear them continue to argue about whether or not Liam should stay.

When I looked up, I could see her pushing him towards the door through her chest. "I promise I'll call if she needs you. I think she just needs to talk now."

Liam's worried gaze flicked to me. "He is sure?" he asked me. "I just need to know you're okay. Just tell me you're okay."

I nodded, a small but grateful smile curling my lips. It occurred to me that, for the first time in my entire life, I had a support network.

I had a group of people who really cared about me and vice versa, who I could go to when I needed to. I've never had this before.

I was always alone – even when my father was still alive.

You can't exactly tell your sick and dying dad that you're having a hard time making friends because

You're too busy trying to figure out how to pay for his medical bills, can you?

I had a family now. Minnie, Liam, Kyle, Elijah and Grayson were my family. They weren't my relatives, but I knew they would always support me and vice versa.

And that's all I ever wanted. It felt so good not to be alone anymore.

"I'm fine," I stated firmly, leaving no room in my tone for him to doubt the veracity of my words.

"Tonight was intense. You can stay if you want, but I highly doubt you want to hear about my love life. You might want to save us the embarrassment of me sharing the exact details with you."

Liam's nose wrinkled in disgust. "Shit. Yes, you are probably right."

He stood there for a moment longer, looking at me, before finally heaving a big sigh and saying, "Can I at least get my shoes? And my phone?"

I laughed. It was good to laugh. To my surprise, Minnie looked at me like she was really thinking about shoing him away barefoot and without a phone if that's what I wanted.

"Yes, of course you can take your shoes and phone!" I said, laughing some more.

Liam gave me a grateful look as Minnie stepped aside to let him in.

I looked at Minnie with raised eyebrows as he hurried to her room to get his things.

Her cheeks were painted with a deep blush – that I didn't even know was possible for vampires and moved - restless. “You're not mad, are you?”

I immediately shook my head. “Of course I'm not mad. Why would I be mad?”

She shrugged. “He was your friend first. And I don't want nothing to come between us.”

“I'm not mad,” I repeated, giving her a reassuring smile. “A little surprised, perhaps. But I'm happy for you two more than anything. You guys are... cute together. Unexpected but cute.”

Minnie smiled. “OK good. I've been dying to tell you, but Liam made me promise I'd wait...”

“Hey, did I hear you blaming me?” Liam asked as he re-entered the room, shoes on and phone in hand. Still shirtless, though.

He approached Minnie and bent down to cup her face and place a gentle kiss on her lips. She smiled at him. “Call if you need anything,” he told her. Then he looked at me. “Any one of you. Did you understand?”

Minnie nodded. “Yes, yes, we will. Now get out of here. I have a best friend to take care of.”

Liam kissed her one more time before walking to the door. “See you two tomorrow.”

After Liam was gone, Minnie turned to me. “I'm going to get some ice cream and dry clothes. Don't move a muscle. I'll be right back.”

I sighed and sank onto his couch.

GRAYSON

I was in a shitty mood. Any guesses why?

I had just returned from a long meeting with three of the Mortar. They preferred to work late into the night vampire thing.

They liked the night. Always nocturnal. It usually worked. I trained with the wolves in the morning, met with the vampires at night, and did whatever was in between.

But today, I had to use all my strength to go.

My stomach churned just thinking about what happened earlier. The way she looked at me after I yelled at her.

I yelled at her.

She was trying to kiss me. She was trying to love me. And I yelled at her.

Cum. Cum.

I could feel all of their emotions through the bond. Sadness, hurt, disappointment. Never anger, though. I never despise. She was so kind, so sweet.

It was normal for Lunas – mates of alpha males – idolizing her teammates and thinking they couldn't make mistakes. Lunas were naturally submissive and easy to tear down.

Belle would believe anything I told her because I was her alpha. I mean, she believed so easily

when Azazel told her that she meant nothing to me when he was in control of my body.

And now she thought my rejection was her fault. But it was my fault. It was all my fault. It was my fault I was going through all this.

A sticky sheen of sweat formed on the back of my neck as I remembered how she looked at me when I pushed her.

It was the same expression she gave Azazel when he first hit her. Raw, tangible shock and devastation. And I wanted to die for making her feel that way.

And then another emotion came over her face.

Humiliation.

If I could punch myself in the face, I would. Strong. Incessant. Until I'm bleeding and broken on the floor. This was what I deserved.

What Belle didn't know was that I wanted her as much as she wanted me. More. I was dying without her. Losing my mind.

When I said I wasn't going to have sex with her the first time in a hot tub, it was more for my benefit than hers. It was a reminder to myself that she deserved better than this.

I climbed the stairs to our room taking the steps two at a time. I opened the door and went inside, looking for my companion with desperate eyes.

I needed to see her. To embrace her. To just be with her and make sure she was okay. That I was so incredibly sorry.

She wasn't here. Her scent was as old as mine, telling me she hadn't been back here since we both went in the hot tub earlier today.

Before I had time to panic, my cell phone rang in my pocket.

I still wasn't used to carrying that stupid thing with me, preferring to mind link with anyone I needed to talk to, but I needed to have a way to communicate with anyone who wasn't a werewolf too.

I growled when it rang, planning to just ignore it, but ended up taking it out of my pocket in case it was a message from Belle. To my absolute relief, it was.

Belle: Hi, this is Minnie. I have Luna's phone.

She's in my house. Sleeping on the couch.

Thought you should know so you don't turn alpha-que
can't-find-a-mate and kill everyone.

I ran out the door a second later.

My fingers curled gently but hastily around the doorknob of Minnie's apartment, and I didn't want to wake my sleeping companion, who I knew was on the other side.

I could smell her coming off the wood, along with the scent of her tears.

I didn't have to wait long for Minnie to open, which was good; five more - maybe ten-seconds and I'd break down the door.

Minnie gave a sad smile when she saw it was me. She didn't hesitate to open the door wider and waved me in. "Let's go," she said in a despondent tone. "She is here."

I followed her into the other room. I let out a sigh when I found Belle asleep on the living room sofa, a thin blanket over her body and a pillow nestled under her head.

She was wearing a T-shirt now – one of Minnie's by the smell – but I still – could see the outline of her black bikini under the cotton. She never came back to our room.

I knelt beside her, gently stroking her head, careful not to wake her. Tearstains were running down her cheeks. And suddenly I was convinced that I was the biggest asshole in the world.

My vampire began to purr at her, and my wolf withdrew to the back of my consciousness, leaving me in complete control.

My supernatural halves – both of whom knew how to operate on instinct alone knew this was an important moment.

"How long did she cry?" I asked Minnie.

"She was crying when she got here," Minnie replied calmly.

The dew of her tears was still fresh on her face.

I shook my head. Fuck.

I looked at Minnie. "Did she tell you what happened?"

She shook her head. "She didn't give me all the details. He said he didn't want to spend the night crying. All I could get out of her was that she was worried."

"Concerned?" I repeat.

"About your relationship." She shifted, pausing for a moment as my body felt like it was being ripped in two.

"So she sat on my couch and cried and ate ice cream and then we watched Twilight together."

I clenched my teeth so hard it felt like my jaw was about to explode. Then, as gently as I could, I lifted her into my arms.

The T-shirt she wore was wet from her bathing suit, clinging to her skin. He was probably cold. I cradled her sleeping form to my chest as if she were the most precious thing in the world.

Because she was.

And I didn't deserve her.

"Thanks for the support," I said to Minnie. "She is lucky to have you as a friend."

Minnie gave me a sad smile. "She's lucky to have you too, you know. You are a good fellow. Always protecting her, even when it hurts."

She was trying to make me feel better. And me enjoyed the thought. I just wish she didn't. I deserved to feel all the guilt churning in my stomach.

Instead of answering, I carried Belle to the door. "What time are you two leaving tomorrow?" I asked Minnie before

to go out.

"She said she wouldn't come with me tomorrow. Said he wanted to spend the day in bed."

I sighed.

"Have a good rest of your night, Minnie," I said.

"You too, Alpha," Minnie replied as I walked down the hall. "Don't be too hard on yourself, okay?"

I would have laughed if I could have felt any emotion other than hate even at that moment. For me

It was too late for that.

Chapter 47

BELLE

My eyes were so swollen from crying all night, that hurt to open in the morning.

I was extremely happy that I decided to stay home today instead of going with Minnie.

All I wanted the last few days was away from Grayson and my ward, but right now nothing felt better than lying in bed and watching movies all day while I tended to my wounds.

Groaning, I tried to roll over, only to be stopped by a heavy, muscular arm around my waist. I stopped.

Grayson was here. Grayson was never here in the morning. He was sleeping beside me, pressed to my body, his grip on my waist strong and unyielding.

No wonder I felt like I could sleep for ever. I always slept better with him next to me.

I pondered that I didn't even remember coming back from Minnie's apartment last night.

Grayson must have brought me back. I looked down. I was wearing his shirt and boxers. He should have changed me last night too.

I couldn't remember the last time I woke up with him beside me. It must have been weeks ago. I wondered if he knew what time it was. It was nearly nine. Was he late for something?

I was sure he had missed training completely.

"Grayson." I shook his shoulder. "Grayson, wake up."

His brows drew together, but he didn't open his eyes. He pulled me closer with a huff. "You are disturbing my sleep," he muttered.

I rolled my eyes. I shook your shoulder again, more strong this time.

He groaned and finally opened one eye, looking at me.

"Can I help you with something?" he said lazily, seemingly unconcerned with my confusion.

"You're still here," I said, stating the obvious.

One of his eyebrows rose. "I am?" He raised the head and looked around the room. "Huh. Strange."

I pushed into his chest, my heart fluttering as he let out a deep, sexy laugh that made my stomach do a dip. "I meant, why are *you* still here? You know what time is it?"

He shrugged, laying his head back on the pillow and pulling me closer. "I'm not bothered. I'm taking the day off."

I couldn't help the look of surprise that came over my face. Since when was taking a day off an option for him?

"But...don't you have things to do? you are not a king or something like this?"

He nuzzled his nose in my hair, inhaling deeply. "Exactly. I'm king, so I can do whatever I want. And I'm taking the day off."

I snorted. Was there something I wasn't understanding?
"Do you have plans or...?"

"Yes," he replied. "I intend to spend the entire day with my beautiful companion."

Oh. OK. I understood then. He felt guilty about what happened yesterday in the hot tub and was going to try to make it up to me by spending time with me.

I should be happy. A whole day of Grayson for me? This looked absolutely amazing. But it made yesterday seem like it mattered a great deal. And I didn't want it to be a big deal.

I didn't want him to feel like he had to appease me when he'd done nothing wrong to begin with. I wanted to forget everything that happened and move on with our lives.

And, most importantly, I wanted him to spend time with me because he wanted to, not because he felt bad.

"Grayson," I began, already feeling the all-too-familiar emotion of embarrassment welling up in my chest. "You don't have to do this. I Know You're Scanned with CamScanner Super busy. You can go to work. You don't have to stay with me."

"I know I don't need to. I want. And there's nothing you say or do that will change my mind. I'll spend the day with you, period."

"I have to run to the gym to help Kyle with some stuff and talk about what's going on, but that's only going to be an hour or so. And then I'm all yours."

I wanted to dig a hole to bury myself in the ground for the rest of eternity. Instead, I buried my face in his bare chest and groaned.

Grayson took the opportunity to press his lips to the top of my head, purring in contentment.

"Let me go," I growled, pulling away from him before his purrs had more than a calming effect on me. "I need to urinate."

I grabbed the TV remote from the bedside table and handed it to he. "You can choose the first movie if you like."

Grayson chuckled and tossed the remote at the foot of the bed. "Oh no. There will be no movie session today. I think we both know you need to get out of this apartment. I'll take you out."

"To go out?" I repeat. "What do you mean by 'leave'?"

"It is surprise." He stood up – momentarily mesmerizing me with his shirtless body and muscular legs – and held out his hand to me.

"Let's go. I will prepare a hot bath for you. while I go to train and then we go to the city."

GRAYSON

When I got back to our room after practice, I could hear Belle still in the shower, humming to herself. I smiled at her excited sounds, happy as long as she was happy.

I felt so much calmer after spending an hour at the gym. I told Belle that I needed to talk to Kyle, but that wasn't necessarily true.

I had seen Kyle and spoken to him for a few minutes, but the real reason I left her was to go and relieve some tension before spending the day with her.

I hoped it would help me not jump on her in the middle of our date. It helped a little, but the closer I got to my little companion, the more my control started to slip away.

Her sweet scent assaulted me and forced me to pause in the doorway for a moment to try to get my bearings.

I walked over to the bed and sat on the edge as I slowly took off my shoes. I was still shirtless after practice and was looking forward to seeing how my partner would react to the
I see.

She was weak when it came to my chest and abs. Her pupils were dilating and she was always fumbling for words. It was adorable. And sexy.

Shit, stop thinking about those things.

The sound of her getting out of the tub caught my attention. Complete silence ensued. The only thing I could hear was Belle's breathing as she obviously tried to guess if I was here or not.

I smiled.

Moments later, Belle's head popped out of the bathroom door.

"Oh. Hi," she said. As expected, his eyes roamed over the muscles in my arms. She licked her lips. "I didn't know you were back already."

My eyebrows rose. The smell of your excitement filling the air told me she was lying.

I was pretty sure that if she lifted the towel wrapped around her body just a few inches, I'd see how wet her slit was for me – and not because of the shower I'd just taken.

No, she knew damn well I was back from my trip to the gym. She could feel me, and her body was already heating up, getting ready to mate without even knowing it.

Without saying another word, she opened the door and left.

Completely naked and soaked.

My heart almost stopped.

She didn't even bother to wrap herself in a towel as she paraded across the room, right in front of me, displaying every inch of her beautiful, perfect body for my hungry eyes.

I should have looked away. And normally I would. As much as I wanted to see her get dressed every day, it was easier on both of us if I looked away.

But it was completely obvious that Belle had planned this. She wanted to seduce me.

And even though she knew better than to give in, she still I was so sensitive after everything that happened yesterday.

I needed to boost her confidence, to show her what effect she had on me. I decided then and there that it wouldn't hurt if we spent the first few hours of our day off in this room.

In bed, preferably.

I leaned back, enjoying the particular show my mate was putting on.

Goddess, I loved her and whatever scheme she was planning right now to get my attention, as if she didn't already have it all the time, 24/7, even when I wasn't with her.

She was nervous. I could see by your breath and elevated heart rate.

She had planned this.

My little companion was trying to seduce me. And it was working – more than working.

I was salivating. Sweating. Mine felt like they were about to explode, and pre-cum was leaking from my cock into my pants.

Somehow I was able to contain myself. It's for her own good, I repeated to myself. Stay away from her and you'll keep her safe.

This was becoming a lot easier said than done.

My vampire started purring without my consent, watching Belle intently through my eyes. At the sound, Belle relaxed a little, some of the stiffness fading from her shoulders.

She still hadn't looked at me though, swinging her pretty hips over to the dresser against the wall across from the room.
our bed.

She took a deep breath before slowly opening the top drawer and pulling out some sort of lacy black fabric.

Belle was, right in front of me, putting on some fucking lingerie that could make a stripper blush.

BELLE

I put on the fancy underwear calmly, not once looking at Grayson even though I was dying to. Was he watching me? My heart rate sped up. My palms started to sweat.

Oh, God, what was I doing? That was so stupid. I
I should have known it would come to nothing.

I walked past him to the full-length mirror across the room. I watched myself, running my hands over my sides in a way that I only hoped looked teasing.

Even I couldn't deny the fact that I looked beautiful.
Well, at least I hoped it was. I could only hope it had caught Grayson's attention.

He didn't show any signs that he was enjoying it - or
even watching - the little show

What I was doing for him.

A gust of wind ruffled my hair. I smiled. Grayson's glowing hands gripped my waist from behind, then abruptly pulled me in front of him.

He began to purr, the sound coming from deep in his chest and vibrating down my back, making my entire body feel warm and languid.

Something long and hard was pressed against the bottom. from my back, and I had to hold back my excitement.

"Are you trying to kill me?" he moaned in my ear, his voice disturbed and desperate.

I turned in his arms, winking at him innocently. "I have no idea what you are talking about."

Grayson's eyes roamed over my lace-wrapped breasts, darkening significantly. His hands tightened around my waist, purring starting to grow in his chest, automatically making me melt even more into his embrace.

"Where the hell did you get this?" he asked, his voice coming out all scratchy.

I smiled, wrapping my arms around his neck and threading my fingers into his silky dark hair. "Minnie went out shopping the other day."

His eyes narrowed. "So you bought this just to torture me?"

Well... if the hood fits...

One of his hands traveled over my chest and then lightly over my breast, right over my covered nipple.

I took a deep breath. The space between my legs throbbed. "I needed new underwear."

“You have two drawers full of underwear in our wardrobe.” Unashamedly, his eyes focused on my barely visible nipple, licking his lips with a hungry expression.

“Not the kind I wanted,” I breathed. “I read somewhere that women can feel more empowered when they wear sexy lingerie under their everyday clothes.”

Grayson growled and leaned in, his lips grazing the curve of my ear, inhaling deeply. “No way. You are not going to wear that today.”

“And why not?”

“Do you think I can make it through the day when I know you're wearing this?” he asked, kissing my ear and then the side of my neck, just above my mark.

“Do you think I won't freak out?”

I grabbed his chin and forced him to look at me, so I stood on tiptoe and brushed my lips against his.

He groaned.

“Then I'm wearing it right,” I whispered against her mouth.

Without warning, I was picked up and placed on the bed in less than a second, Grayson on top of me. His mouth crashed against mine, claiming me, dominating me.

I kissed him back eagerly, pulling him closer to me by his hair. My entire body lit up at his touch, begging for more.

I pulled away as Grayson continued kissing me. His lips traveled along my jaw and down my throat, paying close attention to my mark. I groaned.

“Grayson,” I whispered.

His tongue slipped out and licked over my mark – completely enveloping it and driving me crazy – before he responded. "What is love? What you need?"

"You," I replied breathlessly. "I need you. Please."

"I'm right here, my beautiful. I'm here," he said, never taking his lips from mine.

His hands roamed my body, but never came close to unclasping my bra or touching my panties. I let out a frustrated breath.

"No, Grayson, that's not what I meant. To mean, I... want you to want me."

Grayson's body froze on top of mine. he if he pulled back so he could look at me with his black eyes.

"Want you? Belle... Are you still worried about our conversation the other day? I thought I made it clear how much I love you. I want you so much."

"I know... I just... So why don't you..." I swallowed hard, my cheeks turning bright pink. I was really about to be that "Why haven't you...made love to me yet?" kind of girl.

"Shit, Belle..." he replied, his head falling.

"Please, Grayson," I said, not even caring if I was begging or what he might think of me.

"I can not take it anymore. I need you to take me. I need to be connected to you. I need" I gulped, feeling my face heat up "to feel you inside me."

Grayson growled so loudly the bed shook. "Cum. Fuck, you can't say things like that to me, Belle. You me... Fuck."

He moaned, dropping his head to my neck, breathing in deeply, growls coming from his chest with each breath.

Feeling his resolve breaking, I kissed his shoulder, then licked to the spot that I knew would be where I would mark him if I were a werewolf.

I sucked on the spot and then bit down gently. he released a violent series of curses.

"I need you inside me, Grayson," I repeated, whispering in his ear as I continued to kiss and lick the side of his neck, trying to mimic the way I'd seen werewolves kiss their mates.

I pressed my core against his hard erection. "I need you deep inside me, thrusting in and out, over and over, until you come deep inside.

I need you to mate me. Please."

Grayson was losing control over me. His hips were grinding fiercely against me, making stars dance in my vision. Her purr was the loudest I had ever heard.

The sound was incredibly intoxicating. that was making me releasing copious amounts of fluid from my pussy, completely soaking my panties.

Without warning, Grayson snarled and his elongated claws ripped down the front of my lace bra, pulling it completely out of my body.

I would have scolded him for ruining my new underwear, but I didn't get the chance because a second later, his mouth was on my nipple.

I screamed with happiness. My back arched into his touch and my hands gripped his hair, pulling him impossibly closer. His manly scent was driving me crazy, my mouth watering.

What I wouldn't give to have his cock – the same one he was still rubbing my swollen clit over and over again – in my mouth, releasing his cum down my throat. I was desperate.

But not as desperate as I was for him to fuck me.

Grayson seemed to be feeling the same way I was. He trailed openmouthed kisses down my body until he reached my panties and then ripped them off my body.

“This,” I gasped, opening my legs for him. Any modesty I had flew out the window the moment his crimson eyes took in my dripping pussy. “Fuck me Grayson. Please fuck me.”

Grayson's growl shook the walls and the bed. “I need to taste you first, mate. I need my mate to come on my tongue.”

Now, it's not that I didn't want that. He could lick my pussy for the rest of eternity, and I would never get tired of it. I doubted he would either.

When he started, you usually had to beg him to stop and finally come up for air. But oddly enough, I needed more now.

If he didn't stick his huge dick in me in the next few two minutes, I would definitely explode.

I opened my mouth to protest, but was immediately silenced when he ran his tongue across the entrance to my pussy.

Okay, so maybe an orgasm from your mouth isn't so roomy...

"Oh," I groaned. "Oh..."

I was so turned on it only took me a few minutes to climax, screaming his name as my head thrashed against the pillow.

"What are you doing?"

"Shh, my needy mate," Grayson said. He sucked my clit into his mouth, swirling his tongue around it.

My head fell back. "Grayson." I whimpered his name as my hips moved against his sinful mouth.

As good as it was, we both knew it wasn't what I wanted. "Grayson. I need your dick. Now. Please."

He groaned. "I can't stand it when you beg."

Excellent.

He looked at me from between my legs. He made intense eye contact with me as he licked my clit, once, twice, three times. It was the most erotic thing I've ever seen in my life.

"Just let me take care of you, Belle," he said. His voice was so deep and smooth. It felt like silk as it traveled through my ears.

He kissed my tingling bud with his glossy lips.
“Let me make you feel so good you'll forget about everything else.”

I tensed, finally understanding what he meant.
He was distracting me so he wouldn't have to have sex with me.

I sat up on my elbows. “Stop, Grayson.” I jerked his head.
“I'm serious, stop.”

Grayson's tongue slowed to a stop and he stood up.
His eyes immediately focused on my lips which were pressed into a line in an effort not to cry.

“Belle...” he said. His hand cupped my face. “I did something?
I hurt you?”

I shook my head. Tears pooled in the corners of my eyes,
which infuriated me. Why do I always have to cry?

I grabbed a blanket and wrapped it tightly around myself. I
didn't look at him as I spoke. I'm just going to say this. “I need you
to tell me why you don't want to have sex with me.”

“I want-”

“I need you to tell me why you don't want to have sex with
me without lying recently, I keep thinking it's because you don't
love me anymore or something.”

I laughed nervously, which ended up sounding like a tearful
squeak. “Which is ridiculous because we're mates, and it would
probably take a long time for your mate to stop loving you, right?”

Grayson tried to answer, but now that I had
started, there was no way to stop.

“It's just that, before everything happened, you could barely keep your hands off me. You couldn't stop talking about how much you wanted to sleep with me. But now... I know you're really stressed and all, but I thought... I know something's going on. You've been avoiding me, working constantly, and yet you haven't made love to me, which I know has killed your wolf. I can see the battle inside you every time we're together. What are you not telling me? Something changed?”

You do not want me anymore? Are you no longer...attracted to me?”

Grayson looked like he was in the worst possible physical pain when I finished. Meanwhile, I was sobbing, my chest doing huge leaps with the effort of not bursting into tears.

He pulled me to him. I wanted to fight his grip, but he started purring before I could, and all my struggle left my body.

He laid me on top of him, my back against his front, his arms wrapped around me. I knew what he was doing.

From this position, their purrs vibrated throughout my body, soaking in the calming vibration. My tears slowed to a stop and a comforting tranquility filled me.

"Better?" he asked me after a minute.

As if he didn't know the effect his mindless purrs had on me.

“I hate it when you do that,” I muttered.

He kissed my forehead, brushing my hair away from my face with gentle, loving fingers. “No, not hate.”

I sighed. Was he right. I am not.

“You're right,” he said calmly. “There is something I have hidden from you.”

I silently waited for him to continue.

“Do you remember the portrait of the former queen of the supernatural?” he asked.

I had no idea what that had to do with anything, but I nodded anyway. “Evangeline. The woman I met at the restaurant.”

During my first few days in Zaweth, Grayson took me for a tour of the castle.

On that tour, he showed me portraits of all the kings and queens of the past – vampires, werewolves and everything in between – and I was shocked to discover that I actually recognized one of the portraits.

I had known the beautiful blonde woman in the painting, although Grayson claimed she had been painted hundreds of years ago.

It was Evangeline. Evangeline Viotto, the woman I met at restaurant the night before Adalee attacked me.

When I told Grayson about this encounter, he didn't believe in me.

Well, he didn't disbelieve me - he didn't exactly say those words, but he definitely thought the story was a little crazy and forced.

But I knew what I saw. I knew it was her. I wasn't sure how or why...but the former queen of the supernatural definitely came to visit that night.

“Yes, Queen Evangeline.” He ignored my other comment. “Do you know why she was considered such an important and influential queen?”

I shook my head.

Grayson took a deep breath. "She was a fairy, Belle. The last of your kind."

I turned in his lap so I could look at his waist steadily. He. He grabbed my

"A fairy..." I repeated. "Like Tink or something?"

The corner of her lips lifted. "I think you're thinking about pixies, although I remember Tinkerbell being call of the two in the cartoons. The pixies are small, like Tinker Bell. Fairies are human-sized."

I shook my head. "Okay...", I encouraged him to continue.

I could see the concern in his expression. He was nervous to be talking to me about this. Why?

"Evangeline Viotto was a member of the Fae, one of the most dangerous and powerful creatures of all time," Grayson continued. "So powerful that she was hunted and assaulted most of her life. She was enslaved and taken advantage of until her mate found her and made her queen. Many say this is why she was a just and good ruler. She had compassion for her people. She cared about them because she knew what it was like to really suffer."

I swallowed hard. It made sense, really. That's how she managed to take my pain away that night in the cafeteria. She had powers.

"Then there's a huge expectation on my shoulders," I replied quietly. I relaxed at the sound of her purring, seeking the comfort she gave me.

"You are a wonderful queen. It's not my goal to make you feel inadequate. They say that all the queens of the

supernatural know suffering. It's what makes them so compassionate and kind to their people. You will be an amazing queen. But I never want you to be persecuted the way she was because of your powers."

"Good thing I'm only human then," I said, giving him a smile "No one will care about me, right?"

Grayson's lips tightened into a deep frown. My heart squeezed in my chest.

"What?" I asked him. I massaged his shoulders, trying to calm him down, noticing for the first time that they were a little bigger than usual. His eyes were black.

I hadn't realized how close to the surface his wolf was. I was getting used to your eyes changing cor.

There was something really bothering him.

"Talk to me, Grayson," I begged, feeling a little panic now. "Why are you telling me all this?"

When he still didn't answer me, I did the only thing I could think of. I leaned in and pressed my lips to his. It only took one for him to groan and pull me closer, deepening the kiss.

He thrust his tongue into my mouth, making love to mine in long, teasing strokes that made my stomach churn and clench.

His hands ran from my waist to my bottom, massaging with a low growl. The movement only made me budge against him, my hips starting to thrust forward slightly.

I could feel his hard length beneath me, long and thick and desperate. I sighed.

"Fuck, I want you, Belle," he groaned against my lips, driving my hips over his in a way that was driving me crazy. "I fucking want you."

"You have me," I whispered back, just brushing my lips on his as she spoke. "What are you waiting for?"

I screamed in surprise when I was suddenly flipped over so I was lying on my back.

I looked at Grayson with wide eyes as he gently spread my legs and settled his massive frame between them, using his hands for support on either side of my head.

His lips crashed back onto mine in a desperate, passionate kiss. I groaned.

But then he walked away. He looked at me for several long seconds before saying, "Come with me."

Chapter 48

GRAYSON

Once we were both dressed and I made sure she wasn't wearing any of the damn lingerie Minnie bought her, I led Belle through the halls of the castle.

It was a bit of a long walk, but I never let go of Belle's hand for a single moment. She smelled amazing, like sweet sex and mating pheromones.

I almost cursed when I thought of the way she begged me to make love to her in our bedroom, pushing her wet pussy against me, licking and kissing the area of the mark and whimpering in my ear.

Fuck, she almost killed me. It was a miracle I got out of there alive.

She had a right to know exactly what was going on. asking from me. And it's about time I told her.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

She had never been to this part of the castle before. Has been blocked for a reason.

"The files," I replied.

"Because?"

"Because there is something I need to show you."

Belle's small hand gripped mine so tightly that when I looked down at it, I saw that it was white. I was scaring my poor mate.

I pulled her to me gently and lifted her into my arms, cradling her to my chest. I purred as I continued to walk and only relaxed when I felt her snuggle into my neck with a sigh.

We went down several flights of stairs until we couldn't go any further away, reaching the lowest level of the palace, underground.

It was a giant maze down there with twists and turns that could trap a person in an endless loop if you weren't careful.

I maneuvered with ease though, having got down there hundreds of times when he was still looking for Belle.

I finally stopped at the end of a long hallway, which ended in an archway. I stopped in the small brick room. It was dark and the air was heavy with condensation.

I put Belle on the floor. She turned, surveying the room.

"Is this where you tell me this was all just a big joke and it kills me?" She laughed nervously.

I walked over to the wall on the other side of it and removed a loose brick from the stone layers. Behind it was a small box of matches, which I picked up.

"King Elijah Viotto came from a powerful bloodline of vampires who had the power to create and manipulate fire." I held up the matchbox for her to see. "Since I don't have those powers..."

I lit a match and held it up to one of the torches that lined the walls of the small room, lighting it with fire. Immediately, the fire spread and all the torches ignited.

Belle took several steps back. "I don't think I'll ever get used to magic," she muttered uneasily.

I walked to the opposite side of the room, where the bricks on the wall were arranged in a circle the size of a car tire.

My eyes turned red and fangs sprouted from my gums as my vampire surged into my mind. I didn't even need to call him. He knew where we were and what I needed.

Silently, I pressed one of my fangs into the pad of my right thumb until it broke the surface of my skin. A drop of blood formed on my thumb.

I looked back at Belle, who was watching me with skeptical interest.

"It only works on the blood of royalty," I explained.

"And since I'm the only living royal, at least until we complete the mating process" – my entire body tensed at the mention of mating – "I'm the only person in the world who can enter this room."

I pressed my bloodied thumb into the center of the circle on the wall. The bricks began to spin towards the circle, slowly at first and then faster.

Eventually, they were moving so fast that an ordinary person's gaze wouldn't be able to keep up. It became a huge blur of wind and brick.

"Yeah, fine," Belle said as she looked at the spot where the wall used to be in awe. she walked up to me.

“That was the coolest thing I've ever seen. Are you telling me this has been here all along and you just now showed it to me?” She slapped my chest. “You are hiding things from me.”

I led her a few steps forward with my hand on her back. “Why don't you look what's inside and then try telling me that again?”

Behind the wall was another, larger room, lit by the same torches that surrounded us.

The room was filled with tables with incredible artifacts and relics, dating back centuries, all related to the life of supernatural royalty.

The amount of history in this room alone was absolutely astonishing. And it would have gone unnoticed if not for Cassian Mortar getting lost several years ago and finding the room.

Someday, I planned to really explore the archives – pull it all out and assess its significance. Maybe I'd even make a museum out of it all.

But for now, its sole purpose was to house and preserve the object that was the sole reason we were here now.

Belle hesitated, her eyes darting around the files, probably confused as to why I brought her here.

I gently took her hand, bringing her attention to me. “You have nothing to fear. It's perfectly safe in there,” I told her.

She didn't look convinced. “I just...I have a feeling that whatever you're about to show me is going to be a very important one. It will explain why you've been acting so strange since we got back from Maine and why you haven't taken the step.

final to officially mate with me and make me his. And that's what I want. But before that happens, I just need to know that when we leave that room, you'll still be mine.
partner. It won't end with me losing you, right?"

I swore low. "The fact that you have to ask that..."
I ran my hand over my face.

"Get those damn thoughts out of your head. You will never get rid of me. It would be easier to find a grain of salt in a sandbox."

Before she could respond and probably present me with more evidence of what a horrible mate I'd been to her, I scooped her up in my arms and threw her over my shoulder.

Belle squealed. "What are you-"

"Enough of that," I snapped. I marched to the podium. On top of it was a piece of parchment scrawled in ink and lit by the torches that surrounded us.

"Read," I grumbled as I placed it in front of him.

His eyes scanned the old, fragile document. "This is it...?"
She looked at me. "Is this the prophecy?"

I nodded. "Read," I repeated.

She looked down. My body simultaneously relaxed and filled with anxiety. I knew I should have told her about this prophecy a long time ago. After all, it was her life that was in danger.

I just had to do everything in my power to protect
the

I wrapped my arms around her from behind, pulling her to me so that her back was completely

pressed against my forehead, not an inch of space between us.

I studied her for a while, looking for any signs of fear or panic on her face. The prophecy was long, though, and it was taking her time to absorb all the information it offered.

"Immortal king...", she read aloud. "Immortal King?" His gaze locked with mine. "Are you talking about you?"

My chest rose and fell restlessly as I nodded.

"But... that means you'll live forever – without me." Her bright blue eyes widened, her tongue sliding out to wet her lower lip. Is that why you didn't mate with me? Are you afraid that I will die and you will have to go on without me?"

I held her closer, a low growl leaving my chest. "No. You die, I die. Did you understand? I refuse to live without you." I squeezed her hips gently. "Keep reading."

"But I-"

"Belle," I coaxed. "Let's talk after you read all. OK baby? Don't start panicking just yet."

"Oh, so there's more reason to panic?" she he said, his voice sounding stressed.

"Nothing we can't handle together."

After a moment's hesitation, she turned and looked at the podium.

I hated all the stress I was causing her – I had been causing her. I could feel the worry emanating from her in waves and my protective instincts took over.

I swept her hair over her shoulder, revealing her bare neck to me. My lips grazed her mark as she continued to read, my chest vibrating with my vampire's deep purrs.

She leaned back against me, her fingers losing their grip. Tension they had in my arms, which were still wrapped around her.

My only goal was to soothe her, but I definitely didn't mind when the scent of her arousal and mating pheromones filled the small room's air, mingling with the scent of wet stone and damp air.

His breathing quickened and I bit back a moan as my already hard cock twitched in my pants. I knew Belle could feel it, the air around us so sexually charged with tension it was almost suffocating.

I couldn't stop my lips from kissing from his mark to his pulse. His heart was beating frantically under my lips, racing even faster as I sucked on his neck.

It was all I could do not to sink my fangs into her throat and swallow her sweet blood, knowing all it would do was send them both into a frenzy.

"Do you want me to read this or not?" Belle demanded, unconsciously wiggling her beautiful ass against my cock.

I chuckled into his neck despite my feelings of despair. "Sorry love. I'm just looking forward to it."

She didn't answer, turning back to the prophecy.

"And she will become a member of the Fae. They will assume the throne, reincarnated king and queen," she read aloud.

My lips pulled away from her skin, but my purrs only got louder as she continued to tense with every word she read.

"What this means?" she asked me, pointing to the part that explains their transition after mating.

"It means you're going to change after we mate," I explained softly. "You will become a fairy like Evangeline Viotto."

Chapter 49

GRAYSON

"You're kidding right?" Belle asked.

"I'm not kidding, love. I wish. Everything in that prophecy is true."

Belle turned, and I knew she would have tried to pull away from me in a panic if I hadn't pinned her quickly against the podium pressing my body in front of her.

She looked down at my chest, her gaze unfocused, her thoughts racing a million an hour. "A fairy. A fairy. OK. I, um..." She let out a big sigh. "Sorry, I'm just trying to process all of this."

"Okay," I said, trying to calm her down. "Unhurried."

"A fairy," she repeated once more. "But what does it mean? His voice rose an octave. "Do I have to become a fairy if we want to be together? "I don't think I even know what a fairy really is. What they do? What kind of powers do they have? And will it hurt?"

"You told me changing into your wolf was too painful the first time. It will be like this? Will this happen right away? As soon as we're done, I'm going to pass out, or it's going to be a few days."

"Hey Hey hey." I held his face between my hands. "Take a few deep breaths for me, okay? I need you to calm down so my wolf doesn't lose his mind."

I could already feel my inner beast getting ready to fight conscience.

He wanted to wrap her in his fur and force her to sleep, convinced that a good night's sleep was what she needed whenever she was upset.

Belle didn't hear me at first. I could see her thoughts racing behind her eyes as she tried to process everything.

"Come here, love," I purred, pulling her to my chest. vibrant.

She only struggled with me for a second before laying her head down on the vibrations and wrapping her arms around me. Her muscles began to relax almost instantly.

"That's right. That's my girl. Just Breathe."

We stayed like that for a few seconds. So she spoke against my shirt. "Is that why you haven't... been with me?" that's why

I hardened. "Yes. I would have had sex with you that first night in that hotel in Maine if I could have. It's killing me not being able to bond with you."

"Why did not you tell me?"

"I wanted. You have no idea how much I wanted to tell you. But I had just found you again. I was already burdening you so much with Azazel, and my vampire, and becoming queen. I couldn't risk scaring you when I had just started to earn your trust back." I ran my hand through her hair. "I didn't mean to burden you."

"So does that mean... we'll never complete the mating ritual?" His hands curled into my shirt. "You Will you never stay with me like this because you are afraid of what might happen?"

“Fucking hell I won't. I'll eat you and your pussy sweet. And so on. Make no mistake about it.”

“But what about-?”

“Nothing and no one will stop me from taking what's mine, you hear? We're both going to go crazy if we don't mate. The bond is already uniting us. And then you walk around in mouthwatering fucking lingerie...”

“Yes, I will not apologize for that. She did her job; caught your eye, didn't it? You are finally being honest with me.”

“Oh, it did more than that. You have no idea how close I came to taking you on the spot.”

Standing on tiptoe, she wrapped her arms around my neck. So the little minx just brushed her lips across mine, whispering, “Once again... doing her job.”

Of their own accord, my hands slid down to cup her perfect ass, pulling her abruptly forward so she could feel her effect on me.

“Don't tease me, Belle,” I groaned. “I'm barely holding on. Have some mercy, okay?”

Her pupils dilated at the feel of my rock hard cock against her stomach that her diamond blue irises were almost gone.

I knew very well the fact of being attracted to each other. that we were

So desperate for connection on a deeper level – which included me shoving my rock-hard cock into her soaking pussy until she screamed my name – that we could barely end this serious conversation.

Belle was the first to snap out of the trance the mate bond had put us in, blinking the lust out of her eyes.

"So, uh, what are we going to do then?" His breathing was getting labored. "What exactly does it mean to become a fairy?"

My jaw tightened.

"Sincerely, I do not know. I read all the information I could about the Fae, but most of it was just myth or superstition. Evangeline Viotto was born a fairy. She never had to transform. As far as I know, you will be the first fairy created. I don't know what to expect. I don't know how to protect you."

Suddenly, Belle reared back and hit me in the chest. So she did this again and again until she was basically having a little fit against me. Of course it didn't hurt. In fact, it was more adorable than anything.

"Per. What. You. No. Me. He said. These. Stuff?" she yelled as she continued to hit me with the heels of her hands in weak pats. "You big idiot! You asshole! You took it all by yourself without telling me what's going on?"

Though I could feel his genuine anger through the bond, I couldn't help but smile as I watched my beautiful mate vent her frustration of the last few weeks onto my rock hard chest with ineffective jabs.

"It's okay, honey, it's okay. That's enough. you will hurt," I said, grabbing her wrists.

She continued to struggle, trying to get her hands out of my grip, but I didn't budge. Would she hurt her perfect palms if continue.

My vamp started to purr at her, hoping to help her calm down, but it seemed to have the opposite effect when her angry gaze turned to me and she glared at me.

"No! Stop using your stupid purr to make me do whatever you want, you big, dumb, stupid, manipulative, vampire, werewolf, man... thing! Argh!"

My eyebrows raised. I imagined many different reactions from my little companion when I told her about the prophecy, but I never expected anything like this.

She obviously needed to vent. I let go of her wrists and stopped purring, allowing her to do whatever was necessary to calm down.

"There!" she screamed as her hand connected particularly tightly with my pecs. She looked at me with renewed irritation.

"And why are you so muscular? You look more like a giant rock than a real person!" She hit me again and again, but her blows felt more like little soft touches than anything else. She was so fucking adorable.

I did not answer. I just continued to look at her with fun, letting her vent.

A minute or two later, her energy finally ran out and she collapsed against my chest with a huff. She was still mumbling disgruntled when I started running my hand up and down her back, trying to calm her down.

"Feeling better?" I murmured against his hair.

"No," she rumbled back. "You really give me nerves, you know?"

"You commented."

After a moment of silence, Belle asked, "I'm going to gain wings? Oh my god, will I be able to fly? Fairies can fly, right?"

I shook my head. "I have no idea. I wish I could tell you more, but legend has it that fairies develop abilities based on need. They are never the same. I don't know what will happen to you. I could tell you what to expect if you turned wolf, but the Fae have been extinct for years. That's why we have to approach the matter with caution. I won't risk you getting hurt.

"So...okay, you're scared that having sex with me might kill me. Right?"

I growled, hating that we were talking about her death so casually. "Yes."

She nodded. "Okay, but listen, because I think I have the perfect solution..." She paused. "What if we just have sex anyway?"

"No. No way."

Her head rolled back, a moan coming from her throat. "I think you might be exaggerating a bit.

Look, the prophecy said that I would become queen. I can't be queen if I'm dead."

"Evangeline Viotto was a queen too, and look what happened to her. I'm not taking any chances, Belle. We don't know what the faerie transformation will be like because no one has ever done it before. Even if you survived, it could still hurt you, cause permanent damage... Do you hear me?"

There I was, talking about her possible death, my worst nightmare, and she was staring off into space, not caring about me.

His eyes flicked to mine. "Sorry, I, um...it's just...I think I have an idea. I think I know how to fix all this."

Chapter 50

GRAYSON

Belle pulled her older-than-dinosaur phone out of her back pocket. It was a flip phone the size of a small brick. It was a reminder of how she lived when she was in Maine.

It made me unnecessarily angry.

"What are you doing?" I asked her.

She clicked through her contact list in a hurry. "I am looking for Queen Evangeline's phone number," she explained.

I looked at her, certain that I had finally driven her to the brink of madness. "What?"

"Evangeline gave me the number when she visited me at the restaurant. She told me that I would need to talk to her about something in the near future. I think now is the time."

I narrowed my eyes in frustration.

"Dear..."

"I know, I know, you don't believe me because you think I was in the middle of a grief-induced psychotic break and made it all up."

She pressed the call button and put the phone on speaker. "But just ride the wave for a second, yeah?"

I sighed and listened to the sound of the phone's ring tone echoing throughout the large room. I wasn't sure what Belle thought she was going to get out of it.

I admit, though, that I was a little interested to see how it would turn out. Who the hell was on the other side of that number?

After a minute of listening to the tone, it went to voicemail – the kind that told me this phone number didn't belong to anyone.

Belle withered as she stared at the phone. She hung up before leaving a message and looked at me. “Okay, so maybe it was a psychotic break. But it was worth a try, right?”

She looked to be on the verge of tears. She was on edge. I had stressed her out enough for one day.

I leaned over and kissed her forehead. “Right,” I replied in a gentle tone.

I took Belle to the library. She needed as much information about the Fae as possible. Over the past few months, I've done a lot of research on my own.

I scoured the supernatural realm for any text I could find about fairies or turning into anything other than a wolf.

I found a total of three books – all with just one page of relevant information each.

It was irritating.

And that was all I had to show Belle regarding the answers. I felt useless.

I took her out after that. As much as I knew she wanted to be alone with me to talk about all of this, I couldn't for two reasons.

First, because I knew she needed to get out of our apartment, and second, because I had proven that I couldn't be alone with her in our apartment without getting precariously close to fucking her until I couldn't anymore.

So yeah, I took her out. We went out to lunch and talked for hours. It was so much easier to concentrate when she was sitting across from me, out of reach, in a public place. It kept me in line.

I told her everything she wanted to know and thanked my lucky stars that she didn't get too mad at me for hiding so much vital information from her for so long.

Don't get me wrong; she was angry – she also wanted to pity and forgive me. I really didn't deserve her.

It was late at night when we finally got back home. We were both tired from the exhausting day.

My arm was around my sweet companion's shoulder, and she leaned into me lovingly as we approached the door to our apartment. I stopped her when she reached for the doorknob.

"I need you to do me a favor, Belle," I said. I glared at her to make sure she could see me head on.

"I need you to help me with something."

She nodded apprehensively. "OK..."

I couldn't help it as I slowly pulled her to me by the waist so we were glued together. "You have to give me

a break. You have to stop being so sexy before I go crazy.”

His lips slowly curved. “I don't know if this is something I can control. I have a lot of new lingerie to debut.”

I held back a groan, imagining her wearing the black one. tiny that she had put on before. “Belle...” I warned.

She laughed. “Hey, it's not just my fault! you know how hard it is for me to be close to you without tearing *your* clothes?”

A low purr vibrated in my chest. My hand moved down her body, sliding over her jean-covered ass. Her talking about ripping my clothes off didn't help the point I was trying to convey.

“Oh, trust me, you made that perfectly clear, lifemate. How about helping us then?”

She rolled her eyes. “Okay fine. I promise not to try to seduce you anymore... even though my sensuality is often simply uncontrollable.”

I laughed. “And I promise the same.”

I led her through the door of our apartment, feeling much lighter than the last time we left.

That was until I noticed the figure sitting in the corner of our room.

BELLE

Grayson instantly sprang into action, turning into his wolf faster than I could blink.

He snarled at the person sitting in the armchair in the corner, approaching her in a crouch, ears pressed against his head.

The figure in the corner chuckled. "Oh my God, you have a huge wolf. No wonder you're the next hybrid king. You can be even bigger than my mate."

My breath caught in my throat. "Evangeline?"

She looked so elegant and confident, sitting with her gloved hands folded neatly in her lap and her legs crossed at the ankles.

She was wearing a turquoise dress the color of the Caribbean Sea, and her silvery blonde hair was pulled into an elegant bun on top of her head, with loose strands framing her face.

She grinned at me. "I was asking when you were going to call me."

"I-I, um..." I wasn't as stuttering as the last time I spoke to her, but then again, I didn't exactly know that she was the former queen of the entire world, did I?

"It's so good to see you again my girl," she continued. His gaze slid to Grayson, who had stepped back to stand protectively in front of me.

He was still snarling at her menacingly, crouched low. "You can transform. I'm no threat. Look at your mate, she is not afraid of me." She smiled at me.

"Are you, Belle?"

I hesitated for just a moment before slowly denying it. "No. I don't think so." I put my hand on Grayson's head. "It can shift," I said.

Grayson didn't move for several moments, then he turned and caught the front of my shirt between his teeth, then promptly began dragging me towards our bedroom door.

It was clear to me that he was taking me there so he could change and get dressed while still keeping an eye on me.

"Oh, um," I looked at Evangeline as we entered our room. Fortunately, she was watching us with an amused smile on her face. "We'll be right back, I guess."

Evangeline nodded. "I will be here!" she yelled after us.

I smiled back and quickly closed the door. Grayson was human again when I turned around.

Before I even knew what was happening, Grayson had his hands on either side of my face and was crushing my lips against his. tingles

roamed my body.

"I'm sorry for not believing you," he said when he pulled away a second later. "You are wonderful and beautiful, and I will never doubt you again."

I laughed. "Excellent." My eyes moved down her body as if they had a mind of their own.

"Now, get dressed. We are with the queen of the supernatural sitting in our living room."

He kissed my lips one more time. "You are the queen of the supernatural, honey. And don't forget about it."

.....

After changing into a pair of jeans and a white T-shirt, Grayson walked out of the room first, pulling me behind him with his hand tightly gripping mine.

It was sweet how determined he was to protect me from sweet old lady sitting across from us.

"King Grayson Stoll," greeted Evangeline, "it is a pleasure to meet you."

"Queen Evangeline Viotto," Grayson replied, bowing the chin in recognition.

Evangeline laughed. "No one has called me that in ages. It's good to hear again. It's good to be here again."

She looked around with raised eyebrows.
"Although I don't remember being so...modern. All the rooms I stayed in were gold plated and had a custom chandelier. I must say this is much more welcoming."

"The room you and King Elijah stayed in still exists. AND where the Mortar are now."

Evangeline nodded. "Yes, the Mortar. Still inhabiting the palace, apparently."

"You're...alive," I said.

"Seems like it, doesn't it?"

"As?"

"I'm happy to answer any and all questions, but I need to warn you that my time here is limited. I won't be staying much longer - and I have a feeling you have far more important questions to ask me that have nothing to do with the state of my mortality."

I took a step forward, only to be interrupted by my still hesitating companion.

I rolled my eyes. "What it is. I trust her," I said.

I took a seat on the couch across from Evangeline, and Grayson quickly followed.

I already knew he would try to pull me onto his lap when he sat down next to me. He did this when he felt protective and possessive.

But there was no way I was going to have a conversation with Evangeline Viotto sitting on my mate's lap, so I quickly pressed myself against him as he sat down so that I was almost on top of him.

He purred softly and wrapped an arm around my shoulders, pulling me impossibly closer.
Success.

"You've been having a big scary alpha king wrapped around your little finger." she hummed. "I know the feeling. So to what do I owe the pleasure of your call, my dear Belle Dupree?"

I took a deep breath and gripped Grayson's hand tightly in mine. "We need to know about fairies."

Evangeline threw back her head and laughed. "Yes, I'm sure they do. Any details?"

"Transformation," Grayson interrupted. "We need to know what the transformation into a fairy will be like." His voice was strained and low. His body was rigid next to mine, and his eyes were dark brown.

This whole subject was really stressing him out. My throat hurt thinking about the fact that he had been dealing with this alone for so long.

I mean, the idiot did this to himself... but still so it must have been a lot.

I squeezed his hand, trying to give him some comfort. He immediately squeezed back.

Evangeline's smile faded a little. "Oh yes." She let out a deep breath that didn't sound promising at all. "Unfortunately, that's the only thing I can't help you with."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"I was born a fairy. My powers may not have developed until I met the king, but even then, I never had to go through the changing process. I'm not sure if anyone has passed," she explained.

Grayson snarled, baring clenched teeth at the ceiling.

I quickly turned to him and cupped his face in my hands, determined to calm him down before he did something stupid like kill the previous queen.

He stared at me with his vivid red eyes, remembering a volcano about to erupt.

"Shouldn't I be the one freaking out?" I asked him, trying to keep my tone light. "This is happening to me, remember? How did I become the one who comforts you?"

He growled again, lower this time and more menacing.

Okay, so that was the wrong thing to say.

He grabbed my wrists, squeezing them lightly. "You can't get hurt, Belle." His voice was strained and deep. "I can't let anything happen to you. You're everything to me."

"I know," I agreed. Excitement welled up in my chest. "You are everything to me too."

Evangeline leaned forward, catching our attention.

I released Grayson, turning to the former queen. "Why are we thinking changing to a fairy is going to harm Belle?" she asked. The Fae aren't like werewolves. We don't need to break bones or create new limbs. We are human at our core."

"It was agonizing when I became a hybrid and acquired my vampire. Vampires are also human at their core, aren't they?" Grayson pointed.

"Ah, yes, but your body had to process an extreme amount of highly toxic poison by becoming part vampire. It won't be like that the transformation into a fairy."

"How do you know?" Grayson continued to challenge. "He can guarantee it?"

Evangeline's eyes left him for a moment. "No, I don't think I can."

Grayson was about to explode. His anger was palpable in the air around us. This mixed with his overwhelming fear for my safety, and it felt like I was nearly drowning in my mate's intense emotions.

I put a hand on his knee in a pathetic attempt to calm him down, but he continued to seethe.

"So what, should I just mate her, knowing that this can you kill her?" he snarled at Evangeline.

"I can assure you this won't kill you..." she said, trying to comfort him.

"You don't know that," he interrupted. "You can't know. So the only thing you can guarantee me is that I can never be with my own mate."

"You will mate Belle, young alpha, no matter how hard you try to avoid it. You are companions. And it's in the prophecy. You will complete the mating process and assume the roles of king and queen of the reincarnated supernatural, whether you like it or not. Your fate is already written for you."

"Will I get wings?" I cut.

Both gazes turned to me.

"Forgiveness?" Evangeline asked.

"Will I get wings?" I repeat. "You know, like a real fairy." I studied her wingless appearance with a grimace. She didn't look anything like what I thought fairies were.

They both stared at me for several seconds. My attempt to change the subject was pathetic and obvious.

But I didn't know how long Evangeline would be here, and I didn't see the point in continuing to talk about what the change would look like when there was clearly no absolute answer. I had other questions.

"It's possible," Evangeline said finally. "Wings are common to the Fae, but each Fae develops their powers based on need and circumstances."

"So we have no idea what I'll be like as a fairy?"

“I can see that you will have powers. I'm afraid that's all I know.”

I shifted, restless. My frustration at the lack of information available about Fae was starting to show. I had no idea what I was getting myself into.

“May I ask what your powers are?” I asked Evangeline.

She gave me a small smile. “I have many powers. It would take too long to list them all. I believe there are other, more useful ways to use that time.”

Grayson let out a snarl. “So you can't give us any useful information,” he snapped.

I sighed. I refused to believe he had just said that. “Grayson!” I scolded, elbowing him in the ribs. He ignored me.

“It's okay, Belle,” Evangeline assured me. I was relieved to see that she looked amused rather than offended. “This type of behavior is expected from an alpha male trying to protect his mate.”

“That doesn't mean it has to be tolerated,” I groaned, looking at him.

Grayson seemed totally unconcerned by my scolding tone and look. “I don't want to,” he declared suddenly, looking at Evangeline with his jaw set.

Evangeline's brows drew together as she waited for him to continue with his confused statement. After a moment she said, “I'm afraid I don't understand. What do you not want?”

"I don't want to be king," he replied, his voice unwavering and hard. "If giving up my title means ensuring my mate's safety, then so be it. I will step down as King of the Supernatural."

"Grayson..."

"That's not possible. A prophecy is non-negotiable. Is inevitable part of your life. Your story is already written."

"Then write the fuck down. You made that prophecy, right? You must also be able to change it."

Evangeline started to shake her head, but Grayson abruptly slammed his fist down on the coffee table, growling loudly.

I gasped and jumped up, gripping Grayson's arm tightly.

"I will not lose my mate!" Grayson exploded.

Evangeline didn't flinch, continuing to watch the rabid alpha male in front of her with enough calm to calm any raging storm. Slowly, she got to her feet.

"You will not lose your mate," she said, her voice firm. "Belle will survive. As the prophecy states, the two of you will assume the roles of the immortal king and queen of the reincarnated supernatural. So while I can't say how she will react to your mating, I can tell you that she won't die." His gaze slid to me. She smiled. "Belle has a lot to do."

I turned to Grayson, giving him a small smile. "It saw? I'll be fine."

"Not being dead is a far cry from being okay." With a huff, he pulled me closer to him, making my shoulder rest against his chest.

As strange as this continued public display of affection was, I knew he needed the physical touch to help calm him down. He pressed a rough kiss to the top of my head, his chest vibrating with his low growls.

"Sadly, my time with you two is coming to an end," Evangeline said. She rose from her chair and smoothed her dress with her palms. "I need to go now."

Grayson stiffened behind me.

"Oh," I said. It felt like she'd only been here a few minutes. I still had so many questions for her. "Do you have to go yet?"

"I would love to extend my visit with you two," Evangeline replied, folding her hands in front of her.

His eyes momentarily wandered to the doors of the terrace, with an incredible view of the entire kingdom of Zaweth.

She looked at us with an expression that could only be described as nostalgic. "I like being back in this palace. Despite its change in appearance, it still brings back a lot of fond memories."

Her lips curved. "I also enjoy talking to you two. You remind me so much of me and mine companion at the beginning of our journey."

The faint halo of light around her form was getting darker, brighter, illuminating the dark room around us.

"I really wish I could have been more helpful. I wish I had given better answers to your questions. you can be

Elijah and my reincarnated spirits, but much of this journey is yours. You must experience it for yourself.”

Grayson stood up, pulling me with him. “Is there any chance I can convince you to stay longer?” he asked her.

I almost scoffed, thinking it was a little ironic that he was begging her to stay despite his incredibly rude behavior towards her, as if she wanted to be around him longer than absolutely necessary.

It was a miracle I could stand it.

Evangeline shook her head. “Unfortunately not. My powers allow me to visit, but they have their limits. I gotta go.”

She was glowing brighter than the lamp next to her. I almost had to squint to keep looking at her.

“Where exactly are you going?” I asked, letting my curiosity get the better of me. It was still not clear whether she was alive or not. We were talking to the ghost that?

And if she really was here, did that mean King Elijah was out there too? Did the Mortar fail to kill them when they took the throne all those years ago?

Evangeline laughed as one person might when sharing an inside joke with another. “That would take a long time to explain. Just know that this will be the last time you see me.”

Did that mean she couldn't come back or couldn't come back? "But what if we have more questions?" I let it slip.

"Will you be able to come back if I text you again?"

"The phone only works once," she explained. "You can text that number, but I won't receive it. As I said before, this will be the last time you see me. My powers will not allow me to return."

I wanted to ask why, but was distracted by the sudden burst of brightness around her. I swallowed hard and covered my eyes as Grayson pulled me into his protective embrace.

"I have to get back to my mate now. He gets worried when I'm gone too long. I'm sure you both understand," Evangeline said with a giggle.

I could barely see her; she was too bright for look directly.

The halo of light around her spread through her body, making it look like the glow was under her skin, illuminating her clothes and hair.

"Fate chose you two for a reason; you'll make an amazing king and queen," she continued, her voice sounding far away. "Just trust that what the prophecy says is true and all will be well."

With that, the light exploded into a million tiny sparks that filled the room like snow. Grayson forced my face into his chest and stepped in front of me protectively.

Complete silence ensued. Grayson and I still we were listening, waiting to see if it was over.

After several moments, we finally lifted our heads and cautiously looked around the room. Evangeline is gone, as is the light. We were alone.

I was the first to speak. "Um..." I looked at Grayson, his arms still around me. I couldn't help but laugh. "Did that really just happen?"

Grayson shook his head in shock. He was smiling too, but his wide eyes were still scanning the room. "Yes. It just happened," he confirmed.

One more dumbfounded laugh escaped my mouth as my forehead dropped to his hard chest. "My life used to be normal, you know," I said against his shirt.

Grayson laughed. "Normal or boring?"

I think he was right. I would much prefer this life, even if it's been a little crazy and unexpected since I met him.

I sighed and lifted my head to look at him. "And now?" I asked.

I was acutely aware of the fact that we were alone once more. I was also aware of the fact that there didn't seem to be a good reason why we couldn't mate now.

That knowledge warmed my body and led me to slip my hands under the hem of his shirt, caressing the bare skin from your back.

I traced his muscles and even trailed my fingers lightly beneath his belt and the waistband of his pants, hoping Grayson would take the hint.

My efforts were rewarded when he began to purr softly, obviously enjoying my suggestive touch.

Moisture pooled between my legs at the sound, and a moan escaped my mouth before I could stop it.

I knew Grayson could smell my arousal because his lips landed on mine a moment later.

Heat coursed through my core and exploded in a pool of butterflies that left me breathless. I moaned and leaned in for the kiss.

The way his lips moved against mine, the way he thrust his tongue into my mouth as if he couldn't wait to taste me, somehow made me feel lost and like I'd finally found my home simultaneously.

He pulled away too soon. "Now..." he began, his tone making my stomach churn. My skin tingled when your eyes roamed my flushed face, shifting between red, black, and forest green.

"Fuck now I remind you of the promise you made me just now."

I pouted. "What promise?"

He lowered his head until his lips were barely touching mine as he spoke. "The promise that you wouldn't try to seduce me into having sex with you."

The moan I let out resembled that of a whimpering child. "Are we still talking about this? Even after everything Evangeline just said?"

“Just give me time to figure it out,” Grayson said, trying to calm me down.

“I know the bond makes waiting almost impossible, but please let me think about it. A few days, okay? Give me a few days, and then I'll gladly let you break my willpower with your wandering little hands and the mouth-watering smell of your arousal.”

My heart climbed into my throat. If I wasn't mistaken, it looked like Grayson was finally confirming that we were indeed going to mate, something I hadn't been so sure of until that moment.

“A few days?” I repeated, swallowing hard. I shifted my weight, looking for any kind of friction to ease the throbbing between my legs.

I doubted my ability to last a few more seconds, let alone a few days, but I could try.

A muscle jumped in Grayson's jaw. I wanted to lick that muscle. “A few days,” he confirmed.

I tried to understand his need to wait. I could feel the evidence of his arousal, his hard cock pushing against my stomach.

He obviously wanted me – and I was pretty sure I'd made my desire for him more than clear.

We knew all the information available to us about what the changing process would be like when I turned into a Fae, so what was the point of waiting to mate?

Grayson was very sweet. He was very concerned about keeping me safe. His protective nature would be the death of us both.

"Okay," I whispered. "A few days."

Chapter 51

GRAYSON

I made sure my shower was very cold in the next morning.

It took all my determination to disentangle myself from my companion as I got out of bed. She slept snuggled into my chest the entire night, seeking as much physical contact as possible.

After I left her, I sat on the edge of the bed for at least an hour, watching her as she slept in just one of my shirts.

Her lower body was still covered by the sheet, but her shirt had ridden up, exposing her stomach and the underside of her breasts to my hungry eyes.

I knew very well how she was under those sheets too. It looked like she had just "forgotten" to put on pants last night - or even underwear.

Which meant her sweet pussy was so easily accessible by a simple tug of the blankets.

It was a miracle I was able to get away from her. As much as I would have liked to wake her up with my face between her legs, I knew she needed sleep after everything I'd put her through yesterday.

She had no idea she had been sleeping next to a hungry beast all night.

About five minutes into the shower, I heard Belle start tossing and turning in bed. My ears pricked up, tuned in to every move she made.

I didn't want her to wake up, but I also knew that my absence would eventually make her move. The bond of mating was a plague, making her crave my closeness until we were fully mated.

Seconds later, I heard her sit up in bed, wide awake now. She sat there for a brief moment before the sounds of her soft footsteps approached the bathroom.

She didn't even bother knocking before entering. I went immediately assailed by the intense scent of their mating pheromones as they filled the small room and nearly suffocated me.

Despite the fucking cold shower I was taking, I felt every inch of my body break out in a sweat, an all-consuming thirst taking over.

My cock was hard, standing angrily against my abdomen, and I was suddenly hit with the depraved need to make Belle squeal – gasp and scream as I made her beautiful breasts bounce with me thrusting into her from behind.

Belle didn't say anything as she stood in the middle of the bathroom, but I could feel the sparks dancing over my skin even through the frosted glass of the shower door.

All she could see was my silhouette and yet the sparks were so strong that I winced.

“Belle, what are you doing?” I asked her, my voice so ragged I barely recognized it.

I put my hands above me on the shower wall and leaned over so the cold water hit me head on.

It made little difference. I took ragged breaths in an effort to keep my anxious wolf under control.

"Waiting," she stated, her voice coming out as needy and anxious as I'd imagined. I held back a groan.

"Patiently". She added breathlessly.

This had to be some kind of extreme torture method. "Whereby?" I said.

"You get out of the shower."

I waited a few seconds, barely seeing straight. I was pretty sure all the blood in my body had gone to my cock. "Would you mind explaining why?"

"I don't think so. Guess you'll have to come here to find out."

"Why don't you just join me here before I come over and get you?"

I could hear the smirk in his voice. "Hmm, I I'd like to, but I'm already pretty wet."

I let out a vicious growl. My dick bounced unhappily against my abdomen, sticky pre-cum leaking from above.

I turned and looked at her through the glass, her body just a blurred silhouette. I slid the window open and got out, completely naked and dripping wet.

Belle was standing in the bathroom doorway in just my long shirt, her hard nipples poking the fabric, her hands clasped behind her back.

Belle's bright blue eyes didn't hesitate to look at me. observe in full, moving slowly down my body and stopping with exacting precision on my swaying cock.

He gave a huge jump just having her eyes on him, and his wide gaze shot up to meet mine, a beautiful blush forming on his cheeks.

"You got my attention, young lady," I growled.

She approached slowly, swaying her sensual hips with each tempting step. Once she was in front of me, she looked at me with her big, clear, bright eyes, blinking innocently.

His hands slowly moved up my arms and shoulders, then down my chest and abdomen.

I tried to stay still, but it was getting harder and harder with each passing second. My hands balled into fists at my sides. "Belle..." I warned.

"What?" she replied as innocently as before, her hands still continuing their maddening exploration of my skin.

My knees almost gave out when the back of her hand gently grazed my cock. I was salivating. Sweating. Barely controlling me.

"Belle..." I said again, this time more quietly, warning her that she was very close to going over the edge.

I couldn't keep my hands to myself anymore.

They landed on my mate, immediately grabbing the shirt she was wearing so it dragged up, giving me the teasing view of her sweet pussy lips.

I immediately regretted it as it didn't get better nothing like the situation I was in.

Or maybe it got a little better.

Belle wasn't doing much better than I was.

I could smell how wet she was, and I was pretty sure I'd be greeted by a wet driveway if I threw her onto the bathroom counter and spread her legs wide as the beast inside me demanded I do.

The image itself was enough to send a shiver through my body. Sending my lips trailing over her hairline. I loved the feel of her fingers on me as they traced the deep lines of my abdomen – one of her favorite spots to touch when she was gathering her courage.

She kept her touch gentle and teasing but never strayed too far from my aching cock.

In other words, I was in hell. And yet I couldn't pull away or force her to stop.

"I thought we were going to help each other," I moaned into her hair, breathing in deeply of her scent. You were going to give me a few days to sort things out, remember? You're not playing very clean, mate."

She looked at me and smiled sweetly. "I am just enjoying my man's body. Is this a crime?"

I knew all of your teasing and flirting this morning was a result of your discovery of the prophecy.

Now that she had confirmation that I wanted her as much as she wanted me, her confidence around me was through the roof. It was sexy as fuck. It would also be what put me in the grave early.

"It's not a crime," I replied. "Just really, really bad. Do you know what pain in eggs is?"

She laughed.

"Is there a purpose to this sweet torture?" I asked.

She licked her lips and tried to discreetly rub her legs.

Hell. Fuck.

"I've been thinking..." she began.

Here we go. "Continues."

His eyes were fixed on my lips and his body began to gravitate forward towards me. It was clear that my little companion wanted to kiss me.

Very.

And I wanted to leave her.

"I've been thinking..." Her hand slowly moved down my stomach and nearly brought me to my knees as it grazed the head of my erect cock.

"I want to fuck you. Today. Like, now, actually."

Like fire in gasoline, my whole body ignited. My wolf burst into my consciousness, joined by my very excited vampire, and forced a hissing half-dangerous growl out of my throat.

I pulled Belle's body against mine – because it was either that or his lips against mine and I cursed.

She didn't let my intense reaction distract her.

Even pinned against me with one of my hands tangled in her hair, forcing her face against my chest.

wet, she kissed my chest, sucking the skin, probably leaving a mark behind.

“It's time, Grayson,” she whispered. Other Kiss. A little lick. “There is nothing else we can do.

We just need to let whatever happens.”

I was shaking with need, so incredibly close to give in

“You don't want me, Grayson? Don't you want it all to end? To finally be fully mated and connected?”

“You know I do.” I didn't even recognize my own voice.

She looked at me through her long lashes.

And I knew I couldn't wait any longer.

I glued my lips to hers.

Chapter 52

GRAYSON

With my hands squeezing her perfect ass, I lifted Belle and set her on the bathroom counter. Her legs were already open, inviting me in, making it easier for me to position myself between them.

I crushed my lips against hers at the same time as I moved my bare cock against her panties, snarling when I felt how soaked she was, even through the thin layer of fabric that separated us.

I couldn't help it, disregarding how rough I was being with her, basically rubbing myself against her like she was a bitch in heat – which – I suppose wasn't too far off the mark for us.

Fortunately, Belle didn't seem to mind, whimpering against my mouth, pulling my hair and matching my movements with her own hip gyrations.

My vampire was purring at her – loudly. It was adorable and very exciting how much my mate seemed to love the noise, rubbing her chest against mine so the vibrations traveled through her body.

I swallowed each of his moans and sucked on his tongue, totally lost in its flavor.

My alpha male was coming out, my need to control and dominate her.

Those instincts I'd tried to suppress for so long were almost overwhelming as I grabbed his head and tilted it hard to the side so that it was at the angle I wanted.

One that made it easy for me to explore every inch of her mouth with my tongue.

Belle let it go, turning to Play-Doh, finding comfort in my control. I was sure we were a shocking sight to behold, desperately kissing and grinding against each other as we were.

Belle tried to pull away from me, but I wouldn't let her. I growled and pulled her back, pushing my tongue back into her mouth. She fell against me, giving in to the kiss once more.

It was just a momentary distraction, because seconds later, she was trying to pull away once more. "Grayson," she whimpered against my lips.

I moaned, loving how breathlessly my name came out of her mouth, but I was too distracted to answer her. I was drunk on the scent of her intense arousal and my own need to mate with her like a man possessed.

Belle finally managed to pull away, but I couldn't stop kissing her, sucking, nipping, licking my way down her chin and neck, to my mark on her throat.

I grabbed her with my mouth and gnawed at the mark with my fangs, finding great satisfaction in the way her head tilted to the side and her hips moved against her.

my.

The mark had healed so well since our time apart, thriving on our closeness and turning into a white scar that looked so beautiful on her neck where everyone could see it.

I loved that anyone who looked at her knew she was mine.

Meanwhile, my hand skated up the inside of one of her open thighs until it covered her sopping pussy. She
She shuddered as I circled her clit once with my thumb and spread her legs wider.

Fuck, I needed her naked and under me.

"Grayson..." she whimpered again. "Bed. Please. Take me to bed."

BELLE

Grayson was practically mad as he lifted me off the bathroom counter and carried me into our bedroom, his hands squeezing each side of my ass and rubbing me
your peace

I wrapped my arms around his neck and my legs around his waist as he continued to suck on my throat.

He was growling and purring and roaring nonstop as he thrust his huge, rock hard cock between the folds of my pussy, brushing my bare clit every time.

I don't even think he was trying to bring me to orgasm, but I was incredibly close to the edge.

He was finally breaking free. I could see. He wouldn't fight me anymore. He would mate with me.

"Grayson," I groaned. I was clinging to him as if I would die if he let go. Which I probably would. "You will make me come if you continue."

The growl he let out only made more of the wet arousal flow between my legs and onto his cock. My clit throbbed as he began to rub himself more violently against me.

It only took a few moments for me to take to the skies, coming against his cock, drenching him completely with my intense orgasm.

Next thing I knew Grayson had used his vampire speed to carry us across his room in the blink of an eye, and I was on my back in the middle of our California king-size bed with my mate facing me.

I blinked as I watched my mate above me. I hadn't expected Grayson to look so...unhinged.

His massive chest heaved with every strangled breath he took.

His hair was still dripping from the shower and falling over his forehead, his muscles were tense and much bigger than usual, and dark hairs sprouted from his skin.

I knew he wasn't about to transform or anything, but his disheveled appearance made it extremely clear that I wasn't the only person excited about what was about to happen. It was kind of sexy, honestly.

His hands gripped the inside of my thighs and they opened wide so he could fit between them.

He watched my haggard appearance with greedy crimson eyes.

It started with my flushed cheeks and swollen lips, then worked its way down to my heaving breasts and nipples.

He alternated between breasts, holding me, sucking me, worshiping both sides equally with hands and tongue.

Every flick of his tongue, every pull of his teeth, sent electricity to my core.

I didn't even notice when I started grinding against him once more, rubbing my sex on his cock over and over again, needing more, more, more.

He started to leave wet kisses on my stomach, down my body towards my open thighs. He'd given me enough orgasms with his tongue that I knew what he was about to do.

Panic rose in my chest. Had he changed his mind about mating with me? Was he going to lick my pussy until I came and then come up with some excuse to leave me like he always did?

I would definitely die if that were the case. I am not I could last another minute without being fully connected to him.

I grabbed his hair in my fists and tried to pull him off. back, but he didn't move. "No, Grayson, please."

My words desperate they were almost incomprehensible, driven by my all-consuming excitement. "I want your cock. Please. Not your mouth. Please give me your dick."

A carnal growl exploded from his mouth, and her entire body shuddered violently, but he didn't cease his journey from her lips downward.

"Silence, mate," he growled over my skin. His wild eyes held mine for a single second. "I will take care of you."

What the hell did that mean?

The only way I wanted him to take care of me was to shove that huge piece of meat between his legs inside of me, but he didn't seem even close to doing that.

His hands gripped each of my thighs with unrelenting strength, his fingers digging into my skin, momentarily distracting me from the struggle.

He opened me further so that I was exposed to maximum exposure and positioned himself so that his nose was right in front of my slit.

He took a deep breath, taking in my scent in a long breath.

Before I could stop him or even begin to understand what he was doing, he thrust his nose between my folds, running from my entrance to my clit.

He circled once, twice, as he continued to sniff me. Her eyes closed in ecstasy at the same moment where my head fell back against the bed, my back arching.

Holy shit, was he going to make me cum with his nose? That would be news.

I just looked at him when he abruptly pulled away a few seconds later. He was already looking at me. The length of his nose glistened with my arousal. I swallowed

em dry.

He broke eye contact as he leaned forward and placed a single, slow kiss on my throbbing pussy. Then he stuck his tongue in me, growling so hard it shook the bed. I almost came right there.

As good as it was, though, it wasn't what I wanted – needed. If he thought I was about to let him distract me with his tongue and then run away again, he was sadly mistaken.

I let him know my objection by jerking his head and struggling to close my legs as I tried to dodge him.

“Stop,” he demanded, his mouth still on my slit. His arm pinned me in place by my stomach, trying to stop my movements.

“No,” I snapped. “You stop.” I kicked my leg, hitting his thigh with a hard swing of my foot.

So I thrust my hips upward and finally managed to pull away from him. I mean, it was just a little bit, but hey, it was far enough to get your attention.

Faster than I could comprehend, his face was right above mine, his breath blowing over my lips, one of his hands pinning my wrists above my head.

His other hand continued to play with my sex, lazily circling my clit in a way that made my fingers curl.

“If you don't stop squirming, I'll be forced to arrest you,” he warned. His voice was low, rough. It sent a violent shiver down my spine. “Let's do this my way, mate.”

His threat should have startled me, but all it did was turning me on even more, which I didn't know was possible.

There I go begging again. Desperate tears formed in the corners of my eyes. "Please just fuck me, Grayson. I can not take it anymore. I don't want you to make me come. I only need you."

His hard expression turned soft and then amused when he finally seemed to understand what I was saying. My Grayson.

A smile took over his lips. "Ah, I see, mate." He pressed a kiss to the corner of my lips at the same moment he thrust one of his fingers into me.

I immediately moaned, arching my back so that my sensitive breasts pressed against his hard chest. His finger began to poke in and out.

"You can stop worrying. I'm going to eat that sweet pussy today." His finger continued to move.

"I'm going to stick my dick in your tight hole and make you come for hours before I finally come in you and tie you to me forever."

Your thumb massaged my clit, lighting fires all over my body. "This is what you want, isn't it?"

I tightened around his finger, barely able to control myself. I was already on the brink of orgasm and he had only been touching me for a few minutes. "Yes, "I groaned."

He chuckled and ran his tongue along the side of my face in a gesture that reminded me of the animal side he was hiding. I closed my eyes tight. "I want you to fuck me."

he growled. "I know you do. And that's what you're going to get," he said softly. "But you'll have to wait. I need to get you ready first though."

Another finger joined the first. caused a notable stab of pain as I was stretched. I slightly.

I thought I was fine, but then he started moving his fingers in and out of me, curving them slightly each time they were fully inside.

But I breathed through the discomfort, still seeking my next orgasm.

“But I am already so wet. You made me come once. I'm ready,” I continued to moan, despite the extreme pleasure he was causing me.

I knew I shouldn't be complaining, but my mind was fuzzy. If it weren't for his grip on my wrists, my hand would already be wrapped around his cock as I tried to guide him where I wanted him.

“Why can't you just stick it in now?”

His fingers picked up speed and my brain nearly went into Aneta iranita. I whimpered as I short-circuited. I whimpered as that familiar ball started to roll in my stomach, telling me that my next orgasm was close and about to consume me.

But just when I was about to reach my peak, Grayson plunged a third finger into me. And everything changed.

I screamed as pain shot through my core and my legs involuntarily tried to close, only to be stopped by the huge form of Grayson still between them.

He held me in place as I tried to dodge him, trying to escape the pain.

"That's why," Grayson said. His tone was much gentler now. He paused his movements, letting me get used to how much he was stretching me.

I closed my eyes tightly, trying to stop myself from pulling away from him.

He kissed my forehead. "If I'd known we'd be doing this so soon, I would have prepared you better. You've only had two of my fingers inside you and my dick is a lot bigger than two of my fingers. I need to make sure you're ready for what's to come."

His thumb began to rub circles over my aching clit again, giving me a much-needed distraction from the pain I was feeling. "If you can come with four of my fingers, then I'll let you have my cock."

"Grayson..." was all I managed to say. I wasn't sure I could. It hurt enough to distract me from pleasure.

Was this how it would feel when he finally took my virginity? Would it be worse?

"Shh..." he murmured into my hair. "Just try to relax for me. You're getting tense when I need you to be really relaxed."

He released my wrists, using his newly freed hand to stroke and massage my flank. "Concentrate on relaxing your muscles, Belle."

His thumb increased speed on my clit, helping me follow his orders. I took a deep breath and focused on staying calm.

I forced my body to soften and sink into the bed beneath me, giving my mate complete control, knowing Grayson would take care of me.

"That's it, honey." He nipped at the mark on my throat and I nearly convulsed with pleasure, tilting my head to the side to give him better access.

The twinge of pain was beginning to be overcome by pleasure, even as his fingers began to move.
again.

All I could focus on was the way he continued to massage my clit and suck on my mark, all the while making his fingers graze my g-spot with exacting precision with every movement he made.

"You're starting to like it, aren't you?"

I nodded, pushing my hips down against his hand.
"Yes...Grayson..." I groaned.

"This is what I like to see," he moaned into my ear.
"You're fucking my fingers so good, honey. I can't wait to see what you do with my dick."

He hummed and licked my ear. "Do you think you're ready for one more finger?"

I nodded again. "Please," I begged. Not only did I think I was ready, but I was craving it now, craving the feeling of being stretched out. I needed. Everything felt so good now.

Grayson growled. "Fuck, you're so wet. My hand is completely covered in your fluids. You're so desperate for your mate's dick that you're leaking it, huh?"

I gasped at his lewd words, clenching around his fingers, so unbelievably ready to be filled by him. He purred happily. "Shit, Belle, you keep squeezing me. Such a good companion."

With that, he slowly placed a fourth finger in my tight one. I swallowed hard and tensed, the pain of that simple enlargement overcoming me once more.

"My poor darling," he said against my hair. "That it hurts?" He curled his fingers, running them over my g-spot.

My electrified pussy felt like it was on fire. His other hand traveled up and cupped one of my breasts, palming it, pinching my nipple between his thumb and forefinger.

I shook my head, forcing my legs apart instead of continuing to clench around his hips in an effort to close them. I didn't want him to think I couldn't handle it. I didn't want him to stop.

"N-No," I stammered on the single word.

"No?" Grayson repeated, looking amused. He rubbed his nose against my hair.

"No. I-I...like," I gasped. It wasn't necessarily a lie – I really liked it, but it definitely hurt.

But, by some miracle, it somehow hurt less to have four fingers inside me than it did to have three, probably because I was incredibly turned on.

But no amount of pain was going to stop me from coming again so I could finally have what I really wanted.

“Hmm, I'm sure you do.” He nibbled on my ear.
“You're doing so well, Belle. So perfect.”

His thumb began circling my clit with more enthusiasm, and he began to thrust his fingers again, in and out, in a perfect rhythm to completely numb my mind.

I tightened around him, glad to feel his care.

“Are you about to come for me again yet?” he asked, the hunger in his voice sending a wave of unexpected excitement through my already frazzled system.

“Is my mate the holy grail of virgins, so perfect that it only takes a few seconds after being stretched out until she can no longer start screaming my name again?” He licked my mark with a dark chuckle.

I arched my back, my eyes rolling back in my head. Though the pain was still present, it was overshadowed by the pleasure he was bringing me.

I shook my head vigorously. “Yes. Do not stop. I love you so much. Please don't stop.”

“Not in my plans, baby.” His hand began to pick up the pace, causing colors to flicker behind my eyelids. My hips rose and I realized how powerful this orgasm was about to be.

I had never felt anything like this. Grayson made me come countless times, but never when he opened me up like this.

Never when he was sucking on my mark, pinching my nipples, playing with my clit, and rubbing my g-spot with every thrust of his four fingers inside me.

I was on the verge of nirvana.

“Come on, Belle,” Grayson demanded. The head of his cock grazed my nerve bud, and everything in me tightened. “Let me see.”

I didn't even try to fight that orgasm. I gladly let his power captivate me.

A scream escaped my throat, and I was shaking and writhing under his grip as my nervous system short-circuited with a deliciously heady pleasure that seemed to know no bounds.

Grayson held and stroked me the entire time, never slowing his movements. Incoherent noises of happiness escaped my mouth.

His purrs and growls against my throat only heightened the whole experience, throwing me into a sea of pleasure that never seemed to end.

It felt like hours had passed when I finally managed to come back to reality.

I was panting, shivering uncontrollably, my pussy still convulsing around his fingers even though his movements had slowed to a lazy caress.

It was almost an out-of-body experience that Grayson helped calm down.

He pulled away from my mark, looking at me with green eyes I could easily get lost in. The look of absolute adoration he had on his face made pride bloom in my chest, warming me to my very core.

“That was the most beautiful thing I've ever seen,” he whispered. “I fucking love you.”

I bit my bottom lip and smiled. "I love you too."

With a final twist around my clit and a gentle nudge of his fingers against my g-spot, he took his hand away from me.

I whimpered, already missing the feeling of fullness. I could easily come again like this...and again and again.

But my mind was already on other things, specifically the huge cock that was currently nestled between the folds of my still tingling pussy.

GRAYSON

Belle looked at me with glazed eyes, which had seemed so satisfied moments ago, but were now replaced by the same hunger she had shown before I made her come so hard that I was momentarily worried about her.

security.

I didn't know why I doubted she wouldn't be able to handle me. It was part of the reason I'd avoided mating her for so long.

Aside from worrying about her turning into a fairy, I didn't want to hurt her with my... let's just say larger than average size.

But I had just opened her as wide as possible and she gave me the most exciting and seductive orgasm I've ever witnessed. It took my breath away.

It also made me harder than ever.

She was so perfect. Made just for me. Made for my dick, to let me love and care for her, and stand by my side for the rest of eternity as my queen and mate.

She wiggled her hips, a mischievous glint appearing in her gaze as she rubbed her pink, beautiful, sodden sex against my cock.

I answered her thrusts with some of my own, covering myself in her wetness in preparation, before bending down and molding my lips to hers in a deep kiss that quickly turned rough and passionate.

With one of his hands holding my shoulder, the other traveled down my pecs and abs, until it wrapped around my hard length.

My hands turned into tight fists
both sides of your head.

I crushed my lips harder to hers, my vampire purring so loud it drowned out all other sounds around us besides the sound of her sweet moans against my lips.

Every move she made, every sway, every breath and flutter of her eyelashes made me feel like I was on the verge of madness, so close to losing what little control I had left.

Fuck, I couldn't take it anymore. I needed to be inside her. I was hungry for it. Salivating. Panting and licking into his mouth mindlessly as I fucked his hand.

Belle pulled away just long enough to say, "You Will you mate with me now?" before kissing me again.

Meanwhile, she ran her thumb over the tip of my cock, covering it with oozing pre-cum, and positioned it at her entrance, spreading her legs wide for me.

It took all my control not to stick it in there.
same.

I pulled away from her sinful mouth and pulled my cock out of her grip, laying my head even more comfortably at her entrance, jerking myself skyward.

"Belle, look at me," I croaked, holding on by a thread.

Belle squirmed again, arching her back, trying desperately to get closer to me. How did I get so lucky to get a mate so hungry for my dick

I could not understand.

"Mate," I said. I needed all the attention

whether

Her half-closed eyes immediately met the
my. she whimpered.

"You better tell me right now if you're not a hundred percent sure what's going to happen," I growled.

"Because once I get inside that tight as fuck cunt with that big werewolf dick, there's no going back. There's no stopping me from making you mine forever.

"My animal side will take over, and I won't stop until I've filled you with my seed, until my cum is dripping from you, and until we're forced to stop just out of sheer exhaustion. My wolf wants you completely covered in my semen so every man that comes within fifty feet

of you being able to smell who you belong to, because I will be engraved in your very being. There's no escaping me after this. You will be mine whether you like it or not.”

She mumbled something incoherent in response.

It was clear that she was too consumed with her arousal to think straight, her hips thrusting as she tried to push me into her, her breasts swaying in a mesmerizing pattern that caused a low growl in my chest.

I grabbed her hips to stop her. If it continued like this, there was no telling what I would do with her.

“Answer me, mate,” I demanded, barely recognizing my own voice. I squeezed her hips and her gaze focused on me once more. “Tell me this is what you want. I need verbal confirmation.”

“Yes!” she finally screamed. Her hole contracted against the tip of my cock. “Yes, this is what I want. More than... oh my God... more than anything.” She licked her lips. “Is... is that what you want?”

I smile at her. Even as she was panting, looking like she would pass out if I didn't fill her soon, she still had to make sure I was comfortable and wanted her as much as she wanted me.

One of my hands reached out and grabbed his jaw in an unrelenting grip. “You don't even have to ask, girl.” I couldn't help but clench her jaw, needing to subdue her.

My wolf lunged forward, ready to force my instinctual, animalistic side to take over, but I pushed him away one last time, needing to say one last thing.

“If anything happens, if the pain is too strong, or” – my teeth ground together” or if you start to shift, let me know. I might look a little...angry.” That was an understatement.

I was going to lose my fucking mind when I finally got inside her. I was already halfway there. “But I will stop if it's for your safety. Did you understand?”

She nodded, shifting, knowing it was time. “I Got it,” she whimpered and pushed her breasts up.

I felt the color of my eyes change, turning dark red as I released his jaw and placed a hand on his hip. My other hand grabbed my cock and pushed her legs open as far as I could.

Without wasting another second, I let out a fierce growl and plunged my cock into my mate, finally making mine.

Chapter 53

BELLE

With a strangled roar, Grayson rocked his hips forward, taking my virginity in a single thrust, filling me to the brim with his monstrous cock and unleashing total euphoria on me.

I screamed once he was fully inside me, digging my nails into his back as searing pain raced through my body.

Jesus Christ, he was big. Big and long touching a part so deep – inside of me I didn't even know existed.

“So – *fuck* – so small and tight. So wet and perfect. My perfect girl,” Grayson panted against my neck. His voice was low and tortured, filled with the presence of his inner beast.

He stopped over me, giving me time to adjust as he licked and nipped at my mark, growling in my ear. He was so rigid on top of me.

Every muscle was contracted, taut under his skin. It obviously took a lot of effort not to move, but I appreciated every second he could give me.

The pain was severe, but not as much as I thought it would be. Grayson was right – getting used to his fingers first was definitely the way to go.

Even though it still felt like it was being torn apart two, I managed to keep calm.

“Breathe, Belle,” my mate said through gritted teeth. closed.

I didn't even realize I was holding my breath. I released her with a breath.

“Excellent. Try to relax your muscles.” He grabbed a fistful of my hair and tilted my head to the side, exposing my neck for one long lick. A bite and a rough suck.

It was as if he was unable to contain himself; keeping his mouth on me was the only thing keeping him sane. “Your body was made for mine. Your sweet pussy was made for this, to receive my cock.”

His hand ran down my body until his fingers on mine swollen clitoris, rubbing it in tight circles.

Colors sparked and sparkled behind my eyes, and I loosened my grip on his shoulders, trying to focus on how deft his fingers were, playing with my mountain of nerves.

I breathed as he told me to, and my pussy walls finally relaxed around his cock. I didn't even realize he wasn't all the way inside me until I felt him slide another inch forward, his balls hitting my ass.

“Good girl,” Grayson said, praising me even as his arms shook with the effort to control himself. “You are doing so well. I can't even believe how amazing it is inside you.”

A few more seconds passed before the pain finally subsided enough for me to think clearly.
again.

To test it, I tightened around Grayson, and immediately moaned as they exploded from my core and my entire body heated up like it was on fire.

Grayson punched his free hand into the bed next to mine. head and bit my neck, right above my mark.

He never broke the skin or caused me any wounds, but the way his teeth pressed into my mark caused an intense physical reaction.

I tightened around him again, squeezing his limb and moisture seeped out of me.

“Belle. “Grayson's voice was the deepest I had ever heard. Rough as gravel. “Don't do this unless you're ready for me to start moving – unless you're ready for a fuck.”

Excitement swelled in my chest. Without saying another word, I tightened around him once more and rocked my hips against his.

"Cum!" Grayson exploded. Her hips drew back and immediately surged forward as if of their own accord. Both of us we moan.

“Yesssss,” I whimpered. It was good – so good.

And that's when his thrusts began. each one was stronger, faster than the last, taking my breath away.

I threw my head back as a happy scream escaped my mouth.

Grayson made a cracking sound and started thrusting into me mercilessly.

His eyes were wild, hungry, ricocheting off every inch of my body, watching my reactions.

as he took me with animalistic strength. All I could do was lie there and accept whatever he gave me.

My body was alive with sparks. Every move he made sent tremors through, my womanhood squeezing him with every thrust, as if I never wanted him to go away.

My mouth dropped open as he started to move faster, faster, faster. Grayson was a man reduced to a beast above me. The look in his eyes was determination and voracity and I didn't care one bit little.

I would have been scared if I wasn't so absorbed in the feeling he caused me. But this was my mate. This was the moment I'd been waiting for months.

I panted and whimpered as he thrust again and again without mercy, making me feel things I had never felt before. I had entered a different plane of existence – a plane filled only with mind-blowing ecstasy.

Oh God, why did we wait so long to do this?

I would never turn down the opportunity to have Grayson's tongue between my legs, but it was nothing compared to having his incredible cock pumping between them.

Without warning, he let out a savage growl and put his mouth on mine without stopping the hip movements.

I moaned against his lips, gripping his neck and shoulders, my nails digging into his skin, pulling him impossibly closer to me.

I sucked on his tongue as I listened to the sound of the bed creaking beneath us. He was so damn strong that the bed

it slid back and forth with every movement he made.

He was thrusting so hard that my teeth would snap if it weren't for his tongue in my mouth.

I thought it couldn't get any better, but then he started thrusting his hard cock in a way that hit a specific spot inside me over and over again.

I cried out and arched against him so my hard nipples rubbed against his chest. I screamed his name, not even recognizing my own need-filled voice.

He licked my lips, his purring so loud in my ears that it drowned out every other thought. "I love your little fuck noises," he growled. "Enjoy, mate. Comes around your partner's cock. Enjoy now."

I couldn't help but follow his orders. My eyes rolled back in my head. My body shuddered and spasmed. The whole world stopped as the most powerful orgasm I'd ever experienced washed over me.

Meanwhile, Grayson continued his relentless command of my body. The sight of his eyes rotating between colors – black, red, green – only seemed to heighten everything I was feeling.

He was power and beauty in motion, like a horse in motion. I couldn't take my eyes off him.

Veins bulged from his taut muscles and his face was in a state of intense focus and determination; it was beautiful, honestly.

It seemed like forever before I finally came down from my climax. I've been reduced to a chatty mess

and weak, a total slave to his rough fuck that never seemed to end.

I was still fluttering around him when he leaned in and sucked on my mark. I whimpered, overwhelmed by the sensations but so eager for him to continue.

“So beautiful,” he said, the words rumbling against the my skin. “Come for me again, beautiful.”

I groaned in confusion, unable to say anything else. There was no way I was going to come so soon, no matter how good he made me feel.

“You heard me, Belle,” he continued, his voice low, almost menacing.

I barely understood what was happening when, suddenly, Grayson sank his teeth into my mark. And just like that, like magic, I immediately came again.

When I came the second time I heard someone screaming and it took me a while to figure out it was me.

Grayson was growling nonstop above me and I decided right then and there that it was one of my favorite sounds of all time.

Before I could comprehend what was happening, Grayson pulled away and turned me so that I was on my knees with him behind me.

He bent me forward with his hands on my shoulders and then thrust his length back towards me without wasting a second. I accepted with an enthusiastic groan.

He held me in that position for a few minutes, driving in like a jackhammer before pulling me up so we were back to front.

And, still without stopping his movements, he placed his lips on my neck. It didn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that this new position he put us in was to give him better access to my brand.

His tongue, mouth and teeth on the skin of my neck drove me crazy as he fucked me from behind mercilessly.

"Mine," he continued growling, one of his hands kneading my breast, pinching my nipple. "Mine, mine, mine."

Then, without warning, he sank his teeth into my neck, simultaneously branding me and using his vampire fangs to suck my blood.

I'd already been shockingly close to another orgasm, and oh God, I couldn't have stopped that landslide even if I'd wanted to.

"*Cum!*" Grayson roared as the most intimate part of me clung to him. "Yes. Squeeze me, darling. Holy shit, I can't get enough of you cumming around me."

His voice was otherworldly at this point, full of his most animal side and mixed with his vampire purr – and I'd be lying if I said it didn't make my orgasm stronger.

Something about him losing control was so unbelievably hot, I didn't even know what to do. I loved being able to do that with him, who had that kind of power over him.

"Yes," he exploded against my sweaty neck. "I'm close, mate. About to fill you up. About to make you mine forever. Once and for all."

A shaky nod was the only response I could muster. I couldn't speak. I couldn't do anything. I was out of breath. No voice. No thoughts.

I was on another planet entirely, a planet full of of pleasure and orgasmic bliss.

My climax was still in full control of my body, pleasure flooding me with numbing wave after numbing wave.

My legs threatened to give out from under me as I shook and thrashed, but Grayson knew exactly what to do.

Without taking his dick out of my throbbing pussy, he turned me around again, so I was on my back, looking at him.

I was trapped under his huge, muscled body, gripping his shoulders like my life depended on it as his hips got faster, more ragged with each deep thrust.

He was fucking me so hard now that my teeth were chattering together and I could tell by the wild look in his eyes that he was seconds away from his own release.

I wanted this. I could already feel our bond solidifying between us and I looked forward to that moment when we were finally fully connected more than anything else.

With that in mind, I tightened my intimate muscles around him so tightly he couldn't even pull away from me and watched with great satisfaction as Grayson's eyes went blind.

He got out of control. Primitive. Wild. There was no stopping him now.

Finally, finally, he let out a wild roar, his giant form shuddering as something warm and wet began to fill me.

Load after load of his hot come shot into me, heating me until it spilled out of my pussy and up my inner thighs and onto the bed below us.

An overwhelming feeling of... love and blind devotion for the man above me filled my chest to the point of bursting.

I quickly realized it was the mate bond.

The feeling of our bond finally becoming complete, connecting us on a level I didn't even think possible, was so intense and... magical that I instantly came all over again.

The euphoric pleasure was so intense that my limbs thrashed, my breathing stopped, my back arched, and fireworks exploded behind my closed eyelids.

I thought I would barely survive the pleasure.

Grayson pressed his sweaty forehead to mine, leaving sloppy kisses on my lips as our bodies continued to shake in the spasms of passion.

"I love you. I love you," he said through heaving breaths. He sang those words over and over again. "My partner. My everything. I love you. I fucking love you."

"I love you too," I said, my own voice full of emotion. My weak hands clutched his face, looking for something to anchor me to. "I love you, Grayson."

It took a few moments for us to finally calm down, for our breathing to slow down and our bodies to stop shaking.

And still, he held himself inside me, making no move to leave anytime soon.

He licked my face and stroked my sides, all the while purring so loudly I could barely hear myself think. Not that I minded. I would be happy to go without thinking for a while longer.

I was shocked at how clearly I could feel their emotions now, almost as if they were my own. I could feel

Your love and adoration for me swirling around us like a cloud.

I could also feel how happy his wolf and vampire were now that I was claimed, even though they were already gearing up for another round.

My alpha mate was feeling territorial right after mating.

He conjured up images of tying me to the bed and forcing every other living soul out of the palace for at least a week as he took me over and over again until he was sure the bond was fully complete.

I chuckled, completely happy with our new level of connection.

“Tell me you're okay, Belle,” he growled against my cheek as he gently brushed some of my hair back from my face and played with the sweaty strands between the fingers.

I smile dreamily. "I'm fine," I said. And I really was. In fact, I was more than fine. I was happier than ever.

I could tell Grayson could sense the truth behind my words. He could probably also feel my happiness mixed with his. "Good. Because I'm nowhere near finished."

His cock immediately started to harden inside me. I gasped and clutched around him in shock.

"What?" I asked, eyes wide, nails already digging into the skin of her shoulders. "A-again? Already?"

Grayson nodded. "Should I rephrase my question?" he breathed between flicks of his tongue against my jaw, my throat, even my ear.

"What I should have asked was, are you well enough to put up with me again? And again? And again?" He slowly teasingly – rolled his hips against hers.

my.

I whimpered and gasped, moisture already pouring out of my greedy hole, covering his hard length in preparation for a second round.

"Because, now that I've had you, now that I've discovered the bliss of your sinful pussy wrapping around my cock as I bury myself in you, I don't think I can let myself go. to hold.

"I don't think I'll ever be able to let you out of this room or this bed again."

“Grayson,” I groaned at the promise in his words. I opened my legs wider for him, trying to encourage him to move again with my own needy thrusts.

I couldn't believe how quickly I wanted him back after my first time. Shouldn't I be in pain? Instead, I felt only despair.

Grayson chuckled and pinned my hips with his torso so I couldn't move. I huffed in annoyance, which only elicited another amused chuckle from Grayson's chest.

“I need to hear you say it, Belle.” He leaned back so he could look me in the eye. “Tell me you're ready for more. Or tell me you need to rest. I'll give you what you want no matter what you decide. But choose quickly, because I don't think I can last another second of her pussy drowning me in her sweet as fuck arousal or squeezing me like she's begging me to suck my cock again without freaking out.”

My nod was embarrassingly eager. “I'm ready for more. Please give me more.”

His lips turned into a grim smile. “Your wish is an order.”

Not only did Grayson's beauty resemble a horse from run when I fucked, but so did endurance.

It was late afternoon when he finally pulled away from me, whispering that I needed to rest now. He was right, of course.

I could barely keep my eyes open at that point, still aboard the roller coaster of happiness he always bought me tickets for.

He disappeared for a moment, leaving me alone and confused on the bed, only to return a few seconds later with a wet towel in hand.

I swear, sometimes the man moved so fast it was impossible to keep track of where he was going.

The act of him cleaning me somehow felt more intimate than the hours we'd spent humping like rabbits, and I found myself ducking for some reason.

I shooed his hands away with lazy slaps when he tried to wipe me off. He pinned me with a warning look. His wolf was still in charge and wasn't going to let me sleep until that he had cleaned me up.

I could see it in his dark, swirling eyes. He it looked dangerously beautiful.

How Grayson seemed unfazed by our mating, other than the fine sheen of sweat that glistened over his toned muscles, I couldn't understand.

I probably looked like a mess. hair all over part, sweat dripping and skin red and blotchy from exertion.

"You've never looked so beautiful," Grayson said, interrupting my thoughts with a stern tone. It occurred to me that he could probably sense what I was thinking.

The mate bond would never cease to amaze me. "Worn down by my relentless fucking, eyes

glazed with complete satisfaction and exhaustion. I'm tempted to go get a camera.”

“Don't you dare,” I muttered through a yawn. My voice sounded slow and sleepy even to my ears.

The soft rumble of his laughter settled deep into my bones, filling me with warmth. “Good thing I have a memory like a steel trap.”

His eyes roamed over my body in a lazy look before lifting up to meet mine once more. “Now spread your legs for me, beautiful. Gotta clean up my sleepy mate.”

I was so silly the way he called me beautiful like that was my name. I followed his orders and allowed him to clean me up without argument.

Once he was done, he threw the cloth to the floor and crawled into bed beside me. He picked up my body and placed me on his purring chest before swinging his leg over me and pinning me to him.

The position would probably be a bit suffocating for any normal couple, but I knew his need to dominate and control me was still at full force right after mating.

And, for the moment at least, I didn't mind letting him do what he wanted. I would put him in his place and remind him who was boss later.

His fingertips trailed down my spine, and I hummed in utter contentment as I fell into a dreamless sleep.

Chapter 54

BELLE

My body tingled with warmth and happiness when I woke up.
late in the morning of the next day.

I smiled and stretched my arms stiffly over my head, laughing when I felt
the pain between my legs.

So I reached across the bed to my mate, hoping to crawl on top of him and
nuzzle his warm neck with my cheek.

But I didn't find him near me. My hand instead
fell on cold, empty sheets.

I immediately sat up, my heart racing in my chest.

"Grayson?" I yelled into the dark room. My gaze went to the windows,
realizing it was night. Had I slept all day? No wonder I felt so rested.

But if this fucker really left me alone the morning after our first time
together... I would be about to explode out of bed and hunt him down to punch
him in the face.

And then I saw him.

Grayson was sitting in a chair he'd pulled to the side of the bed, looking
down at me. He was leaning forward, his arms on the bed and his chin on top of
them.

I almost screamed at how close his face was to mine.

"What are you doing there?" I asked. I bowed,
so I was lying on my side right in front of him.

He was wearing boxers now, which didn't look the least bit fair enough, considering the fact that I was still naked.

When Grayson didn't respond, I propped myself up on my elbow. It was then that I noticed his overwhelming anxiety coursing through our newly strengthened bond, accompanied by fear and exhaustion.

"Are you well?"

"Are you well?" he answered uneasily. "How are you feeling?"

I reached out and grabbed his arm, squeezing it gently. He loved that the sparks were even more intense than before. He immediately placed his hand over mine. "I am fine. Great actually. Incredible. I'm happy."

He didn't look convinced. "He is sure?"

I took her hand in mine and placed it on my chest, right over my heart. "Can't you feel how happy I am?" I could definitely feel how worried he was.

he was.

He looked at the spot where my hand had been for several moments, his eyes changing from black to red to green repeatedly.

I made a face. "Why aren't you in bed?" I could feel how much he wanted to hold me right now and I had no idea why he was fighting that urge. I wanted the same thing.

"I needed to be able to see you – to see if you were in pain. I needed to watch your face."

My heart broke a little. Though it was more than a little creepy that he just sat there and watched me.

while I was sleeping he was so scared that something was going to happen to me that he put his needs and wants aside.

This man really loved me, huh?

"Come here," I whispered, holding out my hand. "Please."

Grayson got back into bed with me, pulling me against him so we were chest to chest. I ran my thumb under the deep bags under her eyes.

"You slept?" I asked him.

He shook his head. "I had to make sure you were fine."

I sighed, letting my forehead fall against his. "You worry a lot. I would have told you if something was wrong."

"What if you didn't know until it was too late? What if I couldn't save you because I was too busy sleeping?"

"So what, you're never going to sleep again because you're so worried I'm going to combust without warning? Do not be ridiculous. You need to rest. Especially after" I swallowed, my cheeks turning red – "everything we did yesterday."

Grayson's lips curved for the first time since I'd woken up, and it sent a shiver down my stomach. I would do anything to keep that smile on your face.

"Hmm..." Grayson hummed. "You're lucky I can and practically read your mind now. Otherwise I would have woken you up every hour last night to make sure you were okay. "Your happiness through the bond is the only thing that gives me peace of mind." His chest began to vibrate with his

silent purrs as his lips grazed my chin.

“Are you sure you are feeling all right?” he asked in a low tone that made me move against him.

“Um...yeah,” I mumbled. I was becoming obscenely distracted by his wandering hands with every passing second. Especially one that was stroking my inner thigh. “I feel great.”

Grayson's smile widened. “I can't believe I've waited this long to finally feel your incredible grip,” he growled.

I bit my bottom lip. “I don't believe it either. AND for what? Because you were afraid that I would change? I feel exactly the same as I did before we mated. absolutely none difference.”

He abruptly squeezed my ass hard, possessively, pulling me even closer to him. I let out a little scream.

“I hope you don't feel exactly the same. You are mine now. Forever. For the rest of eternity.”

My breath was coming out embarrassingly fast. “I think I would be fine with that.”

“Would you be okay with that? Honey, you don't have a choice. I will stay with you, whether you like it or not.”

I laughed. “Glad I like you then.”

“Just like?” He asked.

“Mm-hm... I think I'm still fond of you. It might take a little longer. I mean, you kidnapped me after all.

Or do you not remember it? What kind of girl would I be if I fell in love with my kidnapper?"

"The kind that is mated to an alpha male," Grayson he offered, lowering his head to nibble on my mark. It was still sore from being bitten multiple times last night.

It sent shivers down my spine. "I regret nothing, dear. I would do it all over again in a heartbeat." He placed my leg over his hip so that my pussy was in line with his hard cock.

I gasped as he slowly rolled his hips once against mine, sliding his cock between my slick folds.

"Are you sore?" he said right next to my ear. "I know I was very rough with you. I could not help it. I needed to claim you as mine. To dominate you. I needed."

"I know," I whispered. I closed my eyes, already losing myself in the sensations he was causing in the lower part of my stomach.

Was it really possible to want him again after hours? countless hours he spent inside me yesterday?

The answer was yes. Yes, definitely yes.

In fact, the closeness I felt with him due to their bond only made me want him more, almost as if we hadn't completed the mating process to begin with. I was desperate for him again.

"I'm a-little sore," I said, completing my earlier thought, realizing I'd never responded to

your question. "But it's n-nothing I can't...um...handle."

His cock rubbed against my clit with exacting precision, turning my brain to mush.

"My poor baby. I rode you hard, huh?" He increased the speed a little and I almost died on the spot. He was teasing me. He was enjoying watching me fall apart for him.

"Grayson. I want you again. Please." I didn't care that I was begging as long as he slid that magic cock into me in the next five seconds.

I gasped at the intense pleasure that overtook our bond. Holy shit, he liked hearing me say that, hearing me beg for him and getting to do something about it.

His pleasure immediately filled my chest with heat and space between my legs from cold with butterflies.

"I know you do," he replied in a low tone. "I can feel your need. I can smell. My cock is practically drowning in it."

His movements abruptly ceased and he leaned in so his lips were right next to my ear. "So what are you going to do about it mate?"

My eyes locked with his. It took me a moment to understand the meaning behind his words. He was giving me permission.

For the first time, he was allowing me to do what I wanted with him, with no restrictions or limits. It was such a simple thing he was doing and yet it meant so much to me.

I suddenly felt like crying.

I'd been holding back from touching him and acting on my need to pleasure him for so long that I didn't even realize I was still doing it now, even when it wasn't necessary.

But Grayson noticed yesterday and was sharing his observation with me now through mate bond.

Even when he was inside me for most of yesterday, I kept my hands in places I knew were safe: his face, shoulders, chest, abdomen, but never below. He knew what I was doing even when I didn't. He knew I was holding back and protecting myself from his rejection, which I was all too familiar with. I was so familiar with it that I expected it.

“What are you going to do about it, Belle?” he asked again, quieter this time, with more intent behind his words.

I smiled. I knew exactly what to do.

I pushed him onto his back and climbed on top of him. I was careful that no part of my soaked core was touching him – my own way of teasing him the same way he teased me.

Grayson crossed his arms behind his head and watched me with raised eyebrows, a cocky smile plastered to his lips.

I couldn't help but lean forward and kiss those lips. Once. Twice. Three just in case.

I felt his muscles tense beneath me as he held back from grabbing me and kissing me deeper like I knew he wanted to.

“Aren't you going to stop me this time?” I asked, letting my mouth brush his as I spoke. My hands roamed over his pecs and over his arms and shoulders. “No excuses about having to work? Or don't you feel the time is right?”

“Fuck no.” His words came out strained. It was getting harder for him to contain himself. “Not even the Moon Goddess herself could keep me from you now.”

I wet my mouth, looking at my mate trying to decide exactly what my next step should be. The possibilities were endless.

I tried to press my legs together to try to ease some of the pulsing discomfort I had there, but Grayson's massive form was there, preventing any kind of friction.

Deciding this would just be about him and not me, I leaned in and placed a slow kiss on his jaw. Then your throat, Adam's apple, collarbone and chest muscles.

I kissed all the way down to her stomach and the little mound of hair that led to my final destination.

“Belle,” Grayson moaned, his voice strained, letting me know he was barely able to control himself. He wanted me to rush things.

I laughed, but I didn't go any faster. I wanted to enjoy the time.

My lips were directly above his shaft pulsating now. With a smile, I slowly reached down and placed a gentle kiss on the tip.

Even with that simple touch, her hips rose a little, and another low moan came from deep in her chest. I loved the effect I had on him. I loved being able to make him lose control so easily.

I was about to wrap my lips fully around his tip, my mouth watering with the need to taste him, when suddenly, he sat up.

He grabbed the bottom of my jaw with his huge hand, stopping what I was doing.

He let out a vicious snarl that shook the entire bed. "You've got to be kidding me," he said, every muscle in his body flexing with unbridled fury. "Someone wants to die."

"What?" I answered.

Without warning, he gently grabbed me by the scruff of the neck and pulled me up so my face was directly in front of his. He crushed his lips to mine. "I'm sorry," he spoke against my lips.

As if on cue, a knock can be heard on our apartment door. Grayson let out a growl so loud and powerful it shook the entire room. Hell, it probably shook the entire palace.

I put my hands over my ears.

"I'm going to kill him," Grayson snapped. "Who?" I screamed. "What is this?"

With one last apologetic squeeze of my neck and a kiss on my mouth, he pulled me away from him so I was lying on my back on the bed next to him.

"Wait, what are you doing?" I asked, watching as he rose to his feet in all his naked glory.

Lord, did I have sex with it? "I thought you said that not even the Moon Goddess could take you away from me."

"And I was serious," he replied grimly.
"I'll be back - as soon as I kill my beta."

"Your beta?" I repeat. "Kyle is here?"

Grayson grunted in response. He was upset. I could feel his anger coursing through our bond, squeezing my heart.

He didn't like it when we were interrupted during an intimate moment like this. He liked even less that there was anyone anywhere near me right after the first mating.

"I'll be right back. Stay here." He started walking towards the door.

"Grayson!" I called him. I quickly got up and wrapped a sheet around myself. "Where are you going? You naked!"

Grayson was no longer paying attention. He was shaking with rage, body growing, preparing to shift.

He obviously didn't care about his state of undress. Their attention was focused on destroying whoever was on our doorstep.

"Grayson, wait! You can't just..."

I chased him to the door only for him to turn around, walk back to me, throw me over his shoulder and carry me back to the bed at a speed I couldn't even manage.

process.

He unceremoniously dropped me onto the mattress and climbed on top of me. above me, looking down at me with angry, dark red eyes. I swallowed hard.

"Stay. Here," he said. "If I come back and find you moved even an inch towards that door, you're not going to like the consequences. Got it, mate?"

"I'm not a child." I looked at him. "Do you want to take a kick in the balls? Try talking to me like that again."

Grayson bared his teeth in frustration and buried his head in my hair, taking a deep breath and calming down to my scent.

I knew he was on edge and he couldn't exactly control his actions right now. Maybe I could have discounted it and just done what he said.

But that didn't mean he could get away with talking so with me.

There was another quick knock on the door. Grayson growled in her direction.

"Um, excuse me, do you really think I want to be here right now?" Kyle's voice called through our apartment. "Actually, do you think I would be anywhere near your palace wing right now unless it wasn't extremely important?"

I sighed. "Go talk to your beta," I told Grayson. I massaged the tense muscles in his neck with my fingers in an attempt to calm him down quickly.

"I will stay here. Promise. The sooner you go see what he wants, the sooner we can get back to what we were doing."

He kissed my mark and then my lips before settling down. I lean back to look at me.

"You should be aware. Anyone has access to kingdom now. Anyone."

Our bedroom door opened a second later.

I stumbled back with a gasp, not expecting my mate to burst through the door just then, only to be grabbed around the waist and crushed against his bare chest.

"I thought I told you to stay in bed," he said, scolding.

"And I thought I said I would kick you in the balls if you keep talking to me as if I were a child."

A muscle ticked in his jaw. "You drive me crazy as fuck."

"Don't blame me for your psychosis."

"Baby, you are my psychosis."

With that, he released me, and in the next second he was across the room in our closet, wearing a pair of dark jeans.

"Going somewhere?" I asked.

Frustration crept over his face. "Yes. I'm sorry my love. You know I wouldn't go if it wasn't really necessary."

I nodded, following behind. "I know. All good. Kyle it looked very serious. What does it mean that the barriers have fallen?"

He paused after pulling on a black T-shirt, brows furrowed. "Did you hear?"

"Of course I could hear it. You were in the other room."

He looked perplexed. "The rooms are soundproofed. The only reason I knew Kyle was coming was because I smelled him, and the door was closed. Even I would have to strain to hear through that door when it's closed."

I shrugged. "Well I think you should get your money back because whoever soundproofed this room obviously didn't do a good job."

Grayson shook his head, picking up the shoes. "So I guess you heard that Zaweth's wards are open. First time in ages."

I pulled my sheet tighter around me. "What exactly does that mean?"

"It means someone figured out how to break the barrier. Someone very powerful. That means anyone can pass."

"Well, can't you just put it back?"

"Not without an extremely powerful sorcerer. And the only one nearby happens to be missing. And I have this strange feeling that I know who is responsible."

He walked over to me, pressing a firm kiss to my forehead. "We need to protect the borders. As far as we know, Azazel is already in the kingdom."

"And are you just going to walk around?" I said. "And you who he wants to kill. Shouldn't you be hiding?"

"I'm not a coward, Belle. I will not run away like Azazel. I'll rip him apart for what he did to you. Because that's what he deserves. I will make him suffer."

The emotions I was feeling from him suddenly made sense. He wasn't afraid of the potential danger his kingdom or his people now faced.

He was looking forward to Azazel coming. He was cheered up. He wanted to destroy it.

"What can I do to help you?" I asked, already taking my clothes.

"You can stay here where I know you'll be safe – where Azazel can't get to you," he said as he reached down to pick up his boots.

He walked past me to the bed, where he sat down and He quickly began tying his shoes.

I threw on some panties – of the non-sexy variety this time – before pulling a pair of jeans over my hips.

A sneer flew from my mouth. Why did I know this would be his answer before I even asked the question?

"I'm not going to sit here like a helpless doll while you go about your business. No way. I will go together." Dressed in a white T-shirt.

Finished with his shoes, Grayson finally looked at me with a piercing gaze.

I knew the expression on his face. It was a look that said that he wouldn't change his mind.

"Argue with me all you want, Belle," he said slowly. "Will not happen. I will not put you in danger on purpose."

“There has to be something I can do! I can help with medical things. Or with children. This is my pack too.”

He ignored me, already walking to the door. I tried to put on my sneakers, hopping on one foot as I followed.

“So what, are you going to lock me in this apartment while you go to war?”

He nodded. “Yes, that's exactly what I'm going to do.”

I scoffed. “I know how to unlock a door. You cannot force me to stay here.”

Grayson's eyebrows rose. He opened the door to reveal Liam standing there, a grim expression painted across his face. his face.

“No, but I can,” Liam said as he entered the apartment.

I looked at my mate. “What is that? What is he doing here?”

Grayson was hesitant with his words. “He will make sure you stay here.”

Chapter 56

BELLE

"You suck at this game," Liam told me. "Seriously, kids play better than you."

Playing my cards on the coffee table in front of me, I dropped my head to my knees with a groan.

Grayson had left several hours earlier, leaving me alone with Liam, who wouldn't let me leave my apartment no matter how many times I threatened to kill him, his family, and his future children.

It was absolutely irritating.

"Better stop trying, Belle," Liam said the fifth time he'd pinned me against a wall after trying to break through when he wasn't looking and running madly for the front door.

"Even if you somehow managed to get past me, there are two more wolves on the other side of this door, tasked with keeping you in.

No one will enter and definitely no one will leave."

I couldn't care less about the stupid Go Fish. My eyes kept straying to the front door, my heart squeezing a little harder every second Grayson didn't come inside.

That was stupid, of course, since I could sense through the mate bond that he wasn't close, but I couldn't help but hope he'd show up safe and sound.

Liam and I had been playing games and watching movies for several hours. He was trying to keep my mind busy, though he was unsuccessful.

He had just won his fourth straight Go Fish game in record time.

I'm not sure how we ended up playing Go Fish, as it's a game for kindergarten-aged kids; Liam must have suggested this because he knew my mind was busy with very uncomfortable thoughts.

Unsurprisingly, I was having a hard time concentrating; I focused most of my attention on trying to tune in to Grayson's emotions through the mate bond.

His most prevalent emotion was anger, followed by anxiety and a bit of bloodlust.

His fear was minimal, almost entirely non-existent, thank God, fueled by his concern for me and his need to get revenge. I would find it sweet if it weren't so scary.

Every now and then, I could feel Grayson sifting through my emotions the same way he sifted through his, checking in on me and making sure I was safe.

I think Grayson knew it brought me comfort when he did that, so he did it often. I felt his warm presence in my mind every five or ten minutes.

"Any news?" I asked Liam.

Liam was getting regular updates on his phone via a royal news and emergency agency.

My phone seemed to magically disappear around the same time Grayson left – an odd coincidence that prevented me from browsing the news like I wanted to.

I wouldn't be so upset about Grayson hiding my phone if I didn't know that Liam was sorting and filtering the information so as not to freak me out.

Liam sighed and picked up his phone. I watched anxiously while your thumb scrolled across the screen.

"They are still just patrolling the borders," he told me. "Nothing changed. I would tell you if there was anything to worry about."

As if that stopped me from worrying.

I fidgeted in my spot on the living room floor, trying not to look as nervous as I felt.

"This is ridiculous," I complained. "I may be a human and not a werewolf or vampire, but I know how to take care of myself. I won't do anything stupid if you let me out.

"Letting you out would be the stupid thing," Liam replied as he took my cards so he could shuffle and deal us both another hand.

"I thought you were going to side with me. You were my friend even before you were my 'guardian' or something."

Liam scoffed, not bothering to look at me. "So this is where we are now? All I'm trying to do is keep you safe, and you're trying to blame me?"

"Wouldn't hurt to try," I grumbled, hugging my knees closer to my chest.

I glanced at the door one more time, unable to stop a worried sigh from escaping my mouth.

The only reason I wasn't struggling as much was that I knew Grayson would feel safer if he was sure I was safe. He would never be able to concentrate if I was alone.

That would only put both of us in danger.

So I would stay. As long as I was able to feel that Grayson was safe through our mate bond, I would stay in the apartment, even if it made me feel like a helpless child.

Liam finished shuffling and started dealing the cards for another round of Go Fish. The two of us were sitting around the coffee table in the living room, me on the floor and Liam on the couch.

"No more Go Fish. Please," I said, pushing the cards away from me.

Liam sighed and stopped his movements.

"Do you want to play something else? I hate to admit it, but Go Fish is the only game I know how to play. Card games and board games are not very popular in vampire culture."

My lips curved slightly for the first time since Grayson left. "This is sad. What kind of childhood was that?"

Liam smiled. "Not a good one. But let's not talk about that. It's depressing as fuck. In fact, I'd love to hear how you're doing. The last time I saw you, at Minnie's apartment, you were really upset. Something happened between you and your mate." He hesitated, his gaze fixed on the cards in his hands.

Then he looked at me. "But everything is... resolved between you now?"

"Other than the fact that Grayson insists on keeping me locked in the apartment?" I asked. "Yes, it's all settled. More than resolved."

He nodded. "That is good. That's..." He paused momentarily before blurting out, "I'm sorry, I have to ask – aren't you supposed to be a fairy by now?"

"What?" I was so taken aback by his question that it was the only thing I could think of to say.

Then it dawned on me, Liam knew that Grayson and I had finally completed the mating process. Of course I did.

I had completely forgotten what Grayson had told me about what would happen to his pack after I mated with him.

Everyone connected to Grayson would be able to feel it when he finally fully connected to me, just as they felt the moment he first met me.

Despite my attempt to stop him, I felt a flush darken my cheekbones. And not just because Liam knew Grayson and I had had sex.

I mean, that wasn't great either, but what really embarrassed me was the fact that pretty much every supernatural creature in the world knew I'd lost my virginity to their king yesterday.

"Oh, God, no, no, no..." My face fell into my hands. I couldn't even look at Liam. suddenly, no

it felt so bad that I was being held captive in my apartment.

How was I going to go out in public again?

“Okay, no need for that,” Liam said, getting up and crouching next to me on the floor. “Seriously, you'll have your mate worried if you start freaking out. And he has some shit to do.”

He placed a hand on my shoulder, trying to comfort me, though it didn't help at all with the humiliation gnawing at my stomach.

“Nobody gives a shit if you got laid, Belle. In fact, most people were overjoyed that you were finally officially their queen.”

He dropped his head when I still didn't respond. “Fuck, and you were starting to relax too. I shouldn't have brought it up.”

“Uh, yeah, you think?” I snapped, finally looking up at him. I took several deep breaths. Was he right; losing your mind now wouldn't do anyone any favors.

I needed to stay calm, if only because of Grayson.

Brushing my hair out of my face, I said, “It's okay. Everything is good. I am fine. Everything is fine. This might be the most humiliating moment of my life, but I'm fine, right? Nobody cares that Grayson and I mate because I live in this crazy supernatural world where all of that is normal, right? Everyone knows when everyone else has sex, and the only reason I think it's weird is that I'm a human and not some crazy werewolf, right? Right?”

Liam didn't answer, probably thinking I had crazed.

"Oh, my God, tell me I'm right!" I exploded.

"Certain!" Liam responded immediately, agreeing frantically shake your head.

"Yes, you are absolutely right. Nobody cares. Not even a little. Everyone knows when everyone has sex and everything..."

The mix of embarrassment and annoyance I was feeling made my entire body deflate. I closed my eyes tight.

"You suck at comforting women. I don't know how it goes to be able to stay with Minnie."

He placed a hand on his chest, feigning pain.

"There. That hurts."

"You'll get over it," I muttered.

"Okay, but putting the whole sex thing aside, I only ask because I read the prophecy. I know what was supposed to happen after you mated. But you are still... you."

"Yes," I breathed. "Still me. absolutely none difference as far as I can see."

"But what about turning into a Fae?"

I shrugged. "I'm just as confused as you are. Looks like I'll remain human for a while longer."

"That's good, right? It means you and Grayson were worrying about nothing..."

A ding came from Liam's phone, interrupting him. He picked up the phone and laughed when he saw who it was.

"What?" I asked. "Who is it?"

He shook his head and held the phone up so I could see the text lighting up the screen. "Your mate," he explained.

Grayson Stoll: Tell Belle to stop worrying so much. I am fine. I'm in the woods with other pack members, taking turns patrolling the borders.

Everything is fine. She can go to sleep. I'm sure she's exhausted. Tell her I'll be back soon.

I leaned back after reading the message, feeling my heart significantly lighter. "Well, that's good-"

Suddenly, I felt a dramatic shift in Grayson's emotions. My heart plummeted to the soles of my feet. I wasn't sure how I knew, but I knew something had happened – something bad.

He was in trouble.

"Belle? What is wrong?" Liam asked.

"Something happened to Grayson," I explained frantically. "There's something wrong."

"But we just got a message from him. He said that was fine."

I barely paid attention to what Liam said to me, too busy navigating through my mate's emotions.

They seemed to be rapidly intensifying by the minute.

"Things have changed."

Something was causing Grayson to panic. He was scared, and that fact alone made my world feel like it was coming to a halt.

"You know what happened? Can you tell?!" Liam continued with the questions.

I shook my head. "I-I don't...I can't..." I poked at Grayson's mind, but got no other information, felt nothing but his fear.

Without any warning, my connection to Grayson was severed. My mind suddenly went still. My breath was sucked from my lungs at the same time my stomach filled with lead.

I couldn't feel Grayson's emotions anymore. He didn't want me to feel his fear, so he stopped me from feeling anything. Which was decidedly much, much worse.

That meant what happened must have been bad enough for him to hide from me.

It was his way of protecting me. I knew. But that didn't make me feel any better. I didn't want to be protected – I wanted to know he was okay. I needed to know if he was okay.

My eyes darted to Liam, who was still at my side, watching me intently. "He severed our connection," I told him.

Panicked tears welled up in the corner of my eyes, but I quickly bit them back. "What do I do? I can no longer know what he is feeling."

A silence ensued as he tried to determine the right thing to say. His hesitation was evident, telling me

immediately that no matter what he said I was going to be upset.

"I think... the only thing you can do... is wait."

And upset I was.

"My partner is in trouble and you want me to do nothing?" I asked. "What if he gets hurt? What if he gets killed?"

"Belle, listen to me. I think we both know that Azazel Mortar is behind this. I need you to be fucking logical right now. How the hell are you going to be able to help when facing one of the most powerful vampires in the world? What could you do to help your partner during a situation like this?"

"Certainly more than sitting in my living room twiddling my thumbs and playing fucking Go Fish!" I snapped, seething with rage. I am the queen of the supernatural, of Zaweth, and I need to be there if something is going on. I'm not selfish and I'm definitely not a coward. I need to be with my mate if something is going on. And you will not stop me."

Without saying another word, I rose with conviction, made my way to the front door once more.

Liam used his vampire speed to appear in front of me in less than a second, blocking my path. "I can't let you do this," Liam said.

"Get out of my way, Liam. I'm serious." My voice was furious.

His arms crossed over his chest as he stared at me with an unwavering expression. "No."

I was so tired of this shit. I was fed up with other people thinking they ran my goddamn life.

Decision made, I went into the kitchen, opened a drawer and grabbed a knife.

Liam's eyebrows rose in shock as I approached him once more. "Belle, what are you doing? The most you will get here is get hurt."

"I'm not an idiot, Liam." I tried to keep my posture steady as I raised the knife. "Get out of my way, or I will attack."

Liam's lips curled up at the corners. He was clearly enjoying my threats.

"Do you really know how to use a knife? combat training with blades since the age of eight. I would take you down easily. Even without my vampire skills."

"It doesn't take a genius to figure out how to stab someone," I replied. "Now, get out."

"You know I can't do this. I wouldn't be able to live with myself if something happened to you. And neither does your mate."

It was cute, really. Liam was a good friend. It was a shame he was also an ass guy.

And then... I'm not really sure what happened next.

In a moment I was walking towards Liam, knife in my shaking hand, ready to do whatever was necessary to get to my mate.

And the next, I was standing in the middle of the hallway outside my apartment, just inches away from stabbing a very beautiful stranger in the stomach.

"What the hell?" exclaimed the curly-haired woman standing in front of my door. I immediately recognized her as one of the original members of Minnesota's Grayson pack. Bridget, perhaps?

I had the opportunity to chat with her during my first week in Zaweth and I remember thinking she was really nice and extremely stylish.

Standing beside her was another werewolf that I didn't quite recognize. But I knew his name was Christopher.

Like most werewolves, he was massive and intimidating. It didn't help that he was dressed all in black and was covered in muscle.

So Liam hadn't been lying when he said there were two werewolves parked outside my door, tasked with keeping me inside.

Bridget barely managed to dodge my knife before I realized what I was about to do and pulled her back to me.

"Why do you have a knife?" asked Bridget.
"Were you about to stab me?"

The man glanced back at the closed door before turning to look at me, confusion etched on his face. "Where are you from?"

I was just as confused as they were. I had no idea how I ended up here. I deleted? Oh my God, did I really stab Liam? I mean, I know I threatened him, but I never meant to.

Relief rushed through me when I heard Liam's voice calling from inside my apartment.

"Belle? Belle! Cum!" He let out a string of curses as he started looking for me. "This shit isn't funny, Belle!"

The two werewolves seemed to narrow their eyes at me, obviously hearing the same thing as me.

"I, um..." I began. I took a few steps back. "I gotta go."

Without saying another word, I turned around and started running across the street. Hall.

"Hey! Hang on!" the man shouted after me. I could hear the sound of his much faster footsteps running after me. Bridget was busy knocking on my apartment door, trying to get Liam's attention.

I wasn't even halfway down the hall when Christopher grabbed my arm, trying to get me to stop. I squealed, preparing to fight him, but then he released me. He just dumped me.

My eyes flew up, looking back, only to find that Christopher was gone. In fact, not even the runner was there.

I was once again in another location. And this time, I didn't recognize where I was.

I was surrounded by tall trees that seemed to go on forever, obviously in the middle of a forest. But which forest? Was I still in Zaweth?

And, more importantly, how the hell did I end up here? Was I losing my mind or did I just Apparate like a bloody wizard out of *Harry Potter*?

“Each Fae develops her powers based on her need and circumstance,” Evangeline's voice rang in my mind.

Was that what she was talking about? I needed to get out of my apartment, so I appeared on the other side of the door.

I needed to get away from the werewolves guarding my apartment, so I instantly appeared in the middle of the forest somewhere. Not the most useful solution, but I suppose it could work.

At least I wasn't stuck with Liam anymore.

Holy crap. Was I a fairy now?

Chapter 56

GRAYSON

HALF HOUR BEFORE

After hundreds of years, the invisible border that protected the realm of Zaweth and prevented anyone from entering had been torn down, and we had no idea how or why.

I didn't even know it was possible. The sorcerer who raised them all those years ago, Gulus Mallor, was still alive and a lifelong resident of Zaweth.

While not immortal, sorcerers were some of the longest-lived creatures in existence. They were often called the sea turtles of the supernatural world, living for a thousand years on average.

They were also incredibly rare. Gulus was one of few existing and also one of the oldest with 912 years.

And he was gone. The only man who could do something to help is not found anywhere.

The supernatural realm had many enemies who wouldn't think twice about taking advantage of our fallen borders. For all we knew, they could already be in Zaweth.

Kyle and I rushed to secure the borders before it was too late. At least a hundred of our best warriors were stationed across Zaweth, and we were recruiting more volunteers to rotate shifts.

We've been patrolling the borders for the last few hours. It was dark now, the night sky covering us in dark shadows and moonlight.

The forest was quiet at night and brought great peace to me and my wolf.

I didn't get to enjoy that peace because Belle was upset with me. I felt her irritated and worried by our bond, enjoying our new connection and constantly checking in on me.

I totally regretted not teaching her how to mentally connect – a skill she could take advantage of now that we were fully connected – before I left her.

It would have been an extremely useful skill, especially since I took her phone so I could be responsible for what information she was exposed to.

I tried to send her calming vibes through our link, but did little to calm her down. That was to be expected.

It was difficult for newly mated couples to be apart from each other, even when both were in safe surroundings and possibly not facing a battle with a psychotic vampire.

I wasn't kidding yesterday when I said I planned to keep her in bed for the rest of the week. And yet I planned to do just that as soon as I knew my kingdom was ready. safe.

Tune in to Belle's feelings through the link, seeing how she was doing. She liked to feel my presence because it meant I was okay. She calmed down a bit, but her concern for me was still great.

I sighed. I hated leaving her with Liam. It was easy to get away from her after mating, especially since she didn't turn into a faerie like I'd hoped after we broke up.

Was the prophecy wrong? Or would there still be a change?

I grabbed my phone and sent Liam a quick message asking him to tell Belle to stop worrying and go to bed. I would get back to her ASAP. His anxiety was completely unnecessary.

This whole situation sounded all too familiar.

Leaving Belle just before mating and being taken to guard the borders from an unexpected breach reminded me a little too much of the night Azazel took over my body.

I had no doubt that he was the person behind all of this. Kidnapping Gulus Mallor, despite being a harmless old man, and threatening him to remove the borders was not beneath Azazel.

If my suspicions were correct, all we had to do now was wait for Azazel to act on whatever ridiculous plans he was hatching.

And then I would kill him, make him pay for what he did to mine. lifemate.

And then I would go back to said mate, throw her to the nearest surface and let her get on with whatever she was planning to do to me before we were interrupted.

Then I would ram her repeatedly until we were both too exhausted to continue.

Maybe I'd fuck her from behind this time. Or watch her face contort with pleasure as she sat on my cock and dug her nails into my chest like I knew she loved to do.

"You know, I have to tell you, this whole 'being a hybrid' thing has been both a blessing and a curse," Kyle said to me, feigning exasperation.

We were walking through the forest, checking with our warriors at the borders to make sure there was no land that wasn't being crossed. Kyle didn't stop talking the entire time.

I could have done the patrol myself.

Still, Kyle insisted that I not be alone because the last time Azazel was in my territory without permission, he took advantage of my solidarity, taking care of me and body for several months.

"What are you talking about?" I asked.

"Well, thanks for asking," Kyle began. "Becoming a hybrid has many benefits – bigger, faster, stronger. A totally better warrior. And that's great."

He let his gaze slide to me. "What they don't tell you about becoming a hybrid is that you smell it every time your alpha is thinking about mating with Luna."

I smiled. His comments about my sexual potency didn't bother me as much as before I finally took my sweet mate.

My temper was much milder now. My wolf was at ease for the first time since I was old.

enough to find my mate, because Belle was mine in every way, shape, and form.

I had everything I ever wanted.

But my need for her was still high. Mate with her only made me more insatiable.

I wanted to fuck her blindly. Nonstop. Forever. Watching her face contort adorably with constant orgasms. Pleasing her until she was as addicted to me as I was to her.

I seriously doubted that need would ever go away. Kyle would soon realize that and learn to ignore it.

At least he was the only one with strong enough senses to feel every time I was thinking about having sex with my irresistible mate.

My pheromones weren't as strong as before, so no one but him would be able to sense them. It was just a burden for Kyle to carry, and that was fine with me.

"Breathe through your mouth" was the only solution I gave him.

Kyle groaned. "I thought it would get better after you guys two finally did the grind and roll."

"Then you are an idiot."

He chuckled, shaking his head. "He guesses-"

He couldn't finish his sentence because, at that very moment, a blinding light filled the space around us and something invisible slammed into my body.

He picked me up and threw me to the ground at the base of a tree. I gasped and grunted with the impact, coughing several times.

What the fuck was that?

I rolled onto my side as I tried to control my breathing and groaned at the intense pain in my shoulder. And then I realized what had happened.

The invisible force field that protected Zaweth was back. I could see the almost invisible domed enclosure shimmering above me.

“How the fuck...” I muttered.

I sat up and looked for Kyle, my heart nearly stopping when I found him.

No, no, no...

I was up and running in less than a second and dropped to my knees beside him.

Kyle was lying on his back on the floor, motionless, showing no signs of breathing, eyes blank and emotionless looking up at the sky.

A deep, thin wound as if it had been made by a knife cut, started at the top of his head and ran down the entire right side of his body, down to his feet in a long, bloody line.

Cut out his right eye and down his cheek, down his side of your throat, chest, stomach and leg.

His blood gushed out and pooled around us, completely soaking my jeans and filling the air with the smell of iron and death. It was a scene from a horror movie.

The force field had gone through his body. His right foot was nearly split in two, sliced right down the middle, all the way down to the ankle, where it turned into a terrible wound.

in the flesh.

I had no doubt that if I turned him over on his stomach, the terrible line-shaped wound would also be running up his back.

A perfect line that circled along him the same way the force field appeared around him, starting at his feet and then moving upwards.

"No. No. No!" I screamed. I grabbed his shoulder, shaking, trying to get him to move. "Kyle!" He didn't move.

I could barely breathe. Panic scratched the walls of my throat, obstructing my trachea.

If that's what the force field did to Kyle when it was restored... then what did it do to the hundreds of pack members stationed along the border?

All of them were within the area where the force field would have materialized.

"Too bad," a familiar voice said behind me. "Your beta was an annoying nuisance, but it was never my intention to kill you."

I got up and turned to face the owner of the voice.

It was no surprise that Azazel Mortar stood before me, casually dressed in black pants and a matching black button-up shirt.

His cocky smile showed his pointed fangs, and his vivid red eyes seemed to glow menacingly.

in the dark.

"War fatalities, I suppose," Azazel continued, his menacing smile expanding over the pale skin of his face.

He spoke cheerfully, as if he were casually chatting with an old friend.

An all-consuming rage surged through me, taking over all my thoughts, my vision turning red with maddened, seething rage.

Azazel Mortar just successfully killed my beta along with an unknown number of my pack members. He took control of my body for months and tortured my mate.

He made us live in fear of him and his next plan, wondering every day if that was the day he would achieve his goal and finally take the throne.

But not anymore. Tonight, he would pay for his sins. It is night, Azazel Mortar was a dead man.

With a roar, I leapt forward, moving forward in a blur.

I reached for him with claws outstretched, intending to rip out his organs, his tongue, and his eyes. But not your jugular. Or your heart. No, that would be too easy.

His death would not be quick or painless – it would be excruciating and horrible.

I would make sure he felt it when I broke each one of his bones before ripping both of his arms from his body at slow speed and then doing the same to him.

your legs.

I wanted him to know what it was like to have blood oozing from his open wounds and pooling around him.

her body, knowing that she would be unable to do anything to to stop.

The same way I felt when I watched Kyle's pool of blood spread around him a few moments ago.

But then, just as I was about to reach Azazel, my fingers brushing the fabric of his shirt, he was gone, no longer in front of me. I spun with another furious roar.

His dark chuckle did little to give away his location. It seemed like he was everywhere, coming from all directions.

“Did you really think this would be easy, Alpha Grayson?” Azazel said, his tone mocking as his voice echoed around me.

He was everywhere and nowhere. His physical body was nowhere to be seen.

I showed my teeth. “Come out and face me, Azazel.”

Another laugh. “Oh, I intend to.”

The rustling sound could be heard behind me and I immediately turned around. Azazel was leaning against a tree with his arms crossed over his chest, that annoying smile still on his lips.

I lunged at him once more and managed to catch up with him this time. turn.

I had no idea how he managed to escape my earlier attack, but it didn't matter because I was already digging my claws into his stomach. Her red eyes widened as I started to thrust them into her flesh.

And then, just like that, he was gone again. My hand was still flexed, still covered in blood, but there was no one else in front of me. I looked around confused.

“Tsk, tsk, tsk,” Azazel growled. “And here I was, thinking we had a connection.”

I realized with a start that he was beside me now, a few feet away, gaily watching me.

And even though I dug my claws into his stomach, he appeared to be completely unharmed.

His clothes were as tidy as before, and no blood stained the fabric of his shirt.

My molars ground together. "What game are you playing, Mortar?" I asked.

I took a slow step towards him, determined to keep him in my line of sight this time, but was interrupted abruptly by another voice – Azazel's voice, but coming from my other side now.

"After all these months of sharing the same body, almost the same consciousness, I really started to feel like I knew you. I may have even started to respect you."

As this new version of Azazel – the version of him that had just spoken – stepped forward, the one I was looking at was still to my right, watching me.

My gaze flew back and forth between the two. There was two of him. Two copies of the same man right in front of me.

"It really hurts." His voice suddenly came from behind me. I spun, only to find another Azazel approaching, bringing the new count to three.

There were three Azazel Mortar surrounding me. "It hurts that you are so determined to kill me," this third version continued with a sad shake of the head.

"Although I suppose I intend to do the same," said the version to my left.

"My brother always called me a hypocrite," said Azazel to my right. "I think he was right."

My attention snapped to them all, my neck straining to keep them all in my line of sight as I realized that any one of them could attack the moment I turned my back and faced another.

That was an almost impossible task – especially when I heard several footsteps rustling on the forest floor and countless Azazel Mortar came out of the shadows of the trees, surrounding me.

At least forty of them formed a large circle around me, all of them wearing the same outfit, the same psychotic smile, the same glowing red eyes.

Magic. It was the only explanation. Azazel was using some sort of magic to make multiple copies of himself. But I already knew that none of the versions around me were true.

And if my theory were correct, harming those duplicates would do nothing to the real one.

I could kill them, yes – just like I just killed the second Azazel that appeared in front of me – but a new one

Clone would no doubt appear in his place, unharmed and smiling at me.

Deciding to put my theory to the test, I reached out and, using sheer strength, buried it in the chest of the closest Azazel to me, not hesitating to wrap it around his heart.

It was extremely gratifying to see the fear take over his expression as he realized my intentions – to rip his heart right out of his chest.

But before I had a chance to end his miserable life, he vanished into thin air, just like that. My hand formed a fist around nothing, still covered in his blood.

"That wasn't very nice," a new version of Azazel said, appearing in front of me in the same spot where the old one was. he was.

His plan was clear. He recognized that he would never be able to kill me alone. We both knew I was bigger, faster and stronger.

He wouldn't stand a chance, especially with the army of werewolves and vampires I had on my side.

But he took care of any help I could ask for by killing all the warriors near me when he somehow managed to get the force field back on.

He knew I would guard my borders with the best members of my pack. I had no way of knowing about the horror that would ensue when the force field was restored.

I fell for your trick and had the blood of countless people in my hands as proof.

Now, however, he could face me without any of my pack members coming to my aid. I could make a mental connection to call for help, but it would take them a long time to get here.

I was on the outskirts of Zaweth, a half hour's run in wolf form from the main part of the realm. And Azazel knew it. He was going to do this as soon as possible.

Everything made sense. A version of Azazel I could handle. Hell, even fifty of them would be papaya with sugar.

But it was when all these versions of him became practically indestructible – simply reappearing completely unharmed, the moment I killed them – that things started to get a little dicey for me.

But luckily for me, I saw the only flaw in his plan.

I knew he wasn't capable of this level of magic alone, just as I knew he couldn't bring down Zaweth's borders alone. He was using sorcerer magic.

Which is why I would bet my life that Gulus Mallor was somewhere nearby at this very moment, helping Azazel in his attempt to take the throne.

And wherever Gulus was, the real version of Azazel had to be too – someone had to tell Gulus what to do, when to put the force field back and when to make new clones.

Both Azazel and Gulus had to be somewhere close – close enough to observe what was going on.

And, if I had to guess, Gulus was probably using magic to keep them hidden behind some invisible curtain and to mask their scent.

But if I could find Gulus and kill him, all magic would stop and I could end Azazel's pathetic life without further obstacles.

But I would have to go through Azazel's indestructible clones to do that. This was the part that could be a little difficult.

I had a very small amount of time to find out where Gulus was before Azazel made his clones.

attack. If I could keep Azazel talking, I might find him before it was too late.

There was no real invisibility. Difficult to detect at times, but each invisible force field had a glowing, almost invisible iridescent quality.

If I could find that glimmer then
would find Azazel.

"I'm impressed, Azazel," I said in a low tone.
"Only you can figure out the only way to truly kill me without risking your life or doing any dirty work."

I scanned the many versions of his face that surrounded me, looking for any sign of shimmering magic as he spoke.
"You really are a coward through and through."

I hoped the comment about his cowardice affected him.
And it did. In sync, each of the surrounding faces broke into a sneer.

"What you call cowardice, I call good judgment," Azazel's voice snapped.
"I will not be known as the fool who died because he thought he could take on the Alpha Grayson Stoll."

My eyebrows rose. "Clones or not, this title is destined to be yours. Make no mistake, Azazel. You will, Die today. By my hands."

The clones bared their fangs at me. I was running out of time and I still had to figure out where Gulus was hiding the real Azazel. He would attack anyone
time.

I was right when several of the clones lunged at me without warning, using their vampire speed to

move faster than I could understand. But I was also fast.

I turned into my wolf before they could reach and ripped the first clone apart with my teeth.

The second and third were dispatched just as quickly, my own vampire speed proving very effective in conjunction with my werewolf abilities.

I was able to hold out for a while.

But they kept coming, throwing themselves at me until I had thirty or more – it was hard to tell – on top of me, tearing into my flesh with their teeth and claws just as I was tearing at them with mine.

My priority was keeping them away from my jugular. Azazel did not provide his clones with weapons, so they only had its fangs and claws to attack.

They would try to hit my neck because that would be the quickest and easiest way to kill me. I couldn't let this to happen.

Before I had a chance to kick them, two clones bit my leg at the same time, ripping my muscle apart, tearing off a piece with their teeth and spitting it out on the ground.

I howled in pain as my leg gave out from under me and I went under.

I tried to get up while still trying to limit their access to my throat, but two more clones did the same to my other leg and I fell to the ground once more.

I... I was missing out. In less than thirty seconds, Azazel pinned me to the forest floor. Your clones

they piled on me, and I quickly became powerless to stop them.

Even though I managed to somehow avoid them piercing my jugular, their teeth and claws were tearing me all over my body. I would soon be losing a lot of blood.

Then a miracle happened. At the same moment, a loud scream could be heard in the distance, each and every one of Azazel's clones froze.

They became immobile statues above me, some with their teeth still digging into my skin, others falling to the ground in mid-leap.

Though confusing, I wouldn't complain. I continued to fight them off, finding it so much easier to do so now that they weren't fighting back.

I'd barely gotten half of them out of me when, without warning, they all just...disappeared.

Yes, that's right - all the clones above me and around me are gone, almost as if they never existed, to begin

I wasted no time getting to my feet and taking another fighting stance. I was not a fool. This had to be a trick. Why would Azazel just give up in the middle of a fight?

Then I heard the sound that made my blood run cold. the terrified voice of my mate, screaming my name. "Grayson!"

Chapter 57

BELLE

My thoughts were interrupted by the sounds of growling and screeching coming from somewhere behind me. It looked like people were fighting – lots of people. Vampires and werewolves, if I had to guess.

My stomach dropped dramatically when I realized I recognized the owner of the growls. I would recognize that sound in anywhere. It was Grayson's wolf.

I ran towards the noise, my heart racing as the sound of my companion's distress only seemed to get louder and more intense.

Even in the dark, what I found was worse than I could have ever imagined. There were two men, one with silver-gray hair and the other with pitch-black hair, both looking out into a clearing of trees, their backs to me.

The biggest one was standing, dressed all in black to match his hair, arms crossed casually over his chest. The other man was crouched down, his long brown hooded coat skimming the ground.

His arms were extended in front of him and his fingers were splayed. It took me a moment to realize exactly what they were looking at.

There was a mountain of people piled on top of a struggling, snarling wolf. They were biting at the wolf, tearing at it with claws as it howled and tried to fight them off.

Grayson. O lobo era Grayson.

And the more I looked, the more I realized that all the people on top of him were the same person.

They were all perfect copies of one of the men standing in front of me – same clothes, same black hair... and red eyes.

It was Azazel Mortar. Azazel Mortar was trying to kill My mate.

There was a lot about the situation that I didn't understand.

I didn't know how it was possible that there were so many versions of Azazel. Or why the older man was crouched on the ground with his arms outstretched.

But none of that mattered. All I knew was that needed to help.

I acted on pure instinct. I rushed forward with my kitchen knife still clutched in my hand.

Azazel turned, probably able to hear me coming, and looked at me with a wide, familiar look. I knew those eyes. I'd seen them in Grayson's packhouse, looking at me with an almost gleeful hatred.

I don't know how I thought Grayson was capable of the mean things this man in front of me had done to me all those months ago. And now he was trying to kill the love of my life.

Then I was going to kill him.

Azazel didn't have a chance to act on the shock I'd given him when he saw me coming because my knife sank into his stomach a second later.

He gasped, his arms falling to his sides, his mouth getting loose.

I didn't want to take any chances, so I pulled the knife out of his stomach and thrust it back in as hard as I could. So, just in case, I did it one more time.

Gotta make sure you hit all the vital organs, right?

Blood spurted from him and landed on my hand. He coughed and blood from his mouth splattered onto my white shirt and jeans.

He grabbed my wrist, digging in his claws. The fury was evident in his eyes. "You whore," he spat.

His body began to slump forward and I was forced to release my grip, unable to support his massive form against my much smaller one.

He hit his stomach on the forest floor with a loud thud and took my knife down with him, still lodged deep in his stomach.

I watched as her blood began to pool around her bent figure. His back rose and fell unevenly with his last ragged breaths. And then he was still.

I could feel my pulse in my throat. Behind my eyes. Like a racehorse, riding fast on my chest. I thought about what exactly I had just done.

I had killed someone.

Evil vampire or not, a man was dead...
my cause.

His blood was on me. In my hands. Splashed in my face. Piling up under my shoes.

No one talks about how much blood there is after stabbing someone to death.

So much. Blood.

I was so absorbed by the horrors of what I'd just done that I didn't even realize there was another man until it was too late.

The much older man, who was obviously trying to help Azazel defeat my mate, was still crouched on the ground, but he was looking at me now.

He had shoulder-length white hair with highlights.
gray hairs and the strangest bone structure I had ever seen.

That made me pause – somehow alarmed and captivated by his strange features all at the same time.

He had a strong square jaw that was accentuated by his short, straight haircut, and his cheekbones jutted out from beneath his flesh, hollowing out his cheekbones in a way that could only be described as morbid.

Her skin, although most of it was covered by her clothes, what little I could see was wrinkled to the point of being uncomfortable.

Tattoos covered nearly every inch of his body.

They were faded and faded with age, peeking out from under the sleeves of his brown leather coat and snaking through his bony fingers, up his neck and circling his face, and disappearing into his hairline.

The dark ink was moving too, dark swirls dancing along his skin almost as if they were floating alive, a part of him. It smelled – like magic. But not the kind I was used to.

The magic I could feel this man working was dark and powerful.

But that wasn't the most disconcerting part of her appearance. No, that title belonged to his eyes.

They were pure white, their irises almost invisible, their pupils filled with the blizzard that was their gaze. And they glowed, clear and shocking in the darkness that surrounded us.

The whole look was like something out of a horror movie – a crouching creature, staring at me in the night, only its white eyes visible.

And the way he was looking at me made my blood run cold. His attention flicked to Azazel's body, still lying at my feet, and then back to me. And I knew instantly – this man intended to kill me.

I barely managed to scream my mate's name before his fingers wrapped around my neck and my body was pressed against a tree hard enough to make the world around me spin.

Shit, I should have dropped my knife, shouldn't I?

Chapter 58

GRAYSON

I couldn't see Belle, which meant she was somewhere behind Gulus' invisible shield, but I could smell her. I could hear their strangled, terrified gasps. And that would be enough to guide me to her.

I was still in wolf form when I started to run towards his scent.

The Azazel clones had definitely done more damage to me than I cared to admit – but the pain still hadn't gotten to me.

The adrenaline coursing through my veins made my injuries completely tolerable, almost completely painless. My sole focus was saving my distressed mate.

The moment I broke through Gulus's shield, I froze, stopping in my tracks. That nasty old sorcerer had Belle by the neck against a tree, her feet dangling at least a foot above the ground.

My damn heart lodged under my jugular. She was covered in blood. Spattered on his face and soaking through his white shirt. It dripped from her shoes.

Her wide eyes met mine as she struggled violently against the grip. Fuck, she looked so small compared to Gulus. And delicate.

My innocent, helpless mate was being strangled by one of the most powerful men in the world. My worst nightmare was happening right before my eyes.

Something wet under my feet took my attention for a while. single second. I was stepping in blood.

And there was someone lying on their stomach a few feet away from me, their red, lifeless eyes seeming to stare directly at me.

Azazel.

Azazel was dead.

“One more step,” said Gulus, “and I break her neck.”

I forced my wolf to give up control so I could shift into my human form. Once I was back on my two feet, I spoke to Gulus in what I hoped was a calm, even tone.

“Put my mate down, Gulus.” The power of the Mortar surged from my mouth to him, forcing him to obey my command.

He roared as he released his grip, and Belle fell to the floor. She immediately began panting, violent coughing causing her entire body to convulse.

A small amount of tension left my chest.

“Stay away from her,” I continued. Gulus complied, taking several steps back. "Look at me."

The moment he was facing me, a level of fear I hadn't expected appeared. Genuine terror painted the sorcerer's withered face.

Though I never met him, I always respected Gulus Mallor. I grew up hearing stories about him and his kind nature.

He was once regarded with great prestige, even a consultant to some of Zaweth's greatest kings.

But now he had hurt my mate. So now I wanted to rip his head off his shoulders.

"He made me do it," Gulus tried to explain. "He used the power of the Mortar to force me to tear down the borders and hurt all those people. I had no choice. I would never try to remove you from the throne. You are a wonderful ruler."

I shook my head slowly. "You claim he used his powers to force you to do his bidding?"

Gulus nodded vigorously. "Yes!"

"How did he find you?" I asked.

Gulus frowned. "What?"

"You've lived in Zaweth all your life," I said in a low tone. "Indeed, you are known for refusing to leave the realm's lands. You are often called a hermit or a wolf lonely."

"But our records show you left Zaweth for the first time in hundreds of years just over a week ago." I looked at Belle, seeing if she was okay.

She was still coughing, but it was softer than before, and she managed to sit up. She was going to be fine. I let out a sigh of relief.

"Now, normally, I wouldn't think twice about that information. You are free to come and go from Zaweth as you please. But it's the moment that makes me question the true motives behind his visit to the human world.

"Azazel made me do it!" exclaimed Gulus. "He forced me to come out of Zaweth!"

I grind my teeth. I hated liars.

“Azazel is not allowed within the borders of Zaweth. There is also no way for him to pass on information. He had absolutely no way of contacting you unless you contacted him first. Unless you left Zaweth to meet him.”

Gulius swallowed hard, his mind visibly racing to find an explanation to justify his odd behavior. "I..."

“But you could have left for another reason,” I continued. “Perhaps to visit an old friend or do some countryside travel. It seems like a pretty reasonable theory that Azazel could have tracked you down after you left the realm's lands and forced you to do what he wanted.”

Gulius was shaking his head again, agreeing with everything I said with wide eyes.

I took another step forward, muscles bunched in preparation for the attack that was about to take place.

“But, you see, Gulius, if that were really the case, an innocent man wouldn't threaten to kill the girl who just freed him. He would not strangle the king's mate he claims to respect.”

Gulius knew it was over. I could see it in his white eyes. Defeat. Acceptance.

He took a deep breath.

“I used to be great. Not so withered and old. Kings of the supernatural sought my advice long ago. But now...” He stopped, wincing as if the rest of the sentence pained him just thinking about it.

"I thought I could be big again. But I seem to have found myself on the wrong side of history. And now, after all these years, that's all I'll be known for, isn't it?"

I did not answer. He didn't want an answer.

He shook his head slowly and then gently closed his eyes. "Just be quick."

And I went. He was dead on the floor with a broken neck a few seconds later.

It wasn't because I felt sorry for him or wanted to extend mercy, it was because I had a mate who needed me, and I didn't want to waste another moment before making sure she was okay.

Belle whimpered my name as I pulled her into my arms, tears of relief cascading down her cheeks. My own relief was so great that I almost cried.

"Are you well?" I asked as I brushed the messy hair out of her face. Her small body shook against mine, the trauma of the night taking its toll.

She nodded. "You are? Y-you're hurt. Your legs-"

She was talking about the wounds on my legs where Azazel had bitten off chunks of my flesh.

I silenced her, placing a gentle kiss on her forehead to try and ease her worries. "They will heal. I've dealt with far worse things than a few miserable bites."

She was quiet for a few seconds as she searched my expression. Then she said, "You are naked."

I couldn't help the laugh that rumbled in my chest. "AND what are you worried about?"

I ran a finger over her cheek, smearing some of the splattered blood onto her face. My smile faded. "Did you kill Azazel?" My voice was gentler now, filled with concern.

Her blue eyes filled with more tears before going to where Azazel's body was still on the floor.

Then she did something I didn't necessarily expect. She looked down between us at her shirt and grabbed the fabric, holding it out for me to see.

"It bled on my shirt. I think it's ruined. I don't think I can get it out." She bit her lip as she tried to hold back the tears, still staring down at the bloodstained shirt.

"I didn't know there would be so much s-blood."

My heart broke a little. I tipped her head back and laid my forehead against hers, trying to get her to look past the blood everywhere.

"I think you're in shock, sweet girl," I told her, continuing to smooth back her hair. "Let's buy you a new shirt. You don't have to worry about that." I kissed your lips once. "You saved me, Belle."

"You were doing a lousy job on your own," was the her answer.

I laugh again.

"If you arrest me and then risk your life again," she continued, "I will kill you. I am not kidding. I already killed one person. I know how to do it now."

Damn, this girl was cute. And very serious when she was threatening someone. "Consider me warned," I relented. We would just have to cross that bridge when we got to it.

"And you can't block your emotions from me either."

"What?" I asked. "I don't..." My voice cracked as I searched through our bond, only to find that she was right. I was hiding my emotions from her, and wasn't even aware.

"I'm so sorry, honey. I didn't know I did that. It must have been some kind of instinct, my wolf trying to keep you from worrying."

"Well, all it did was make me more worried. That's why I knew I had to come find you. The only reason you would have done that is if you were in real trouble."

"While we're on the subject, how exactly did you escape Liam? And how did you get here so fast? Last thing I remember, you were still in our apartment."

Belle looked around at the forest that surrounded us. The sun was just beginning to rise, so everything was a little brighter now that the morning mist was reflecting the light. Was beautiful.

"I honestly don't know. I don't even really know where we are..."

Her eyes landed on something and narrowed as she tried to determine what it was. Fear immediately took over our bond. "That is...?" she asked.

In an instant, she disappeared from my arms. I stepped back, looking confusedly at where my mate had been.

"Beautiful!" got roared.

My mate had just disappeared like fucking Houdini. Here one second, gone the next. The only explanation was magic.

My gaze found Gulius, thinking he had to be the culprit, but he was still very dead behind me.

"Oh my God..."

My head turned to where Belle's voice had come from, only to find her now several feet away from me, kneeling on the ground.

I would have been more confused about how she got there if it weren't for what she was looking at.

"K-Kyle!" she sobbed as she took in his mangled form, still exactly where I'd left him. "Oh, my God, Kyle!"

I used my vampire speed to get to her quickly. I knelt beside her in front of my beta
died.

Belle was barely able to speak through her sobs. "O what it happened? What d-did that to him?"

My throat suddenly felt too swollen to speak. With everything that happened, I was momentarily able to put aside the horror of my best friend's death.

I had to focus on defeating Azazel. I had to avenge him. I couldn't have let myself down by his death.

I wish I had stayed in that frame of mind for Always.

Now, kneeling beside her body, her blood still fresh on the ground, pain I could never have imagined consumed me like fire.

Half of his body was completely destroyed by the force field.

The wound was horrific, chunks of her flesh hanging off in some areas, while bone was visible in others. His right eye was shattered, bone was visible in others. His right eye was shattered.

How... How were we going to let Elijah see his mate like this? It would finish him off. Fuck, it was about to break up with me.

And what was worse was that he wasn't the only one like that. There were many warriors stationed around the border when the force field went up.

Probably not all of them were directly in the zone that could have killed them, but I knew there must still be a few.

Who knows how many of my people – my family members – I've lost today?

Belle's sobs were loud and gut-wrenching. She kept repeating his name over and over, as if it would wake him up.

I put a hand on her back. "He..." I swallowed hard. Why couldn't I speak? My mouth was numb.

My entire body was numb as I started to accept the massive loss my kingdom was facing today.

The need to cry was strong in my chest, but I couldn't. "He was standing at the border when the force field went up. It tore right through him."

Belle shook her head, her movements convulsed and frantic. She placed a trembling hand on her uncut cheek and stroked the skin with her thumb.

"He's going to be okay," she whispered. "He'll be fine."

His entire body was shaking again. The trauma of this day was taking its toll and she was no doubt still in shock over having killed Azazel.

This was the last thing she needed right now. I wish I had protected her. I would have told her about Kyle's death eventually, but not right after everything she's been through today.

I didn't want her to start her grieving process by seeing his body like that.

"Belle, we have to go back," I told her. "We need to get his body to Elijah. We need to let him know what happened."

My heart sank just thinking about it. Elijah already knew his mate was dead, he could feel it through the bond.

Seeing his body like this would be difficult, and I doubted Kyle wanted Elijah to see him like this, but I wouldn't be the person to stop Elijah from seeing him.

If Belle died, there would be nothing on planet Earth to stop me from seeing her, from holding her against me one last time.

Belle shook her head again. "No!" she screamed. She placed her hands on either side of his as she continued.

to sob. "No, he's going to be fine. I'll make sure he's okay. I will not let him die."

Heavy – everything was heavy, my eyes, my heart, my limbs. This was all too much. Belle wasn't doing no sense. She was in deep denial. I needed to get her out of here before she completely lost herself.

"Belle..." I began, keeping my tone as gentle as possible. "He's already dead. He's been gone for quite some time. There's nothing we can do now but not take your body back."

I placed my hands on her waist, preparing myself to physically push her away when she started screaming again.

"No! No, don't pull over! Don't pull over!" She pushed my hands.

The way she looked at me with her red eyes made it feel like I was being pressed into the earth, both of our sorrows threatening to bury me.

"I'll help you," she whispered. She looked so desperate. "You have to let me help him. Just give me a few minutes, please. Then we can go back. But I need a few minutes. He's not gone yet - he's just not gone."

I looked at her, trying to understand. What the hell did she think she would be able to do for him now? Kyle died the moment the force field went up.

The only good thing we can take away from it was that it was painless. It was fast. He didn't have to suffer.

But if trying to help him now would help her sleep tonight, knowing she'd done all she could, then I'd let her stay a little longer.

"OK." I shook my head. "Some minutes."

Intense relief surged through the bond. "Thank you," she whispered.

She looked back into Kyle's almost unrecognizable face and placed a hand on each cheek, in the same places as before.

This time, though, she leaned her forehead against his, squeezing her eyes shut. She simply held him like that for a long moment, tears streaming down her face and into his.

After a few more seconds, she started to speak. "Are you well. You're fine, Kyle. You'll be fine. Please, please be well."

This went on for several minutes. She whispered to herself as she held him, telling him over and over that he would be fine.

I sat and watched in silence, my heart breaking more and more with each passing second. How long should I let this go on?

Her pain made her hallucinate, thinking she could bring a dead body back to life. To say it was worrisome was an understatement. Could this all have to do with her father's death?

Perhaps she felt she could have done more. Was it possible that she blamed herself for his death?

Almost ten minutes later, we were still there. I knew I had to push her away eventually. I had a whole kingdom to

to care. Kyle probably wasn't the only person who died today.

I had to be there for my subjects. And that couldn't be good for Belle, taking on the responsibility of healing a dead man. What did that say about her mental state?

I was about to put my hand on her back and tell her it was time to go when I heard someone approaching. The person's footsteps moved quickly, telling me it was a vampire.

Minnie appeared a moment later. I wasn't unhappy to see her. Maybe she could help me convince Belle to leave Kyle's body.

I wasn't surprised to see her either. As Mortar's healer, she was called to where people were hurt.

She absorbed the scene silently. She looked at me first. She seemed indifferent to my nakedness, but her lips curved down as she took in all the wounds I carried because of Azazel and my battle.

Then his eyes moved to Belle crouched over Kyle. I saw the moment when she realized exactly what had happened. Her body withered before she looked at me and shared a look of devastation and sadness.

She came to stand beside us.

"I'm walking across the border healing people who've been hit by the force field," she explained softly, her arms crossed over her chest. "Most people are fine, just affected by the hit as the pitch went up without actually being hit. But there were maybe ten people..." She studied Kyle with reddened eyes.

"I couldn't help anymore. They... They're already gone."

I shook my head slowly. "I figured that would be the case. Thank you for helping the people you did."

"I'm so sorry for your loss, Alpha. He was a good beta." continued Minnie.

"He will be missed," I replied. "Just like everyone we lost today. It is a sad day in Zaweth."

Minnie looked back at Belle. She was still crying, whispering words to Kyle I could barely make out.

"Is she saying something?" Minnie asked.

"She's telling him he's going to be fine. She said that is trying to cure him," I explained.

Minnie's dark brows drew together in confusion. "Heal him? Doesn't she know he's...?"

I shrugged. "I don't know. She is in shock. she is like this ten minutes ago."

Minnie let out a heavy sigh. "All good. Well, maybe we should...?" She stopped before she could finish, her eyes widening. "What the hell?"

I followed her line of sight until I was looking at her thing she. What the hell was right.

Kyle's foot was split in two, split in half halfway to the ankle, where it became a long gash. But that was no longer the case.

His foot... seemed to have healed. there were no more cut, just a white scar.

And that scar went all the way up my leg, stopping right at my lower abdomen, where I could literally see the skin healing itself.

It was healing. His wounds were healing.

"As...? Is Luna doing this?" Minnie asked, looking as stunned as I am.

"Fairy." It was all I could say, because it was the only thing that made sense. "It's her powers." I looked at Minnie.

"She's using her fairy powers."

Minnie's eyes widened. "Because you two mated. The prophecy."

When I looked back at Kyle's body, his horrible cut was still fading, turning into nothing more than a forgotten trauma that felt like it happened years ago.

I couldn't help the way my chest swelled with hope. Was it really possible for Belle to heal Kyle after everything that happened to him? To bring him back to life?

Belle was still kneeling over Kyle, her forehead to his, your hands cupping your cheeks.

"You'll be fine. You're going to be fine, Kyle. I won't let you die. I won't let you do this to Elijah.
You'll be fine."

She would whisper things of that nature nonstop. I wasn't even sure she knew what she was doing with her eyes so closed.

Fortunately, she could feel--hopefully she knew about the magic that was happening now because of her.

It was several long minutes before her face began to heal, everything slowly healing like two pieces of fabric being sewn together.

The scar was impressive, fully healed and covering the entire length of his body. Minnie and I were paying full attention, holding our breath as we waited to see what would happen next.

"L-Luna?" Kyle's voice suddenly groaned. "You're going to be in so much trouble when the alpha finds out you're here."

Belle finally sat back to look at him, her breath caught in her throat. "Kyle?" she whispered. "Are you... are you okay?"

Kyle cocked his head in confusion. "Of course I'm fine. Are you worried about the explosion? What the hell was that? And how did you get here? Does the alpha know you're here?"

He sat up a little, until he was propped up on his elbows. "Is that blood on your face?"

Belle tried to laugh, but it came out more as a breathy sob. She covered her mouth with her hand. "Oh, my God, you're okay." She launched herself into his arms.

Kyle caught it with a grunt of surprise.

"I-I'm so glad you're okay..." she sobbed.

"What...?" Kyle asked, completely dumbfounded by Belle's strange behavior. He finally looked up at me, noticing my presence for the first time since waking up.

Her eyes widened. "I swear she hugged me, Alpha."

His attention turned to Minnie as she giggled. "You saw it, right?" he asked her. "I had nothing to do with it!" He pointed at my mate sobbing into his chest.

My laugh was deep and genuine and full of relief. He thought I was upset that he was touching Belle.

Normally, this would be true. But I would make an exception for today.

"What happened to you?" Kyle kept looking
My appearance.

I was sure it looked pretty run down, still all bloodied and bruised from the battle.

"Did you change?"

Belle sat back, finally letting go of him. She laughed as she wiped her nose and sniffled. Her cheerful eyes met mine. The wide smile she offered me was the sweetest thing I've ever seen.

It looked like Kyle was going to be fine. Azazel was dead. And my mate was a tough fucking pixie.

Epilogue

BELLE

THREE WEEKS LATER

There was nothing better than sitting in a bathtub of boiling water after a long day.

Grayson and I had to get up at the crack of dawn to train, and so we were busy until about ten o'clock that night.

And, yes, you read that right, Grayson was finally with me. teaching him how to fight despite my months of begging him.

Now that I was getting better at using my powers, Grayson knew he would never be able to keep me out of harm's way if I decided to participate.

Trapping myself with Liam would never happen again, because I could just magically appear wherever I wanted.

So Grayson agreed that if I insisted on putting myself in danger instead of hiding like a helpless doll, I might as well know how to defend myself.

On top of all that, after we finally mated for the first time, we couldn't let go of each other.

I wasn't just talking about sex, although sex was great. We just wanted to be close to each other constantly.

It was nice to know that Grayson really wasn't. avoiding since you brought me to Zaweth.

He was just sexually frustrated – to say the least – and being close to me without being able to touch me only made his frustration a million times worse.

But now we could spend so much time with each other as much as we wanted – and boy did we take advantage of it. The only

Time we were apart was when I went out with Minnie to help save someone's life.

Healing people was the most rewarding experience of all. I understood why Minnie loved what she did so much. There was nothing like being the one to give a person in pain some peace.

Minnie's powers and mine were definitely different, but they usually ended with the same result.

If someone cut their finger off, Minnie could heal it, so it wouldn't be an open wound anymore. But it would still be a stump.

I, on the other hand, would be able to reattach the finger, heal the skin so that nothing more than a simple scar remains.

More importantly, I could bring people back to life - a power I developed after Kyle was killed by the force field.

But although I was praised after discovering this skill, it had its downsides. One of them was the time limit. I couldn't do anything for a person who was gone for more than a few hours.

It was terrible to run to someone's aid and discover it was too late. And so, it had become my responsibility to tell the family.

I also didn't think it was fair to decide who would live and who would die. I didn't want to play God. So I only brought people back to life on rare occasions.

My only exception was the day Azazel killed countless people with the force field. I saved everyone I could, and only a few people who couldn't be saved.

I had done what I could to help. And I felt incredibly good about it.

Grayson and I were equals now, both respected and loved by our people. We share the responsibilities and burdens of being Zaweth rulers of the supernatural.

And we loved each other. More than I ever thought to be possible for two people to love each other.

Grayson didn't say anything as he walked into the bathroom.

My lips curved up the tiniest bit, but otherwise, I stayed still too, keeping my eyes closed even as I felt his gaze roam over my naked body and heard his breathing get heavy.

I had left the bubbles out of my bath today for a reason.

I could hear rustling as he approached me and then quickly took off his clothes.

Neither of us spoke as he scooped me up in his arms and placed us back in the still warm tub, with my back against his chest and his legs on either side of my hips.

He purred at me, the vibrations rolling through my body and settling in my core, making my pussy throb with sudden eagerness.

I mumbled, knowing his aim was to turn me on.
As if I wasn't already turned on the moment he walked into the bathroom.

I wasn't the only one. I could feel his hard length pressing against my lower back like an invitation, one I was eager to accept.

I didn't hesitate before putting my hand behind me and envelop his cock, giving some stimulation to his throbbing manhood. He growled low.

Anxiety filled my chest, I turned and straddled his lap. I pressed my lips to his before grabbing his length once more and lowering myself over him.

We both moaned happily against each other as I started to sit on him, squeezing my pussy around him the way I knew he liked it.

After a few moments, he pulled his lips away from mine and let his head rest against the edge of the tub.

He watched me rock up and down on his cock, watching my bouncy breasts and flushed cheeks with a predatory look in his eyes.

I could see this night was going to be a long one. And I was looking forward to every second of it.

Grayson placed his hands on my hips to guide me up and down his cock, but otherwise let me do what I wanted, be in charge of our pleasure.

My chest swelled. I was no longer afraid to touch him.

A few minutes later, we were both moaning in satisfaction as we came, me pulsing around him as he kissed me.

filled with her hot cum – a sensation I would never tire of.

I leaned into his chest as we both collapsed as he ran his hand up and down my back in smooth motions. And I suddenly felt dizzy for loving him so much.

I said exactly that to him. "I love you, Grayson," I whispered against the skin of his chest.

His purring increased. "My perfect little companion." He bent down and kissed my forehead. "I love you too. More than you could understand."

End of book 2....

that only I can see and wearing heels that make your legs look too sexy for their own good.”

My hand went through the hem of her skirt, lifting it a little. Her breath hitched as my fingers grazed the crease of her cute little ass, leaving delicious sparks behind.

She slapped my hand, but it was a weak blow with no thrust. The corners of my lips lifted.

My mate was so stubborn, so stubborn. It was one of the things I loved most about her. Even now, when I could clearly smell her arousal clouding the air, she fought me.

Because she knew she deserved better. And she did. If I really had done all those things to her, I would expect her to run away from me and never look back.

But I hadn't done any of that, and his refusal to listen to what I had to say was doing more harm than good in this one. time.

“Grayson, please,” she begged, pushing against my chest. “People are looking. If my boss shows up and sees this, I could lose my job.”

“Do you think I care whether or not you lose your job, baby?” I laughed.

“Your being fired would just be one more reason for me to take you back to my pack with me, where I can support you and make sure you're well taken care of. You understood? It's my job to take care of you. That's what I'm doing now. So are you going to sit down and take a break now or God help me...”

"Is there a problem here?" someone said behind us.

We both turned, looking at Belle's boss, who I knew was named Jerry based on the conversation I'd overheard during the day.

I also overheard that he was secretly using the diner to launder drug money for some dealers.

It was fair to say that I hated the man. And I didn't want him near my mate. Even now, he was too close to her for my liking.

Belle's face lit up when she realized Jerry was watching our interaction, and my automatic response was to pull her closer to me, wanting to comfort her.

I was happy when she unconsciously leaned over to me.

I stepped in front of her before she could say anything. I heard her huff in annoyance behind me, but I ignored it.

"Belle has been working for eleven hours straight," I said. "She needs a break and she's going to get it now."

Chapter 20

BELLE

My mouth fell open as I looked at the back of Grayson's head. I couldn't believe he had just spoken to my boss like that! He really didn't care if I got fired, did he?

I pushed at his shoulder, trying to get him to step forward so I could get out of the corner he'd caged me in. Of course, he didn't move.

"I'm fine-" I started.

"And who exactly are you?" Jerry asked before I could continue. I could hear the challenge in his voice. Oh God, this was not good.

"I'm her...husband," Grayson declared. "Belle is my wife." He looked very pleased to say that.

"No," I immediately disagreed, pushing her back even harder. "You are not-".

"So you're the idiot who broke down my door," said Jerry.

I snorted. Seriously, why was no one letting me talk? Stupid men. Now Jerry knew that Grayson was back here even though I had promised him that my supposed ex would never come back.

"I hate to break it to you, buddy, but you're the reason she's working right now," continued Jerry, surveying Grayson's massive frame with a sneer.

The fact that he wasn't intimidated by Grayson was just further proof that he was an idiot.

"Belle is not scheduled for a break tonight because she is working to make up for the loss of revenue she caused this morning. So I suggest you let her get back to work before I decide she has no more work here."

I could feel Grayson starting to shake. His square jaw looked like it was about to break free of his jaw. "Belle isn't getting paid?"

He looked at me, his eyes darkening, starting to turn black once more. "Aren't you being paid to work?"

I swallowed. "Just for tonight," I told him, trying to speak calmly so he wouldn't lose his temper. "It's okay, really-"

"No. Its not good. It's a long way from being okay." His voice sounded like gravel. He turned to Jerry, looking openly.

Jerry finally seemed to come to his senses when he saw Grayson's furious expression and took a fearful step back. "I'm taking Belle home now."

Jerry's eyebrows rose in surprise.
"Pardon me? She hasn't finished her shift."

My pulse started to hammer. "Grayson," I whispered. I hated how desperate I sounded. The last thing he wanted to do right now was beg, but he had no choice.

I squeezed his arm, hoping that contact with him would make him more understanding, even though I was no longer his mate. "Stop. Please. I can't lose my job."

Grayson looked at me, studying me for a moment. It seemed to take an effort to inhale steadily.

He turned to my boss. "You will allow Belle to go home for the night. You won't talk about it again. In fact, you won't even remember what happened."

Then, before I could even comprehend what was happening, I was abruptly thrown over Grayson's shoulder and right past my boss and everyone else in the room. restaurant.

"Grayson, put me down!" I screamed. I managed to pull myself up a little, shocked to see Jerry walking in the opposite direction from us. My brows furrowed.

What the hell? Was he giving up like that? "Grayson, put me down now!" I screamed even louder, hitting his back and kicking my legs.

I winced as my fists felt like they were connecting with solid rock instead of flesh. I doubted this man had any kind of body fat.

"Stop," Grayson ordered, tightening his grip on my legs until it became nearly impossible to move. I huffed in anger. "You will get hurt."

He carried me through the cafeteria's back entrance, where, luckily, no one could see the embarrassing situation I was in.

"I didn't finish my shift!" I screamed.

Grayson shrugged his huge shoulders, lifting me up to up and down with movement. "I'm not bothered."

"I can't be fired, Grayson! Please! Put me down!"

No warning. Grayson stopped pacing and shifted my body so that his arms were under my ass, holding me.

So my feet were dangling a few feet off the ground.

We were eye level in this position. My breath hitched as my gaze met his black eyes, showing me how close he was to turning into his wolf.

"You won't be fired," he growled, his tone deep and final. "If you want to keep this damn job where they treat you like shit, then so be it. I'll make sure you don't get fired for going out tonight. But I'll be damned if I let them make you work like a dog for hours without paying you."

"You don't know my boss, Grayson. He lets people go for a lot less. And he doesn't like me since I started working there. How are you going to keep him from firing me?

Threatening him? "I don't think this is going to work in my favor."

"I have my ways," Grayson replied calmly, completely unconcerned with my panic.

I gave him a dubious look.

"Stop worrying. Everything will be fine, I promise." He leaned over and kissed my forehead softly.

I threw my head back, disgusted that he would even think of putting his lips on me after everything he'd done to me.

Grayson's eyes darkened further, obviously not liking my reaction. I took a step back. Would he take his anger out on me like he had so many times in the past?

"We're done talking about this," he fumed. "Where do you live? I'll take you home and make sure you eat something and then get a good night's sleep."

I immediately shook my head. "No. I am not going say where I live."

One of Grayson's eyebrows rose in challenge. "Do you think I have no way of finding out, baby?"

My heart fluttered when he called me baby.

I never thought I'd be much for sappy names if I got into a relationship, but there was something about Grayson calling me those things that made me feel...loved. Special.

Yuck. Idiot. Why did I suddenly feel like throwing up?

I must have been trapped in my thoughts for a while because I felt Grayson's big hand massaging my hip as he continued to hold me, his touch bringing me back to reality.

What the hell was I doing? He was able to make me let your guard down very easily.

"Put me down," I snapped again, squirming in your arms. "And don't call me baby."

"No and no," he replied in the same final tone I had used. His grip on me never wavered. "Tell me where you live."

I almost screamed in frustration. "You can't make me demands, you... you imbecile!"

Grayson's eyes sparkled with amusement. "Ass face?" he repeated.

I couldn't even let myself be embarrassed by the terrible insult I'd concocted, too consumed by my rage. "Yes, you are an idiot! And an idiot and a... an idiot! Now put me down! And leave me alone!"

Grayson ignored me, chuckling in amusement when he once again threw me over his shoulder like I was nothing more than a sack of potatoes.

I screamed in fury and kicked my legs, but nothing I could do. I did make him loosen his grip on me not even a little bit.

"For!" I finally screamed as loud as I could. My irritation was so intense at this point that I couldn't help but scream in frustration. "Put me down! Put me down right now!"

To my surprise, that actually made Grayson stop. He stopped and lifted me off his shoulder, placing me carefully on the ground.

His brows drew together with concern as his dark eyes met mine. "Belle, honey, why are you crying? I didn't hurt you, did I?"

I hadn't even realized I was crying. I quickly wiped away the tears. God, why did I have to be so weak?

I pushed his hands away from me hard as he made a move to reach for me again. "Do not touch me!" I screamed. "Never touch me!"

Grayson looked like he was in physical pain as he watched me. "Okay, I won't touch you," he agreed.

“Just tell me what I can do to make you feel better. It kills me to see you cry.”

I laughed in disbelief, the sound getting clogged in my throat. “You are the reason I am crying!” I screamed. “If it wasn't for you, if I never met you, I wouldn't be crying right now. I would be back in Minneapolis, completely content and oblivious to the fact that there is a man as evil and manipulative as you out there.” I took a deep breath, my voice dropping to a husky whisper. “I wish I hadn't met you.”

Grayson stiffened. I had to look away from the expression of pure torture he was sporting. “You didn't mean it like that.”

“Oh, isn't it?” I asked. “Don't you understand what you've done to me, Grayson? You ruined me. You completely and utterly destroyed me. I've been in agony for months now, walking around like a zombie, just a shell of my old self. I can never recover from what you did to me. This will torment me forever. And now here you are, acting all sweet and messing with my brain and making me think you might want me again and asking me to listen to you when I know what you did wasn't right and...”

I paused, my lips trembling and my throat tightening as I desperately tried to hold back my tears.

“And I want you.” I cried softly, my words almost incomprehensible. “I want you so much it hurts to look at you and be near you and just...I can't want you. I can't have you.”

Grayson took a step forward. “Yes you can-”

“No, I can't!” I interrupted. “Not after everything you've done for me, and especially not when I know what you're really capable of.”

I wrapped my arms around myself, shaking my head and sniffing through my runny nose.

“What you are doing now is cruel. Acting like you care about me when you and I both know you don't. It must be one of the most horrible things a person can do to another person.”

“I'm not acting, Belle,” Grayson said, a muscle sliding up and down in his throat. His eyes were back to their normal green, boring into me like he wanted to permanently drown me in his gaze. “I want you. I want you more than anything in this whole world.”

I angrily wiped away my tears, hating that I was letting him see me cry again. I didn't want him to know how much he still held me.

“You mated with someone else. You rejected me. You, you left me alone through the worst pain of my life after you decided you'd rather have someone else. What would you do with me if you took me back? Huh? Would you keep me hidden away somewhere like a whore you secretly fucked because you're too embarrassed to have me as your true mate?”

Something that looked like realization flashed in Grayson's eyes. “You still think I mated with someone else,” he whispered. He swore under his breath. “Fuck you, Belle, no wonder you were so upset.”

He reached out his hand to me, but I dodged him, retreating. I searched his eyes, confused as hell.

"I don't understand," I said.

Grayson took a deep breath. "Belle, I never mated with that wolf."

My heart turned upside down. I stared at him for several seconds, suddenly feeling dizzy. I couldn't have heard him correctly.

"What?" I choked.

"I never mated with anyone else," he repeated. He took a step closer to me so he was now less than a foot away from me. "Nothing happened. You are still my mate. You have always been my companion."

"You...you never slept with anyone else?" I asked, needing to hear him say it one more time.

Grayson shook his head, bringing his hands to cup my face. I was too busy trying to suck air in and out of my lungs to fight his touch.

right now.

"No. God, no, baby. Shit, I thought you knew. I thought you felt like we were still connected. This should have been the first thing I said to you when I found you."

He took a deep breath, leaning in so close I felt his breath fan my face. "It has always been you. You are the only person I will mate with. I'm still your mate, and you're still mine."

"But... But I saw..." I couldn't finish the sentence. The memory hurt too much.

"I know what you saw. I know. And I promise there's an explanation for that, just like there's an explanation for every other terrible thing that happened to you because of me. Kyle stopped us before anything happened." He wiped the tears streaming down my face with the pads of his thumbs.

I could feel his pain radiating from him through the bond the same way I was sure he could feel mine.

This only made each other's pain worse.

"I can't believe you thought I was mated to someone else this whole time. Didn't you feel it when Kyle stopped us?"

I remembered feeling them stop, but... "I- I thought that meant you were... finished." I closed my eyes tightly. I didn't want to think about it. "I don't know. I couldn't tell what I was feeling with all the pain. I-I..." My voice trailed off, my throat tightening.

Grayson made a whimpering noise. I opened my eyes, barely able to see him through my tears. He took another hesitant step forward, so his body brushed mine.

"Please let me hug you?" he asked.

I should have said no.

But I didn't.

Grayson wrapped his arms around me and pulled me against him. That was all it took for me to start crying. My emotions surged to the surface all at once, exhaustion and pain nearly overtaking me.

"I'm sorry, Belle," Grayson whispered repeatedly in my ear. "It has always been you. I promise it was always you."

My knees buckled under me. almost fell into cement below us, but Grayson didn't miss a beat.

He took me in his arms, hugging me close to him as he started walking. I didn't even care where he was taking me. I just needed to be close to him.

I cried into his chest like I had this morning when he found me. The information that he hadn't slept with someone else and that he was still technically my mate was shocking.

I didn't know how to process the relief and pain that was coursing through me. So I didn't. I just cried and let Grayson hold me.

Only a few minutes passed when I heard Grayson speak again. "Belle, where are your keys?"

I lifted my tear-filled gaze from the crook of her neck. To my complete surprise, we were in front of my apartment door. I made a face. How the hell did we get here so fast?

How did he know where I lived? I think he actually had ways of finding out about my information.

"Belle, darling. Keys. Please, I just need to get you inside and to bed so I can take care of you properly." Grayson said.

I blinked, finally processing what he was saying. "I left them at the diner," I realized. Weakly wiped the tears from my eyes. "But it does not matter. The lock doesn't work."

"What?" Grayson snapped. Her hand flew to the doorknob and twisted. The door opened without any problem.

He growled, the sensation vibrating against my chest. "Have you been staying in an apartment that doesn't lock?"

I shrugged sheepishly. "It's not like I have anything worth stealing."

He swore under his breath, his body shaking with the evidence of his wolf, but he walked through the door without arguing.

And that's when sudden panic gripped my chest.

"Hang on!" I screamed.

Grayson's movements stopped and he looked at me with concern.

"The fact that you haven't slept with someone else doesn't change anything." I said, swallowing hard.

Grayson's brow furrowed. "What do you mean?"

"I mean, you're not forgiven," I somehow managed to say without fumbling my words.

"You may not have had sex with that girl, but you still cheated on me. I saw it. E- And you still said horrible things to me and hit me and abused me and..." I trailed off, breathing. Deep.

"What you did to me is still unforgivable."

Grayson growled. "No. Screw this. You need to know what happened. It was not me-"

"I don't call!" I yelled back. "I do not really care! Nothing, absolutely nothing can excuse what you did to me! Now, Me. Put.On.the.floor!"

Grayson's throat muscles moved in a pattern, and he made a husky animal sound in the back of his throat.

He still hasn't let me go. And I wanted to scream.

Finally deciding I'd had enough, I lifted my leg as hard and fast as I could and slammed my knee straight into his groin, knowing it was the only place that wasn't covered in pure muscle.

And therefore also the place where I could do the most damage.

Grayson immediately groaned. Her face turned red and the muscles in her neck swelled, shock and pain flooding her features.

He didn't let go of me, but his grip loosened just enough for me to squirm out of his arms and fall to the floor.

Still in the grip of pain, Grayson doubled over slightly. Knowing this was my only chance, I pushed him out of my apartment door and slammed the door right in his face.

I didn't waste a second before grabbing a folding chair metal from the nearby table and placed it under the doorknob.

So I grabbed the door chain and bolt and made sure they were both secure, praying that was enough to keep him out. My apartment might not be locked from the outside, but it sure as hell was locked from the inside.

I wasn't stupid enough to sleep in an apartment that any random person could walk into at any time while I was there.

It only took a second for Grayson's angry voice to be heard from the other side of the door. It slammed against the wood. "Belle! Let me in right now!"

I didn't answer as I watched my door swing on its hinges. I backed away, afraid he would come at any moment.

I knew Grayson could take it down if he wanted to, but I really hoped he'd give up before that happened.

I could feel the tears starting to fall again as Grayson continued to pound against the door. "Open this door right now, Belle, or I swear I'll break it down!"

I sat down on the mattress, which still brought me within sight of the door, pulling my knees up to my chest. I couldn't stop the sobs that took over my body.

I didn't even care if Grayson could hear me. I am not I cared nothing more.

I just sat on my bed and...cried.

The pounding stopped the moment the first sob left my mouth. I could barely hear Grayson's broken voice whisper, "Belle..."

Chapter 21

GRAYSON

I never loved Belle more than I did in that moment. I
I've never been more proud of her.

I've never been so frustrated with her.

I paced back and forth behind his building, my entire body
reverberating with growls. The building was falling apart and
definitely not suitable for my wife.

I wanted nothing more than to get in there, throw her over my
shoulder again and take her to a five-star hotel.

There I would feed her the best food money could buy, rub
her tired feet, and tuck her into bed with my arms around her.

I could feel her sadness and devastation through the bond.
She had stopped crying about an hour ago, but she was still awake.

The silent shuffling I heard from her window
every now and then she told me she couldn't sleep.

I felt ridiculous. Here I was, an alpha-no, the king of the
supernatural dammit, standing outside my mate's apartment like a
pathetic stalker, desperate to catch any kind of glimpse of her.

Even the slight movement of the open window shades against
the wind made my heart race.

It was midnight and the apartment light was still on. I continued walking under her window, never taking my eyes off the glass.

My chest kept vibrating with the constant growl of my wolf. He missed his mate as much as I did. Even my vampire missed her, though I'd barely spent any time with her.

My jaw tightened. Why the hell was she still awake? She had been working hard all day. I thought I had brought her home to rest, not stay up all night.

I knew she was exhausted. She must be in a lot of pain too, pain caused by her resisting the mate bond and continuing to keep me out of her mind.

If she would just let me in, let me comfort her through the bond, she would understand how much I missed her. Needed her. I regretted everything that had happened.

I froze when I saw slight movement behind her window pane. My breathing stopped. Belle slowly approached the window, her eyes puffy and her cheeks streaked with tears.

She was still in her waitress uniform, although now it was wrinkled from wearing it all day.

She looked out hesitantly, her arms around her waist, the way he did when he felt vulnerable.

I knew she could feel me watching her by the way her body relaxed the tiniest bit, taking comfort in the feel of my gaze on her.

And then, even though it was dark outside and I was sure she couldn't see me, her gaze found me for a few moments. moments.

I couldn't control it when my vampire and wolf came forward, trying to get a better look at their mate. I was grateful for the darkness. I didn't want my glowing red eyes to startle her.

His hand rose and rested softly on the window pane, as if he were reaching out to me. My wolf whimpered. I took a step forward, barely able to contain myself.

A tear trickled down her cheek.

My heart totally shattered. Without thinking, I walked over to her, needing to hold her in my arms and tell her everything was going to be okay.

With shaking hands, she closed the window and closed the drapes, blocking my view of her. I stopped walking, knowing she was telling me she didn't want me near her.

She started to cry again. I could hear the constant sobs she was trying so hard to suppress, even through her closed window. And there was nothing I could do.

All I could do was stand there and hope that she would eventually let me in, let me explain what had really happened.

Belle finally fell asleep a little over an hour later, thank goodness. After crying – sobbing from exhaustion,

her breathing finally started to even out around two in the morning.

I was sitting under a tree outside from Belle's apartment, looking at her window. I've never felt so useless, so helpless in my entire life. I didn't know how to do this.

Keeping my distance was killing me – and her. I knew the bond was causing her so much pain because I was so close, trying to give her that final push to force us together.

But she was so stubborn and wouldn't do what was good for her.

The image of my mark on her neck entered my mind. It was so swollen that it took the form of a giant lump. It was surrounded by small boils and was undoubtedly infected.

I couldn't even imagine how much it hurt. It made me physically sick to think of how much pain she was in and knowing that, at least for the moment, there was nothing I could do to help.

At this point in our relationship, we should be fully mated, and the mark should be nothing more than a small white scar on your neck, only visible if you're looking for it.

But because Belle and I were apart for so long, because she denied the bond, it was huge and angry, a consequence of our starving mate bond.

A sudden, horrible scream of terror brought me out of my thoughts, coming from Belle's apartment.

I immediately knew something was wrong with my mate and was on my feet and running towards her in less than a second.

I jumped up to her window without a problem and opened it, quickly stepping into her room and landing on my feet with ease.

I looked for threats in the small room, but I was confused. when I found none.

My frantic gaze found Belle. She was in bed, obviously still asleep. But she whined and tossed and tossed.

A deep frown settled over her pretty face, and tears trickled from her tightly closed eyes. She was having a nightmare.

Another scream of terror came out of his mouth, shattering my soul. "No!" she screamed, still sleeping. "Please do not!"

I approached her quickly, taking care to stay still so as not to wake her. If she woke up and found me here, she would be even more terrified than she was now.

"Belle, honey." I whispered as I knelt beside her bed. I had to ignore the fact that it was just a mattress on the floor in an effort to keep some sort of trace of my sanity.

His body was covered with a simple, thin blanket. She was shivering, goosebumps breaking out on her arms, her nipples poking through her thin tank top. My hands twitched with the need to touch her.

"Grayson," said her terrified voice.

My shoulders slumped as I sighed. "I'm here honey, I'm here."

"No!" she screamed suddenly. "Grayson, please don't! Please do not..."

My stomach dropped to the floor in realization. She was having a nightmare about...me. She was dreaming that I was hurting her... forcing myself on her.

"Sorry!" Belle continued. Her voice was obstructed by her tears. "I am really sorry. Please do not-"

"Belle, God no," I whispered. I gently took her hand in mine. "Shh..." I said. "Shh, it's okay. I am here. I will never hurt you again."

I thought hearing my voice would help her, but the opposite has happened. She struggled harder the moment she heard me talking to her as she tried to pry her hand out of mine. I wasn't having any of that.

My voice might terrify her, but my touch shouldn't. She's been deprived of that for so long.

The more Belle started kicking and screaming, her nightmare getting worse, the more desperate I became to calm her down. I had to do something.

I crawled into bed beside her and wrapped my arms around her. around her, pulling her against my form.

For a moment, she struggled against me, slamming her little fists against me and kicking in her sleep.

It didn't affect my dominance over her. In fact, I just tightened my grip, putting one leg over her and letting my hand travel up the back of her shirt to rest on the bare skin of her back, pinning her to me.

I held her tight, feeling her tremble against me.

It was then that I realized how broken she really was. I could feel her prominent spine against my hand on her lower back.

His cheeks were sunken, and the outline of his ribs poked my stomach. It made me wonder when was the last time she ate.

I watched her work all day and didn't see her take a break, not even to eat something after I demanded it from her. Did she have a food source?

I frowned and hugged her closer to me. I would make sure she ate tomorrow, even if she didn't know I was the one providing food for her.

His body finally stopped fighting me, acknowledging his mate's touch. I sighed deeply in relief. She was still shaking and there were still tears streaming from her closed eyes, but at least she was calm.

"Grayson," she whispered in her sleep. "Please excuse me..."

My wolf whimpered. "No," I said, desperation leaking from my tone. "You do not do anything wrong." I hoped she could hear me even if she was still asleep.

"You do not do anything wrong. Did you hear me, Belle? I'm the one who should apologize. I made the mistake, not you. I love you so much. You have to know this. I love you so fucking much."

"Grayson," she whimpered again.

I sighed and leaned down to kiss her forehead. "Shh..." I mumbled against her hairline. "You're fine now. I'm here, and you're fine. Relax now, my love. I have you. I have you."

As if I had given an order, your body slowly started to stop shaking and she sighed contentedly.

She unconsciously moved closer to me, finding comfort in her mate's arms, and nestled her face into my chest, right where she belonged. I felt the tightness in my chest ease a little.

Unable to help it, I leaned down and licked the rage mark on her neck. I knew it wouldn't do much to heal her in the long run, but it would ease her pain for now.

The only way to truly heal and bond would be stay in physical contact with her. It would feed the bond that was so obviously starving.

It was that or mate, but that was more complicated now.

Mating didn't just mean completing the mate bond and binding her to me forever, but now the consequence was a change unknown to Belle.

I hadn't forgotten that Belle would turn into a faerie after we first mated; I had just chosen to put it out of my mind for now.

I didn't want to think about her going through a painful change after I made love to her, something I had no control over, because eventually we would have to mate or risk further killing the bond.

Belle moaned against my chest, moving her neck to the side so I had access to my mark. She wanted me to take care of it for her.

I happily licked it off, more than willing to take care of it. my mate in any way she needed.

Eventually, Belle fell into a deeper sleep, finding peace in my arms. When was the last time she slept properly?

Based on the dark circles under your eyes and the look of exhaustion what I saw in his face, it must have been around the same time as me, if not before then.

I wondered if the bond let her sleep. She was in pain?

I fought to remain calm and not let my wolf take over. I had to remind myself that I had Belle back now.

It might take a while to mend what I broke and get her to trust me again, but I had her in my arms and she was getting some much needed rest. That was all that mattered.

"Sh..." I continued whispering in her ear, enjoying the feel of her relaxing into me for the first time in months.

"I love you, Belle. I love you. I am really sorry."

We stayed like that for the rest of the night. I didn't let myself fall into sleep, not wanting to accidentally stay here until morning, but also not wanting to let Belle out of my arms.

I studied her most of the time, holding back my wolf's angry growls every time I noticed how broken and fragile she looked.

Our time apart had really taken a toll on her, but god, she was so strong. Many would not be able to go three months without their mate, especially before completing the mating ritual.

Our bodies were already gravitating toward each other, trying to force us to mate. It would have been painful at this point even if she hadn't run away from me.

I sighed as the sun began to rise hours later. I shifted, knowing I should get up so Belle doesn't freak out when she wakes up.

The moment I moved though, Belle whimpered and pressed her frail body closer to me. She wrapped her arms around my neck and buried her face in it.

My chest tightened. I wanted to be with her more than anything in the world. And I knew Belle wanted me to stay too; she just wouldn't let her conscious self give in to that need.

I moaned softly as she threw one of her legs over my waist, unconsciously pressing her warm core against mine and snuggled even closer into my neck, breathing in my scent deeply.

"I know, love, I know." I whispered into her hair. I inhaled her scent deeply too, before placing a final kiss on her forehead. "I have to go now, beautiful, but rest assured I won't leave you. I'll be right behind you wherever you go, protecting you and making sure you're okay.

You just let me know when you need me, and I'll be there, okay?" I tilted her head gently so I could see her beautiful sleeping face.

I smiled softly when I noticed she had some color back in her cheeks. She didn't look so tired and pale anymore. Good.

"Please. Please talk to me soon. Please just listen to what I have to say. I love you. I need you in my life."

Moving as slowly and gently as I could, I disengaged my mate and pushed away from her, grunting at the physical pain it caused me.

My entire body burned with the need to get back into bed and press Belle against me for the rest of eternity.

Male werewolves found it extremely difficult to stay away from her mates, especially when they were in pain.

We could go crazy with the need to nurse them back to health and make sure whatever hurt them never got near them again.

I was going against my own nature, putting even a hand's breadth away from us.

I ignored my wolf and vampire who were pressuring me to stay. They were only making my inner turmoil worse.

They didn't understand that to get her back, we had to stay away. We had to give her space to let her know that we would never force her to do anything again.

I snarled as my wolf took control of my body and suddenly pushed me back so hard that

my body slammed into the bed, barely missing Belle's sleeping form.

My gaze snapped to look at her. She was still sleeping, thank God. Her ability to sleep just reminded me how much she needed rest.

I promised myself I would come back tonight. And every night after that. I would give up sleep for the rest of my life if it meant helping my mate rest.

As soon as Belle started to stir in her sleep, I slipped out the window.

Chapter 22

GRAYSON

The moment my feet hit the ground after jumping out of Belle's window, I reached for Kyle.

"Kyle," I told him through the mindlink.

His response was immediate.

"Well, hello, Alpha. It's good to hear the sound of your voice on this beautiful morning. Although, I would have thought you'd be... well, busy after meeting the luna yesterday, if you know what I mean."

I forgot how much he could talk. I ignored your inappropriate comment – no time for your shenanigans today. "I need you to come to Maine," I said, getting right to the point.

He didn't respond for a few seconds.

"Uh, yeah, I don't know if you know this, but you kind of put me in charge of an entire kingdom when you left, so I'm a little, um... extremely busy right now-

"I don't care," I interrupted. "This is more important. There is no kingdom without its queen. I fucking need you here now. Belle is refusing to listen to me."

"That's because she knows what's good for her. Smart girl."

I snarled through the link, making sure he could hear my anger and impatience.

“Damn it, Louise, it's okay,” he said. “Someone is not in a joking mood today. I can be there at the end of the day if I take the private plane. Will this work for you?”

“Okay,” I grumbled. “She needs someone to talk to that she can trust, and... that's not me right now.”

“So you're bringing the big guns, huh? I am leaving now. I will keep you updated on my ETA.”

“I'll text you her address.” I was already pulling my phone out of my pocket.

“See you soon, Alpha.”

As soon as I felt Kyle's presence slip from my mind, I heard a loud sound coming from Belle's window. An alarm. I hardened. I had just left her apartment a few moments ago.

I looked at the watch on my wrist. It was a little after four in the morning. She was up until two.

Where could she be so early in the morning that it was more important than sleep?

The correct answer was nowhere. She shouldn't be awake right now.

I heard her moan and then turn off the alarm. The sounds of her moving around the room came next.

I started pacing once more, wanting nothing more than to climb in there and demand that she go back to sleep.

My vampire pressured me to use Mortar power on her, while my wolf wanted me to use my alpha tone. I pushed them both aside.

Minutes later, I moved quickly to the front of her building when I heard the sound of the front door opening and closing.

She cautiously exited the building, her gaze scanning her surroundings, no doubt looking for me. I was too far into the shadows for her to see me, though. But I knew she could still feel me looking at her.

Fury consumed me when I saw that she was wearing that fucking waitress uniform again. My eyes scanned its form. She was so beautiful.

I had to hold back a groan as I watched her hips sway as she walked. As much as I loathed the uniform, I couldn't deny it made her look pretty good. Very. Damn. good.

I didn't know if I would be able to spend another day seeing her walking around in that fucking outfit.

I followed her silently, making sure to stay far enough away that she wouldn't see me. I had to stop myself from dragging her back to her apartment and having my wolf sit on top of her again until she fell asleep.

It seemed to work the last time she needed to rest.

I stopped in my tracks when she stopped abruptly and grabbed one of her heels. She pulled it off her foot, uncovering the battered skin underneath.

Her foot was covered in blisters and red, irritated skin. There was blood and wounds too, from the damn heels she was forced to wear.

"Shit," Belle muttered under her breath, her shoulders sagging. After pulling her hair back into a bun, she kicked off her other shoe and continued her barefoot walk on the concrete sidewalk.

My wolf growled so loudly in my chest that I was surprised when Belle didn't turn to look for me. My wolf rocked my body forward, urging me to go to her.

I pushed him down hard. I was already fighting my nature for not allowing myself to take care of her; I didn't need my wolf working against me either.

I continued on, my body stiff and aching for me.
to contain.

She walked barefoot for almost half an hour until she reached the same diner where he had spent all day yesterday.

My wolf fluttered in my chest, furious to see that she was back here after working late last night and not getting paid.

Fortunately, however, there were two other waitresses there, already working. Then she wouldn't be alone.

I pushed my wolf down once more, took a deep breath and walked into the restaurant behind her.

BELLE

"Your boyfriend is here again," Candice said with a singing voice when she came to stand beside me.

"Who?" I played dumb. I had seen Grayson come in when my shift started, but I had already decided that I would not interact with him under any circumstances.

I was very tired emotionally and physically.
to deal with it today. Maybe if I ignored it for a while

enough, he would give up on me and leave me alone. I mean, he had done that once, hadn't he?

"Oh, come on. Don't tell me you haven't noticed it yet." Candice nudged my side teasingly. "No one could ignore that face of his. Or body. He's been looking at you since he sat down."

"Is there a reason you haven't gone there yet?"

I looked at Grayson. He was in the same booth as yesterday and, as Candice had said, he was really looking at me. Heat traveled through me as my eyes met his. I looked away quickly.

"Who is Belle's boyfriend?" Brenda asked, walking behind us to get to the cash register.

Even though she was nearly two decades older than us, Brenda was always interested in whatever gossip was circulating in the restaurant that day. "Is that Liam kid here again?"

A low growl came from the corner, barely audible. My heart rate increased, knowing where the noise was coming from without even having to look.

"Liam is not my boyfriend." I said quickly. I already knew Grayson didn't like Liam; in fact, I was pretty sure he had done something to it.

He still hadn't shown up after disappearing yesterday and he didn't pick up when I tried calling him this morning. I was starting to get really worried.

I didn't need Grayson to hear people calling Liam from my boyfriend when I still wasn't convinced

that he hadn't let his wolf eat him or something.
Do Werewolves Eat Vampires?

"He is just a friend. I have no boyfriend." I was sure to speak clearly so that a certain someone would be sure to hear me.

"Maybe not, but that guy in the corner is definitely interested," continued Candice.

She had no idea.

Brenda looked amused. "Oh really?" she looked at Grayson. A flush crept over my cheeks.

I knew Grayson could hear us no matter what, but honestly, did they have to make it so obvious that we were talking about him?

"Why don't you go over there? He's cute," she whispered to me.

I rolled my eyes. "I already told him I wasn't interested. when he was here yesterday." I said. "I don't know why he's back here."

"Maybe he's hungry," Candice supplied helplessly.

"Have you taken his order yet, Belle?" Brenda asked.

I looked down. I thought about lying, but I knew that Candice would give up on me right away if I did.

"No," I replied, hoping she didn't make me go over there and talk to him. "He didn't ask for anything yesterday. He just sat there all day. I thought today would be the same."

Brenda frowned. "Hun, your job is to take orders. And if he won't get food, he can't stay here.

and occupy a perfectly good table. I'll have to ask him to leave if that's the case."

My eyes widened. I didn't want any of my co-workers to interact with Grayson, especially my sweet manager, Brenda. I knew what he was capable of.

I wouldn't be able to forgive myself if someone got hurt because Grayson lost his temper over something as stupid as telling him to leave the restaurant.

"He's not doing anything," I said. "Can't he just sit there?"

Brenda shook her head. "You know the rules. If he If you're not a paying customer, then you can't stay here."

I sighed, already feeling my body heat up and my stomach churn just thinking about having to talk to him. "I'll take his order right now." I murmured.

Brenda nodded in approval. "let me know if you have any problems."

I approached Grayson's table slowly, my lips pressed together in a thin line. He watched me the entire time, waiting patiently with his hands folded in front of him.

"What you want to eat?" I asked brusquely when I finally stopped in front of his desk.

"I thought you didn't want to serve me," he replied, his deep, smooth voice sending shivers down my spine. As if he hadn't heard the entire conversation that followed.

I looked up from my notepad, looking. "If you don't order something soon, my manager will throw you out."

A half smile curved his masculine mouth. "You Are you finally admitting that you are here with me?"

"No, I just don't want you to hurt anyone when they try to force you out. Now please just tell me what you want."

I hated that we were arguing again. I was so, so exhausted.

Though I had slept through the night for the first time since coming to Evergreen—something I was surprised to realize when I woke up feeling warm and content—fighting the mate bond was starting to take its toll.

price.

Grayson studied me closely, his brows drawing together. "Love, did you eat anything today?" he asked me, completely ignoring my request.

"Stop calling me baby. Order something, or I'll pick something up for you."

"I'll order if you tell me what you ate today," he replied sternly. "Don't think I won't drag you out of this restaurant the same way I did yesterday."

I knew he wasn't bluffing. I screamed internally.

"I had a bowl of cereal, okay?" I finally answered.

He frowned. "That's not enough food. You don't ate nothing yesterday. I'm not going to have my mate pass out or starve to death when those things are so easily avoidable."

When he called himself my mate, an agony so fierce washed over me that it nearly took my breath away. My whole body fell. I had to bite my lip to keep from moaning in pain.

"You're not my mate, Grayson," I whispered, letting my tone convey how hard this was all for me.

"I don't care if you've never slept with anyone else. You gave up on me. I wanted you, and you gave up on me."

I swallowed the lump forming in my throat, looking away from his intense expression. I couldn't have this conversation with him again. Seemed to be rejected over and over again.

I took a few steps back. "I'll ask Candice to bring some pancakes or something. Stay if you want. I really don't care anymore. I have to get back to work."

He grabbed my wrist before I could walk away. Sparks danced down my arm and warmed my skin.

"If you would just let me explain," he said, "you would see how much I want and love you. I never gave up on you. It wasn't up to me. I never wanted any of this to happen to you. ."

My throat was too dry to swallow. "Yes, well, it was," I said, my voice sounding calm and defeated, even to myself. "The damage has already been done."

I pulled my arm out of his grip and walked away.

Chapter 23

BELLE

I hated that he was here. I hated it, as much as I tried to ignore it and focus on my work, he was the only thing I could think about.

I was aware of his every move, of his eyes that followed me everywhere I went in the little diner.

And most of all, I hated that my traitorous body wanted nothing more than to go to him and forgive him for every horrible thing he'd ever done to me.

Because I still needed him. God, why do I even need him?

He had rejected me. He tried to mate with someone else. There was no way I could make it any clearer that he didn't want me. So why was I still reacting like this to him?

Why was it so physically painful to be away from him?

I picked up the tip left for me on the table of my last customers for the night. It was dark now, and I left the diner at last, leaving only Grayson behind.

Candice and Brenda had left a few hours earlier, and the cook, who was still in the kitchen, was going to close after I left.

For the first time in hours, I allowed myself to look in her direction. I immediately regretted it. He was looking right at me.

Our gazes locked and instantly, it was like a wave of warm, calming water washed over me.

I took a deep breath as some relief came to my aching body.

Grayson had a worried, frustrated expression on his face, but it softened the moment we made eye contact.

His shoulders slumped slightly. "Belle," he mouthed, his expression turning into one of pure torture.

I knew he wanted me to come to him. He was desperate for it. I could feel her emotions coursing through what was left of our bond.

Giving in, I approached him slowly, hesitantly. He watched my every move, his entire body tense as he tried to hold back from jumping at me.

When I finally stopped in front of his desk, I crossed my arms securely in front of my stomach, as if they were going to provide me with some sort of protection from the dangerous creature in front of me.

"We are closing now. I'm leaving."

Grayson's deep green eyes darkened a little when he realized I wasn't here to finally hear him out. "OK." He started to leave the cabin. "I will walk you home."

I didn't move. "I am very tired." I whispered.

Grayson frowned. "I know baby. You need to sleep. You barely slept last night."

"No, that's not what I meant, Grayson. I am tired," I repeated.

He stared at me, still not understanding.

"I don't want to do this anymore. I don't want you to be the only thing on my mind anymore. I made progress, real progress before you arrived. I started to recover from what you put me through. But now you're here and..." I groaned.

"I want to get rid of you—this hold you still have on me, even after everything you've done to me. I want to go back to who I was before you held my heart. It's not me anymore. I am the version of myself that is tortured by everything you put me through."

Grayson opened his mouth to speak.

"And I don't want to argue," I continued quickly, interrupting before he could say anything.

Tears started to well up in my eyes. I cleaned them before they fell.

"Look, I know what we had..." I trailed off, swallowing the huge lump in my throat. "I know what we had wasn't what you wanted..."

Grayson growled. "That is not-"

I stopped him quickly. I needed to get this out. "Let me finish, or I swear to God I will kick you in the balls again." I was serious; it was starting to sound like a good option now. I took a deep breath. "And I know that, as an alpha, having a mate means you gain more power. So maybe the mate bond is making you regret... rejecting me because of this."

Grayson stood and held his hand out to me. I gave a Step back.

"Belle, please-" he tried to say.

"No, you have to let me take this off. I need to get this off."

His breathing was so erratic. His eyes were black. His jaw was tight. But he seemed to understand my need and nodded for me to continue.

“We are both suffering,” I continued silently. “But it's only because of this supernatural bond between us. In the end, we weren't supposed to be together. And you know this. You knew that the first night I came to stay with you. It doesn't excuse how you treated me, but you knew you didn't want me and that I wasn't the right mate for you.”

Grayson growled loudly, his entire body shaking. I was obviously making him upset.

“So even if —” I had to look away at this point, somehow keeping myself from breaking down into agonizing sobs.

“Even though I loved you... I don't think you ever loved me. Not really. You just felt a connection to me because of some magical bond you had no control over. You felt trapped. And that's why you acted that way.”

I took a deep breath, wiping my sweaty palms on the front of the skirt. I looked at him.

His eyes were black with his wolf's presence, and dark hair sprouted from his arms, letting me know he could barely stop himself from shifting.

I wasn't going to let that intimidate me into not finishing, no however.

“But everything is fine. I—” I could barely say it. “I'm letting you go. If the bond is making you regret what you did to me, I don't want you to feel that way anymore. “Actually, I don't want you to feel anything anymore when it comes to me.”

I took a step forward. I studied his heaving chest and tense muscles. I was on thin ice but kept going anyway.

“You know I'm not what you want. That's why you treated me the way you did in your packhouse. That's why you tried to mate with someone else. You were mad that I ended up as your mate and rightfully so.”

I brought my arms tighter around myself, letting my gaze drift to the window beside us, to the small town that had become my home for the last few months.

"I'm strong. I know that. I've been through a lot in my life and I've always been able to pick myself up and move on." I looked at him. "But I'm no luna. And I'm definitely not strong enough to survive what you put me through again. And like it or not, you would put me through that again because you don't love me. You would eventually come to resent me – the same way you did a few months ago.”

I closed it at the thought of being rejected again. Just thinking about it made my brand burn and my heart sink.

“So I'm asking you civilly and genuinely – no more yelling, ignoring you or begging you to leave me alone... If you care about me a little bit – if anything you said to me in Paris was even a little bit true – Do me a favor and let me go. Ignore the mate bond that's saying you need me or that you should want me for power.

Go home. Go be the alpha I know you are and find a new mate that's better suited for you. You do not need me. I would only drag you down.”

By the time I finished, Grayson looked so close to changing that I could practically see his face starting to morph into his wolf's.

He was breathing deeply, his muscles bulged, dark hair sprouted from his arms, and his irises were pitch black.

"I can speak now?" His voice was so deep I could barely understand.

I shook my head slowly.

"Good."

In the blink of an eye, he was in front of me, grabbing my waist and slamming me against his body. I nearly moaned at the contact, reveling in how good his touch felt against my skin.

I was still shocked at how much bigger he was. He looked incredibly strong, fit and healthier than ever.
Never.

The time away from me really did him good, which only further proved my point that he was doing better without me.

He leaned in so his lips were right next to my ear, his cool breath on my neck, making me shiver. I tried to push him away but he was too strong.

It was clear that I wasn't going to leave his arms until he released me.

"You're mine, Belle," he growled against my skin. "You always were and always will be mine. And I will go to the ends of the earth to make sure you understand this."

I tried to pull out of his embrace, but he just tightened his arms around me. I was too tired and weak to fight.

So instead, I let the tears fall, crying silently as I slumped forward until my forehead rested on his chest.

He seemed to hold his breath, waiting to see if I would move before wrapping his arms completely around me and pulling me impossibly closer.

I knew I should have fought harder, but that's what the bond wanted, and it felt incredibly good to give in-if only for one moment.

Grayson was starting to calm down when his wolf slowly gave him back control. It was obviously helping to have me in his arms.

After basking in his heat for just a few more seconds, I finally whispered into his chest, "You're never going to let me go, are you?"

He leaned down and gently kissed the top of my head. "I think you already know the answer to that." He murmured against my hair.

I pressed my lips together and squeezed my eyes shut, willing my tears to stop. Not them. I shook my head. "Yes."

It made sense, really. Life was never meant to be easy for me. I was a fool to think it could be.

I was destined to fall in love with a man who didn't love me back, who only wanted me for the power I could give him and who resented me because he stuck with me.

And yet, even though all of that was true, he still couldn't let go of me.

"Does this mean you are finally going to let me explain?" Grayson asked. "I promise it will be worth your time."

I leaned back, wiping the tears from my eyes. eyes. I shook my head. "No. It doesn't matter. No explanation is going to change the fact that I'm not the one for you. I can't be your luna." I licked my lips, tasting the saltiness of my tears. "I gotta go."

I started to walk away, but Grayson grabbed my arm. "No. Enough of that. It wasn't me who..."

"Stop! Let go of me, Grayson. I mean it!" I ripped my arm from his and took a step back. To my surprise, he didn't try to grab me again. "Please, please, just leave me alone."

"You know I can't do that," he replied in a low voice. "I can never leave you alone. I can't live without you, Belle."

I walked away from him. "For your sake, I really hope that's not true."

Chapter 24

BELLE

I was grateful that Grayson had let me go to the diner. I was grateful for the walk home alone, where I could collect my thoughts and cry without feeling like someone was watching me.

I walked into my dark apartment, kicking wildly in my stupid heels, not caring where they landed. My tears continued to flow, trickling down my neck and onto the cotton of my shirt.

My heart almost stopped when I turned on the lights. A huge figure was standing in the middle of my kitchen. I let out a loud scream, immediately turning to run out the door.

"Luna! Stop yelling! Wow, it's just me!"

My eyes adjusted and I could finally see.
"Kyle?" I asked. "Oh, my God, Kyle?"

I barely recognized him. He looked different, very, very different. He seemed to have gone through the same transformation that Grayson had.

His body was bigger, stronger and more mature. He had grown at least a foot tall, as had Grayson, and his muscles were bigger and much more defined.

But it was the big goofy smile he wore on his face that told me he was still the same old Kyle, despite his intense physical transformation.

I looked at him for several long moments, trying to decipher if my exhausted mind was playing tricks on me. "Are you really here?" I asked him, approaching him slowly.

"Come and give Daddy some sugar," he replied, spreading his arms wide.

I threw myself into his arms. He grunted at the hard contact, but didn't hesitate before wrapping his arms around me, pulling me even closer.

Tears welled in my eyes and sobs burst from my mouth. I wasn't even sure why I was reacting this way to seeing him again.

I just needed a friend. I needed someone in who I trusted and who knew everything I went through.

"Ah, hell, honey," Kyle said consolingly, leaning his cheek against the top of my head and squeezing me tighter. "Do not Cry."

"I'm sorry," I sniffled into his chest. Wiping my nose with the back of my hand, I looked at him and smiled. "I am very happy to see you. Very happy. I missed you so much."

"Of course you do. I am very unmissable." Kyle rolled his eyes, returning my smile with equal enthusiasm. "I missed you too."

I got out of his arms and took a step back. wiping my tears. "What are you doing here?"

"I came to see how you are," he explained. His eyes darkened a little as they roamed over my face. "I heard you were having a hard time."

I couldn't stop the heat that rose under my cheeks. I knew I looked bad, but I still hated that Kyle could see it in my face.

My eyebrows drew together. "How did you hear that?"

"The alpha, of course."

Only a tiny bit of disappointment settled in my stomach. "Have you... have you been talking to him?"

Kyle nodded.

I didn't know why I expected Kyle to have stopped talking to Grayson after everything that had happened between him and me. It wasn't fair of me to want that.

Grayson's pack, as toxic as it was to me, was Kyle's home. It was where Elijah was and where he had spent his entire life.

I guess I expected to have a common lawyer in all of this, a friend I didn't have to keep secrets from.

But now... There was no way I could tell Kyle everything I was thinking and everything I had experienced now that I knew he was still under Grayson's control.

All the questions I'd been thinking about for the last few months came rushing to the tip of my tongue, waiting anxiously to be asked.

I wanted to know what happened after I left, how was Elijah doing and did Kyle confront Grayson after finding him in bed with a girl other than me?

I asked the most obvious question first. "Why are you literally a giant now? Did you and Grayson take steroids or something? Or is there a new werewolf disease

that I don't know is making you 50 feet tall?"

Kyle laughed. "No steroids, I promise. And as far as I know, I haven't caught any disease, although Elijah might disagree with that."

"So what happened?"

I looked at his massive form. He wasn't as big as Grayson was now, but he still looked extremely intimidating, much more intimidating than before.

And that was a difficult thing to achieve, as he and Grayson were already much larger than the average human before the transformation.

A part of me was a little relieved that it wasn't just Grayson who had grown up significantly. This meant that he didn't get stronger because he was away from me, but for another reason.

Something else must have happened.

"I think it's something the alpha would like to explain to you personally," Kyle told me.

I looked around, suddenly worried that Grayson was watching us or maybe listening. What would he do if he knew Kyle was here?

"Does Grayson know you're here? I don't think he'd like-"

"Alpha knows I'm here," Kyle replied to my question. "Actually..." He jerked his chin behind me.

"I invited you here," a deep voice finished.

I turned to find Grayson standing in my doorway.
Of course he was here. Even when I couldn't see him, he was always around.

Grayson's eyes immediately narrowed on Kyle's hands that were still around my waist. He let out a low growl. "Hands off my mate, Beta."

Kyle's arms dropped to his sides in less than a second.

I looked at Grayson. My temper rose. "Not your mate," I snapped at him.
"Kyle can touch me if he wants.
You shouldn't even be here."

Kyle whistled softly. "You weren't kidding, Alpha. Is bad."

I turned to Kyle, ignoring Grayson's glare. "Beta?
Are you the beta now?" I asked him.

He shrugged sheepishly. "It's a long
history."

"A story I definitely want to hear," I said.
Did it happen after Adalee died? "You don't have to leave soon, do you?" A sudden panic hit me. I didn't want Kyle to leave.

I wanted him to stay here as long as possible. The friendship I cultivated with him was the one thing I haven't regretted about my relationship with Grayson.

After months alone—if you didn't count Liam's overprotectiveness—the amount of comfort I found in him standing here in my apartment was immeasurable.

Kyle shook his head. "I'm here as long as it takes necessary," he replied, satiating my concerns.

I let out a deep breath. "Okay," I said, feeling less tense. "OK. Can I get you something to drink?" I ran to my cupboards, grabbing the only glass I owned. I took a break. "Actually, I only have water."

"All good. I'm not thirsty." Kyle replied, raising an eyebrow at the old plastic cup in my hand.

I put the glass back on the counter. Then my attention returned to Grayson, who was still standing in the doorway of my apartment. I crossed my arms over my chest.

"Is there a reason you are still here?" I asked to him. Kyle snorted.

"I'm here," Grayson began, giving Kyle a look that could make anyone's blood run cold, "because we need to talk."

"Is that why you invited him here?" I asked him, pointing at Kyle. "Bringing you here is part of your plan to try and lure me back to your evil lair to torture me some more, huh?"

Kyle coughed to hide another laugh.

"I'm not planning to-" Grayson didn't finish the sentence, growling in frustration. "He's here to help me explain. If you won't listen to me, then maybe you'll listen to him."

"I told you-"

"I know what you said," Grayson said, cutting me off.

"And if I have to hear any more bullshit about how you're not good enough for me or shouldn't be my luna coming out of your mouth, I might freak out. I can understand if you thought what I did was unforgivable..."

"Well-" I interrupted, trying to explain that what he did it was unforgivable...

"But I'm not going to let you go on thinking you've done something wrong," Grayson continued. "Or that there's something wrong with you because it's a fucking lie, Belle. Did you hear me? It's a lie your brain has been telling you from years of assholes telling you you're not enough when really, they're the ones with the problems, not you."

He took a deep breath, obviously trying to calm down before his anger took over. He took a few steps towards me. "I need you to let me explain what really happened, baby. Will you let me do this? Please?"

I tightened my arms around myself, feeling intensely uncertain. "I..." I swallowed hard.

Exhaustion was starting to get to me, and for a moment I wished the ground would open up and swallow me whole just so I could have some peace.

I don't think I could handle another fight with Grayson right now. Each one was so unbelievably draining and forced me to fight harder and harder against the nature that demanded I forgive him.

I didn't want to do this. No more.

"Come here, baby," Grayson said. He picked up one of my folding chairs that was leaning against the wall and carried it over to me, placing it in front of me. "Sit down. You're starting to sway."

For once, I didn't argue. Was he right; the room was starting to spin around me and my knees were weak. I dropped my body into the uncomfortable chair, dropping my head into my hands.

Knowing my mate was close, my stomach twisted inside me and my brand burned, begging for Grayson's touch and affection.

As if he could hear my thoughts, Grayson knelt beside me, placing one of his big hands on my leg, letting his thumb run over my bare skin in the way he knew would turn me to mush.

I didn't have the energy to push him away.

"Please let me explain, Belle. Please," he begged.

I sighed. Tears of frustration were starting to form in my eyes once more. I couldn't hold back my tears when I was around him.

"I don't understand, Grayson. I really do not understand. Why do you even want to explain? The way you treated me..."

I shook my head. "You gave up on me. You made it clear that you didn't want me and you wanted to hurt me. So I don't see why you would go back. What has changed?"

"So much," Grayson said. "So much has changed and at the same time nothing. I came back because I love you. I love you so much it hurts. I can not lose you. That's why I'm here. I need you to know this because I can see how much pain it's causing you to think that I don't want to. To think that I don't want you.

Is not true. Nothing that happened in my pack house was true."

A single tear trickled down my cheek and onto his hand, still on my knee. I heard Grayson's rough intake and saw his nostrils flare.

My eyes met Kyle's. He nodded encouragingly at me, giving me a sympathetic look. "It's important that you hear this, Luna," he said.

"So are you on his side?" I asked Kyle. "Do you think what he did to me was good?"

Kyle immediately shook his head, looking horrified at the idea. "No! No, Goddess, of course not. Nobody should have to go through what you went through. But the alpha has an explanation, and a good one."

When I didn't respond right away, still hesitant, Kyle continued. "You can trust me, Luna. I would never do anything to hurt you. You know it."

I licked my dry lips. "I thought the same thing about him," I said, looking at Grayson.

Grayson's expression flashed with such pain that I almost regretted what I'd said. His eyes were completely green now, and I found myself falling into them.

I missed his eyes so much, and I haven't seen them in a long time since his wolf was in control basically the entire time he was here.

I missed Grayson. I missed my Grayson so much.

Part of me wondered what the problem was with letting him explain. It's not like I had to agree to be with him after hearing what he had to say. I was just... scared. So scared.

After everything he'd put me through, self-preservation was my number one priority. I wouldn't let him hurt me again.

After a few more moments, I finally responded. "OK."

Grayson's breath hitched. "OK?" he repeated, hope and shock in his tone.

Honestly, I was a little shocked too. I shook my head. "All good. You can explain. Tell me what happened."

I could practically see the extreme relief traveling through Grayson's entire body.

"But," I continued quickly before he could say anything, "you have to promise me something."

Grayson responded with apprehension. "All good."

"If I let you explain...and the explanation isn't good enough, you have to leave me alone. No more following me. No more showing up at my work. No more asking my old friends to come over here to manipulate me into talking to you. You have to let me go. Forever. I can not handle it anymore. OK?"

Grayson studied me for several long seconds before answering. "OK."

I leaned back in my chair, taking a deep breath. "All good. Let's hear it then."

Chapter 25

GRAYSON

Finally, I thought with relief.

Cum.

Finally.

Belle was going to let me explain. I could fix it - I would fix that.

“Thank you,” I said softly. I reached out and tucked a strand of hair behind her ear, seeing how she had to resist the urge to lean into my touch.

“Thank you for giving me just a little bit of your trust. I know it's hard, but it means the world to me.”

She did not answer. She didn't have to. I knew she was still hesitant and cautious, but I also knew she wanted it to be over as much as I did.

Even now, her body was gravitating towards me, so desperate for the comfort she knew her mate could give her. And I was desperate to deliver. Soon I would be able to.

“Kyle is here because I cheated on you, and you need someone whom you trust for this conversation.”

She looked at Kyle, who gave her a crooked smile. “I will always be by your side, Luna,” he said.

Belle smiled weakly at him, but I could see her discomfort grow at being called her title. I glanced at Kyle.

I knew it was in his nature to call you Luna, but I told him not to call you that before he got here. He muttered his apology.

Here goes nothing.

I grabbed her knee gently. “Belle, look at me. I need you to hear me when I tell you this.” She turned her head towards me, her beautiful blue eyes bright with unshed tears.

“It was not me. Everything that happened to you in the packhouse – I didn't do any of that.”

"I don't understand," she replied calmly. "What do you mean?"

I looked over at Kyle, who was standing silently against the wall. He shrugged.

Cum. I had replayed this conversation so many times in my head, but now that the moment had arrived, the words couldn't seem to come out of my mouth.

How the hell was I supposed to explain this to her? What was the best way to get her to believe me?

"I was being controlled," I continued. "By a vampire."

Belle stared at me for a while, processing, searching my eyes for the truth. "I can't tell if you're kidding or not," she finally said.

"Yeah, I wouldn't believe you either," Kyle interjected unhelpfully.

I looked at him.

"Sorry. It doesn't sound very believable," Kyle continued, raising their hands in defense. He looked at Belle.

"But it's true. He was being controlled by one of the most powerful vampires alive. He... The alpha started a war over it."

Belle looked between the two of us, her brows knitting together.

"Do you remember the first night I brought you to my packhouse?" I asked her. "When did I have to leave you late at night to deal with vampires in my territory?"

She nodded tightly. A sweet flush crept over her cheeks as she probably remembered what we were about to do before all this happened.

"That was the last night things felt normal," she whispered, the sadness in her voice almost tangible in the air. "You changed after that."

"Exactly. The vampire attack was a trap. The former king of vampires, Azazel Mortar, was waiting for me. He used black magic to dominate my body. I was there, witnessing it all, but I had no control."

"The vampire king?" Belle repeated stiffly. "Are you trying to tell me that a vampire king has taken over your body?"

"Former vampire king," I emphasized.

"The throne was taken from him, and he was replaced by his brother, Zagan Mortar. He wanted to take over my pack to regain control of the vampire realm."

"That's why the alpha was acting so strangely," Kyle interrupted. "Do you remember how I said he was considering letting vampires into the territory?"

Belle nodded.

"Well, that's why. His body was taken."

She looked at me. "I..." she murmured. "I am not..."

I took one of her hands in mine, pressing my lips against her fingers in what I hoped was a reassuring gesture. I was glad when she didn't try to pull away. "I know this is a lot to take in."

She nodded. "If what you're saying is true... C How do I know you're not still being controlled by a vampire?"

"Because you can feel the mate bond between us," I said, squeezing her hand gently. Even I could feel the powerful tingle traveling between us, demonstrating our bond.

"You can feel it when I touch you. Or when I talk to you. You couldn't feel it before, when Azazel was in control of my body."

She thought for a second, looking down at our hands. united. I could tell she knew I was right.

"The sparks weren't...they weren't as strong when I was with you in the packhouse. But I thought I just – I thought it was because you didn't" – her gaze dropped – "that I didn't anymore or something."

I placed my hand under her chin, lifting her head until she was looking at me again. "I'll always want you. You understand me? Ever. You are my mate. My other half. "There isn't a world you're in out there, and I don't want to be with you. We are destined to be together. I can't survive without you."

More tears fell from her eyes as she really let my words sink in. I didn't know if she believed on me or not, but it didn't really matter. I would prove it to her.

"The vampire is gone now. He is no longer inside me. That's why I'm acting normal again. He gave up control of my body the day you ran away.

"He's gone now, and he's not coming back. I can promise you that."

"As?" Belle asked. "How did you get it out of you?"

I didn't know how to respond without startling her.

"This is complicated," Kyle said when I hesitated. "The alpha almost he died."

Belle's eyes met mine, wide and full of concern. "Did you almost die?"

The last thing I wanted was to make her more upset than she already was. But he also needed to present her with all the information and evidence.

I pulled my shirt over my head to reveal my upper half and the scar where I'd been impaled with a tree branch. It was an impressive mark, taking up most of my chest.

Belle gasped. Her hand flew up to touch the scar. "Did he do this to you?" she asked. Then, as if realizing she'd accidentally touched me, she tried to pull her hand away.

I stopped her by placing my hand over hers, assuring her that she couldn't move it. She didn't fight me.

"It had to be done," I explained. "It was the only way to force Azazel out of my body. He would have died with me if he had stayed."

"But you... you didn't die? Were you okay?" belle
He asked. "Sorry, that's a stupid question.
Obviously, you didn't die. Just... how does one survive something like that?"

His fingers moved over the scar on my chest, lightly tracing the raised skin.

I looked at Kyle, who met my gaze apprehensively.

"There are two reasons," I said, not knowing how to explain this to her without freaking her out and sending her running for the hills.

"First, I received the blood of Amelia Mortar. She's a vampire-

Belle gasped. "I really know who she is!" she exclaimed, looking rather pleased to know about something without needing it explained to her. "I also received her blood."

My wolf surged into my awareness. "Why the hell did you receive the blood of Amelia Mortar?" I demanded.

I instantly regretted my harsh tone. Belle took a deep breath and leaned back further in her chair, pulling my hand from my chest and holding it against hers.

Suddenly, she watched me with a wary, hesitant expression. I had to remind myself that the last time she heard me talk to her that way was right after my hand violently connected with her cheek.

I had to try harder to keep my anger under control.

I swore softly. "I'm sorry my love. My anger is not directed at you." I told her. "It's just... the only reason anyone gets Amelia Mortar's blood is if they're close to death."

"And I was. The night Adalee found me," Belle admitted. "She nearly killed me."

I growled. I didn't want to remember that night. Although Adalee trying to kill Belle was the only reason why

managed to find her again, yet it was one of the most terrifying moments of my life.

Belle nodded slowly. "Liam and his sister, Laila, gave me her blood after the attack."

It made sense. That's why she didn't have any marks when I found her.

My body shook with rage even as I was grateful for what Liam had done for my mate. I still couldn't help the possessiveness or protectiveness I felt for her.

"What is the second reason?" Belle continued. "The second reason why you are alive. You said there were two.

I tried to prepare myself to tell her this information.

"When Azazel took control of my body, he bit and accidentally injected me with vampire venom."

Belle's breathing increased a little. "Vampire poison? Does that do the same thing as their blood? Healed you?"

"Do you know how my eyes turn black in the presence of my wolf?" I said as gently as I could. "And do you remember my eyes getting red when I found you?"

I cursed myself to hell over how terrified she looked all of a sudden.

"Red eyes?" she stuttered. "Did you really have Red eyes? I thought I was making them up."

I grabbed her knee when her breathing started to get harder and harder, the same way it did when I found her and she had a panic attack.

I approached her, sitting on my knees so that my face stay level with her. I held her face in my hand.

"Hey. Hey, you're fine, baby. Take a few deep breaths." I told her, keeping my tone steady and even. "Are you well."

His breathing didn't calm down. "I keep having nightmares about you with the red eyes. Every night. You stalk me and say you'll never leave me alone and..." Her chest began to rise and fall more violently.

"Nightmares?" My heart broke. Is this what she dreamed of last night? "No, God, baby, no. It's not something you need to be afraid of. If anything, it should make you feel safer."

She didn't look convinced, far from it.

I looked at Kyle. He met my gaze, but it was clear he didn't know how to tell her either.

I turned my attention to Belle. "You remember my wolf, right?"

Belle nodded once, her eyes still wide, her breathing still wild.

I let my anxious wolf surface, turning my eyes black.

Belle visibly relaxed in his presence. My wolf snarled happily in my chest.

I loved that she felt so comfortable around him – especially considering how she reacted the first time she met him – but it killed me that she didn't feel this way around me anymore.

I promised myself that I would change that soon.

"Well..." I hesitated for a moment. "Meet my vampire."

I let my vampire step in and fill my consciousness. My wolf took a step back, allowing my eyes to turn bright red and vibrant.

Belle didn't react well.

She jumped out of her chair, making a splash and clatter behind her. She staggered away, nearly tripping over her own feet to get away from me. I could see the panic attack starting to gain control of her body.

I got to my feet. "It's okay, Belle," I said, trying to calm her down. "I won't hurt you. You do not need to be afraid."

I was completely destroyed by the piercing fear that burned in his eyes.

I started to move closer to her, needing to do something, but stopped when she squealed in labored breath, backing up even further until her back was pressed firmly against the wall behind her.

Belle was looking around, trying to determine her escape route.

She reminded me of a caged animal desperately looking for a way out. She looked so fragile, worn down to the bone and beyond exhausted.

I tried to push my vamp down so she wouldn't have to look into the red eyes that so obviously scared her so much, but my vamp wasn't budging. He wanted Belle to see him.

And he wanted to look at her. He'd been holding back for so long, not wanting to startle her, but now that he was released, he refused to be shoved back.

"Belle, it's okay," I tried to plead with her. "Everything is well, dear."

She shook her head. His hand flew up to grab your throat.

Kyle took a step forward. "He won't hurt you, Luna. His vampire cares for you as much as his wolf."

Her eyes were wide with fear, uncertainty and so much pain – pain that I understood well because I had been living in hell since the day she left me.

I regretted showing her my vampire. She was already so scared, and I only made things worse.

I tried to push my vamp down once more. He wasn't listening to reason, convinced he could help her if I'd just let him. I fought him.

Belle reached a shaky hand for the doorknob of her apartment. She was going to make a run for it. She was going to go out into the cold night, barefoot and without a coat, in the midst of a panic attack.

I couldn't let that happen.

An unfamiliar feeling formed abruptly in my throat and rose up. It was my vampire – he was doing something, making some kind of noise, just like that. way my wolf growled.

I started to purr. It wasn't a noise I'd ever made before, vibrating under my ribs and in my throat. I wasn't even sure how I was doing it.

My vampire seemed to be making the sound on pure instinct.

Belle reacted to my purring almost immediately. Her body relaxed and her breathing slowed. His eyes went hooded and calm.

She took a deep breath as she watched me, no longer reaching for the door but seeming enthralled by the sound coming from my chest.

My vampire's purrs were soothing her. They were helping her. It seemed like she couldn't help but react to the noise.

She even started leaning forward, gravitating toward me as if she couldn't help herself.

I took this as my opportunity to go to her. I never stopped purring at her as it seemed to help, taking on my vampire duty now that I knew how to do it.

She watched me through narrowed eyes as I approached her, determined. The moment she was within reach, I wrapped my hands around her waist and pulled her to me.

I needed to feel her against me, to comfort her. She automatically melted into my embrace, not fighting anymore. In fact, she looked eager to let me carry her weight against me.

She buried her face in my chest, right where my purrs were loudest. She sighed, absorbing the vibrations I was producing as I stood there, stunned.

With Belle still in my arms, I threw Kyle a look over my shoulder. He was watching us with wide eyes, looking just as confused as I was.

Belle shifted against me, and her bright blue eyes rolled up, looking down at me. His pupils were dilated.

“How... How are you doing this?” she whispered.

“How are you making that—that purring noise?”

Even as she spoke, she pressed herself against me, seemingly unable to contain herself.

“My vampire,” I replied softly. My purrs got louder and his eyes got tighter.

“My

vampire wants to calm you down. I have never purred before.”

And I had a feeling that she was the only person I could do this for.

She pressed her face back into my chest. Soothing her didn't seem to be the only effect my purring had on her because, suddenly, the scent of her arousal filled and saturated the room.

With.

“Kyle,” he said. “Fora.”

“Yes”, was his immediate response.

Then he used his vampire speed and a gust of wind blew past us. The door to Belle's apartment opened and closed as Kyle left the room, leaving Belle and me completely alone.

Chapter 26

GRAYSON

After Kyle left, Belle looked up, scanning the
living room.

Her brows furrowed when she didn't find my
beta. "Where-?"

I interrupted her question by getting up and carrying her to the bed – or
should I say, her mattress on the floor.

I shook off the furious feeling that I still smelled like Liam Blackwood and
sat down on the mattress with my back to the wall and Belle on my lap.

She clung to me tightly, her arms around my neck. I had to yank her off my
chest to get her to look at me, but I didn't stop purring. It calmed her down and left
her
with less fear.

This is what she needed right now.

At the same time, the scent of her arousal only grew the more I purred.
She shifted restlessly in my lap, her cheeks flushed a bright pink.

Huh, so it seems the purring had two effects on my beautiful companion.

I carefully brushed out a lock of brown hair
that had fallen out of her ponytail behind her ear. I held her chin.

"How are you baby? Are you feeling better?" I asked her, running the pad
of my thumb over her pretty chin.

She nodded. "Yes."

She placed her hand on my fluttering chest. I put my hand over hers, holding her there.

"I, uh..." she whispered. "I have some questions."

I gently squeezed her hand. My purrs only increased a little. "Ask me anything, beautiful."

His pupils were dilated and large. She licked her lips and moved her hips against me once more. I could tell she was trying to contain herself by the way she kept looking at my lips.

"Could you..." she started. "Could you, um, stop purring? I-I'm having a hard time concentrating."

I couldn't help but laugh. This was a handy little trick my vampire gave me. I would definitely have fun exploring all the ways my mate would react. to that later.

But for now, I let the purring sound fade away, giving her some relief.

She let out a deep breath, her body slumping a little in relief. "Thanks."

Now that my purrs weren't calming her down anymore, she stiffened a little.

Afraid that she would try to run away from me again if given the opportunity, I grabbed her hips and pulled her closer, making sure she had no way out.

"What are your questions, Belle?" I persuaded.

I noticed her studying my eyes.

I hadn't been paying attention to what color they were, too focused on my mate, but now I realized they were a deep red, a mix of black and red for both my wolf and vampire.

Both were at the forefront of my consciousness, watching Belle with as much interest as I did.

"So you're a...vampire now?" she asked, her voice calm and meek.

"A hybrid," I corrected softly. "My wolf is still here. I have both creatures in me."

"And that's why you're so big now?" His eyes scanned my chest and arms. I could hear her heart rate jump slightly. "Becoming a vampire... did it make you grow?"

"Like that." I rubbed her hips gently, holding myself back from purring again since it seemed to make her so calm the last time, and she looked terrified now.

"When I transitioned, my vampire made me stronger, faster, the ultimate predator. The size change came with it."

"Are you... Are you dangerous?"

"Never for you. Do you understand that, Belle? My vampire loves you, as does my wolf, as I love you. You have absolutely nothing to worry about. I would never lay a hand on you.

His eyes dropped from me. "You said that before too."

She took a deep breath. "And Kyle is a hybrid now too?"

I shook my head. "He was also bitten. So he also went through the transition."

Her small hand went to my neck and gently touched the scar where Azazel had sunk his teeth into me.

The two small perforations were barely visible anymore and would heal completely with time.

I had almost forgotten about the scar, but I was glad Belle had found it. It was further proof that what I was saying was the truth.

His eyes shot back to mine. "You went bitten by the vampire king?"

I shook my head. If she needed to hear it all over again, I would happily repeat myself until she felt she understood. "Former Vampire King."

"And he turned you into a werewolf hybrid vampire?"

"Try."

"And took over your body for months?"

"Try."

She dropped her face into her hands. "That's a lot to take in. I don't even know if I can believe you. This story is pretty insane."

On pure instinct, I started purring again, but this time I was quieter, so she could barely hear me.

Her body could feel the vibrations though, and she relaxed. visibly. Good. When she relaxed, so did I.

"I know my love. I have you." I answered. I gently pulled her back to me and placed her on my chest. She let me carry her full weight and even cuddled up to me.

Intense relief surged through me. she finally was listening to me. She was letting me hold her without a fight. She was giving in to the bond.

My hand ran up and down her spine. She shivered against me.

"So... weren't you the one who said all those...horrible things to me about how you would only want me for pleasure and power?" His words were full of tears.

I tensed when I realized she was about to start crying again.

"Weren't you the one who hit me several times and tried to sleep with someone else when I didn't want to?"

"No. It was not me." My heart squeezed, making rolls behind my ribcage. "But I was there. I could see everything he was doing to you, saying to you. Almost killed me. I was trapped, forced to watch my mate being tortured."

His eyes were big and round. "Could you see everything?"

I shook my head. "I struggled a lot to break free. That's why he spent so little time around you. Every time he got close to you in my body, I fought him, tapping into his consciousness.

"It made him weak. But I couldn't break free, no matter how hard I tried. My wolf did it once."

"You wolf!" she exclaimed. "That day you broke my cheek, he took care of me."

As if on cue, my wolf growled softly in my chest, letting her know he was there. Belle smiled softly with the sound.

"I didn't break your cheek," I said, reminding her.
"I would never think of hurting you like that. Azazel Mortar was the one who hit you. He did it to mess with me, to piss me off and prove he had control over me and could do whatever he wanted to you, and I couldn't do anything to stop it. Except I did. My rage was so great when he hurt you that my wolf was able to break through the dark magic blocking us and care for you. But as you may have noticed, he's not the best communicator in the world, so he couldn't explain to you what was going on. He could only apologize."

My wolf shivered inside me at the memory. Never we feel more powerless than at that moment.

"I remember," Belle muttered under her breath, pain filling her.
your voice.

I hugged her tighter against me. A moment of silence passed as I let her process everything I was saying to her.

"So..." Belle started. "Are you you again? You promise that there are no more evil vampires inside you?"

"Yes. It's me again. Enough of the evil vampire. You have no idea how long I've waited to tell you."

Belle looked at me, hesitation filling her gaze.
"But how do I know it won't happen again? How do I know you won't just...cheat on me again? I don't know..." She snapped. "I don't think I can handle this again."

“Because it won't. I won't let it. I'm stronger now than before. I know how to avoid this. And my vampire would never tolerate that.”

She sat back, hesitating for a moment. Then she tried to get off of me.

I quickly grabbed her waist, pulling her back to me. “What are you doing?”

“I...I think I need a moment,” she whispered. “I need time to process this. And I can't do that around you. You make my brain stop working.”

“It's the mate bond. He wants us together because that's where you belong. With me. You need me as much as I need you. We need each other.”

I gripped her waist tighter, not enough to hurt her, just to show her how desperate I was. “Please don't make me leave you again.”

She seemed to struggle endlessly for several seconds. “I need to have a clear head. To be able to think.” She shook her head. “I just need some time.”

It was physically painful to let her crawl off my lap. She walked to her apartment door and opened it. She looked at me, waiting.

I got up slowly, never breaking eye contact with her. When I was in front of her, I gently grabbed her face with both hands, tilting her head so she was looking straight into my eyes.

“Take your time, man. I will wait for you forever.” I told her. So I leaned forward and kissed her forehead. “You let me know when you're ready.”

And then, with great effort, I left her.

Chapter 27

BELLE

I closed the door behind him and dropped into a chair just as Grayson left. I could hear my heart pounding in my head, making my entire skull throb.

As always, my brand burned, begging for to be close to my mate again. I groaned.

There was a soft knock on the door, and the only reason I knew it wasn't Grayson was that I didn't feel the connection to him.

"Luna?" Kyle's voice came from the other side of the door. He pushed open the door and peeked his head inside. His eyes softened when he saw me crying. "Okay if I come in?"

I shook my head. It would be nice to have some company.

He walked in, looking around my apartment. "So this is where you've been staying these last few months, huh? It's, uh... too bad." He didn't even try to maintain education.

I couldn't help but laugh. I appreciated that he didn't pity me like everyone else did.

"Yes," I agreed, wiping my nose. "Is very bad."

"It's better than the room you were in at the gang. That's a plus. At least you're warm in here."

I shuddered. I didn't want to talk about my life in the pack house or the circumstances I was living in. I especially didn't want to acknowledge the way Kyle was looking at me with a piercing gaze.

"Why didn't you come to me, Luna?" he finally asked. "It kills me to know that you were hurting so much and felt like you had nowhere else to turn. I would have helped you. You know that, right?"

"Sorry." I whispered back. "I did not know what to do. I didn't want Grayson to hate me any more than he already did. He told me to stay away from you. I was desperate not to do anything that might upset him."

"This is just another sign that the alpha has been overpowered. He would rather die than make you feel this way. Did he not prove it to you in Paris?"

I didn't know how to respond. I knew he was right. A few moments passed. Kyle leaned against the small kitchen counter, crossing his arms over his chest, watching me.

"Can he hear us?" I finally asked.

Kyle shook his head. "No. He told me he was going for a walk. He wanted to give you space. I just came to see how you are."

I sighed. I could feel the distance between Grayson and me growing up, and it was starting to make me sick.

"He's telling the truth, isn't he?" I whispered. "I can feel he is telling the truth."

Kyle gave me an understanding look. "Yes, he is telling the truth. I found out the day you left. He's been a pain in the ass ever since. He hasn't stopped looking for you for a single second. He couldn't concentrate on anything else."

I dropped my head into my hands. "I miss him. I miss him so much. Why the hell do I miss him?"

I shouldn't still feel this connected to him, should I? He was so...horrible to me."

"He's your mate," Kyle replied in a soft tone that told me he understood. "He is your soul mate, the one person who was made specifically for you. How could you not miss him?"

"It's a miracle you two can stay away from each other for so long without freaking out." He paused. "But you know it's okay to still be afraid, right? After everything you've been through..."

I looked at him. More tears welled up in my eyes. "I can't do this again, Kyle. I can't be with him and be rejected again. It... It nearly killed me last time."

Kyle's chest rose and fell with heavy breathing. "He won't let you go through that again. He will never reject you. He will protect you. "He is stronger now. More prepared. More determined to keep you safe after everything he's put you through."

"Your pack hates me, though. I don't know if I can go back there. I can't be a luna when everyone rejects me. They didn't even talk to me. Does Grayson even understand how disappointed his pack was? With me?"

Kyle grabbed the other folding chair and sat down next to me. "Listen to me, Luna. It's important that you hear this. Azazel ordered them to treat you this way. The pack had no choice."

"S-Really?" I asked.

"Yes, seriously. They wanted to meet her, *get to know her*. They never got that chance. They were in the same trance as the alpha

he was. They had to watch as you suffered, even though they desperately wanted to help.”

“Did they tell you that?” I asked, my tone quiet and unbeliever. “Are you sure?”

Kyle nodded. “I am sure. They feel awful about the way they treated you. If you went back to the pack house, you'd see for yourself how sorry they are.

“I'm sure they would love the opportunity to try to make it up to you.”

I leaned back in my chair, barely understanding what he was saying to me. I didn't even notice my hand go to Grayson's mark on my neck. I suddenly wished desperately that he were here.

“Go to him,” Kyle said, uttering the words I was thinking. He smiled. “He is waiting for you.”

I was on my feet and out the door in seconds.

My stomach was a mess of fluttering butterflies as I ran out the front door of my apartment building barefoot, looking for my mate.

“Grayson?” I screamed. Tears streamed down my face, and for the first time in months, it wasn't because I was sad.

My heart raced in my chest when I couldn't find him. “Grayson!” I screamed a little louder, not caring if anyone around me heard.

A sudden gust of wind and a blur of motion in front of me made me jump back and scream. When I opened my eyes, I met Grayson's dark reds with a sigh.

"What is wrong?" he demanded, scanning my body. "What it was? Are you hurt?"

I didn't think about it before launching myself into his arms.

He staggered back a few steps, obviously not expecting my abrupt attack. For a second, he just stood there, his huge chest rising and falling with small growls at me.

I was almost afraid I'd jumped to conclusions, but then he wrapped his arms around me and pulled me closer to him.

And I started to cry. With my arms around his neck and my face buried in his chest, I let all my emotions run free. And then I pulled his face to mine and kissed him deeply.

Grayson growled against my mouth, pulling me closer.

He pulled away after a few seconds. "Belle," Grayson moaned, his forehead pressed against mine. "Do not Cry. Please don't cry, love."

"I can not avoid." I replied, nestling my face into his chest once more, taking in his spicy scent that I missed so much.

"Belle, look at me. Please." His hands moved from my waist to my head. He tilted my head up. "Talk to me. What is it? You are scarring me."

I smiled at him, wiping my tears as best I could. "I really missed you." I stopped. "And I'm really glad you're not an evil vampire anymore. That really—" I took a deep breath. "It really sucked me in."

His jaw tightened. "Do you believe me?" He seemed to hold his breath as he waited for me to respond.

I shook my head, cupping the side of his face, my fingertips running through his hair. "I believe in you. I believe you, Grayson."

His mouth opened in a huge, breathtaking smile. "Thank God," he whispered, searching my eyes. "Thank God."

I expected him to kiss me again, but he didn't. Instead, he lifted me off the ground, pulling me chest to chest, wrapping my legs and arms around his massive, muscled frame.

The only reason I didn't fall was because of your hands supporting me under my ass.

"Kyle. Go home," Grayson growled.

I whipped my head around. I hadn't even realized that Kyle had also come out of my apartment and was watching us from the doorway.

"I just arrived!" Kyle complained.

"Kyle doesn't need to go. I want to reach him too." I argued.

Grayson didn't respond. He was already walking in the opposite direction, taking me with him.

"Hang on!" I yelled, looking at the poor Grayson beta he was leaving behind. "What about Kyle? We can't just leave him after he came this far!"

Grayson's answer was two words, growls and lows and leaving no room for discussion. "I'm not bothered."

I looked at him, ready to continue arguing. I just decided to forgive him, and this is how he wanted to act?

I gasped when Kyle suddenly appeared right behind us. I hadn't even seen him move.

Sensing his presence, Grayson turned and bared his teeth at him menacingly. He gripped me against his body so tightly I almost worried he would start hurting me soon.

"Wow, there," Kyle said, taking several steps back. He carried his neck. "I meant no harm to the moon, Alpha."

"Put me down, Grayson." I demanded, rocking in his arms.

Grayson growled once more and then buried his face in my neck. He started sucking on my brand.

I sighed. "Grayson!" I pushed at his shoulders as my body lit up with pleasurable flames. "Stop this!" My face flushed with heat seeing Kyle witness this.

"It's okay, Luna," Kyle said, trying to comfort me. "Now that you've given in to the bond, it's going to stay that way for a while. Possessive and only concerned with making sure you're okay."

"He will only get mad if I stay."

"So are you leaving?" I asked, trying to ignore the man who was sucking on my neck like some kind of leech.

Kyle shrugged. "Someone has to take care of the pack."

Grayson started to walk away before Kyle even finished his sentence. I looked away for a single second to see where Grayson was taking me, and when I looked back, Kyle was gone.

I looked for him but he was nowhere to be found.

I sighed and leaned my head on Grayson's shoulder, giving up. A small smile played on my lips as he began to purr.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"Hotel," Grayson growled.

"But my apartment is right back there. Why don't we just go there?"

"I will never let you go back to that place again. fucking apartment again."

I leaned back into his arms so I could look at it. "Are you ever allowing me?" I repeat.

He nodded, not bothering to respond. Then his hand gently grabbed the back of my head and brought my face into his neck. "Keep your eyes tight shut, baby, okay?"

"Why?" I asked, my lips moving against her skin as I spoke, causing sparks to shoot up to my toes.

"Just keep your eyes closed and trust me."

And then he started to run. I could feel the wind blowing around us, and for a second I thought it might have put us in some sort of vehicle based on how fast we were moving.

I made the mistake of peeking over his shoulder. That's when I realized what was really going on.

Grayson must have used his new vampire powers to run faster than I could understand.

I screamed and tightened my grip around his neck.

Grayson's huge hand automatically cupped the back of my head and pressed my face into his neck, blocking my view of the world passing us by as he continued to run.

I could feel the vibrations of their purrs starting against my chest, though I couldn't hear them due to the wind in my ears. He silenced me gently, one of his hands stroking up and down my spine, trying to calm me down.

A few seconds later, we were standing in front of a door. A hotel door. My breathing was ragged, still in shock from what had just happened.

"I scared you? I didn't mean to, I promise," said Grayson, gently brushing my messy hair out of my face.

I looked at him. "Maybe a little," I admitted softly, still breathing heavily. "New vampire powers?"

He nodded. "I am really sorry. I couldn't wait any longer to make sure you were okay." He took out a key card out of his pocket and let us in.

"When did you get a hotel room?" I asked to him as he carried me inside.

"Three days ago. When I found you."

It was a nice room, reminiscent of the one we had in Paris, only not as big.

It didn't have a kitchen or several floors, but it did have a living room with a large dining table and two rooms connected to it.

Grayson brought me over to the table and placed me on it. He kept his body between my spread legs so he was pressed tightly against me. My cheeks warmed from the intimate position.

"Come here," Grayson said, slipping his hand under my chin and bringing my lips to his. I sighed with pleasure.

He kissed me fully and passionately, taking my breath successfully and making my whole body tingle.

"God, I missed you. I missed you so much," he said when he finally pulled away minutes later.

"I will never let you out of my sight again. It would take the Moon Goddess herself to take me from you. Even so, I would fight like hell."

I smiled at him, feeling at peace for the first time in a long time. "I'm fine with it."

I didn't even realize I was crying until Grayson frowned and wiped one of my stray tears with his thumb.

"Why are you crying?" He leaned his forehead against mine. "I can't bear to see you cry. I can't stand that I'm the one who keeps making you cry."

I shook my head. "I'm just happy. They are happy tears."

His nostrils flared slightly. "I still don't like it. I will fix everything. I promise. You will never have to cry again."

And he kissed me again.

Chapter 28

BELLE

Kyle was right when he said that Grayson would be possessive for a while. Grayson was acting more than just possessive, he was acting completely insane.

About five minutes after arriving at the hotel, he ordered me a mountain of room service food and had it delivered to the room.

He never stopped touching me one way or another, and his eyes were pitch black and completely terrifying with the presence of his wolf.

He barely spoke except to explain things to me, give me orders, or tell me for the millionth time that he was sorry and how he would make it up to me.

Even then, his sentences were usually just one word. It was painfully obvious that his wolf was in control of the situation.

By the time the food arrived, Grayson had sat me down on his lap at the dining table and placed a plate of food in front of me.

It was some kind of creamy pasta with chicken. It looked and smelled delicious. He had his own plate in front of him as well.

“Eat,” he said, pointing to my plate.

I didn't need to be told twice. I was absolutely starving.

I'd only taken three bites of the absolutely incredibly sinful meal when I felt Grayson brush my hair off my shoulder. I could feel his gaze on my red, irritated, infected mark.

I winced when he ran his thumb over it.
gently.

"Eat," Grayson repeated. I hadn't even realized I'd stopped chewing, waiting with bated breath to see what he was doing. "You need food."

Then he leaned down and kissed the mark, nearly making me gasp. His lips felt so good on the wound that I couldn't help but let out a small moan.

"And you?" I asked, sounding breathless. He hasn't yet had touched the food.

"Just eat, Belle. Don't make me say it again."

"Gee," I muttered. "Too bossy?"

I took another bite, glad to get some food besides peanut butter sandwiches, cereal or restaurant leftovers in my stomach.

Once Grayson seemed satisfied with the amount I was eating, he leaned down and kissed my mark once more.

I squirmed in his lap. I tried to ignore it, but that proved impossible when his tongue slipped out and roamed the spot. To my immense embarrassment, I felt my panties start to get wet.

I could not help it; months apart made their touch look even better than before, if that were possible.

"Grayson," I said, poking his stomach lightly.

"Stop this."

He didn't hear me. He continued licking the mark, running his tongue over it and then sucking the skin into his mouth repeatedly, leaving kisses between them. He was driving me crazy.

"Eat," he said once more against my skin when he realized my chewing had stopped. His voice was significantly lower than it had been minutes before. He continued kissing me.

How the hell did he expect me to keep eating when he was doing this? He knew how sensitive that spot was, and yet, here he was, torturing me.

"Do you have to do this now?" I whimpered even as I unconsciously tilted my head to give him better access. My face heated up. "You are being very disruptive."

"Your mark is not healing properly because we've been apart for too long. The more time I spend taking care of her, the less pain you will be in."

I looked down at her plate of untouched food. "But don't you want to eat? You must be hungry."

"No, I want to take care of you. You need food, and you need your mark to heal."

His teeth suddenly scraped against my mark, almost making me jump off his lap with pleasure. I sighed.

With his hand on my hips, Grayson set me back, growling low. He actually had the nerve to look pissed at me.

"Stop squirming and eat," he ordered for what felt like the millionth time.

"You're going to make me choke on my food if you keep doing this," I complained.

His hands squeezed my hips in warning. "Don't talk about you getting hurt. I'm already on edge."

I rolled my eyes. Grayson didn't say anything else as he pushed my plate closer and then handed me my fork that I hadn't realized had dropped.

"With the."

And his lips were back on my neck.

The rest of dinner was brutal. Grayson looked perfectly content with sucking and licking my neck. For me, however, finishing my meal proved extremely difficult.

To my immense embarrassment, I was practically gasping at the end, leaning fully into him, my head cocked to the side, encouraging his torture.

I felt languid, relaxed and totally at peace. To the
At the same time, however, I have never felt so anguished.

My panties were extremely wet and my
clit throbbed, begging for attention from his sinful tongue still on my neck.

Its purring was so loud it basically drowned out any other sound in the large room. I was totally and completely in tune with him and his every move.

I shifted against him, an embarrassing whimpering noise escaping my lips before I could stop it.

Grayson smiled against my skin. "Are you okay there, baby?"

I rolled my eyes. As if he didn't know what was doing with me.

"U-Um..." I could barely form a coherent sentence. "Grayson..."

"What?" he murmured, his lips sliding softly down my neck to my ear. "What is it, beautiful?"

I squirmed.

He inhaled deeply. "Do you need anything, Belle?" His voice was significantly deeper than it had been just a few minutes before.

I shook my head.

"What do you need? Tell me what you want."

I took a deep breath and closed my eyes. He knew what I wanted. Was he really going to make me say that out loud?

"Touch me, Grayson," I begged. "Please, I need you to touch me."

"I'm touching you baby." His hands smoothed over my hips which were exposed by my skirt now wrapped around my waist. Sparks followed. "You will have to be more specific."

That son of a bitch.

I wanted to tell him what I wanted. I wanted to be that confident girl who could take charge and be sexy without trying. But Grayson or Azazel, I think, really hurt me.

I spent months hating, well, trying to hate Grayson after what I thought he did. I had forgiven him just hours before, and he already had me in his lap, begging for his touch.

His power over my body and mind scared the shit out of me. I didn't fully trust him, not yet, at least.

any less.

The last time I thought about doing anything sexual with Grayson was when he was trying to take advantage of me at his coven.

I told him no several times, and he... I didn't want to think about how he reacted to that or how devastated I felt afterward.

His index finger slid over the front of mine. panties, bringing you back to reality. He didn't touch anything too intimate, but the soft touch of his hand was enough to get my attention.

"You're in control, Belle," he said softly, surprising me with his change in tone. He looked much calmer now. "I won't do anything unless you want me to. I need you to know this. You are always in control."

My body relaxed a little. He said the exact words I needed to hear. How did he know to say that? Had he read my mind or something?

No. I shook my head. He was my mate. He knew what I needed because we were made for each other

like two pieces of a puzzle that fit together perfectly.

I turned around in his lap so I was facing him, straddling his waist. I could feel his hard cock sitting under my thigh, pulsing with life.

I swallowed nervously, my eyes widening. It looked like Grayson's body wasn't the only thing that had grown.

Grayson sat back and watched me, casually placing his hands on either side of my arms as I settled on top of him with my hands on his chest. He raised an eyebrow.

I hated how sexy it was.

His hands gripped the armrests until his fingers turned white, and the wood began to splinter a little as he waited for me to speak, obviously trying to get up.

to contain.

His dark, hungry, dark red eyes studied me, moving from my heaving breasts to my exposed pink panties, which I was pretty sure had a wet spot visible in the crotch. He licked his lips, nostrils flaring.

"I..." I hesitated, totally mesmerized by the look of desire on his face. His eyes lifted to meet mine, and it was like a calming wave washed over me.

"You are going to kiss me?"

He groaned. "Fuck yeah."

With his hand around my neck, he brought my mouth down to his, launching me into a sensual onslaught I wasn't ready for.

This kiss was different from the ones we had shared before.

While the others had always been sweet and tender, communicating love and care, this one was dirty and deep, communicating our passion and despair.

“If we were a normal couple,” he said at the Paris hotel, “we would have had sex several times.”

He said this just the day after he met me. I knew that werewolf couples were extremely sexual and sensitive - I'd witnessed this firsthand when I was in their packhouse.

The fact that Grayson, an extremely dominating and powerful alpha male, had been able to hold back for so long was a miracle.

It was evidence of the truth behind his words. He really wanted me to be in control.

But he no longer needed to hold back.

I gasped against his mouth as he cupped my ass in his hands, pulling me closer to him, allowing him to sink in deeper, his tongue fighting mine.

Pleasure blossomed everywhere. On my chest, on the buds of my breasts, between my spread thighs, across my pulsing mark.

Before I knew it, I was laying my wet core directly over his rock hard cock,

aided by his hands on my waist who immediately knew what I was looking for and eagerly helped me to get on top of him.

We both moan at the contact, his lips becoming even more frantic against mine, something I didn't even know was possible.

I needed friction. I needed movement. My hips started to move on their own, fucking him. He helped me, leading me over his cock and teaching me how to push.

"Fuck, you're trying to kill me," Grayson he murmured against my mouth, his voice husky and rough.

His hands never stopped moving my hips, continually brushing my panty-clad clit over the zipper of his jeans with precise precision.

My fingers curled around his shirt, suddenly wishing desperately he wasn't wearing it. What we were doing now wasn't enough. I wanted to feel every inch of his hard body against me.

"Grayson..." I whimpered.

He kissed me again, driving me completely insane. He pulled away seconds later, and I gasped against him.

"Tell me what you want, Belle."

My hips started to move faster against him, my breathing labored. "...I need..." I didn't even recognize my own voice. "I don't think I can say that out loud."

"Do you need me to help you?"

My chin rose and fell.

His eyes sparkled. His hands on my hips forced me to slow my thrusts, and he leaned forward, his lips so close to the skin of my ear that I could feel his warm breath rustling my hair.

“Say, 'Grayson, please touch my wet pussy,’” he said, supplying me with the words. “Please make me come... again and again.”

Your dirty words made everything in me light up with fire. "Grayson..." I started.

His grip on me tightened in anticipation, pushing my clit against his zipper more or less once. Twice. 3 times. I groaned. “Please touch... please touch my wet pussy.” I said, my words coming out breathy.

"AND?" he prompted, never stopping his rough movements.

“Please make me come.” I whimpered. I was barely controlling me right now. "One and another time."

That was all it took for him to attack.

Chapter 29

BELLE

In what felt like less than a second. I was lying on my back on a bed in one of the bedrooms, looking down at my mate on top of me.

I didn't even have time to process before his hands were ripping my panties off my legs and tossing them across the room, then pushing the skirt of my waitress uniform around my waist.

He grabbed my thighs and spread my legs as wide as he could, his eyes immediately finding my needy pussy with a ravenous expression.

"You're too wet for me," he groaned, his chest heaving.

Just before I was ready to start begging again, his thumb parted my folds and pressed down on my clit.

My entire body convulsed violently at the simple touch, nearly coming on the spot. The shudder of pleasure that coursed through me was so intense it made stars explode behind my eyes.

"I know, baby," Grayson said, still playing gently with my little bud of nerves. I squirmed under him.

"Fuck you, you're a goddamn dream. I have you, Belle. I have you."

The sparks of the mate bond just made the whole experience a million times more intense, traveling through me and heightening the pleasure.

Grayson knew exactly how to touch me too, just the right amount of pressure to add and then take away to keep me high.

My hips moved against his hand, chasing the release that I so needed.

And when my movements became too much, Grayson growled and pinned me to my stomach, silencing me with his deep voice.

I reached out to him. I didn't even know what I wanted, but luckily, Grayson did and he planted his lips on mine, automatically adding another level of intimacy. That me made me feel drunk.

His finger left my clit and I nearly squealed in dismay, but then he reached down and slowly slid inside my sodden hole. I shuddered and squeezed my eyes shut at the sudden intrusion.

Grayson silenced my moans, giving me words of praise, breathing against my neck and licking my mark.

He began to thrust his thick middle finger in and out of my pussy in long, determined strokes as his palm pressed down on my clit, teasing it at the same time.

"Moan for me, baby," he ordered. "Gem for me so I know where that sweet spot is inside you. That way, when I'm deep inside you for the first time, I'll know exactly which spot to hit each. Single. Time."

Dear sir.

My mouth opened at his command, automatically doing what he told me. Whimpers of pure ecstasy tumbled from my lips as he searched inside me with his hand.

Then he curved his finger, suddenly hitting a spot that almost made me cry out.

He laughed. "I found."

I realized then that he was looking for my G-spot, something I had never been able to locate (to be honest, I was starting to think I was one of those unfortunate people who didn't have it).

Somehow he was able to find it in less than thirty seconds.

His finger began to brush the newly discovered erogenous zone with exacting precision with each stroke as his palm continued to caress my clit.

Without warning, the claws of his other hand ripped through my uniform and bra, leaving me naked beneath him, completely at his mercy.

His eyes found my breasts, seemingly mesmerized for several long moments as they bounced with his movements.

Then, before I even knew what was happening, his mouth latched onto one of my nipples, swirling his tongue around it and tugging at it with his teeth.

The hand that wasn't currently in and out of me came over and squeezed the other in my palm. My back arched, pushing me closer to him.

I was losing my mind. I had never felt so much pleasure.

I was a complete and utter mess beneath him, moaning and writhing against his hand, so close to the edge that I was starting to feel tingling in my hands and feet and up my legs.

Grayson released my nipple from his mouth, leaning down to back.

“Eyes open,” he demanded, his words sounding more like a growl than anything else. “I want to see how those blue eyes glow when I get my own cum for the first time.”

My eyelids fluttered open at his command, and I looked up at him. I sighed.

Grayson was significantly larger, his muscles taut against his taut black T-shirt and jeans, his chest heaving with rough snarls, his eyes the deepest dark red I'd ever seen.

Though I knew anyone else would be terrified at the sight in front of me, it only turned me on and made my chest swell with love.

I wanted everything from Grayson – vampire, wolf, and anything else he could give me. And now, he was giving me just that.

At the sight of its sharp fangs peeking out from beneath her upper lip, something inside me grew desperate.

“Bite me,” I begged, pushing against his hand. —
Tag me again, Grayson. Please. Bite me.”

Grayson's eyes flashed bright red and then
in full black.

His purring became so loud it felt like the noise was bouncing off the walls,
causing the whole room to vibrate and more of my arousal leaking out of me and
into his hand,

And then his teeth were inside my flesh, sinking into the spot on my neck
where he'd first marked me all those months ago.

That's all it took for me to go over the edge.

I screamed his name as my pussy tightened around his finger, pulsing
around it.

My eyes filled with bright light, my legs shook, and my heart lurched in my
chest as wave after wave of pure ecstasy traveled through my body and consumed
me completely.

It lasted for what felt like several minutes, and I couldn't do anything but lie
there, gasping Grayson's name over and over again as he continued to prolong
my orgasm for as long as possible.

His hand was still moving against me, inside me, and his teeth were still
lodged in my throat.

Several moments later, I finally descended from my high.
Grayson removed his teeth from my neck, licking the wound he'd created with
gentle strokes, sure to clean away all the blood.

His hand left my pussy and I closed with my hands.
aftershocks.

When he pulled back to look at me, I noticed that he had some of my blood on his lips.

Even though it should have freaked me out – the fact that his vampire had just fed me while his wolf had marked me as his own – felt right.

I couldn't help but smile at him as I watched him.
with half-closed, satisfied eyes.

He didn't return the smile. His expression was still intense, still hungry. I swallowed.

"Grayson?" I asked.

Without saying a word, he leaned down and kissed my navel, his hands returning to grip my hips. I sat up on my elbows, looking at him.

"What are you doing?"

His dark red eyes looked down at me as he traveled down my torso with his lips, getting dangerously close to the spot that was still tingling from the orgasm he'd given me moments before.

Her purring didn't subside, and the sound made me unconsciously opening my legs for him once more.

He wasn't going...was he?

"I need to taste you, Belle," was his reply, spoken against the skin of my thigh. "I've been starving for you."

Hmm, I think he was. Well, I guess he didn't.
dinner, right?

I didn't even have a chance to respond before his tongue slid over my slit. I fell back onto the bed, so sensitive

that even that simple movement of his tongue made me shudder.

“Grayson...”, eu ship.

Grayson didn't hesitate to suck my clit into his mouth, letting out a loud growl that mingled with his purrs and vibrated the little bud.

Holy shit, he was going to make me come again.

And that's exactly what he did...

In mere moments, I was thrown back into a pool of complete and utter happiness.

Only this time, my pleasure didn't peak because the moment I started down, Grayson started to suck and run his tongue more furiously against my pussy, thrusting a finger inside me as well.

“Again,” he ordered, never looking away from my eyes. eyes as he continued to lick me mercilessly.

I started contracting around him once more. The sobs left me and tears of pure satisfaction ran down my face. face.

I writhed against him, pushing my core down against his mouth as I came, which he happily accepted, encouraging me with one hand still on my hip, driving my movements against him.

When the pleasure of my third orgasm finally started to wear off, I collapsed against the bed, completely and utterly exhausted. My breathing was ragged and my heart was beating a mile a minute.

Grayson looked at me with narrowed eyes, and although he wasn't trying to get me mad anymore, he

still continued to lick me. He looked like he was enjoying himself completely, totally content.

When his tongue swept over my extremely sensitive clit, I groaned, "Grayson...Stop," and tried to push his face away from me.

Finally, he sat back, smiling. Your eyes finally returned to forest green, their bodies shrinking to their normal size as their wolf and vampire retreated.

"If you didn't look so tired and satisfied, I would—make you come again. And again. Until you couldn't take it anymore."

"I can't take it anymore," I replied.

He chuckled and stood up, pulling his shirt over his head and playing on the floor.

I couldn't help my body's reaction at the sight of his muscular chest and abdomen, my pussy clenching once more, and my heart rate increasing.

Grayson looked at me with amusement, watching my chest heave and my legs tighten. "Are you sure about this, baby?"

I covered my face with my arms, pink staining my cheeks.

Grayson chuckled once more. He placed one knee on the mattress and leaned over me, placing a firm kiss on my forehead.

"Do you feel better now?" he whispered as he brushed my hair back from my face.

I shook my head even as my face grew redder under my hands, still covering me.

"Good," Grayson growled, pleasure filling his tone. He kissed my forehead once more, taking a moment to nuzzle my hair and inhale deeply of my scent before pulling away from me.

I peeked out from under my arms to see my shirtless mate walk into the bathroom connected to the bedroom, feeling a puddle of saliva in my mouth.

How the hell was he so hot? It was like an Abercrombie and Fitch model having a baby with Chris Evans. Only that he was hotter. It's bigger. And sexier.

And based on very good first-hand and recent experience with the language.

Grayson turned to look at me before walking into the bathroom, catching me looking. He smiled and winked at me before turning away again.

Once he was out of sight, I groaned and rolled onto my side, burying my face in a pillow. I looked at the alarm clock on the bedside table. It was almost three in the morning.

Just thinking about how late it was, I yawned and grabbed the blankets piled up at the edge of the mattress, pulling them up to my chin.

Before I could fall asleep though, the covers were ripped from my body.

"Hey!" I whimpered. "What are you doing?"

Grayson was standing over me with what looked like a rag in his hand. His eyes scanned my body as he climbed onto the bed, kneeling beside me.

"I can't get over how beautiful you are," he said. He licked his lips and then patted the side of my leg.

"Abra."

I blinked. "Excuse me?"

"Spread your legs for me, beautiful. I could have done a good job down there with my mouth, but I still need to clean my baby."

"Wh-what?" Did I stuttered. Somehow, him...cleaning me up felt so much more intimate than what we'd just done. "Absolutely not!"

Grayson's lips curved.

Then he started to purr.

To my utter horror, my body began to heat up and my legs opened of their own accord, basically inviting him in.

I sighed. "That's not fair," I whimpered as he started to wipe away the evidence of his spit and my arousal with the warm towel.

His purrs soon quieted down, lulling me into instead of getting excited, and my eyes closed.

Once satisfied, Grayson got up and threw his towel in the bathroom before turning back to me. He silently removed his jeans and then crawled onto the bed, immediately pulling me to him.

I sighed and snuggled into his chest, decidedly the happiest I've ever been in my entire life.

"And you?" I whispered right before falling asleep.

"About me?"

"Do you want me to...?" I hoped he knew what I was talking about without me having to say it. I could feel his hardness against my thigh and knew it couldn't be comfortable.

He laughed. "No. Not tonight, baby."

"But that's not fair," I yawned. "Are you sure?"

"I'm sure. real men don't score points."

"Okay," I mumbled, choosing not to argue with him since I was already half asleep. I would make up for it later.

"I love you, Belle." He pulled me closer to him, not an inch of space between us. "Sleep."

And I did.

Chapter 30

BELLE

The first thing I noticed when I woke up was how warm and content I felt. The second thing I noticed was that someone was touching me.

Grayson trailed his fingers up and down my spine, then my waist and along my hips, and anywhere else he could get his hands.

I sighed and snuggled deeper into him, seeking more of his warmth and the feel of her glowing skin against mine.

He purred for me, and the vibrations of his chest against mine began to lull me back to sleep. But then he started pulling away from me.

My brow furrowed, and I tried to grab and pull him back to me, but he was too strong.

He placed a kiss on my forehead. "Shhh..." he whispered against my hair. "I am not going anywhere."

I rolled onto my back and watched as I sat and looked down at my body, which was covered only by a thin sheet. The rest of the blankets were still on the floor from the night before.

He licked his lips as his eyes darkened considerably and his purr increased.

"What are you doing?" I asked, stretching my arms over my head.

He did not answer. His eyes followed my movements, and a deep growl left his mouth.

"Go back to sleep, Grayson." I yawned. "It's too early."

Again, he didn't say anything. When I looked up at him, I noticed that his gaze was now centered on my chest, where I realized the sheet had fallen so low as I stretched that my nipples were almost visible.

I snorted. He was so ridiculous. "I'm going back to sleep. You keep doing whatever it is" – I gestured to him – "It is."

I fell asleep almost the moment I closed my eyes.

My sleep didn't last long. No, Grayson had other plans that had nothing to do with me napping. I was woken up a few minutes later by someone touching my toes. I looked down.

Grayson was kissing my feet. He also removed the sheet from my body so that I was completely naked.

I sighed. "Grayson! I'm naked!" I tried to pick up the sheet again, only to find it on the floor across the room.

My eyes narrowed on Grayson, who still seemed consumed with studying each of my fingers like a kind of crazy.

I tried to cover myself with my hands, but it didn't do much good.

It wasn't like he hadn't seen my body before. I really shouldn't be feeling embarrassed; it still felt strange to be completely naked next to someone other than me.

Especially when someone has told me on multiple occasions how disappointing my body was when it was taken over by a vampire.

I shifted, feeling uncomfortable. I tried to sit up, but he placed one of his huge hands on my bare stomach, so I was forced to lie down.

“Stay,” he ordered in his deep, husky voice.

I snorted and looked up at the ceiling. "What are you doing?" I asked as he moved back down my body and kissed the arch of my foot, holding onto his hand.

“Is this your way of telling me you have a foot fetish?” I played. I tried to kick my foot out of reach.

He just squeezed harder, giving me a look that remembered how a parent can scold their child.

I scolded him back, but that quickly turned into a giggle as he nuzzled my foot. “It tickles.”

The corners of her lips lifted. “I could have a fetish for these feet. I could have a fetish for any part of you.”

I could feel my chest and my cheeks getting red. “Okay, but not you, right?” I laugh nervously.

I wasn't one to be shy, but something about mouths anywhere near dirty feet – especially mine, which were covered in blisters and calluses – made me feel a little bad.

Grayson just smiled and slowly leaned in and kissed the top of my big toe without breaking eye contact.

I made a face. "Would you please stop putting your mouth on my feet? This is so disgusting!" I tried to yank my foot out of his reach one more time. He just tightened his grip.

At my request, he chuckled and moved his lips further up, grabbing my ankle and kissing the small knob of bone on the side.

"Okay, really," I said, squirming at the glistening sensation his lips left on my skin. "What are you doing? You are acting very strange. This is very strange."

He kissed the side of my calf, rubbing his nose over my skin and inhaling deeply. "I want to memorize every inch of you. I want a script of your body in my head."

His hands gripped my leg tighter. "I want to know where every mole and freckle and scar is. I want to know your body and its reactions better than I know mine."

His tongue slipped out and ran down the side of my leg, making me extremely grateful I'd showered last night.

Grayson growled once more, the sound instantly it made my entire body heat with need.

He inhaled deeply, his nostrils flaring, and his dark red eyes darted to meet mine, telling me he could smell my arousal, his whole body going stiff.

He grinned in victory but thankfully didn't say anything about it and moved on to my other leg, running his hands up and down my calf before placing his lips on it and kissing down to my knee.

I continued to squirm. "That might be a little too weird for me." I murmured, although I secretly didn't want him to stop.

"I spent months not knowing where you were or if you were safe." He continued to leave kisses between his words.

"I went crazy trying to remember you and imagine every part of your perfect body – your smile, your hair, the shape of your hands... And when I couldn't, I went crazy. I will never forgive myself for not having studied you before, known you to imagine you more clearly after you ran away, and all I had left of you were the memories. I will never again be without knowing every little piece of you. Now, lie back and let me memorize you."

Her purring increased and my body relaxed. immediately, melting deep into the bed.

Grayson growled his approval and then continued to lick, pinch, kiss and touch every inch of my body like he said he would.

After a while, my embarrassment at my nakedness faded and was replaced by warmth and relaxation. Everything about Grayson's touch felt right, natural.

When he officially seemed to be done with my legs and was getting to the part of me where I needed him the most, it was fair to say I was totally and completely on fire.

"Grayson," I begged. "Please."

He continued to linger, acting like I hadn't said anything. He licked my hip bones, his hands huge

holding my legs tightly as he maneuvered his body between them.

And then his mouth was finally on mine. he licked my slit first, soaking up the evidence of my arousal that I'd learned he liked the taste of so much last night.

I whimpered and grabbed her hair. when my hips fired, he calmly pressed them back down.

My orgasm came fast and hard the moment he sucked my clit into his mouth. I practically jumped out of bed, and the stars filled my vision.

Grayson pressed a finger inside of me, feeling my pulse around him as he sucked all my wetness.

Again, I was shocked when he didn't stop, continuing his cares as if he couldn't get enough, even as I writhed against him, extremely sensitive.

By the time he was finished, he had added two more fingers and made me come a total of three times, leaving me breathless and languid on the bed.

Only then did he casually move on, as if thinking, um, I'll stop here for a few minutes, give her a few orgasms, and then continue on my way.

"Oh my God." I whispered as he finished running his hands and lips around my stomach and ribs and up to my breasts.

His fingers skated under them first, then moved up, kneading them gently in his hands, pinching the nipples. "Grayson..."

He leaned down and ran his tongue over one of the pointed tips, swirling his tongue around it the same way he had my clit moments before, taking his sweet time, then moving on to the other.

I arched my back into him, pressing my breasts even deeper into his mouth. He encouraged action by wrapping an arm under the curve of my back, bringing me even closer to him.

He continued like this for a while, spending almost as much time on my breasts as he did on the spot between my legs, where an empty feeling was quickly becoming very prominent.

It shocked me with its intensity, and I suddenly ground my hips against Grayson without thinking, gasping when I felt his hard length pressing against me in exactly the right place.

I wasn't sure where that fierce need had come from. coming – especially as I had just come three times.

But something about the way he was sucking and massaging my breasts, the air in the room, hot and humid with our labored breathing, and the smell of his hair and general perfume so close to my nose was making me desperate.

"Grayson," I whimpered, sounding more than a little breathless. I needed him inside me. Now.

When he didn't even acknowledge my pleas, still completely captivated by my breasts, I grabbed his head with both hands and tilted it forcefully so he could look at me.

And then I completely forgot what I was going to say when he flattened his tongue and ran it across my breast and over my nipple without breaking eye contact for a single second.

He was putting on the most intimate and erotic show I had ever witnessed.

I continued to grind against him, chasing that desperate need to be filled by his cock.

I hoped he understood what I wanted from him without having to say it, because somehow I had lost all ability to form real thoughts.

He groaned when I gave a particularly hard push against his hips. "Shh, girl," he murmured, grabbing my hips and stilling them. "You are distracting me from sucking my breasts."

I sighed. "My boobs?!" I screamed in disbelief, trying to sit.

He pushed me back down. "Yes, my boobs." He pinched my nipple between his index finger and thumb, eliciting a moan from my mouth. "These breasts are mine."

Then his hand traveled up and ran over my lips before placing his lips against mine, kissing me hard. "These lips are mine," he murmured against my mouth.

Then his other hand was abruptly covering my pussy, jabbing his middle finger into me. "And that tight virgin cunt is definitely mine. All of you are mine."

I bit my lip as his finger started to slide in and out of me. I didn't have the heart to argue with him. Not at this moment, at least.

"Who do you belong to?" he asked.

I couldn't answer. My brain was very confused.

Grayson's movements stopped. "Answer me, Belle. Who do you belong to?"

"You!" I swallowed hard, willing to say anything as long as he continued with what he was doing before. "I belong to you. I'm yours."

Once he was done with the front of me, he turned me over and did the same on the other side, only this time, the touch became less passionate and more like a massage, lulling me almost back to sleep.

Her glowing hands looked amazing against my skin.

When he finally seemed to finish his scrutiny, he placed one more kiss on the center of my back and dropped down next to me on the bed. I smile at him. He looked calm.

Happy.

"Do you realize how obsessed I am with you?" he murmured.

My lips curved. "I think I'm starting to understand."

His hand ran to the side of my hair. "You can never leave me again." His face turned serious. "I almost went crazy without you. I wasn't even functioning right."

"I wasn't working either. I am sure that you can tell by the state you found me in."

His frown deepened.

"Cold?" he asked. He must have noticed the shivers he was causing with his hand running up and down my back.

I hummed in response.

He pulled me to him. "I will warm you up."

I laughed. "Haven't you already done this? I think I'm pretty hot."

"I am not convinced."

His lips landed on mine.

My entire body hummed as I kissed him, so completely content and relieved to have my mate's full attention.

A few seconds later, I pulled away a little. "My turn?" I whispered against his lips.

His eyebrows rose and my heart raced in my chest as I waited for his answer.

To my relief, his lips curved into a smile, and he leaned back against the headboard, crossing his arms behind his head.

"Be my guest."

I bit my bottom lip and looked down at his bare chest and arms. He was huge and hard as a rock. Even his muscles had muscles.

I dragged myself to kneel at his feet, in the same place where he had started. I looked up at him, wetting my suddenly dry lips. He was watching me

attentively with that stupid, sexy smile plastered on his face.

"I don't really have to kiss your feet, do I?" I finally asked.

His head tipped back and a deep chuckle came out from your throat.

"Do not laugh!" I grumbled, smacking his chest.

He looked at me, showing his white teeth with his wide smile. "No, Belle, you don't have to put those pretty lips on my feet if you don't want to."

Without saying anything else, I leaned back, leaving a gentle kiss. As much as I didn't like the idea of putting my mouth on her feet, I was more than fine with putting them...else places.

I kissed one of her legs before moving to the other and doing the same, my hands close behind. Grayson's muscles tensed and relaxed under my touch, giving me an odd sense of power.

I loved that I affected him. There was something so intimate and special about studying my partner's body, exploring it the way he explored me.

When I got to the edge of his boxers, I looked up at him. His chest rose and fell rapidly with ragged breaths, his eyes dark red once more. your jaw square was closed.

"You should be enjoying this," I said. "This is supposed to be relaxing. Why do you look so tense?"

“My naked mate's mouth is inches from my hard cock, and you're wondering if I like it?”

His voice was like gravel.

He swallowed hard, his Adam's apple moving slowly in his throat. "I'm really enjoying it. I'm doing my best to hold on, but you're making it extremely difficult.”

“*Oh.*”

I suddenly felt a strange sense of power to take over. For the first time, I was the one driving him crazy. I looked back down at his underwear, running my hands down his legs.

So I straightened my shoulders and leaned back.

Chapter 31

GRAYSON

Belle's cheeks were a sweet shade of pink. as she looked down at my hard cock encased in my boxers. God, she was adorable and too innocent for her own good.

She was lucky I hadn't shot her yet, especially with the way she kept looking at me with those big, anxious blue eyes.

The only reason I wasn't still deep between her legs, simultaneously taking her to new heights and tying me down forever, was because I didn't know what mating would mean to her.

I couldn't stop imagining her going through the intense pain of her first shift. Changing for the first time to werewolves is terrifying and intense and incredibly painful.

And yet, this would be so much easier if she changed into a wolf, because I would know what to expect. I could help her get through this.

But she wasn't turning into a wolf; she was turning into a fairy. I had no idea what that entailed.

And it terrified me.

Mating Belle meant unintentionally putting her in danger. And I would do anything possible to avoid that. For as long as possible, at least.

But that didn't mean she couldn't go on.
doing what he was doing now.

I knew she had never done anything like this before.

If the scent of her sweet virginity – something only a male werewolf could smell on his female – wasn't evidence enough, then it would be blatantly obvious by her clumsy, trembling hands.

When I touched and kissed and pinched her beautiful body, I expected nothing in return.

Even when I'd licked her pussy until she'd given me the most delicious orgasm ever, I'd only done it with her in mind – not that I hadn't enjoyed myself immensely.

So god help me even though my dick was hard like stone and the beast inside me was gnashing its teeth, demanding that I throw her on the bed and make her mine, I was somehow able to contain myself.

She was still weak, still nervous about being around me after everything that had happened. The hard fuck I wanted to give her had to come later, after she trusted me.
again.

I knew she craved my control and dominance. I hadn't missed the way her thighs tightened each time.

Belle's fingers began to poke at the waistband of my underwear, clearly nervous.

“Can I... can I, um... take this off?” she screamed.

I smiled at her, barely able to handle how adorable she was.

Trying to make things a little easier for her, I lifted my hips off the bed and slipped out of my underwear, never taking my eyes off her.

I wanted to make sure she didn't run for the hills when she saw how especially...well endowed her mate was. She had absolutely no reason to be scared of me, but I'd be surprised if she didn't freak out.
a little.

"Why do you look so nervous, Belle? You have absolutely nothing to be afraid of. I promise you."

"Um, I, uh... I just—" She swallowed hard. "I hope you don't expect this thing to, um, you know, fit inside me. Because I really don't think it will. I am not—"

"Belle, baby, breathe. Nothing will happen now."

That seemed to make her relax a little. "Anything?" His hands ran up and down my legs in a way that made a low growl escape my lips. "I hadn't finished my inspection."

Fuck, if my cock got any harder, I would come like a preteen boy on his first date before she even started.

"Well, don't let me stop you."

I wanted to point to where she'd been earlier, but I couldn't help but cup her face and run my thumb over her cheekbone.

I was momentarily transfixed by the absolute beauty that was my Belle. His bright blue eyes threatened to rip my heart out. Christ, I had missed her so much.

Belle snuggled into my touch, and my heart did a somersault in my chest. Then she looked back at my hard cock. He jumped under her gaze

“Are you sure you want to do this, baby? You don't have to if you don't want to.”

“I want to,” she wailed. “I really want. I want to make you feel as good as you made me feel.” With that, she grabbed my hard cock in her small hand, gripping it tightly right off the bat.

“Oh fuck,” I groaned. Pleasure shot through me at his simple, tentative touch, my hips thrusting up on their own.

Belle gasped. “Sorry!” She released me and backed away.

“No. You do not do anything wrong.” I said with my teeth clenched, barely able to speak through my desire. I swore softly. “You did the opposite, sweet girl.”

“Oh,” she replied. His eyes searched my expression and then widened. “Oh. So I can...?” She wrapped her little fingers back around me, trying to pump me once.

My head fell back onto the headboard, a deep moan escaping my lips. If your hand was that good, I couldn't imagine what your virgin mouth and pussy would feel like. “Just like that, baby. And that.”

After two more hard jabs that sent my mind spinning, his hand slowed to a stop. “I don't...I don't know what I'm doing.”

His innocent confession almost had me gasping. My poor companion was nervous.

I pulled her to me. "Give me those lips," I coaxed.
Before she could argue, her mouth landed on mine.

I guided her through the kiss, running my tongue along
from the seam of her lips, encouraging her to open up to me.

I massaged his tongue with mine, making love to his mouth. Her gentle
breaths finally began to calm, and she melted into the kiss.

I pulled away a few seconds later, molding my forehead to hers. "Here
we go. That's better." I kissed her more
once.

"What you were doing now is really good." I tried to give her a reassuring
smile. "What exactly do you want to do?"

"H..." She swallowed hard, her cheeks turning even darker if that was
possible. I followed the color down her neck and chest until it settled on top of
her luscious breasts.
I licked my lips.

"I want to do what you did to me. With- With my mouth."

My cock jerked hard in her hands, causing her to gasp and stare at him
with wide eyes. Jesus fucking Christ, she was going to kill me.

"Do you want to suck me, beautiful?"

She nodded, licking her lips. "Y-Yes. That. But I..."

"You've never done anything like this before, and you're scared," I
provided. My jaw clenched as his grip on my cock tightened slightly, pre-cum
leaking from the tip.

Another nod.

"You want help? I can guide you, but I need to make sure you're right about this."

"This is what I want," she confessed. His eagerness was a great arousal.

My wolf howled at my conscience, demanding that I take advantage of Belle's innocent eagerness and the scent of her sweet arousal swirling in the air around us.

He wanted me to take control of the situation and stop playing around – to hell with worrying about her turning into a faerie. He wanted her, and he wanted her now.

He kept producing images of me thrusting deep into his pussy in different positions and locations throughout the hotel, images of his perfect pussy dripping with my seed, reared and pregnant with my child.

And, fuck, I was about to do what he said.

"Are you well?" Belle's low, unsure voice pulled me back from my thoughts, watching me with wide, hesitant eyes.

My chest tightened as I realized I was scaring her. This was already such a scary moment for her.

She thought she was doing something wrong when that was the furthest thing from the truth. Suddenly my only goal was to soothe and comfort her.

I shook my head, trying my best to control myself before I did something I regretted. The last thing Belle needed right now was for me to lose control. "My wolf is having fun, that's all."

My wolf walked around unhappy in my head.

Belle seemed to recognize my lie right away.
“Looks like you are about to change.”

I laughed. “That's the last thing you need to worry about right now, trust me. My wolf would never intervene during a time like this. Especially when you just agreed to wrap those pretty lips around my cock.”

When she didn't respond, but just continued fidgeting nervously, I continued, “Cuddle me. Caress me with your hand, up and down. Just like you used to. That will be a good start.”

His hand began to move up and down, watching in ecstasy as my head fell back again and a deep moan escaped my mouth. My hands balled into fists at my sides, suppressing my need to grab her.

“Excellent. Good girl,” I said, my voice tight and low.
“Now you're going to want to wrap those pretty lips around the top. When you're ready.”

Her eagerness surprised me when she did as I said, immediately leaning in until the tip of my cock was in her mouth, showing me how excited she was to take me in her mouth.

“Oh, fuck,” I growled, almost coming right then and there.
“You're doing so well, baby. So good. Now you are going to swirl your tongue around it. Lick it real good.”

My mind went completely numb as she followed my instructions.

She didn't even need to be told to start using her hands again on the parts her mouth wouldn't fit, caressing me

up and down as his tongue and mouth sucked and licked me like his personal lollipop.

I ran my hand through her hair, scratching her scalp in a way that seemed to visibly relax her. Good. I didn't want her to tense up. Ever. And especially not now.

"I didn't think you could get any sexier, but damn, you look great with my dick in your mouth." I groaned, pressing the back of my head into the bed.

I couldn't take my eyes off her. I was in heaven. My heart pounded in my chest, waves of pleasure coursing through my body, making my jaw clench until it hurt.

I moaned when his eyes closed, moans and noises escaping her.

Her beautiful breasts swayed and her hard nipples grazed my thighs with every movement, mesmerizing and teasing me at the same time.

I wouldn't last much longer. She was very sweet. Too perfect. I was just holding back from grabbing her head and fucking her sinful mouth.

My grip on her hair quickly turned into a fist as she started bobbing her head up and down in time with her hand.

She wasn't even close to fitting the whole thing into her mouth, but dammit, she was doing fine with what little she could.

She looked at me with narrowed eyes, searching my approval as the perfect companion she was.

My expression must have conveyed how close I was because, the next thing I knew, one of his

Little hands came up and cupped my balls, rolling them gently in my palm.

"Oh, fuck!" I screamed, my hips shooting up before I could stop them, sparks shooting down my legs and making my toes curl.

With my hand still gripping her hair, I began to guide her head up and down. "That's it, Belle. And that. Screw this!"

My seed shot into her mouth, filling her and running down her chin and neck.

She choked a little, her throat constricting as she tried to swallow it all down, but she never pulled away or stopped working her hand up and down my convulsive length.

"Holy shit," I groaned, my eyes closing as my orgasm started to come to an end.

Belle wouldn't stop sucking, moaning into my cock still semi-hard like it's the best thing she's ever tasted.

My semen spilled out of the corners of her mouth, but she continued, so content with what she was doing. I had never seen anything so sexy in my entire life.

My hand let go of his hair tightly and ran through it gently. Shit shit, if she continued the way she was, she was going to make me come again.

I was already starting to stiffen again in her hand. She needed to stop before I did something stupid like fuck her sweet little mouth.

"That's good, Belle." I gently tugged on her hair, coaxing her to get up.

Her twin blue eyes watched me with such innocence as she pulled away from me, finally releasing her grip on my cock.

Never breaking eye contact, she trailed a finger over my lower lip, catching my excess cum and then placing her finger in her mouth, licking it clean.

She smiled. "You taste a lot better than I thought you would."

I groaned as my cock immediately hardened fully once more, slamming against my abdomen, more than ready for round two.

It was made worse by Belle's sweet giggle and mischievous expression when she realized my predicament.

I narrowed my eyes and grabbed her by the waist, pulling her towards me. close to me.

She squealed and continued laughing, rolling into my embrace before nestling her face into my chest like the snuggly kitten she was. An affection like I had never felt filled my body.

With two fingers under her chin, I tilted her head up so I could look at her. Her lips curved into a smile as she met my gaze.

"You're too good at this. It better be one gift given by God. Or we will be in trouble." I said.

His eyes sparkled. "I just had a really good teacher."

Chapter 32

BELLE

After spending a very hot rest of the morning in bed, Grayson insisted we get something to eat, though all I wanted to do was rest.

I was finally starting to feel like I had some of my energy back after being with Grayson for so long, but I was still extremely exhausted.

I think being away from your other half for three months really can take that out on a person.

We were in front of the bathroom mirror, brushing our teeth, Grayson behind me with an arm around my waist.

He was completely out of his mind with his constant need to be touching me or going crazy licking yes, licking my mark. And as much as I never admitted it to him, I kind of loved it.

I needed his touch as much as he needed me.
tap.

Once we were done with our teeth, I grabbed the Grayson's wrist and glanced at the watch on his wrist.

"I have two hours before my shift starts at restaurant", I told him. "I have to go back to my apartment and get a new uniform before I leave."

Just as expected, his entire body tensed behind me, his grip on my waist tightening. "No," he growled. "Absolutely not."

I rolled my eyes. "I'm not leaving my job, Grayson. I know you want me to do this, but it's not going to happen."

"Actually, it's happening. Today. You will never go back there again."

"Yes, we will see that."

I tried to slide out of his grip, but he turned me around so that my lower back was on the counter behind me, and my front was pressed against his chest.

"They treat you like shit there, and I'll be damned if I let my mate leave my arms for a single second today to work a job where they couldn't care less about her health or well-being.

"They've worked you to the bone, baby. Your boss is an idiot and a drug dealer, and I won't let you near him again."

"What are you talking about? A drug dealer?"

"He's using his diner to launder drug money. He is not a good person. And he takes advantage of you. I will not tolerate this, understand? No more."

"Not now that you know the truth, and I just brought you back."

The news about Jerry didn't surprise me. He was always acting superficial in the restaurant and was extremely awkward with money.

I opened my mouth to continue arguing, but Grayson kissed my lips before I could. I sank into him as he happily took my weight.

"Just give it to me today, baby." He whispered against my lips. "Please. We'll address that another time, but I think

that I am physically unable to sit and watch you work again today. I need you here where I can keep you safe and help you heal. Please Belle."

There was something about her pleading tone that made it impossible to say no to him. "Okay," I finally said, giving her a quick peck on the lips. "Just for today, though."

"Okay," Grayson agreed, though he didn't seem like it. happy with it. "We'll talk about that later."

Without warning, his hands went down to my ass and he quickly lifted me over the counter.

I sighed. "What are you doing?"

His eyes fixed on my lips. "I need to kiss you."

Before I could respond, his lips were on mine, inducing me to a deep and passionate kiss.

I walked away.

Grayson growled. "I'm not done," he said, trying to pull me back to him.

I laughed. "Don't we have things to do – today? We pass to all morning in bed basically doing this."

"Nothing more important than that. I'm recovering the lost time."

Someone started knocking violently on the door, pulling us both out of our intimate moment.

"Belle!" a voice called from the other side of the door. "Belle!"

Grayson growled softly, pulling me to him by my hips so I was leaning against him. His eyes turned black and then dark red as both creatures inside him broke the surface.

"It's Liam!" I said, recognizing his voice. I tried to jump off the counter I was sitting on, but Grayson's massive body blocked me. "Grayson, what are you doing? Let me go! I have to go talk to him."

"No," Grayson growled in response.

"No?" I repeated, shocked.

"No."

I scoffed, pushing at his chest again. He didn't move. "You have no right to tell me what to do." I pushed at his shoulders, trying to get him to move, but to no avail.
success.

I was even more enraged when Grayson grabbed both of my wrists with a single hand, completely impeding my movements and ignoring my screams of protest.

Then he leaned over and gently pinched my mark. I couldn't help my body's reaction as I melted against him, letting him take the weight of my upper half in his arms.

"Belle!" Liam continued to scream. The doorknob began to shake violently. "I know you are there! My dad owns the hotel, so I can get a key card pretty easy!"

Without a word, Grayson lifted me into his arms, wrapping my legs around his waist as if I were a child, and carried me into the bedroom, where he threw me unceremoniously onto the bed.

I could feel Grayson's muscles as he pulled away from me. "Stay here," he said, placing a lingering kiss on my forehead.

He took a step back, obviously planning to leave there alone. I immediately jumped to my feet.

Grayson's eyes snapped to me as I followed. "What did I just say?" he asked, his voice sounding like gravel.

I crossed my arms over my chest. "What did I just say? Stop telling me what to do."

His nostrils flared. "I'm not going to have you anywhere near that vampire until I know what he wants. Don't test my wolf now because it won't be you who will have to bear the consequences. It will be him. So stay. Here."

I knew I had no option but to do as he told me. I watched him march away from me, noting that the width of his chest was a little wider than normal, his wolf trying to take over.

The knocking on the door increased. Liam was getting impatient. I had no doubt the door would fall down at any moment. time.

"Grayson!" I called for him. He looked at me, taking a deep breath. "Don't hurt him."

Her fingers curled into her palms, her dark brows drawing together. He studied me for several seconds, obviously struggling with my request.

"I won't hurt unless he gives me a reason to. Be quiet, and everything will be fine," he finally replied, his voice ragged and deep. He turned around, and in the blink of an eye, I was alone in the room.

I heard Grayson open the door outside the room.

"Where the hell is she?" Liam demanded, his steps angrily entering the hotel suite. "What did you do with her? I can smell her, so I know she's here. Belle! Belle, where are you?"

"You will not refer to my mate by her first name, vampire." Grayson growled.

My fingernails dug into the marble countertops as I listened, forcing myself to stay where I was so as not to endanger Liam. Why did Grayson have to be so abrupt and rude to him?

There was no way Liam would respond well to that.

"I'll call her what I want because she's my friend and I'm the one taking care of her. Where the hell have you been the last few months when she wasn't eating or sleeping or barely functioning, huh? What about when she was homeless or when I found her crying in pain in the rain because of what you did to her? You call yourself her mate, but then go ahead and let her suffer, you fucking idiot."

Uh. Oh!

I didn't even need to be in the room to know that a fight was going on. had started. I could hear it.

Excellent. Simply great.

Chapter 33

BELLE

A loud crash sounded and then the sound of wood splintering. Grayson was growling, followed by Liam's growls.

I jumped off the counter and ran across the room, throwing open the door in a panic. It had only been thirty seconds since I'd heard the fight start, and the room was in shambles.

The dining table was completely broken, split in half.

There were claw marks along the sofa cushions, artwork torn from the walls, and shards of glass all over the floor from one of the balcony doors breaking.

The two of them were moving in a blur across the room, so fast I could barely keep up with their movements. They snarled and hissed as they crashed into the suite's living room walls.

"For!" I screamed in panic. "Grayson! Liam! Stop! Please!"

They completely ignored me, hitting the big wooden table and demolishing it. They were doing so much noise I was surprised hotel staff were not alerted.

I did the only thing I could think of. I ran through the broken doors onto the porch. My legs were shaking as I climbed onto the railing overlooking Evergreen, nearly twenty stories in the air.

I slowly got to my feet and turned around, balancing on the thick but terribly high railing. I was never really afraid of heights, thank goodness, but even that made me falter.

"Stop!" I screamed at the top of my lungs. I was sure that even the people below me on the road could hear my plea.

Both men finally stopped in the middle of the room, panting, their gazes swinging to land on me. It was then that I noticed that Grayson had changed into his wolf.

My entire body filled with emotion and desire as I stared at him. I hadn't seen Grayson's wolf since Paris. It made me realize how much I missed him.

Like the human side of Grayson, he's grown a lot since I last saw him, but somehow he still manages to make me feel safe and comforted just by being in the same room.

"Belle, thank God. You're fine," Liam said. He looked over where I was. "What the fuck are you doing? Get down from there! You will kill yourself!"

"It's the only way to get their attention. None of you were listening to me."

Grayson's wolf crouched down as he approached me, almost making me think he was hunting me until I noticed the way his ears were tucked in a non-threatening way.

His eyes were wide and worried. I perceived with a start he was coming to knock me down.

"Wait," I said, holding out my hands and looking down behind me to make sure I didn't fall.

accidentally to my death. "Don't come near me, Grayson. I mean it. I need you to listen to me."

Grayson ignored me, continuing to move towards me slowly, trying not to startle me. He was now only five feet away from me.

"Grayson, seriously-"

I screamed as he suddenly attacked, jumping up and biting the front of my shirt and forcing me to the ground.

Liam called my name simultaneously, as shocked by Grayson's actions as I was.

I thought my face was going to hit the concrete below me, but Grayson quickly turned away, so instead I flew backwards, enveloped in his vagueness, totally unscathed.

That didn't mean I wasn't still pissed off.

"What the hell, Grayson?" I demanded, hitting his side as I pushed. "Didn't you hear me when I told you not to come near me, you big idiot? You could have killed me!"

Grayson fired several quick grunts back, as if say, "Did I almost kill you?"

"Belle, are you okay?" Liam asked, now standing in the door with a worried expression.

It was the first time I noticed that his eyes were glowing red and his fangs and claws were out, his vampire side in control.

I couldn't help but freeze as I watched him, still not used to seeing red eyes anywhere but in my nightmares.

Grayson turned and snarled at him, crouching in a real hunting pose this time, probably mad at him for scaring me.

To his credit, Liam stood his ground even when Grayson's wolf, which was an admittedly terrifying creature and larger than a horse, bared and bit its teeth at him.

I tapped Grayson's side again. "Stop it," I scolded him. Grayson backed away a little. I turned my gaze to Liam. "I am fine. Angry, but fine."

Before I could stop him, Grayson turned to me and started licking my face incessantly, making me laugh and push him away from me.

"Yes, yes, I missed you too, big boy."

Grayson gave his mark on my neck one last lick, sending a shiver down my spine, before laying his massive head and paws in my lap, nestling his head against the side of my knee like a sweet puppy.

It was almost comical, and I couldn't help but laugh and wave my hand on the soft fur of your head.

When I looked back at Liam, he was watching us with confusion and shock written all over his face.

It occurred to me that he had never witnessed companions interacting before, so it must have seemed strange to him. My face brightened a little.

"What are you doing here, Liam?" I asked him, clearing my throat. I tried to get up, but Grayson shoved me back down with his huge jaw. I snorted.

"I came here looking for you, obviously," Liam said, keeping an eye on Grayson at all times. "I came back yesterday. Where have you been?"

"Where have I been? Where the hell have you been?"

"Canada," he replied, looking at the wolf in my lap who wasn't paying attention to him.

"Canada? Why were you in Canada?"

"Your companion told me to go there."

"What? Grayson told you to go to Canada?" I glared at my mate, but he ignored me and licked his paws, acting so innocently. Oh, he was so lucky to be a wolf now.

I tried one more time to get Grayson off my lap. He whimpered but let me roll away. "Go change," I told him. "You have some explaining to do."

He looked at me and snorted unhappily. When he tried to put his head in my lap, I quickly moved my legs so he landed with a thud on the hard floor.

"I am not kidding. I need to talk to you. Go change." I repeat.

Grayson shot Liam an angry look and then looked at me as if to say, "You think I'm going to leave you alone with that asshole?"

"Liam won't hurt me. He tried to protect me from you, remember?"

Grayson didn't look convinced.

"Look, the sooner you get back, the less time I'm going to spend it alone," I tried again.

If wolves had facial expressions then I swear Grayson would look bored. He threw his head back on his paws.

My jaw tightened. "All good. How about I promise not to fight you to go to work tomorrow if you change now? We can do whatever you want all day."

That got his attention. His black wolf eyes opened and then narrowed on me for a few seconds before he finally got up off the ground.

He slowly licked me once on the cheek – completely disgusting me," he snarled loudly once at Liam, then skipped off into the bedroom.

I sighed as I stood up, facing Liam. Now that Grayson wasn't in the room, I didn't hesitate to hug him tightly, hugging my friend, who I hadn't seen in several days.

He hugged me back with a sigh of relief.

"I missed you," I told him, releasing my grip and pulling away from him before Grayson came back and started to growl.

"You have no idea how worried I was when I couldn't find you the day Grayson found me.

"I know. I saw all your messages and missed calls. Are you well? Did he hurt you?"

I shook my head. "No. No, he would never hurt me. Everything that happened between us was just a big misunderstanding. Everything is fine now."

Liam narrowed his eyes. "Why do I find that hard to believe? Am I the only one who remembers how you've been

upset and broken over the last few months? This doesn't sound like a misunderstanding to me. He hurt you, Belle. And I need to make sure you remember that and don't just give in to the mate bond after everything he's done to you."

I licked my lips. "I know. I know how it must look. But I promise you I'm fine. And I will explain everything to you later."

Liam's frown grew. "Belle..."

"How are you doing?" I asked quickly, trying to change the subject.

I didn't want to have to explain myself to him at that time. time.

Especially when my mate would be back any second and would definitely not be happy to hear me talking about our relationship with the man he was fighting.

"Want to explain to me why you just went to the Canada?"

He crossed his arms over his chest, annoyance quickly taking over his expression. "Your stupid werewolf mate told me to go over there after I tried to protect you in the diner."

Frustration welled up inside me. I knew Grayson had done something to Liam. Oh, he was getting an earful later.

"Did he tell you to walk to Canada?" I asked. "AND did you hear him?"

"Well, I didn't exactly have a choice, did I? I know you said your mate was powerful or something, but

you didn't think it was worth mentioning that he was the bloody King Grayson Stoll?"

I almost laughed, put off by that statement. "Grayson is not a king. He's an alpha. There is a big difference."

"Uh, no," Liam continued, a furrow in his forehead showing. "That is not-"

"If you want to keep your fucking head on your shoulders, you'll shut up now, vampire," Grayson said, interrupting him.

He joined us on the porch once more, wearing only a pair of jeans, leaving his top half completely bare. Of course, he made a beeline for me, grabbing me around the waist and pulling me away from Liam.

Liam's brows furrowed at the threat. Her eyes widened. "Hang on. She does not know? That's a big secret to hide."

Grayson was suddenly in front of Liam and had a tight grip on his throat, slamming his back into the wall behind him. "Say another word, and I will pluck your red eyes out of your head and feed them to you."

I ran to them, ducking quickly under Grayson's arm so I was between the two men. I placed my hands on Grayson's chest.

"Stop", I begged. He glared at me, but only seemed to tighten his grip. Liam stuttered behind me. "Please."

Having flashbacks to the flight to Paris when I first met him, I rose on tiptoe and pressed my lips to his.

Grayson immediately started purring, and I heard Liam gasp behind me as Grayson released him. Relief surged through me.

Grayson pulled away seconds later, breathing heavily. He looked at me, gripping my waist tightly. "You are the only person I will risk appearing weak for."

I swallowed hard, trying to control my emotions. "Will you stop trying to kill my friend?"

"Probably not," he replied softly, scowling at Liam, who was still a mess on the floor behind me.

Frustration consumed me even as I turned from Grayson and crouched down in front of Liam to make sure he was okay. He couldn't stop coughing. Her throat was bright red.

"Are you well?" I asked.

He nodded, looking at Grayson as he continued to cough.

"What was he talking about?" I looked at Grayson. "Why did he call you king?"

His square jaw made a grinding noise. He hesitated for a moment before answering. "He called me king because I am one."

My eyebrows drew together. Well, that was news. "A king of what, exactly?"

"King of the supernatural. And soon you will be queen."

I blinked. "I am really sorry." I shook my head to clear my thoughts. "I think I must have misheard. Did you just say you're the king of the supernatural?"

Grayson nodded, taking a tentative step toward me like he was afraid I was going to run at any moment.

"Yes. It's a very long story that I planned to tell you when I thought you were ready" – he looked at Liam – "but, yes, it's true."

Feeling a little betrayed, I asked, "Is this... new or has it always been like this and I just didn't know?"

"No," Grayson said immediately. "It is a new development. Of course it is a new development." He reached for me, his chest already vibrating with low purrs as he pulled me to him.

"I would never hide something like that from you. I was just an alpha before all this happened, I promise. It's a long story, but I swear I plan to tell you everything."

I nodded, leaning into him a little, despite the fact that I knew Liam was watching us. I needed the comfort Grayson offered and I didn't care what Liam thought of me.

"Bullshit," Liam snapped. "Are you going to believe a single thing he says to you, Belle? He's in the middle of a war with a Mortar. He used you for the power you once gave him. "What's to say he wouldn't do it again?"

"You're on very thin ice, vampire," Grayson spat. "If I were you, I would swallow my tongue before I lose it. You have no idea what happened between Belle and me."

The two were facing each other, Grayson moving in in front of me like Liam would consider hurting me.

It was almost comical how much bigger Grayson was compared to Liam, and it almost made me unsure of how I should look next to my huge mate.

"I am not afraid of your threats. You are not my king," Liam spat back.

"Do you want to test this theory? Want another walk to the Canada?"

I rolled my eyes. Men. "OK!" I squeezed between two, placing a hand on each of their breasts.

"When the two of you are done comparing sizes of penis, would anyone like to hear what I have to say?"

"Stop touching him," Grayson demanded, pulling me to him so hard my head slammed against his bare chest. I gave him a dirty look, but he was too busy looking at me.
Liam.

"You're lucky I didn't break your arms in half for hugging you earlier."

"You two are being ridiculous!" I screamed. I looked at Grayson. "Specially you. He's just trying to help. He's the only reason I haven't been homeless these last few months. He and his sister were there for me when I was at my lowest and thought I had no one. I don't know where I would be if it weren't for him."

I turned to Liam. "And you. This is my mate. I know I told you he treated me terribly and I never wanted to see him again, but I was wrong. There were things I didn't understand. And I...I really think Grayson loves me."

Grayson pulled me closer with those words, one slight vibration coming from your chest.

I could feel their intense happiness surging through the bond. "So, I know you're overprotective of me or whatever, but I'm fine. I promise you I'm fine. I'm safe with Grayson."

"And you're sure he didn't just use the power of the Mortars on you?" Liam asked.

"What is that? It's the third time you've mentioned it," I observed.

"The power of the Mortars is the ability to persuade anyone to do what I say," Grayson explained smoothly. "I developed the gift after Azazel left my body and became king."

"Oh. Oh, that's..." I let out a humorless laugh. "That is great. Because it's not like you don't already have enough power. Now you can control all living creatures. This is really perfect."

Grayson turned me so that I was looking at him. "I would never use it unless absolutely necessary. And I would never consider using it on you unless it was a safety or health issue. You know that, right?"

"You better not use that on me. And you better not use it on my friends either. Was sending Liam to Canada really 'necessary' as you said?"

"Yes," he snarled back, glaring at Liam.

"Because?"

"Because I don't like him."

I elbowed him in the stomach, but immediately regretted it when it ended up hurting me more than him. He didn't even move. Jeez, this guy made of stone or something?

"Stop hurting yourself," Grayson chided, already rubbing my definitely bruised elbow. I snorted, pulling my arm out of his grip out of spite.

Then something occurred to me. "Wait a second. You're not expecting me to become some kind of werewolf queen or anything, right? Because you are a king?"

Obviously taken aback by the question, Grayson hesitated for a moment, his mouth opening and closing like a fish out of water, then he looked back at Liam as if he blamed him for having to have this conversation now.

"Good?" I asked. My breath was racing and my mind was racing. I couldn't even be the luna of a simple pack.

I wasn't even sure I wanted to go back to Grayson's pack in Minnesota, even after finding out that his pack didn't actually hate me.

They were just under the influence of some stupid vampire telling them not to talk to me. And now he wanted me to rule an entire kingdom with him? There was no way.

No one would take me seriously.

"Belle, I can sense you're thinking too much," Grayson spoke, pulling me from my thoughts. "You're freaking yourself out, and there's no reason for it. You know I would never give you more than you could handle. and I would never forcing you into something you didn't want to do. All I need from you is to be by my side."

Though her words did help calm my racing thoughts a bit, I still couldn't help but imagine all the dire scenarios and ways I could mess around as the queen of the supernatural.

The human queen of the supernatural. Oh God.

Without any warning, I was scooped up in Grayson's arms and placed back in his lap on the ripped couch. I leaned into his purring chest, sighing at the good feeling of the vibrations running through my body.

"I hate to keep putting you through so much stress. That its killing me. Please calm down," Grayson said.

His words were a bit taken by his purrs, making her voice sound husky, deep and sexy.

"I'm fine", I tried to reassure him. "This is all a bit overwhelming, you know?"

Grayson growled at that.

Liam watched us with his arms crossed over his chest and his eyes narrowed, still skeptical of Grayson and his intentions.

He seemed to have calmed down a bit, however, when he saw that I was in no real danger.

"I've heard of King Elijah Viotto being able to purr for his mate," Liam said, "but it's strange to hear it done in person."

"Can all vampires purr?" I asked.

"We can whistle," Liam explained. "But only when we feel threatened or upset. Just like wolves with growls."

"You need to rest," Grayson interrupted, driving if to me. "You've been through a lot these last few days."

"The last few months," I corrected without thinking. The comment only seemed to sour Grayson's mood further. "I'm fine actually," I quickly corrected.

Grayson hugged me tighter against him. He looked for Liam. "Go away," he snapped.

My irritation increased. "Don't tell my friend what to do."

But when I looked over at Liam, I was shocked to see him already marching to the door without saying a single word. And then, just like that, he was gone.

My jaw dropped. "You... You really just used your stupid powers on him?"

Grayson just shrugged, looking down at his hand running up and down my arm. "He wouldn't have gotten out otherwise."

My head fell back. "I can't believe this is my life. My werewolf boyfriend just said to my best vampire friend to go out using his supernatural powers."

"I'm your best friend. He is irrelevant."

Before I could respond, Grayson threw me over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes and walked straight to the hotel room door.

"Hey wait! Where are you taking me?" I demanded.

"Different hotel room. Obviously we can no longer stay in this one."

With a sigh, I looked back at the dilapidated hotel room as he carried me out the door, landing on his shoulder because I knew it was pointless to fight anyway.

Chapter 34

GRAYSON

I hated that vampire. My wolf paced my chest the entire time he was here, eager to take care of his own pesky vampire and pissed every time I forced him down, refusing to let go.

He thought he had some claim on my wife just because he took care of her for a short time when I couldn't. He was wrong. Very wrong.

She was mine. And I was more than happy to prove it to he.

After changing rooms due to the destruction caused in the last one – something I haven't regretted, especially after finding out that Liam Blackwood's father owned the place – I sat Belle on the sofa in the new living room.

“Food,” I stated, leaving no room for argument. “So you're spending the whole day lounging and watching movies in my arms. And then you are eating more.”

She frowned even as her general happiness and relief surged through the mate bond, content to do as I said. “What is it with you and trying to get me to eat?”

I tilted her head up, my palm cupping her cheek. “You are beautiful, baby. No matter what happens. But you've lost a lot of weight since we broke up. I need to get you back to a healthy weight.”

She didn't argue. I could tell she was secretly relieved.

She was still exhausted from everything she'd been through, and while spending the last twenty-four hours together had helped, she still moved slower than usual and clung to me whenever I was around.

Which I was pretty sure she didn't even know she was doing. Not that I minded, of course.

I gave her a lingering kiss on the forehead before picking up the phone to order room service. I was looking forward to a quiet rest from the day relaxing with my girl.

BELLE

After eating the biggest meal of my entire life. I was happy to snuggle up against Grayson on the couch. His huge arm wrapped around my shoulder as we watched a random romantic comedy on TV.

Things almost felt...normal. As if we were one normal couple just enjoying each other's company.

Okay, well, that's not entirely true. The only thing that what didn't feel normal was the intense sexual energy between us.

The man beside me had my stomach in knots and walls of my pussy pulsing with need.

I was aware of his every move, every breath he took, and the way one of his hands moved up and down my leg in a comforting way as he watched the screen.

The most embarrassing part was that I couldn't stop staring at the outline of his hard cock through his jeans, replaying what it felt like to have my lips wrapped around her this morning.

I was practically salivating at the thought of doing it again, right here, right now. What would he say if I just got down on my knees now and...?

Belle! I screamed at myself in my head, cutting that thought off before it took on a mind of its own. Stop this! Get your mind out of the gutter!

But that was next to impossible, especially when Grayson started to purr softly. It was barely audible over the sound of the TV, but it still caused an embarrassing river of arousal to ooze from my core.

I pressed my thighs together, my cheeks flooding with so much heat I was sure it felt like a tomato.

I hoped beyond hope that Grayson couldn't sense how inexplicably aroused I was, but I knew it was hopeless.

When I looked at his face he had a smile mischievous painting his lips, making my stomach churn.

Fuck, what was wrong with me? I didn't remember it being like this between us before, like it was impossible to keep my hands off him.

Every inch of me felt like it was on fire – and not even it was like we were doing something!

We were literally sitting on a couch together, watching TV – so why did I feel like I was going to combust if he didn't touch me in the next five seconds?

Almost like he was reading my mind, Grayson's hand moved a little higher up my leg, just dipping under the edge of the boxers I was wearing.

I had chosen to take off the sweatpants he had given me earlier when they kept falling off me, deciding I was better off without them.

I was hot all day anyway and I knew that anything was better than wearing my dirty panties.

I managed to make the boxers stay just by wrapping the waist several times and tying with a rubber band.
hair.

I would have to visit my apartment and buy new clothes soon, even if Grayson got all cranky and growling every time I mentioned going back there.

I writhed against him as the throbbing between my legs was quickly becoming too intense to ignore.

My legs opened a little wider on their own, inviting him to where I needed him most and desperately hoping he'd get the hint.

I almost groaned in relief when his huge hand pulled my leg over his, opening even more for him.

But I couldn't hold back the embarrassing sound that escaped my lips as his hand crept up the inside of my thigh at an agonizing pace, almost as if he wasn't aware of what he was doing to me or how much I needed him.

Until his fingers finally reached my needy slit with exacting precision. He ran his hand over it and my head fell back; the only thing separating us was the thin fabric of his boxers.

He rubbed me for a second, nearly driving me insane as he deliberately avoided touching me where I really needed to. He was teasing me.

His teeth nipped the top of my ear, his hand still holding me. "My poor girl is soaking wet. You've already leaked through my underwear and into my T-shirt." He chuckled. "Someone is not paying attention to the film. Did you get distracted, baby?"

I didn't get a chance to be embarrassed – especially since Grayson actually looked extremely pleased with me.

my wetness because two of his fingers suddenly found my clit.

He rubbed in gentle circles, turning my brain off instantly.

"Here we go," Grayson murmured in my ear. Her purring intensified.
"This is my girl."

He continued for a few more seconds, making my body buzz and tingle.

Then, suddenly, he pushed the loose fabric of my underwear out of the way and plunged a finger into my wet channel, nearly turning me inside out. His thumb continued to glide across my clit.

When I lifted my hips, seeking more friction, Grayson growled and paused his movements, inadvertently causing more moisture to leak out of me, coating his finger.

"Stay still," he ordered in a tone that made me shudder.

I continued to squirm against him, unable to follow his instructions. My jerky little movements weren't as satisfying as what he was doing before though, only making me more desperate.

"And I can not."

"You can and will. Or I stop."

My hips instantly settled on the couch. I couldn't help the small moans of despair coming out of my mouth.

Everything was so intense, my entire body incredibly sensitive. Even just his breath on my neck was sending shivers down my flesh.

To my immense relief, his finger began pumping in and out of me again once he was satisfied I wasn't moving anymore.

"That's better," he whispered, picking up the pace.

I whimpered and dug my nails into my palms in an effort to stay still when he added a second finger.

Just like last night, his hand felt magical against me, making me imagine how good it would feel when he finally thrust his cock inside me.

That thought almost made me fall off the edge. he would do that tonight? After we're done here maybe?

I was shocked to realize exactly how much I wanted it – how much I craved it with every fiber of my being.

"Are you thinking of mating, sweet girl?" Grayson growled. "The bond is burning, and your tight little pussy is squeezing the life out of my fingers."

I bit my lip as he quickened his pace. Just hearing him say the word "mating" almost made my eyes roll back in my head.

"Fuck, you're so beautiful writhing in my fingers, daydreaming about the first time I'm going to stick my dick in that sweet pussy of yours." He moaned, licking my neck and swirling his tongue around my mark.

"Come for me, Belle. Let it feel you pressing into me over and over again. Come on, love.

And I did. Intense, overwhelming pleasure bloomed in every places, tremors shaking my entire body, from the top of my head to my toes.

And it seemed to never end. My orgasm continued as Grayson's fingers moved in and out of me, driving me through him, sparks traveling from every place he touched.

After what felt like an eternity, Grayson finally pulled his hand away. I fell back against the couch, my chest heaving and the stars still dancing in my vision.

Grayson brought his fingers to his mouth without looking away from me and sucked on them, moaning. I should have been disgusted, but there was something about the whole scene that made it so erotic.

Neither of us said anything as he pulled me down until I was lying with my head in his lap, watching TV. He played with my hair, running his glistening fingers over my scalp and neck.

We stayed like that until I was completely relaxed. Grayson, however, had a kind of tension coming out of him. Something was bothering him.

"I have to talk to you about something", Grayson murmured.

My nerves started to turn in my stomach at his serious tone. "Okay...", I replied, turning my body to look at him.

"It's nothing to be nervous about," Grayson said, trying to calm me down, probably sensing my nervous energy through the bond, his purrs already starting in his chest. "I need you to come home with me."

I hardened. "To Minnesota?"

He hesitated. "I no longer live in Minnesota. I live... in the kingdom supernatural. In the palace of the Mortars."

"Do you live in a palace?" I fell back onto the couch. "And I thought your cottage was impressive. Are you telling me that you have your own castle now?"

He twisted his body so that he was partially over me on the bed, his hand coming to rest on my waist. "Well, it belongs in the realm of the supernatural and my pack, but yeah. I live there. And you too."

"Hold your horses there, friend. Where exactly is this 'supernatural palace'?"

"This is a little tricky. The supernatural realm is in its own magical realm. It is only accessible by those with permission to be there or of royal blood. The gateway to get there is in Croatia, where the first vampire, Jure Grando Alilovič, was created."

"Croatia?" I repeated, sitting up. "You got to be kidding me. At least their pack home was somewhere where they spoke English and, you know, the States. "Do you really want to take me to Croatia?"

Grayson nodded once, not even bothering to argue with me.

"I don't know if I'm ready," I said after a few moments. "Even if you wanted to take me back to your packhouse...I don't know. I went through so much trauma with your pack. I don't know if I'm ready to be... trapped again. With people who hate me."

"They don't hate you. They-"

"I know they were under the influence of that vampire guy or something. Kyle told me. But that doesn't mean they like me. We don't know how they really feel about me. But regardless, that's not even my main concern. What am I going to do if something happens between us again? And if..."

"Nothing is going to happen between us," Grayson interrupted with a snarl. "I won't let anything happen."

"I bet you felt the same way when you brought me back to your packhouse all those months ago.

Things happen that we have no control over, Grayson. It's how the world works.

But if something happens, I can't get stuck

alone in your packhouse, surrounded by people who hate me again, just waiting for you to finish being taken over by some evil vampire. What if I'm forced to run away from you again? I can't do that in Croatia. I wouldn't know where to go or how to survive."

Grayson's eyes started turning dark red as – he listened to me. "I need you by my side, Belle. It is not up for debate."

"I want to be with you too." I agreed, pausing before saying the next part. "But what if...I just stayed here? I could keep working in the cafeteria and live in my apartment, and you could come visit whenever you wanted. That way, I'd stay out of your way while you're doing your whole king thing, and you..."

"Absolutely not. Fuck that." Grayson snapped. "Do you think I'm capable of being away from you for over an hour without freaking out?"

He abruptly grabbed me around the waist and pulled me to him. He looked at me with such intensity that I almost had to look away.

"I don't function without you, Belle. You understand me? You are mine."

Before I could respond, Grayson abruptly growled so loudly the walls shook around us. My hands flew up to cover my ears, shuddering at the volume.

I thought he was upset about the conversation we were having, but then he released me and stood up, sniffing the air.

"I'll kill him." Grayson said. He started to walk away, without bothering to give me an explanation.

I immediately got up to follow him. "Kill who?"

"That damn vampire is back," he snarled, his voice low and menacing.

"What vampire?"

He did not answer.

"Are you talking about Liam?" I pressed, still running after him, more than a little startled by his behavior.

Grayson turned, causing me to trip over him. He grabbed me by the arms, glaring at me. "Don't say another man's name now, Belle. Especially his. His shoulders lifted.

The feminist in me had to bite my tongue and not slap him. So it was definitely Liam.

I could see how angry Grayson was. And it scared me. He was so nervous that if Liam really was here, I had no doubt he would try to kill him.

So, before he could turn around and continue to plot my friend's murder, I grabbed his face and forced it down to mine, pressing my lips to his.

I knew that kissing Grayson when he was angry was my tactic when I was trying to calm him down. But hey, it was the best distraction I could come up with in such a short time. Give me a break, will you?

Thankfully though, Grayson seemed to like my choice of distraction. He groaned and didn't hesitate to slide his hands under my ass, lifting me off the ground and wrapping my legs around his waist.

My back hit the wall behind me, and the next thing I knew, Grayson was passionately deepening the kiss.

A minute or two passed like that, and I found myself falling into the kiss until I momentarily forgot what my purpose was in all of this, completely overtaken by my mate's lips on mine.

Someone moaned behind us. "Jesus Christ, you guys know you're in public, right?"

I parted my lips from Grayson's, meeting Liam's gaze breathlessly.

"Sorry," I started to say but was cut off when Grayson grabbed my chin and pulled my lips to his once more with an angry snarl.

He was obviously betting on me in front of Liam.

And I was a little embarrassed to say that I pushed my inner feminist down and melted back into him, sucked back into the kiss as if I had no control over any of my actions.

Liam cleared his throat, and Grayson and I pulled away from each other, although Grayson tried to pull me back to him almost immediately.

My face filled with heat as I wrenched myself away from my mate, finding it frustratingly difficult. Once I was on my feet, Grayson stepped in front of me, growling low at Liam.

Liam's hands raised in surrender. "I'm not here to fight you. I'm here to let you know that you have a friend looking for you, and he's been causing quite a stir."

"Friend?" I asked.

"Azazel Mortar".

Chapter 35

BELLE

"Wait..." I said. "Isn't Azazel Mortar... the vampire who...?"

"Yes," Liam replied, watching Grayson closely, gauging his reaction. "The vampire who took over his mate's body. The ancient king of vampires. And he's in Maine."

His eyes met mine. "Looking at you."

Grayson was rigid as a board in front of me.

"How do you know that?" he asked.

"He was at the restaurant about an hour ago. He..."

Liam hesitated. "He killed his boss. And another waitress."

"What?" I sighed. I stepped out from behind Grayson, but only for him to wrap his arms around me and press me firmly against his forehead. "What are you talking?"

"I'm sorry, Belle," Liam said softly. "I came as soon as I knew. My father called me. You are in danger."

"Which waitress?" I demanded.

"The oldest. Brunette."

"Brenda?" I struggled in Grayson's arms. "He killed Brenda?"

Liam nodded. "I'm sorry, Belle," he repeated one more time. turn.

I could feel my heart in my throat. Brenda had a family – she was a single mother. She has two children who

contacted her. His eldest son was about to start college.

She was worried about me the other day about how she was going to pay for his education on a waitress' salary. Their youngest child was only eight years old.

"We need to go," Grayson growled. He tried to pull me with him, and when my feet were glued to the ground, he caught me around the waist.

"Wait," I exclaimed, pushing against her arms. Grayson when he started to lead me away. "Hang on!"

Grayson paused, letting out a low growl.

"Why?" I asked Liam. "Why did he kill them?" My lungs felt like they were stopping. "Was it...was it because of me?"

When Liam didn't answer, I knew it was.

"He was looking for you," Liam explained in a tone gentle as the world began to spin around me.

"And he won't find you. We're leaving," Grayson cut in. He lifted me into his arms once more, marching us down the hall, away from our hotel room.

I didn't fight him this time. Maybe I was in a state of shock, or maybe it was the guilt of knowing that I was responsible for my friend's death.

Anyway, I was suddenly feeling like the walls were caving in around me.

"Grayson," I whispered as he carried me to the stairwell door and hurried down the stairs. Liam followed behind us.

Grayson didn't look at me as he answered. "It's okay, love. I won't let him get to you. He won't hurt you."

Did he think I was worried about myself?

"T- He killed Brenda," I stammered. "E-E Jerry. They are dead." I looked at Liam over Grayson's shoulder. "He is sure?"

He nodded slowly, his expression stern and sympathetic. "Yes I'm sure."

Grayson's arms tightened around me, but he I did not say anything.

"What about her children? She has two children," I continued.

"Where are you taking her?" Liam asked from behind us.

Grayson didn't bother answering him.

"Liam, what about her kids?" I asked. "What will happen to her children?"

"I'll take care of them," he told me. "Don't worry, Belle."

As we were about to exit the stairs, Liam suddenly appeared right in front of us, stopping Grayson in his tracks and blocking the door.

"Get out of my way," Grayson said, his voice low and dangerous.

Liam shook his head. "Not until you tell me where you're taking her."

"That's none of your fucking business," Grayson snapped. "Now, I suggest you move before I lose all my

patience. My mate might have a problem with the thought of you dead, but I don't. In fact, I prefer it."

Liam continued to stand his ground. "One of the most dangerous living beings is trying to hurt her, and you're about to just waltz her out in public like it's no big deal?"

He chuckled, but the sound lacked any real amusement. "I don't know if you know this, but you're not the most discreet guy around. People will notice the giant muscled man carrying the little girl down the street. And they will talk. Azazel will come after you."

"I don't give a shit what you think," Grayson snarled through bared teeth. "Move."

At his magical command, Liam automatically moved out of the way, finally allowing Grayson to slip past him and into the hotel lobby.

Sadly though, Liam didn't seem to know when to give up. He chased us through the busy lobby. "My father has offered to house you two until you can get out of town."

Grayson spun so fast he nearly whipped me. "Do you think I'm going to take my human mate to Jeffery Blackwood's?"

Liam scoffed. "Do you think my father would try to hurt the future queen of the supernatural?"

"I wouldn't doubt him. I've heard of serial killers with more integrity than Jeffery Blackwood."

To my surprise, Liam didn't try to argue or defend his father. "Well, what's your plan then?" he asked instead.

"You know what? I'm getting really fed up with you think you have something to say about what happens to my mate, little boy."

"May I know where you are taking me?" I interrupted.

Grayson looked at me. His eyes softened when he noticed the tears streaming down my cheeks. I didn't even realize I was crying until he reached up and gently wiped them away.

I couldn't get Brenda's face out of my head. I couldn't stop thinking about her kids finding out that the mother was dead.

"Kyle is sending the private plane," explained Grayson, her tone much gentler than moments before.

"Let's go to the airport and wait. It's a public place where you will be safe. And then we go to Croatia."

"Are you taking me to Croatia? That simple? I have nothing to say?"

Grayson's jaw tightened. "You are not safe here. I won't lose you, Belle. I won't even risk it."

"But..." My mind was racing. I knew he was right. It would be safer to go with him. But that meant leaving the life I'd built for myself here. It meant living with his pack again.

That meant I was officially giving in to him.

"But nothing," Grayson said. "Nothing is worth risking your life for."

My face fell into the crook of his neck as I let out an exasperated sigh.

It felt like I was going to Croatia.

Grayson silenced me, running a calming hand up and down the back of my neck as he started walking purposefully again.

People around us were giving us weird looks, but I knew Grayson would never put me down with whatever was going on.

Besides, it wasn't like I was able to keep up. Io and his insane vampire speed anyway.

"Can we go back to my apartment so I can get a few things first?" I begged.

"No," Liam and Grayson said in unison.

I rolled my eyes. I didn't even know why Liam was still following us.

"If Azazel knew where you worked, he probably knows where you live too." Liam fell into step beside Grayson. "You can never go back there."

"We need to get a cab," Grayson said, already walking to the reception.

"No. I'll take you," said Liam. "The less contact you have with other people, the better."

Grayson stopped walking. He looked at me and it seemed considered turning down Liam's offer, but then thought better of it.

"Fine," he grumbled.

One time, we were in the car – Liam in the driver's seat and Grayson and I in the backseat – Liam paused, hands on the steering wheel but not really moving.

Grayson's chest vibrated with nonstop growls. He was on edge, close to changing. His eyes were dark, and he was bigger than he was just moments ago.

I went to sit in my own seat when we got in the car, but, of course, he immediately grabbed me and pulled me onto his lap, wrapping his arms tightly around my waist.

He rubbed his nose against my mark. inhaling deep.

I was a little embarrassed at how sensitive Grayson was being, especially when I caught Liam looking at us in the rearview mirror. I changed.

“Wouldn't it be safer for me to sit in my own seat with my seat belt on?” I whispered to Grayson.

When I tried to move, Grayson let out a growl so loud the car walls shook. Liam and I shuddered.

“Stop trying to get away from me,” Grayson said deeply through clenched teeth, his arms tightening around me.

All I could do was nod my head in agreement.

He adjusted me on his lap so that my back was pressed firmly against his chest again. Her eyes lifted to look at Liam. “What the hell are you waiting for?”

Liam looked at us, his expression rigid. "I don't think it's a good idea to take you to the airport."

"Fuck," Grayson groaned. He opened the car door beside him. "Let's get a taxi."

"Wait," Liam said. When Grayson started to slide out of the car, taking me with him, Liam quickly grabbed my wrist. "Just wait a minute, will you?"

Grayson's eyes narrowed at Liam's grip on my wrist, then turned to meet his gaze. His entire body started to shake.

Before he did something stupid, I quickly I put my other hand on his chest, trying to calm him down.

I looked at Liam. "Liam, let go of me."

He shook his head. "Listen to me first. I'm just thinking about your safety, Belle."

"Okay, but the werewolf behind me is literally about to kill you if you don't let go of my arm within the next five seconds."

Just in time, Grayson's breathing increased, and dark hair began to sprout from his arms. Seeing this, Liam quickly let go of my arm. I sighed in relief.

"Come to my father's house," Liam continued before Grayson could make another move. "It's safe there. I know you think you'd be better off taking her to the airport because it's public or something, but so is the restaurant. We have the memories of over twenty humans that we need to clean because they saw what Azazel did to Belle's co-workers. A public place won't stop him from hurting her, if that's what he wants."

"No, but I would." Grayson growled.

Again, he started to pull me hard out of the car, but I grabbed the headrest of the seat next to us to stop him.

“Do I have a say in any of this?” I asked the two. “Or are you two going to make all the decisions for me, like I'm not even here? I mean, seriously, isn't my life on the line?”

Grayson's forehead fell onto my shoulder as he tried to remain calm, his shoulders rising and falling rapidly with each of his ragged breaths.

His grip on my waist was so tight, his fingers splayed over my ribcage, that I was almost on the verge of pain. “I don't want to hear those words come out of your mouth ever again. No one will hurt you.”

“I agree with Liam,” I declared. “I think we should go with him.” I looked at Liam. “We could just go to your apartment, right?”

Liam hesitated. “Actually, we can't. Apparently you had my address noted in your personal information at the restaurant. Azazel was seen breaking into my apartment earlier today.”

Even more guilt filled my stomach. “He was in his apartment?”

He nodded. “I haven't been back there yet, so I don't know exactly what happened, but my doorman called me earlier.”

“Liam, I'm so sorry. I can't believe I pulled you into all of this-”

“It's okay, Belle,” he interrupted. “I don't care about my fucking apartment. I care about

keep you safe. And the longer we sit in this damn parking lot, just waiting for someone to see us, the more we are putting you at risk.”

“Then I think we should go to your father's house.”

Grayson growled behind me.

My attention turned to him. “It's the best thing to do right now, okay? How long does a flight from Croatia to Maine take? Twelve, thirteen hours? We can't just sit in an airport, waiting for Azazel to find us. We would put all these people in danger just by being there.”

“My father's house is safe, really safe. Azazel would not be able to enter. No one would touch her,” Liam said to Grayson.

“We're just going to stay there until the plane arrives. Then we leave,” I added.

Grayson's dark eyes studied me for several seconds. “Do you trust him?”

My gaze slid to Liam and then back to my mate. I nodded once. “Yes. I trust him.”

In fact, Liam was probably the person I trusted most in the world after everything that had happened between Grayson and me.

Grayson wet his bottom lip, still incredibly tense. “All good.” He leaned back in his chair, adjusting me in his lap.

He looked at Liam, who just continued to stare at us. in anticipation. “Well, vampire, are you going to drive or not?”

Chapter 36

BELLE

We pulled up to Liam's dad's house in record time.

The trip was honestly a little scary – Liam was speeding the entire time, almost running over several people, and taking back roads to avoid busy streets where we could be seen.

The house was surrounded by giant gates of the sort you'd expect to see in a celebrity's home, placed there for your privacy and security.

There was a man in uniform waiting for us at a station near the gate entrance. He let us pass the moment he saw Liam's truck.

We walked up the long private driveway and into one of the largest homes I've ever seen.

In fact, it was so big it didn't even look like a house at all - more like a mansion disguised as a beach house, painted white, blue and cream, but it probably also had at least twenty rooms.

Liam stopped the car in front of a huge garage. It was open, so I could see the six vehicles inside – a Tesla, a Porsche and a Lamborghini parked haphazardly next to each other.

Is this where Liam grew up? I knew his family had money, but this was more than just money; that was power and prestige.

I swallowed hard, suddenly feeling extremely underdressed.

Grayson gave me some of his clothes to wear to the hotel—a black T-shirt and a pair of gray sweatpants that I had to roll up six times to get in—since I only had my waitress uniform from the other night.

I hadn't minded how big everything was when he'd given me the clothes, but now I felt small, like I was drowning in fabric.

"I wish I was wearing something else." I muttered. "I don't even have shoes on."

"It doesn't matter what you're wearing, because if anyone looks at you for more than five seconds, I'll gouge their eyes out," Grayson replied, his voice ragged.

Liam opened the door. "A real charm you have there, Belle," he said as he got out of the car.

Grayson bared his teeth at him.

I reached for the door handle next to us, but Grayson grabbed my hand, stopping me.

"Who else is in the house?" he asked Liam.

"What?" Liam answered.

"I smell three people in there. Who are they?"

Liam's eyebrows rose in shock. I was also shocked. Could he smell them from here?

"My parents," Liam replied. He looked at the house. "AND my sister, probably, but I'm not sure."

"Is Laila here?" I haven't seen my friend since the night Adalee attacked me." A sense of relief filled me, knowing I would get to see her before Grayson and I left.

Suddenly, the door to the driver's seat of the vehicle was slammed shut by Grayson. Then he quickly pressed the lock to keep Liam out of the car.

"What the hell?" Liam asked, watching us from the other side of the window. He held the key up in his hand. "You know I have the key, right? I could go in if I wanted."

Grayson ignored him and instead unexpectedly flipped me onto his lap so that I was straddling him, giving me his full attention.

He gently grabbed my chin and turned my head so I couldn't look away from him.

"I need you to listen to me, okay?" he said, his tone serious. His thumb began to stroke the skin of my chin.

I shook my head slowly. "OK."

"We're about to meet one of the most notorious vampires of all time," he began. "And he invited us to his home, on his territory.

"I don't know what his intentions are, but I don't trust him. And I don't trust him around you, especially when I'm already on edge.

"If I could, I would lock you up and keep you all to myself for the rest of eternity." His hands gripped my hips tightly and then slowly traveled up and along my ribcage.

His jaw was clenched so tightly I was worried it was going to burst. I couldn't stop myself

move against him, feeling my blood heat, my breathing getting deeper.

"I need you to stay with me." He continued. "My wolf is extremely close to the surface. If anything happens to you..."

He took a deep breath. "Just stay with me. I want you by my side all the time. Take more than one step away from me, and I can't promise I won't kill every person in that house. Friend or not."

The intensity pouring out of him in that moment made my stomach clench. "OK. I will stay with you."

He continued to stare at me.

"I promise." I framed his face in my hands and rested my forehead against his, leaving a brief kiss on his full lips. "I will not leave your side." I whispered against your mouth.

He pulled me even closer to him. "No matter what?"

"No matter what." I looked back at the house, suddenly feeling uncomfortable. "They are... They will have eyes red?"

Grayson nodded slowly. "The Blackwoods are descended from the Mortars, so they can change their eye color as they see fit. But, yes, your eyes are naturally red."

He must have realized how worried that made me, because he said quickly. "But you have nothing to worry about because I won't leave your side either. No matter what happens. No one will come close to you. I can promise you that."

Grayson began to purr softly, making my eyes meet his and my body relaxes into his.

I was worrying him. And, God knew, when Grayson was worried about me, things tended to get intense quickly. And not in a good way.

"I'll be fine," I said, trying to calm him down, rubbing my hands on his arms. "I just don't like the idea of being surrounded by all those red eyes after all the night terrors I've had. But I'll be fine. I'm not worried."

Lie. I was terrified.

I studied Grayson's eyes, which were currently a dark red, both wolf and vampire sides looking at me. Liam's eyes were also red. I tried take some deep breaths.

If I could get used to the two of them looking like demons straight out of hell, who's to say I couldn't take it anymore, right?

"Was that what your night terrors were about?" Liam asked, suddenly opening the car door.

I sighed. "Can you hear that?"

Liam scoffed as if I had just insulted him.

"Of course I could hear. I'm a vampire, remember?"

A low growl tore from Grayson's chest. He hugged me closer to him. "How does he know about your night terrors?"

Her gaze snapped to Liam. "How the hell do you know about my companion's night terrors?"

"It's not what you think" I started to say.

"I know about them because I could hear her screaming bloody murder every night when she was with me. You know, after you abandoned her and left her homeless with nowhere to go?" Liam explained.

Grayson's body began to vibrate with rage as his chest grew wider, straining his shirt. He looked at me with livid eyes. "Did you live with him?"

Well, shit.

I swallowed. I intentionally didn't mention my time spent at Liam's apartment, knowing that would only cause problems. "Well, yes, but it's-"

"For how long?" Grayson bit with his teeth closed.

"T-Two months." I replied stiffly. "But I didn't want to, I swear! And I left as soon as I had enough money for my own apartment. I had nowhere else to go. And where would you rather I sleep, outside in the cold, or inside Liam's very nice and secure apartment?"

"You were sleeping in the same fucking house as a vampire, belle. This is the furthest thing from being safe."

I threw my hands up defensively. "Well, it wasn't like I knew that! And aren't you technically a vampire now too? And I sleep in the same bed as you."

Grayson abruptly grabbed my head, making me gasp. He tilted it to the side so he could examine my neck. "Did you bite her?" he demanded of Liam. "If you fed from her, I swear to God-"

I scoffed, pushing him away from me. "No, not him bit me-"

"I'm not asking you." Grayson pushed me behind him.

My mouth fell open in shock. Rude.

"Humans often don't remember when vampires feed on them. In fact, they release a poison that keeps you coming back to them, addicted to their presence like a drug." He looked at Liam.

"It's what makes them so deadly."

"I would never feed from her," Liam fumed. "She is my friend. I always wanted to help you. I took care of her when no one else did."

Grayson lunged forward with me still on his lap, presumably intending to strangle my friend, but I quickly wrapped my arms around his neck, stopping him.

"I'm fine," I whispered into her neck. "I am fine. He never touched me. He wouldn't even think of touching me like that. I promise." I leaned back to look at him, giving him a small smile.

"There's only one person who's ever put teeth in me without my permission, and it was you."

I expected him to return my smile with my joke, but he didn't. Instead, his hand gripped my chin – not hard, but definitely hard and unyielding.

A small red ring formed around his irises and then slowly bled into the black that meant his wolf until it was completely covered. Her vampire was in charge.

“This is how it goes,” he growled. “Mine are the only teeth that will pierce your perfect skin.”

His hand slid up my jaw until it was loosely wrapped around my neck, his thumb running over my wrist. He was so close to me that I could feel his breath blowing across my lips.

He looked at me with such intensity, such desire that I found myself leaning towards him. “Take one more step, boy, and my teeth will be sinking into you next. Right down your throat.”

Grayson didn't look at Liam as he spoke. I hadn't even noticed Liam approaching us, taking slow, careful steps.

I knew he was only concerned about my safety, but I wanted to tell him that he needed to stop messing with Grayson when he was in such a state as he was right now. He was going to kill himself.

Thankfully though, I saw him pause his movements out of the corner of my eye.

Grayson growled. “We will only be here for one night. The plane is already on its way.” I wasn't sure if he was saying this for my benefit or his.

After checking the surroundings, he lifted me into his arms once more and got out of the car.

The interior of Liam's childhood home was even more spectacular than the outside. It was all big windows, white walls with matching furniture, and hard granite floors.

Pleasant as he was, however, he somehow managed to look cute and hostile at the same time. It felt cold and staged, nothing like what I'd expected from the place where Liam grown up.

I was grateful that Grayson allowed me to walk alone as we walked through the big double doors. He stayed close though, his presence behind me like an implacable shadow.

Liam led us through the main foyer, lit by a chandelier and framed on one side by a spiral staircase, and into a sitting room.

Three people were waiting for us – Laila and two red-eyed vampires who I could only assume were Liam and Laila's parents. I could see aspects of both children in their facial features.

I'd always thought Laila was one of the most beautiful women I'd ever seen, and now I knew why. I was immediately struck by her mother's beauty.

She had dark, golden skin that seemed to glow in the light, and her hair was tied in intricate braids, revealing her slender neck and pointed collarbones.

She wore a long yellow dress to look casual, but it looked chic and elegant in her slim form.

She was the kind of woman with a presence that demanded to be noticed and admired - maybe even envied.

The man beside her had the same demanding presence, but unlike his wife, whose captivating beauty was what made her unique, her allure came from her extreme size and intimidating posture.

He wasn't as big as Grayson, but he could have given Kyle a run for his money. His hair was dark brown, almost black, with a few strands of gray starting to show with age.

I noticed immediately how well-groomed he was, the lines of his beard and hair above his forehead sharp and precise.

That surprised me considering the fact that Liam preferred to keep his hair messy, in a way that screamed boy-next-door and just-played-with-some-random-girl.

He was wearing black slacks and a gray button-down shirt and was holding a glass half full of some kind of brown drink – probably whiskey or brandy.

Unlike her children, who looked like perfectly normal humans, neither Mrs. Neither Mr. Blackwood took care to hide their vampire features.

They both had fangs peeking out from beneath their upper lips and red eyes so bright they were almost too impressive to look into directly.

They even had long claws sticking out of their fingertips, sharp and deadly.

I took a step back as soon as we entered the room, suddenly very aware of how small I was compared to all of them and how easily they could kill me.

I wouldn't stand a chance against any of them; I wouldn't last not a second in a fight.

I didn't remember Liam being as intimidating as his parents the night he saved me from Adalee and I found out he was a vampire.

My back met Grayson's front as he stepped behind me, wrapping a thick arm around my waist, pressing me against him tightly.

Laila's lips turned into a bright smile.
as soon as she saw me. "Belle," she sighed, relief clear on her face as she jumped up from the big leather chair she was sitting in and hurried towards me.

She held her arms out, wanting to hug me, but Grayson stepped in front of me before she could reach me.

"Absolutely not," Grayson told Laila sternly.
He backed me up until I was sandwiched between him and the wall behind us, his big hands squeezing my hips.

I let out an exasperated huff. Laila was the last person he needed to protect me from. "It's just Laila, Grayson. She is my friend. She won't hurt me." I told him.

"You said no matter what, remember?" he replied in a low tone.

"Well yeah, but I'm kind of squashed back here."

He took a small step forward so that I was no longer pressed completely against the wall, but he didn't offer me any more room.

"A room full of vampires, Belle. A room full of vampires. You will stay exactly where you are.

My forehead fell to his back. That was embarrassing. "At least let me look at them. Don't you want them to respect me?"

Grayson loosened his grip on my hips, allowing me to peek my head out from behind him. He wrapped his arm around my shoulders, still keeping half of me behind him.

He had obviously staked his claim.

I looked at Laila. She was looking at Grayson. I don't blame her, though. I wouldn't like him either.

"Hi, Laila," I said, giving her a little wave. "I have missed you."

She looked at me. "I'm so glad you're okay. I have been so worried." She took another step forward. Grayson growled

"Too close," he snapped.

Laila's expression soured even more, if that was possible. "I do not like you."

Grayson looked at her, unblinking and completely unaffected by her words.

His lack of response only seemed to infuriate Laila further. "Let Belle go. She's not a dog you can just order around."

To my surprise, it wasn't Grayson who muttered an answer. It was Liam.

"Just let it go, Laila. Belle can be part of the conversation back there." He replied, taking a step a few feet from Grayson and crossing his arms over his chest.

His eyes narrowed on his father, who was sipping his drink and watching our interaction with dazed interest.

How I ended up with two overly protective, supernatural men was beyond me.

Jeffery Blackwood's eyes fell on mine as if he could feel my gaze. He looked at me for several long seconds, looking me up and down and then licking his whiskey coated lips.

"I'm fine, Laila," I interrupted, forcing my gaze back to her. I gave her what I hoped looked like a genuine smile, even though I was terrified by the way her dad was looking at me from across the room. "I don't mind. He can't help it."

Before she could respond, someone spoke.

"So the little werewolf mistress running around my town ended up being the queen of the supernatural, huh? You would never be able to tell by her looks."

I turned back. There.

"Alpha Grayson Stoll," Jeffery Blackwood continued, his voice deeper and more dangerous than I expected.

He approached my companion and offered him his hand when he was already a few meters away, careful not to get too close. "Or is it King Grayson Stoll now? Do you have a preference?"

"I'd rather you not insult my mate or refer to her as the 'little werewolf mistress'" Grayson snarled, ignoring the man's outstretched hand. "You will call her Luna or nothing."

Liam's father's eyebrows rose. He waited a few more moments before finally dropping his hand back to his side. He cleared his throat as he eyed Grayson's large form.

“I must admit, I'm used to being the biggest man in the room. This is a big change for me. I'm Jeffery Blackwood, leader of the Evergreen clan for the last forty years. And this is my wife, Isabel.”

His wife stopped beside him, smiling, baring her sharp fangs. She inclined her head slightly in greeting. It didn't escape my attention that she didn't say a single word.

Grayson didn't respond, just looking at them with a stony face. I had to stop myself from throwing my head back and groaning. It used to be a mess.

Jeffery was good at hiding it, but I could still tell that Grayson's indifference towards him was disconcerting to him. He kept talking.

“Your mate has caused quite an uproar in our city. I was happy to give her a place to stay and keep her safe these last few months despite not knowing who she really was.

“You can imagine what a shock it was to discover her history with you – and now the former king of the vampires.” He looked at me. “You have been very busy, Luna.”

My head tilted in question. it really ended to say that you took care of me in the last few months?

“Actually, as I recall,” I began bitterly, “it was Liam who took me in when I had nowhere else to go. “If it were up to you, I'd be jobless, homeless and on the next bus out of here less than twenty-four hours after arriving at Evergreen. You never wanted me here.”

I was surprised at my own boldness. But there was something about this man that made me immediately dislike him. AND

I wasn't about to let him lie to my mate just because he got on his good side.

The air in the room dried up. Everyone seemed to hold their breath as they waited for an answer.

"That is true?" Grayson asked, his voice deeper.

"I was suspicious of your mate's presence at Evergreen," Jeffery replied, never losing the casualness in his tone. "And no one can deny that I was right in my concerns. She single-handedly brought the current and former king to my door. However, I can say now that I'm glad she stayed here, knowing who she is. I wouldn't have done it any other way."

Liam scoffed. "You hit me when you found out she was living with me."

I sighed. "What?" I remembered coming home to find him with a black eye the first month I was with him, but he had just told me he was in a bar fight. "Why did not you tell me?"

Liam shrugged, maintaining eye contact with his father. "It wasn't the first time my father lost his temper and took it out on me. And I'm sure it won't be the last."

Grayson was incredibly rigid in front of me, tension starting to curl his muscles. I knew it was time to change the subject before he did something stupid like change.

"Do we know where Azazel is now?" I asked.

"Still at Evergreen, unfortunately," Liam replied before his father could.

“Did he avoid our attempts to contact him or did he use the power of the Mortars to get rid of any interactions we manage to have.”

“He won't be able to get to you here. We have the best security money can buy and clan members stationed outside ready to defend the house if needed,” said Jeffery.

The sky outside was pitch black. It was getting late, and all I wanted to do was snuggle into bed next to Grayson and sleep for the next few days.

Grayson looked at me with concern in his dark eyes. “Liam,” he said. “Is there a room where we can spend the night?”

I leaned into Grayson a little more. The bond between us that I hated so much just a few days ago now made me feel safe and loved. He could feel my exhaustion and knew what I needed.

Liam nodded. “Yes. Follow me.”

Chapter 37

GRAYSON

Liam left us in a large guest room with own bathroom.

The moment he closed the door behind him, leaving Belle and I alone, I locked it and immediately started scanning the room for any signs of danger towards my mate.

I checked under the bed and in the closet before examining the windows to make sure the locks were secure. I was impressed when I found bulletproof glass along the windows.

I wasn't sure what kind of vampire – or any supernatural creature, really – would choose a weapon over their supernatural powers, but I appreciated that Jeffery wasn't lying when he said he had the best security money could buy.

Belle sat on the edge of the bed and silently watched while I moved. That calmed me down a bit. I like her eyes on me. I liked having her attention.

I liked knowing where she was at all times – especially in a situation like this.

I didn't feel good about any of it. I hated depending on anyone else but myself when it came to my mate's safety.

Belle got up and walked over to me while I was still examining the window. She ran her hand down my arm. Leaving sparks everywhere she touched.

The attraction between us increased now that we were alone, making my nostrils flare. I automatically pulled her towards me, placing her on my chest.

"How are you?" Belle asked. His hands delved under the back of my shirt, seeking skin-to-skin contact with his mate.

His fingers traced the muscles of my back, gently massaging. I wasn't even sure she was aware she was doing this, but hell if I was going to point this out to her and risk her stopping.

The need to mate and claim her was becoming more prominent. It could no longer be ignored. My wolf was unhappy in my mind. He didn't understand the need to wait. He was ready now.

He didn't think our brand on her neck was enough, he wanted her to smell like us; he wanted everyone to know who it belonged to.

He pushed to the surface and growled into my chest, wanting to show me his anger and remind his mate he was there. Waiting. Anxious.

Belle looked at me, concern etched on her face. But before she could get too worried, I tipped her head up by her chin and pressed my lips to hers.

She didn't hesitate to return my kiss, pulling me close.
closer.

Now wasn't the right time to think about throwing my mate on the bed and devouring her until she screamed my name.
one and another time.

But with the way she was pressing against me and letting out sweet little breathy moans against my mouth, dark and dirty thoughts were front and center in my mind.

If it weren't for that stupid prophecy, Belle would already be linked to me forever. I would have made sure of that. She would be my mind, body and soul.

Fuck, I wanted this.

It didn't help that every instinct in me felt the need to dominate her to remind her and everyone around us exactly who her alpha was.

I pulled away before I lost control. Belle snorted adorably, annoyed. I smiled and licked my lips, my eyes sliding over her beautiful body so perfectly pressed.

against mine.

I loved the fact that she was in my clothes, covered in my scent. It helped to calm me down a bit. I would keep it that way all the time if I could.

"I am well darling." I said, not wanting her to worry.

My wolf growled in my chest again, letting her know that he was, indeed, not doing well. He was going crazy.

Belle gave me a look that told me she didn't believe me. Instead of elaborating though, I just placed a kiss on her forehead and pushed her towards the bathroom to get ready for bed.

She needed to rest, not hear about all the dirty thoughts I was having about her.

She let me lead to the bathroom, not even arguing as I found a new toothbrush in one of the drawers and put some toothpaste on it, handing it to her.

I did the same with mine and then stood behind her as we brushed our teeth, keeping one hand on her stomach, watching her in the mirror.

She rolled her eyes but didn't try to push me away. She knew I was on edge. She knew I needed this, needed control.

"Was I like this the whole time we were talking to the Blackwoods?" Belle asked once we were done with our teeth.

She slipped on the large T-shirt that fell below her knees, readjusting it and tucking one side into the waistband of her sweatpants so it wouldn't look too big on her.

I snatched her hands away when she started ruffling her hair.
"Stop. You are perfect no matter what you look like. It doesn't matter what they think about you."

"I'm glad Laila is lending me some of her clothes for the plane tomorrow."

Liam also offered to get my stuff and everyone else's.
Belle at the hotel and at Belle's apartment tonight.

Belle's head fell back against my chest. She watched me in the mirror.
"You know, as dire as this situation is, I'm... happy to be here with you. I don't want to be away from you for that long again."

Rose stained her cheeks at his sweet admission.
"I missed you."

My chest hurt. "I'd say I missed you too, but that doesn't even begin to express the hell I've been through the last three months without you. Never. Not a day goes by without you by my side. Damn, even an hour might be too long for me."

She smiled. "Well, I hope you can go without for at least a few minutes" – she turned around and placed her hands on my chest – "because I need to pee." She pushed me out of the bathroom.

I snarled playfully as she slammed the door on mine.

method.

Belle was restless.

It was almost one in the morning, and although she had dozed off a few times, she always woke up and fidgeted against me anxiously.

I fished her emotions through the bond, trying to decipher what had her so turned on, but there was nothing too out of the ordinary.

I felt his concern that Azazel was around and that he would return to my pack tomorrow, but I also felt his confidence in my return. She felt safe with me. She knew I wasn't going to let anyone or anything hurt her.

She was also exhausted. Her body was still recovering from the hungry bond, and although she was slowly getting better, it was eating away at her.

So why the hell was she still awake?

She was hiding something from me. I could feel it. There was an imperceptible emotion coursing through her, one she didn't want me to know and was keeping locked away.

As annoying as that was, I pushed my irritation down. I would talk to her about it tomorrow. I didn't want to keep her from sleeping.

My vampire purred at her at a low frequency, not loud enough for her to notice, but enough to help her relax.

I was happy to do it for her all night if she needed it; I didn't plan on sleeping tonight, wanting to stay alert in case something happened.

But the way she continued to move and rub against me almost had me pinning her down and fucking her. It was getting harder and harder to keep my wolf under control.

As the purrs rolled over her, Belle softened and pressed against me. I was curled around her from behind, with her tucked into me, our legs tangled under the sheets.

I had to bite back a deep growl as she rubbed her ass against my rock hard cock, mumbling something incomprehensible in her half-asleep state. Then she calmed down. Her breathing slowed.

Just when I thought she'd finally dozed off, she huffed and turned her body to face me, nestling her face into my bare chest and neck.

I froze as she threw one of her legs over my hip, pressing her pussy against my cock. Only yours sweatpants and my underwear separated us from skin-to-skin contact.

And then she started to move. And grind.

My entire body caught fire.

They weren't big movements – they were small and powered by sleep. Full of innocence. She didn't know what she needed or even that she was doing it, just that it felt good.

And then I realized what was going on, why she was having such a hard time falling asleep, why she was keeping her emotions locked away and why she couldn't stop moving her supple body against me.

She was horny.

Yep, my girl was so horny it kept her awake. The bond was getting to her the same way it was getting to me.

That realization nearly killed me. It was one thing for me to stay without, but my mate?

Cum. What.

If she needed relief, I would give it to her.

My hand traveled down her spine until I was grabbing the back of her neck, squeezing her. Belle took a deep breath, her hip movements rolling to a stop.

"Did I wake you up?" Belle whispered into the darkness.

"No," I replied, my voice deep and husky. "You don't
he did."

My other hand went to her hip, gently encouraging her to continue her movements, faster this time.

I guided her hips down so her clit rubbed against my throbbing shaft.

Belle gasped. "Grayson..." she groaned. "What are you doing?"

"Taking care of you. Relax."

She automatically did as she was told, allowing me full control. Her arms snaked around my neck as I increased my pace, rubbing against her.

Her breath began to come out in short pants until she was crying against my skin.

I growled. "Silence, mate." I kissed her jaw and up to her ear to make sure she could hear me.

"No one but me can hear the sound of your pleasure. I need you quiet. Did you understand?"

She nodded, though she looked a little distracted when started moving her hips. I couldn't have that.

With my grip on your hip. I eased his anxiety and grabbed his chin with my other hand, forcing him to look at me.

"I want to hear you say it. No vampire will listen your sweet moans. Say you understand."

She nodded again, squirming to try to break free of my grip. "I understand," she said, her words rushing out. "I'll be quiet."

"Good girl."

I allowed her to move again, finding his thrusts with mine – harder, faster.

I dragged the ridge of my cock up and down her pussy dressed like a man possessed, my eyes taking in the beautiful sight of my mate writhing against me, finding pleasure with my body.

Fuck, I was going to come like that.

My wolf side clawed at my conscience. that was not enough. He wanted more. It slammed against my mind so hard that I physically pushed forward, nearly crushing Belle.

I couldn't help but let my instincts momentarily take over and push Belle onto her back before climbing over her and slamming my hips into hers.

Belle squealed as I began to fuck her like a wild animal. I knew the moment the seam of her sweatpants started to press against her clit, her eyes rolling back and her legs spreading wider.

I growled low as little noises started coming out of her mouth as she neared her climax. My possessiveness and need to have her all to myself took over any logical thoughts I might have been clinging to.

I gripped her jaw in my hand and slammed my lips down on hers, swallowing down any happy noises she was making and keeping them all to myself.

The taste of her consumed me, and I was suddenly extremely grateful for the sturdiness of this bed, it didn't make a single noise as I dragged my mate into oblivion.

Belle's orgasm came hard and fast. I never took my lips from hers, and she whimpered into my mouth, her nails digging into my shoulders and only fueling my own fire.

Feeling her tremble and convulse against me was all that it took for me to explode, grinding harder than before.

After what felt like an eternity, our intense highs finally ebbed and flowed to an end. Belle was completely limp under me, breathing heavily

I continued to kiss her even though her lips were loose and flexible under mine, not ready to break up with her yet.

Though we both came, the overriding feeling inside me – the need to claim her – didn't subside.

My hips never stopped moving, lazily thrusting as I kissed her.

It wasn't much, but it kept me from ripping off all her clothes and finally taking her sweet virginity.

Later. That would come later.

Belle giggled as I ran my tongue across her lips. I snarled playfully before pulling away and looking at my droopy-eyed, smiling companion.

Fuck, she looked beautiful like this – under me, lips swollen, flushed and satisfied.

After cleaning ourselves up in the bathroom, Belle and I we settled on the bed, she in my arms.

She slept like the dead for the rest of the night.

Chapter 38

BELLE

Grayson couldn't keep his hands off me in the morning following.

I kind of loved it.

He had woken me up extremely early with gentle kisses on my signal.

He had been getting constant updates from the pilot of his private plane all night, and the moment he knew it was close, he wanted us to get up and moving.

We took a quick shower and then got dressed. Of course, Grayson got all snarly when I put on Laila's black leggings and a T-shirt instead of her oversized clothes.

Laila even let me wear a pair of sneakers too, which I was extremely grateful for.

"Fucking vampire scent," Grayson continued fuming under his breath once I was dressed. I rolled my eyes. He should be grateful it was Laila's clothes and not Liam's.

We were about to leave the room when hurried footsteps began to approach.

"Belle! Belle!" someone yelled.

I ran to the door and flung it open before Grayson could catch me. prevent, coming face to face with a panicked Laila.

"My father is a traitor," she said, her words spilling out before I could even react to the large tears streaming down her cheeks. his face.