

## Her Vampire, Her Mate Chapter 2

“Carli?” the vampire’s smooth speech caresses her name, making me feel sick. “You should have told me you were coming out tonight. Where is that....fussy mate of yours?”

“Home with the baby,” she smiled over to him. He grimaces slightly when she mentions Rosie, but if she notices, she doesn’t show it.

“Oohhh,” he rubs her back, and I fight back a growl at the familiar way he is touching her until she shoves off his touch. He may be interested in her, but she clearly doesn’t feel the same way. “So are you ladies having a night out on the town? Can I get you a few drinks?”

He finally looks over my way, smiling politely. The bartender brings me my drink at that moment and places another coke in front of Carli. “I guess not. Well, have fun tonight. I will be around if you need anything. Make sure this all goes on my tab.”

“I always do,” Carli smirks as he walks off, then turns back to me and her face turns into one of concern. “What’s wrong?”

What should I tell her? I found my mate and he’s a vampire? The vampire that is clearly into her? “Who is that?” I managed to say, fighting back the anxiety and sadness in me.

She looks back at the man, who is now talking to a couple of bouncers at the door. “Vincent? I thought you knew him?”

I shake my head, but then remember hearing her say the name before. “Vincent is the guy whose parents went rogue a few years ago? The ones who abducted you?”

“That’s the one.” She pulled her cell phone from her pocket, grimaced at the screen, then sighed. “This asshat. I’ll be right back. If I don’t call him in the next 30 seconds, he says he’s sending out a search party.”

I forced a chuckle, knowing that he was bluffing. She walks off towards the bathrooms and I turn back to the bar, nursing my drink. After a few seconds of contemplating what to do, that delicious, spicy scent hits me again, making the hairs on the back of my neck stand on end.

Vincent slides onto the stool Carli just abandoned, looking over at me with a sultry smile. "I don't believe we met," he drawls. He has a slight accent; maybe Cuban or Puerto Rican.

"Simone," I told him quietly, trying to hide the desire in my voice as his eyes met mine.

"Vincent," he smiled smoothly, offering me his hand. I'm hesitant to shake it, but when I do, the sparks are insane. I wanted nothing more than to straddle him on his barstool, melting into his body.

His face drops slightly at my touch, and he quickly takes his hand back, looking at it like he was just electrocuted by my touch. Could he feel the sparks too?

"Static," he mumbles, offering me an apologetic smile. "Are you and Carli close?"

I licked my lips nervously, "Yeah. Best friends since we were kids."

He nods, "I think I've heard about you. I didn't expect that woman to have such a ladylike friend. Are you a warrior too?"

A nervous giggle bubbles out of me, "No. Not even. I'm not a fighter."

"What are you then?"

I shrugged, feeling a little settled since he was asking about me and not just my friend.

"I'm a student at the moment. I'm attending business school at the University of Miami."

"Business school, huh? What business are you looking at getting into?"

I smile shyly, "My, uh, parents own a fishing charter. I'm learning to take over the family business one day."

"In the tourist industry, I see. Such a beautiful woman, I'm sure you will do well."

I blushed at his compliment. Hope begins to rise up in me, and I'm about to tell him that I'd like to speak with him in private, to explain that he is my mate,

when his focus turns behind me and his face lights up, like a kid on Christmas. He was only being polite to me as Carli's friend. He probably wasn't truly interested in me. My hope came crashing down.

"Well, the f\*\*\*\*\*g douchebag is on his way. I only have about 20 more minutes of fun."

"Trouble in paradise?" Vincent lowered his brows seductively. Carli doesn't notice. She's too busy texting furiously on her phone.

"None of your business," she muttered without looking up, making him laugh breathlessly.

I can't sit here any longer. I'm fighting the mate's pull to this man, and it's ripping my heart out watching as he flirts so openly with my best friend. My married best friend, with a baby and a husband on her way to get her. He is still showing her more attention than me, knowing all of that.

"I need to go to the bathroom," I muttered softly, sliding from my stool on the opposite side of Vincent. I can't risk touching him again. I'll either cry or throw myself at him, embarrassing myself.

"I'll go too," Carli stated. I nodded, not wanting to leave her there with my mate.

The line for the bathroom is long, but thankfully Carli is too busy on her phone to notice how unsettled I am while we wait.

Vincent POV

When my men told me that Carli Childes was there, I wasn't even at my club. It was my day off, and I needed to feed, but the drive to see her overpowered my thirst, and I drove like a madman back to my place of business.

I had to settle myself before walking in. Ricardo, my lead bartender, told me she was here without that incessant alpha mate of hers for once. She rarely went there without him.

I met Carli 6 years ago, when I was going through a strenuous time with my family, and she was also going through a trial with hers. We spent the whole night nursing one another's wounds, then she was just gone the next morning. I spent YEARS searching for her. I spent almost every night in this club

hoping to see her again. I would go to the cove when my abusive father would permit me time away.

The night I saw her again, when I finally had her in my arms, her vexatious mate ruined it all. I know I shouldn't continue pining for a married woman, but it's like a pull on me. She was my first. My first for everything. That isn't something easy to get over.

When I spotted her at the bar, my heart skipped that familiar beat like it always did when I laid my eyes on her. She's fiercely breathtaking. She looked angry, and I could hear with my heightened senses that she was upset about something her mate had done. A triumphant smile spread slowly on my face. Perfect.

When I come up from behind her, the pull is stronger than ever. It's like gravity is pushing me in her direction, not towards the earth. It's strange, though. As I get closer, it's like the pull is drawing me not to her, but to the one beside her. Like a magnetic attraction.

Her friend is quite exquisite, and it takes my full concentration to focus on the feisty redhead and not the brunette beauty beside her.

I'm confused by my own attraction to this mystery girl. I've never seen her before, so I'm perplexed as to why I would feel the gravitation toward a random beauty. I'm around beautiful women all day. I've never felt drawn to anyone except Carli.

While Carli is away, leaving this mystery girl on her own, I can not ignore the pull any longer. I came to occupy the seat Carli left behind.

Simone. Her name is Simone. I find myself being enraptured by her flushed cheeks and charming dimples. Her gorgeous mouth when she speaks and the sweet voice that sounds like chimes in the wind. She's....beguiling. Of course, she is. She is Carli's friend.

I'm confused by the electricity I feel at her touch. Her soft skin sends shivers through my hand. There's something in her bottomless, chocolate-colored eyes that calls to my soul. I look away nervously as Carli comes up from behind her, trying to hide my embarrassing thoughts by putting my focus back on the girl who always ignores me. When Simone's gaze shifts downward, and I feel her energy shift down a negative path, I'm about to reach back out

to her, to ask her what was wrong, but she excused herself to the restroom before I got the chance.

When she and Carli leave, I feel this emptiness and longing. I'm not sure which one of the beautiful women it is for.

Carli POV

"I told you I could get home on my own. Am I not even f\*\*\*\*\*g allowed to hang out with my best friend now?"

"Carli," Parker sighs, pushing his overgrown curls out of his face. If I didn't like his face so much, I'd punch him right in his perfectly straight nose, but I know eventually I won't be so pissed at the prick and I like his nose the way it is. I decided to stomp on his giant foot instead before walking off towards my bike.

"Come on, Simmy," I yelled back at my friend, hoping she would follow me without me having to look back.

To my frustration, Parker's the one who comes following after me, grabbing me around my waist and hoisting me over his shoulder. I yell and scream in protest, punching his back, but he just spanks my a\*s and walks towards his truck, tossing me into his back seat.

"I hope you know you're paying for this later," I glared at him, contemplating running away.

He smirks, that f\*\*\*\*\*g amused glint in his eye, pissing me off more. I flip the bastard off before scooting to the other side of the seat, intending to exit and run. The f\*\*\*\*\*g child lock is on, and I kick his seat in anger. I'm going to shave his head in his sleep. Just you f\*\*\*\*\*g wait, Parker.

Simone slides in beside me, and Parker shuts the door gently before I see him walking back towards my bike. He drives my baby to the back of his truck and lifts it up like it weighs nothing, loading it into the back of his truck. I swear, if he scratches it, I'll lose my f\*\*\*\*\*g mind.

Simone was quiet, looking lost in her own thoughts, which wasn't like her. She usually eats this s\*\*t up, loving the front row seat to my and Parker's bickering. She is worrying her cheek with her teeth inside her mouth, and her usually immaculate lipstick is gone, all licked off like she does when she's stressed.

I reached out and grabbed her hand. Parker was pacing behind his trunk, on a call, so we had some privacy.

“You okay?” I asked her. Her eyes snap up to mine, making me worry as I see the storm in them.

She smiles sadly, and shakes her head, “I’ve just got a headache. Beer before liquor, get sick quicker, right?”

That’s not it. We’re werewolves for f\*\*k sake. We don’t get sick or get headaches from drinking. I haven’t even gotten a decent buzz since turning 18. Of course, my overprotective, overbearing, pain in the a\*s mate could be to blame for that.

“Sim,” I scooted closer to her, rubbing her knee, “Is it Aiden? Did he call you again?”

She huffs a stressed laugh, looking up at the roof of the truck, “No, not him. I blocked his a\*s. I’m just.....I just don’t feel very good all of a sudden.”

I scrunched my face in confusion and worry. She was fine in the bar. What happened between now and then?

My phone starts vibrating in my pocket, so I pull it out, knowing it’s not Parker since he’s still on the phone behind us.

It’s a text from Vincent. Oh! My bike helmet. I forgot it at the club.

Vincent: You forgot your helmet. Are you nearby? My guys said you left the club.

Me: I’m outside in the lifted black truck. Can you bring it out? I’m trapped

He sends a ‘lol’ back, then a minute later, he is striding out of the busy club into the night air, the wind ruffling his black hair as he walks towards Parker. Parker’s eyes narrowed at the sight of him, and I almost laughed. He’s still wary of Vincent. I don’t know why.

It’s been over 3 years and I still feel like Parker doesn’t trust me at times. Yeah, I’m a little reckless, but I’ve not given him any reason not to trust me since we became mates. I’m starting to feel suffocated. It’s like, his need to shield me from the world went on steroids after our daughter’s birth. The

intensity is stifling at times. He even tried to keep me home from work after having her, saying I should take the first year off and adjust to motherhood. Why doesn't he take the first year off to adjust to fatherhood?

I put my foot down, threatening to move me and Rosie in with my dad at their new house right by the warrior center if he didn't stop, so he reluctantly gave in. Finding that tracker in my earrings this morning was the last f\*\*\*\*\*g straw. I still want to strangle him thinking about it.

I look back at Simone. She was watching Vincent talk to Parker, and I could see the pain in her eyes. Did he say something hurtful to her for those few minutes I left her alone talking to my jerk of a mate? Now that I think about it, she was acting kinda off from the moment we saw him. She was all too eager to get away from him when I got back too.

I'll kill him. I'll put a f\*\*\*\*\*g stake through his heart if he hurt my best friend in any way.

"What did he do? Did Vincent do something while I was talking to Parker? If he did-" I started, but Simone snapped her eyes back at me, and the sadness shifted to anxiousness and worry. Worry for whom? Herself, or was it for him?

"No, no. He didn't do anything. He just talked to me. It's just...." she licks her lips, sucking her bottom lip in her mouth, looking like an adorable bunny with her white teeth poking out, "he's my....oh, Carli, he's my mate. I don't know what to do."

What the f\*\*k! "YOUR MATE!?" I shouted, making her jump to put her hand over my mouth. She looks back, and Parker and Vincent are looking at the back of the truck curiously, but quickly recover and go back to whatever discussion they were having.

I lick Simone's hand, trying to get her to remove it from my face, but she doesn't budge. She's used to it.

"Don't. Say. A thing," she whispers quietly, "You know vampires have better hearing than us."

She drops her hand, and I bite my lips together to keep myself from yelling again. If he's her mate, what is she doing in here and not out there mauling him, f\*\*\*\*\*g his brains out? The moment the mate bond hit me, I was on

Parker like white on rice. Does she not want him because he's a vampire? That's not like her. She's not that kind of person.

"Please, keep it to yourself for right now," she pleaded with me, "I don't want to face it yet. I have enough on my plate and....and I don't want to rush into something with someone who doesn't feel the bond the way I do."

I sigh. She's right. Vincent won't feel the mate bond like a wolf. I honestly am not even sure how he will feel towards her, or if he will feel anything. We don't hear about wolf and vampire mate couples that often. It happens, but not often. I wonder if he feels anything at all towards her.

I look back, and it looks like Vincent is the one trying to maintain the conversation with Parker, which is strange. They don't like each other. They tolerate each other because Vincent is a representative on the council, but they don't socialize.

Vincent's eyes keep moving to the back of the truck like he's searching for something. Or someone. Interesting. I dropped the mind link block I had on Parker and mind linked him.

"Hey t\*\*t waffle, ask Vincent what he thinks of Simone for me."

"Why?"

"Just do it."

"No. Tell me why."

I wanted to growl at the jerk, "Do it or I'm sleeping in the guest room for a month."

"I like the bed in there, anyway. It will be like a mini stay-cation."

"You won't be invited." I growled back in the link, "No s\*x for a month too."

He sighs, but I sense he's agreeing. Jokes on him. He's still not getting any. I'll use him for mine and leave him blue-ballin' for a month. I'm not dropping the tracker bullshit that easily.

A minute later, he gets back to me. "He says she's a very beautiful woman and seems like a good friend."



Hmm. That answer doesn't really scream 'mate' but it's a start. Vincent is a decent guy. He's the first guy to ever make me feel like I had value, and that I was cherished, at least after I was truly abandoned by my family, and he is a true gentleman. I think he would be great for my best friend. They're both a bit zesty and their personalities would fit well together. Simone deserves to be with someone who can worship her. Their babies would be cute. Hybrid vamp-wolf babies. With his eyes and her dimples. I'm getting baby fever just thinking about it.

On second thought, maybe I'll let Parker finish once or twice. For procreation purposes only. He had better not enjoy it until his probation is over.

"He told Parker that you're beautiful," I smirked at my friend. She turns, lifting an eyebrow at me.

"And how do you know that?"

"Parker just told me," I shrug, and she narrows her eyes.

"Don't meddle," she glares, "I'm serious, Carli. Stay out of it. I'll figure it out."

"Okay, okay," I put my hands up, then looked down at my phone, right as Vincent walked by, pulling Simone's attention back out the window, "I won't meddle," I murmured right after forwarding Simone's number to Vincent. From this moment on, I really won't meddle....much.

We drop Simone off at her house before Parker drives back to the packhouse. I'm working hard on ignoring him, refusing to come up to the front seat. I love the man, but I'm not putting up with his overprotective antics anymore. He gives up trying to talk to me and just starts humming along to the music, strumming his fingers on the steering wheel. He's not even fazed that I'm mad at him.

I'm annoyed as f\*\*k that I have to wait for Parker to let me out of the backseat because of the stupid child locks. We did it for Rose, as new parents, thinking we had to safety proof everything, even though she never goes in Parker's truck. We bought a Volvo because of its safety rating, and that's the only vehicle we try to put her in.

I try to push past Parker when I hop down, not taking his helping hand when offered, but the bastard catches me in his arms and pulls my back against his front.

“Stop being like that,” he whispers in my ear, running his nose down my neck, trying to use the tingles to rein in my anger.

“f\*\*k you,” I growled. He laughed softly, which pissed me off more. I elbowed him in the stomach and stomped up to the packhouse.

When I got upstairs, I expected to see Elena and my dad there babysitting, but the apartment was empty. I exited Rosie’s room and almost ran straight into Parker.

“Where is my daughter?” I growled at him.

“Grandma Grace stopped by. She’s staying the night at your parents’ and took Rosie. We’re on our own until morning.”

“Great,” I huff, going back to ignoring him, stomping to our room so I can grab my pillow and breast pump. My swollen t\*\*s are killing me, needing to be drained. I wanted to feed Rosie directly since it hurts less, the pump not being my favorite thing to use, but it will have to do.

I stormed out of our room, Parker following quietly behind me, and headed to the guest room, shutting the door in his face. I didn’t lock it, knowing there was no point. The handle was broken and you just had to jiggle it twice for the lock to slip out of place.

“Baby, can you let me talk to you now?”

“Nope,” I stated, getting situated on the bed so I could pump. Parker sighs, lying at the end of the bed on his belly.

“I’m sorry about the earrings,” he tells me, rolling over to watch me as I fasten the double pump to my tits.

“No, you’re not. You’re sorry I found out.”

“That too,” he smirks, “Baby, I’m just trying to keep you safe.”

“By putting a bug in my ears? I thought you gave me those f\*\*\*\*\*g earrings as a sweet gesture. I was bragging to the other female warriors the next f\*\*\*\*\*g day. I didn’t know you gave them to me because you didn’t trust me.”

Parker sighs heavily, “I trust you, Carli, but back then you were going through the baby blues. You would go off for hours on that motorcycle and I was

worried to death about where you were or if something happened to you when you were gone for too long. I know you need your independence, but I also need to know that you're safe."

I grunted, sinking into the bed. I don't like thinking about that dark period. I would get so f\*\*\*\*\*g mad and frustrated for no reason, and then I would feel horrible about my thoughts and my outward displays of agitation. I would be feeding or holding Rosie, and just cry my eyes out, feeling these deep feelings of guilt and anxiety, and I had no idea where they were coming from.

My doctor told me it was postpartum depression, and it was quickly fixed with medication. Going back to work helped too. Being a new mom, being Luna, and those mixed feelings of not living up to the standards I set for myself and feeling useless all contributed to the depression after having the baby. My hormones were so out of whack and my brain couldn't compute all the changes and anxieties at once.

"Why was the program open on your iPad then?" I questioned Parker, turning this back around on him. If it was for keeping an eye on me back then, why was he using it now?

Parker offers me a sad smile, "Bad habit. You weren't the only one going through a hard time, Carli. I felt so hopeless watching you go through that. I couldn't do anything but love you, and sometimes you didn't even want me to do that. When I feel a little restless, I open the program just to check and make sure you're safe. It makes me feel at ease."

Well, f\*\*k a duck. It's hard to be mad at him when he puts it like that. I sighed, pulling out my phone from my pocket, holding both breast pumps against my arm so they didn't unlatch.

"Pull out your phone," I muttered. He looks at me in confusion but does it. I open up my settings and tap on location sharing. I send him an invite to see my location at all times and he smiles brightly.

"No more bugs in my jewelry, got it? This is all you need. And I want new earrings. Without tracking devices in them."

"Yes ma'am," he moved up the bed and kissed my cheek. He sat up beside me, pulled me into the crook of his arms, and started rubbing absentmindedly on the swell of my breast, right next to the pump.

“So what was that about with Simone? Why did you want me to ask Vincent about her?” Parker asked after a few minutes of comfortable silence.

I bit my lip, not sure if I should tell him. I want to help my best friend, though.

“She found her mate,” I mumbled.

“That’s great! But what does that have to do with that bloodsucking vamp-”

“Vincent is her mate,” I interrupted him before he started ranting about the guy.

“Vincent is her mate!?” Parker exclaims.

I just nod, hopping up out of bed now that I’m done pumping. Parker takes the milk bottles and divides them up into storage bags, placing them in the freezer while I clean the equipment. It’s so much easier just to feed her. I hate having to do all this extra shit.

I’m wiping up my chest, cleaning the drops of breastmilk off one tit when Parker comes up to me, then ducking his head and licking the milk off of my other. It grosses me out, but he loves the s\*\*t. I think he would want me to feed him too if I was open to it. I’m not. Hell no.

“Why do you like doing that so much?” I asked the pervert, making him smile with his tongue still dancing around my nipple.

“It’s such a f\*\*\*\*\*g turn on knowing that I did this to you,” he tells me, before sucking my tit in his mouth, drawing out more milk.

“Will you stop it? You’re still on my s\*\*t list.”

“Am I?” he smirks up at me. No, he really wasn’t anymore, but I’m not ready to tell him that, though I have a feeling he already knows.

I pushed him off and then went to put on my nursing bra and shirt back on, trying not to laugh at his pouty face.

“So why did Simone leave if Vincent was her mate?” Parker muses while following me out of the kitchen and back to the guest room. I grabbed my pillow and we walked into the living room to talk.

“She said she has too much going on to deal with a mate that can’t feel the mate bond.”

He nodded in understanding, “It’s weird though. He usually eggs me on about you, but he was just asking me questions about her. Is she still dating that fairy guy, by the way?”

I shook my head, “No. Aiden was....a d\*\*k. He was clingy and wanted more than she did.”

“Vincent asked if she was single. I told him she was.”

“That’s a good sign!” I smiled brightly at him. I’m not meddling, just supporting my best friend from the sidelines.

Simone POV

I feel like a mess. I didn’t even bother to do my hair this morning. I felt so hopeless knowing who my mate was, but also knowing he was infatuated with Carli. I’ve been doing research over the last couple of days and found out that vampires ‘imprint’ on the one they love, and it’s something extremely hard to get over.

Vincent must have imprinted on Carli. That’s the only explanation as to why he is so infatuated with a married woman who also has a kid. She’s the luna of our pack, and Parker is the alpha. An alpha who has been absolutely crazy about Carli from the time he thought she was his sister. There is no hope for him, but Vincent still seems to have that longing he can’t get over.

In my research, I read that vampires imprint when they have a deep, intimate connection with someone, which most likely means my best friend slept with him. My best friend had s\*x with my mate.

She has been texting me and calling me, but I’ve been avoiding her. It won’t be long until she shows up at my house, pissed as hell, demanding to know why I’m not responding. I’m not sure what to tell her when that happens.

I parked my Jeep in the student lot at school and started walking towards my economy class, letting my wavy hair blow freely in the salty breeze. My sunglasses are hiding my makeup-less, baggy eyes, lined with dark circles from lack of sleep. I couldn’t get the mental picture of Vincent and Carli together out of my head long enough to find a moment’s peace. I know her. I

know she used to use boys, and Vincent was probably just another of her victims and meant nothing to her, but for some reason that pissed me off more.

I'm so lost in my own thoughts that I almost run right into someone, stopping just in time as their Dolce & Gabbana sneakers come into view as I stare at the ground. I look up to apologize but end up grimacing instead. Aiden. Why can't this guy get the hint? I scoff, rolling my eyes dramatically, and try to go around him but he sidesteps, blocking my retreat.

"What?!" I snapped. Aiden is tall and has lean muscles. He's in line to become a fairy guard and has a graceful strength like all the rest of them. He's handsome. Not anywhere near as gorgeous as Vincent, but his strong jawline and crystal blue eyes are striking under the mop of thick, shiny silver hair.

"You blocked my number," he seethed, taking a step towards me so we're only a few inches apart. I'm not in the mood for this today.

"Take a hint," I glared at him, hoping he could see the menacing glint in my eyes through my sunglasses.

He sighed heavily, lifting a hand to reach for me, but I took a step back. "What do I have to do to get you to leave me alone?" I snapped at him.

"Mona," he groans out his nickname for me I've always hated. Sounds like an old lady's name. "Why are you being like this? We were doing great. Why would you want to throw that all away? Everything we've been through?"

"We were just f\*\*\*\*\*g!" I almost screamed, "I told you, you aren't my mate, Aiden. I'm not going to be more with someone I have no future with."

"Did you find your so-called mate?" his eyes narrowed. I didn't answer him. I did find him, but it's not a simple yes or no. I don't need to tell this freak anything anyway.

"What do I have to do to get you to leave me alone?" I sighed and repeated, pinching the bridge of my nose and I pulled off my sunglasses.

"Be with me," he pleads in a cold voice, making ice run through my veins.

"Not going to happen," I stated.

“I can be better than a mate, Mona. That wolfy nonsense means nothing to me. I know it means nothing to you either. This is just a power move on your part. You’re being a tease and I’m about done playing your game. You’ve had your fun, it’s time to drop the act.”

I can’t believe what I’m hearing. What the hell?! Does he think I’m just playing a game with him?

“A game?” I repeated his words in disbelief.

“You loved every minute of being with me. Your game of chase, pretending to be hard to get was cute, but I’m done playing it and waiting for you to get your act together. It’s time for you to stop being a w\*\*\*e. I saw you out at the club that night. I saw the way you let those random men rub up on you, putting their filthy hands on your body. That’s not something I’m going to tolerate, Mona. Stop being a little b\*\*\*h, and come back to me.”

No f\*\*\*\*\*g way. Goddess, I miss my brother. He wouldn’t think twice before putting a psycho like this in his place. I all of a sudden wished I was a fighter; a warrior like Carli. What would she do in this situation?

Kill him. She would kill the fucker, or at least knock out all his teeth. She would react first and deal with the consequences later. I’m not Carli, though, and my brother isn’t here. I need to deal with this on my own.

“I’m not playing with you. This is no game. You asked if I had found my mate. The answer is yes. You may not care about this wolfy nonsense, but a mate isn’t a menial thing and even if I still liked you even a little bit, which I promise you I don’t, I wouldn’t choose you over my fated mate, you freak. Leave me alone.”

Aiden’s hand snaps out before I see it coming, gripping around my throat and cutting off the air from entering my lungs with bruising force. The wolf in me snaps, and I have to hold myself back from shifting. I’m not a fighter, even in wolf form. I wouldn’t be able to do anything and there are too many humans in the area.

“WHO IS THIS MATE?” Aiden’s breath washes over my face, making me sick. I whimper in his hold but his hand remains firm. “WHO IS HE!?” he yells, shaking me slightly in his grip.

“f\*\*k. You.” I grit out with the last of the air in my lungs. He throws me to the ground in his fury, and I suck in a lungful of air before it’s ripped right out of me. He got hold of my hair at the base of my neck and pulled me to my feet while trying to drag me to the parking lot.

People everywhere are watching, but no one intercedes. No one came to my aid. Aiden is menacing when he’s pissed, but still, I thought at least one person would be brave enough to save me from this monster.

When we reach the parking lot, Aiden pulls me in the direction of his Mustang, and I start to really fight against his hold, thrashing out and throwing my body to the ground in desperation. I don’t want to go with him. I don’t think I will survive if he gets me in his car.

“Please,” I started begging, pulling on his arms, and digging my nails into his skin.

“YOU. ARE. MINE!” he sneers so menacingly, that the blood in my veins turns cold. I need to shift. It’s my only chance. If I shift, I can run away and have Parker deal with the consequences in the human world later.

As he drags me between 2 cars, I shift faster than I ever have before, my fur slipping through his fingers as he yells in outrage at me for breaking free. I made a mad dash for the treeline around the school’s marshy pond, adrenaline, and fear pushing me forward. There aren’t many places to hide in this form here, so I’m hoping he doesn’t chase me. I’ll have to expose myself even more.

I dove into a bush, ignoring the branches stabbing into my torso and paws, and turned around to see if I was followed. Aiden is speeding away in his mustang, and relief grips me.

Carli. I need to get Carli.

“Help me.” I cried out to her in the mind link.

“Simmy? What’s wrong? Where are you?”

“School. It’s Aiden. He....” I fought back the tears, knowing once they started, I wouldn’t be able to tell her what was happening.

“What did he do? Are you hurt? Is he there now?”



“No. I had to shift and run. He tried to take me, Carli. I don’t know what to do. I’m hiding in the trees by the pond.”

“We’re on our way,” She tells me, keeping the mindlink open so I can hear her as she rushes to get to me. I can hear someone talking to her. Matt? She’s not coming alone. Good. I don’t want her to face him alone if he ends up coming back. I pray he doesn’t come back.

“Hurry,” I squeak out as fear grips me.

“I’m coming as fast as I can. Matt is coming too. We’re on our way.”

Vincent POV

I was just about to lay down for a power nap like I do most evenings before the club opens when my phone goes off. It’s Cathal. I groan, not wanting to deal with council stuff today. I’ve been so distracted, that I barely have any time to manage my normal business duties, let alone other supernatural beings’ problems. My thoughts were consumed with Carli’s friend, and the way her face looked broken and pained the last time I saw her. Thoughts of making her smile just so I can witness those enchanting dimples grace her caramel skin again keep flitting through my mind.

“Yesss,” I drawled as I answered the phone.

“Your presence is requested,” Cathal states, getting straight to the point, as always.

“Where is my presence requested?” I asked him, my voice rising as I spoke. If it’s not important, I’m staying here for my nap.

“University of Miami,” he tells me, making me take notice. That’s that beautiful woman’s school. Simone. The woman I can’t stop thinking about.

“Why there?”

“A young were-woman was almost abducted.” Panic briefly fills me, making my faintly beating heart almost completely stop.

When crimes happen in the supernatural world, a representative from each race needs to be present in order to review the evidence and relay the

information to our leaders. It's a system Carli came up with when she formed the council to unite us in our struggles and make each of our races stronger.

I eagerly volunteered 2 years ago, but now I dread the work. Carli's newly appointed Beta, and sometimes their Gamma, is the one who covers most investigations for Crystal Moon Pack since she found out she was with child. The opportunities to see her dwindled over time and now I find it hard to force myself to participate.

Hearing that a she-wolf was almost abducted at Simone's university, though, has me off the couch and pulling on my shoes before I even get off the phone.

"Who was it? The one who was almost abducted? What happened?"

"I told you as much as I was told, my friend. The young alpha seemed rushed and relayed minimal information of the occurrence."

I grabbed my keys to my BMW and informed my manager, who was accepting the liquor delivery, that I'd be back later, and to call me if there were any problems with the opening.

The whole drive there, my worry overwhelmed me. It was a confusing feeling because I wasn't sure what exactly I was worried about. Many, many werewolves and other supernaturals attended that university. It wasn't necessarily Simone, but she was all I could think about.

Anger filled me thinking about someone trying to take her. My fangs elongate momentarily and I have to focus on my breathing to retract them back in. I must be crazy. I met the woman once, very briefly. I even embarrassed myself talking to the mutt by asking endless, nonsensical questions about the woman. She didn't even seem remotely interested in me. I must need to feed. I'm truly losing my mind.

When I pull into the school, I know exactly where to go because our members from the council that are on the Miami police force have the area blocked off, taking control of the entire situation, so the humans are unaware of the supernatural element of the crime.

I spot Carli right away, but my focus is on the huddled mass she is holding, rocking back and forth in a comforting gesture. My worries and fears were realized seeing Simone's broken, tear-stained face weeping on her friend's shoulder.

I don't even pull into a proper spot. As soon as I know my car is out of the way of traffic, I put it in park and run over to them, my car still running with the driver's door open.

"What happened?" I demand, storming over to them as my fangs tear through my lip and I feel my sinuses tingling as my venom fills my cavities. Parker, sensing the anger in me, steps in my path, stopping me before I came within hearing distance of the 2 women. I forgot, they can't hear as well as I can. They didn't notice my arrival, too engrossed in comforting and being comforted.

"Your face, Vince. You're going to scare her more," Parker tells me when I try to go around him. s\*\*t. He's right.

I work on my breathing, focusing on controlling the burning thirst for blood, the blood of the one who hurt her, pushing behind my burning eyes, which I'm sure are glowing crimson right now. It isn't until I hear her voice, softly telling Carli that she's okay, and I hear her heart beating and the blood flowing steadily in her warm body that I find myself able to calm down.

"What happened?" I pressed Parker, not able to take my eyes off Simone for more than a moment. For some reason, the mutt is smirking at me, which angers me to no end, making my fangs poke out again.

"Calm yourself, you leech," he chuckles, drawing out a hiss from me, "She was worried for nothing. I just find it entertaining."

"What are you talking about, you irritating mutt?"

He shakes his head, smiling, then looks back to his mate, some communication passing between them. My anger is rising again, and I'm about to move the pup myself so I can get answers from the source when he looks back, his face suddenly serious.

"Sorry. You were asking what happened? Aiden Gallagher. He was a fairy knight apprentice Simmy was, uh, briefly dating. He tried to force her to leave with him when she refused to take him back. Got physical," a menacing hiss tears through me, surprising even me with its force, but Parker just smirks slightly and continues on, unphased. "She got away from him by shifting and hiding, but she doesn't think he's going to give up. Cathal and Karina are searching for him now."

I looked back at Simone, and she finally noticed my presence, the look in her beautiful amber eyes unreadable. She holds my gaze, stunning me as the pull towards her grows almost to be too much to resist when her face suddenly falls, and she turns back to Carli's shoulder, fresh tears streaming down her face. My heart breaks watching her in so much pain.

"Where can I find this Aiden?" I snarled at Parker.

"When we find him, you will be my first call," he says, surprising me.

I can't take the distance any longer. I move around Parker, and he lets me, now that my fangs are put away and my temper is under control.

When Carli looks up, she offers me a sad smile, and whispers to her friend, "Someone is here to see you, Sim."

"I can't, Carli," she sobs, burying her head deeper into her friend's shoulder, worrying me because it looks like she's cutting off her air intake. Her hold on Carli's shirt has her knuckles on her tiny, frail hands turning white. Rejection stabs through me. Was she afraid of me? I have my bloodlust under control. I should appear normal right now.

Is it from the experience? Is she wary of men right now?

That theory is proven wrong when a wolf warrior comes up from behind the women from the direction of the pond, wearing nothing but shorts as if he was just in wolf form. He bends down to hand Simone some sunglasses and she throws herself in his arms, sobbing uncontrollably once again.

"I know Sim. I'm so sorry. I called your parents. They're on their way."

"Matt. I miss Casey. I want my brother."

"I know, Simmy. I know. You have us, though. I would never let anything happen to you, and neither would Carli or Alpha."

"Or Vincent," Carli adds, looking at me sympathetically as she continues to rub soothing circles on her back.

The man looks at me and nods, jealousy rising up in me. Who is this man to Simone? Parker told me she was single. "Mark and Mitch are going to take

shifts escorting you. You're going to have round-the-clock guards until we find him."

"He knows where I live, Matt. He can find me."

"Stay with me then," I said the words before I could think them through. They fly out of my mouth in desperation, wanting to prevent this man from making the same offer.

She looks over at me in confusion. "Why? You don't know me."

I looked nervously at Carli, "Um, because you're Carli's friend," I muttered the lame excuse. To my surprise, she scoffs at me.

"No, thank you. I can stay at the packhouse."

"I think staying with Vincent might be a good idea," Parker says, coming up to join us.

Simone's eyes narrow, and her eyes turn glossy, indicating they are speaking in that freaky way through their minds.

"I think you should too, hun," Carli tells her, brushing the hair behind her ears. "Vincent is a good guy, with tough security and he's also....protective. I'm sure he wouldn't mind keeping you hidden for a few days while we find that asswipe."

I smile thankfully at Carli, happy she is supporting my rash offer. It may have been rash, but I want nothing more than to get closer to Simone; protecting her while learning why gravity is pushing me towards her.

A soft growl, no more menacing than a purr, vibrates through Simone's chest, and her exquisite amber eyes turn glossy once more. What are they talking about? I shifted self-consciously, waiting for her reply.

"Fine," she finally grits out, turning a cold look towards me. "Only until he's found."

Simone POV

Carli and Matt came racing towards me, pack SUVs with several more warriors, all in the bare minimum of clothing, are loitering in the parking lot

above. They must have been in wolf form training and brought who they could.

I threw myself at Carli, still in wolf form, and started shaking violently with relief. She coos at me, rubbing my fur and letting me whine and cry into her neck until I calm down enough to shift back.

Matt brought me spare shorts and a t-shirt that smelled strongly of Lilly. When I couldn't walk, my legs weak and wobbly from shock, he scooped me up and carried me up to the parking lot, where the police, all our people, were blocking off the incoming cars and urging the students already parked in the lot to move their vehicles. Parker pulled up as we reached the lot, running over to us and taking me from Matt.

I don't realize I'm hysterical until he starts running his fingers through my messy hair, engulfing me in his aura, not to command me but to make me feel safe and protected.

"We're here, Sim. You're safe. You're safe," he repeats over and over again as I sob into his chest, gripping into his shirt like a liferaft.

When my panic settles, and the shock dies down some, he sets me on the curb, and I instantly fall onto Carli, gripping onto her as a fresh bout of tears starts flowing from my swollen eyes. Is it messed up that I'm thankful for not wearing makeup today? Relief that I don't have to worry about runny mascara on top of everything else sends me into hysterics again.

Parker and Carli are enveloping me between them, just hugging and rocking me in their arms while reassuring me they will keep me safe. I feel crazy because all I can focus on is the fact my eyes probably look hideous right now from all the crying and sobbing.

"What can I do, Simmy? What do you need?" Matt crouches on the ground beside us.

"My sunglasses," I choked out, making him laugh softly.

"Sunglasses?"

I nodded, burying my face back into Carli.

“Can you tell us what happened first?” Parker asks, leaning away from me slightly to look at my face.

I tell them what happened with Aiden, all three of them growling ferociously by the end. Matt was one of Casey’s closest guy friends and he’s been protective of me in Casey’s place since Casey moved. He gets up, looking almost as pissed at Carli before I remind him of the sunglasses. I want to be able to hide my face. I feel disgusting, and I still am having a hard time focusing on my other problems with that pushing at the front of my mind. I know it’s probably from the shock, but I still want my sunglasses.

He sighs heavily, “I’ll look for them while making a few calls. Where did you lose them?”

I shook my head, “I don’t know. It happened so fast,” I told him.

“He’ll find them,” Carli reassures me.

Parker goes off to explain to Cathal and Karina, the fairy knights on the council, what happened. Aiden was an apprentice under Cathal, and I’m one of his daughter’s best friends. He is livid, and they leave almost as soon as they arrive to find him.

People everywhere are watching curiously, and I suddenly feel sick, remembering how no one came to help me when he almost took me away with him. I can still feel his fingers and nails digging into my scalp as he dragged me out by my hair. I’m sure if I wasn’t a wolf I would have bruises all over my neck and body. I feel disgusted knowing I ever had any kind of relationship with that monster of a man.

Carli is rocking me back and forth, telling me I’ll be okay as I start weeping all over her again.

“I’m okay,” I repeated over and over again to Carli as I tried to get my tear ducts to listen to me and quit filling and spilling over. I have all of them to protect me. Carli would kill him before letting him get to me again.

I’m breathing deeply, trying to control my crying when that delicious, spicy scent hits my nose, making me look up. There stands Vincent, talking to Parker. He looks pissed and even hisses, his fangs shining in the brilliant sun at something Parker told him. I stare at them confused about what he’s so mad about.

He looks over at me, and when our eyes meet, I'm hit with overwhelming emotions once again. Pain stabs at me. I told Aiden I had found my mate, but that mate has no idea what he is to me. He is in love with my best friend. Tears started pouring from me once again as I buried my face back into Carli's shoulder, guilt and anger mixing together because I hated her right then for being the one my mate wanted more than me.

"Someone is here to see you, Sim," Carli tells me softly.

No. He's here to see you, Carli.

"I can't, Carli," I whimper. I can't face him rejecting me for my best friend over everything else right now.

Matt bends down behind me, handing me the sunglasses I requested, but instead, I throw myself in his arms, not liking the mixed emotions I have for my friend right now.

"I know Sim. I'm so sorry. I called your parents. They're on their way."

"Matt. I miss Casey. I want my brother."

"I know, Simmy. I know. You have us, though. I would never let anything happen to you, and neither would Carli or Alpha."

"Or Vincent," Carli added, making me want to scream. Is he still standing there? Why? I know he's part of the council, but why is he standing around watching me be miserable? I'm having a hard enough time pulling myself together.

"Mark and Mitch are going to take shifts escorting you. You're going to have round-the-clock guards until we find him."

"He knows where I live, Matt. He can find me."

"Stay with me then," Vincent's velvety voice surprised me, making me turn around and look at him confused.

"Why? You don't know me."

"Um," he pauses momentarily, eyes wondering to Carli, "because you're Carli's friend," he looks shyly at Carli, pissing me off. He doesn't want me to



stay with him for any other reason than to get close to Carli. I scoff in annoyance.

“No, thank you. I can stay at the packhouse.” No way am I being used by my mate so he can get closer to her. No way in hell.

“I think staying with Vincent might be a good idea,” Parker tells me.

I narrowed my eyes at him. He has to know how Vincent feels about his mate.

“You know he likes your mate, right? He is just going to use me to get closer to her.”

“I don’t think that’s the case here. He was only concerned about you.”

“And if he does just want to get closer to your mate? I know Carli told you, Parker. I know you know he’s my mate.”

“All the more reason for you to stay with him. I’m telling you, Sim, he was only concerned about you earlier. He couldn’t take his eyes off you.”

“I think you should too, hun,” Carli tells me, “Vincent is a good guy, with tough security and he’s also....protective. I’m sure he wouldn’t mind keeping you hidden for a few days while we find that asswipe.”

The smile that Vincent sends Carli makes me growl in fury. Are they all blind? Can they not see that he is in love with her?

The closer Vincent gets to us, the more the mate bond pulls me to go to him. Even though I want to fight it, my body is seeking his comfort. I hugged Matt a little tighter, fighting the urge to throw myself into Vincent’s arms.

“Simone, use this as an opportunity to get closer to him. What would you be telling me if I was in your situation? Hell, what did you tell me when I was in my f\*\*\*\*d up situation? You should take him up on his offer and TALK to him.”

I’m thinking about Carli’s words, and she’s right. This is an issue that I can handle now, even if I don’t want to.

“Fine,” I grit out. I stare back at Vincent and he is smiling triumphantly. “Only until he’s found.”

My parents, primarily my dad, were my last hope of getting out of staying with my mate. The pull of the mate bond, combined with the rejection I felt knowing he was in love with Carli was hard enough to cope with, then when you add everything else on top of it; Aiden, my pressing school assignments, not being able to attend school until Aiden was found, and then my negative feelings towards my best friend, I just wanted to go home and curl up into a ball and cry on my own, breaking down in the comfort of my own bed.

Parker, the traitor, had to go and tell my parents that Vincent was my mate. They were all for his and Carli's little plan after that. Why wouldn't I want to go with my mate? Well, he was a vampire and didn't know I was his mate was reason number one. Secondly, he f\*\*\*\*d my best friend. It's a suspicion at this point, but in my gut I know it's true. Lastly, he's imprinted on that same best friend he slept with, and it tears me up being near him knowing that.

I asked Matt to be the one to take me to Vincent's house. Carli, I could tell, was minorly offended, but then Elena called to tell her Rosie had eaten a penny and she had to go home. Her daughter was getting to be as much of a pain in the butt as she was. Rosie was always getting in trouble and she was barely a year old. It didn't help that the kid was spoiled rotten. I'm not above her charms, though, and may be a contributing factor to her spoiledness.

Matt pulled into the parking garage connected to Vincent's condo building. He gave me instructions and keys to get in. Matt pulled into the designated spot for Vincent's cars between his BMW and Lamborghini. He had 6 reserved spaces, and this was the only spot empty. How much money does this guy have?

To my surprise, Vincent is waiting for us at the elevator, looking nervous and maybe even excited. I try to bury down my longing as I walk toward him, but it's hard. He looks so....mouth-watering. That would be the best way to describe the smooth planes of his sexy face and strong jawline. I wanted so desperately to run my tongue along the smile lines etched on his face as the corners of his plump lips pulled up in the corners. His eyes, strikingly red like my desire for him, are calling to me, and for once I feel like he is looking at and only seeing me. Not Carli's best friend but me.

"Hola!" He greeted us, taking me back for a minute.

"You speak Spanish?" I asked.

He laughs nervously, rubbing his jaw, “Ah, not well. My mother was Puerto Rican. She only spoke it when she was angry.”

I smiled at that, “Was she angry a lot?”

“Haha, no. Not at me anyway.” He turns to Matt, “I can take those from you,” he tells him, nodding down to my bags.

“I’d like to take them up and make sure the apartment is secure if that’s OK. Her brother would kick my a\*s if I didn’t. My mate too.”

Vincent’s eyes brightened at hearing that, “You have a mate?”

Matt smiles and nods, “Yeah, my Lilly pad. She, Simmy, and Carli are all close.”

“I look forward to meeting her one day,” Vincent smiled politely.

“Nah, I’m good. She would swoon over your accent and then I’d hate your guts,” Matt laughs.

Vincent and Matt continued to chat on the way up. I was surprised to see we were going to the top floor to the penthouse.

When the elevator doors slide open, Matt whistles in appreciation. The apartment is all white marble, white furniture, white walls, and decor. The only pops of color are the tropical plants throughout the entire open space. The wall of windows looks out over the ocean and the view is breathtaking. I love it. Everything about it. It’s definitely not what I expected a vampire’s apartment to be like. There isn’t anything black or gothic in the entire place.

Vincent leads us around a posh sectional, down a bright hallway, decorated with expensive-looking paintings of exotic birds. He shows us the bathroom for guests and points out the linen closet and his office, which looks much like the rest of the apartment. He opens the door to a bedroom at the end of the hall, indicating it’s his bedroom.

His scent is explosive in the space, and I almost embarrass myself by taking deep, exaggerated breaths full of the spicy deliciousness. Goddess, it is going to be so hard to act normal when the pull gets stronger being in such close proximity to him and being constantly immersed in his smell.

His bedroom is very simple. Just his bed, floating nightstands, and a couple of chairs facing out towards the view.

He opened the door next to his, indicating for me to enter with a wave of his hand.

“This will be your room. I assumed having the room closest to mine would be the safest.”

“It’s so pretty,” I said excitedly, a huge smile spread on my face. The bed has a plush duvet, with pink accent pillows. The view is the same as his, and instead of basic chairs, there’s a hanging chair suspended from the ceiling, a woven blanket sitting on its seat with a couple of books stacked on a small table beside it.

The artwork on the walls are all abstract pieces that resemble roses when you squint just right. The vanity outside of the ensuite has a vase full of at least 3 dozen pink roses, a few red littered among them. He bought me roses?! Did he think Carli would be the one to drop me off? No. He was there when Carli got the call from Elena about Rosie. He knew it was just going to be me and Matt.

Matt walks in and sets my bags on the bed.

“How many points of entry are there?” Matt asked Vincent.

“Let me show you,” Vincent responded, turning to show him.

Matt comes up and gives me a big hug, “After I check, I need to get back. I’ll come to check on you tomorrow. Call me if you need me,” he kisses my cheek then whispers in my ear, “I heard what he is to you. I also know why you’re acting like that towards Carli. Call me or mind link me if you need to.” He gives me a pointed look, kisses my forehead, then goes to follow Vincent. When I turned to watch them go, the expression on Vincent’s face startled me. His brows are pulled together like he’s confused about something, but he quickly recovers and walks away, ahead of Matt.

What was that? Did he hear what Matt said? No way. I could barely hear Matt.

I start unpacking my clothes, hanging them on the hangers provided in the large closet. I don’t know why I packed so much. I probably brought half my

wardrobe. I set a pair of glittering high heels on the built-in shelves, wondering why I brought them in the first place when Vincent walked back in.

“So, um, do you need help unpacking?”

I lick my lips nervously, trying hard not to react to being alone in this room with my mate.

“No, I’m okay. Thank you, though.”

“Sure,” he nodded, walking to the window and looking out over the breathtaking view. “There are bodyguards posted around my building. I have one at every entrance and in the parking garage. You will be safe here, Simone. I promise. I, um....well, it looked like you didn’t want your friend to leave. I just want you to know I will do everything in my power to keep you safe.”

“Wouldn’t want to disappoint Carli?” I challenged him. He laughs at my sarcasm.

“That woman would obliterate me if I let harm find you,” he rubs his chin while observing me, “Not because of Carli, though. I truly just have this....this deep desire to keep you safe. Strange, huh? I barely know you but the thought of that.....fiend hurting you makes me....violent,” Vincent scrunches his face in confusion.

He’s not doing this because of Carli? I try not to get my hopes up. Just a few hours ago he was flirting with her right in front of me. In front of her mate too.

We stand there in awkward silence for a moment before Vincent coughs, clearing his throat.

“I’ll have dinner delivered soon. Does Italian sound alright?”

I nodded, “I like Italian food,” I smiled at him.

His smile is brilliant, “I know. Parker informed me. I’ll come to get you when it arrives. I’ll leave you to settle in.”

When he passes by, his shoulder brushes against mine, sending core tightening shivers all over my exposed skin. He must feel it too because he gasped in shock, rubbing his shoulder lightly.

A slow smile spread on his face, "You have quite an electric personality, Simone," he chuckled, "I will come to get you soon for dinner."