

# Kidnapped by My Mate Novel

## Chapter 21 –

### Filed To Story:

Once Grayson had officially paid, we stood and left, continuing our exploration of Paris.

I had never walked so much in my life; my feet were beginning to hurt, but I didn't want my time with Grayson to end. It all felt so magical.

"This day hasn't even felt real. It's probably been the best day of my life," I told Grayson, complete sincerity in my voice.

Grayson nodded his head in agreement, smiling. "Just you wait. Tomorrow, I'm taking you to the Louvre. You'll be amazed."

I stopped walking. "Tomorrow?" I asked. "I thought we were going home tomorrow."

Grayson faced me. "Yes, but I thought one more day wouldn't hurt. I must get back to my pack then, anyway. And my private jet won't be ready until tomorrow night."

"You have a private jet?" I asked in complete shock.

"Why didn't you just fly that to Paris?"

He shrugged. "I only just bought it yesterday. I always had a strange stubbornness when it came to buying my own jet, always preferring to fly commercial. I didn't understand it until I met you on that plane. It was because fate was setting me up to meet you."

He came forward and pulled me into his chest, leaving a kiss on my forehead.

"Now, there's no reason for me not to have my own jet. It'll be much more convenient." His body shook with laughter. "Also...I'm sort of never allowed to set foot in the MSP or Paris airport again after what happened on the last flight."

I gawked at him. "Serves you right! You almost killed a man!"

Grayson laughed again. "I'll say this one more time. He deserved it. No one looks at what is mine."

I scoffed and shoved him away from me. “You’re a Neanderthal.”

I continued to walk, and he quickly caught up to me, taking my hand in his. He kissed the back of it.

“I’ll be a Neanderthal, as long as I get to keep you by my side.”

I blushed a deep red.

I thought about what he’d said. I couldn’t stay another day in Paris. I had to go home... I was already risking being kicked out of my apartment for not paying rent.

Actually, I probably would get kicked out.

I hadn’t worked in so long that I probably wouldn’t make my rent. Which meant I had to find a way to escape Grayson and get back to Minnesota.

Maybe I could convince the airline to reschedule my return flight on the cheap? I didn’t bother saying anything to Grayson. I knew that he would just try and convince me not to go.

It made me sad to think I’d have to go home tomorrow and continue working in my lame job at the diner, with my lame boss.

But I knew that this bizarre and beautiful dream couldn’t last forever, as much as part of me wished it could. As we continued to walk, Grayson wrapped his arm around my waist, tugging me close to him and looking down at me with a contented smile.

It made my chest feel warm.

He’s getting too attached to me. At that realization, the warm feeling left my chest.

There was no way that this relationship could continue when we got back to Minnesota.

Sure, we only lived a couple of hours away from each other, but I had no car, no way of getting to him. And I wasn’t going to force him to drive to me every time I wanted to see him. I would feel too guilty.

I knew that the way he was making me feel would only make it harder for me to leave him and return to real life. The thought made me stop in my tracks.

Grayson stopped too and looked at me. “What?”

I breathed in deeply and wrapped my arms around myself.

“This isn’t a date,” I said firmly. The words hurt to say, but I kept my stance.

Grayson raised his eyebrows. "Excuse me?"

"In the restaurant, you called me your date. I just wanted to let you know that I don't see this as a date."

He licked his lips and approached me slowly. "Is that so?"

"Mmm," I said, feeling more awkward and nervous now that he was standing right in front of me, looking down at me. Why does he have to be so tall?

"Do you want to know what I think?" He placed his thumb on my lips, tracing them.

I didn't answer, too transfixed by the sparks in my mouth.

He leaned down so that his lips were touching my ear. "I think you desperately want this to be a date." He took my ear into his mouth and bit down lightly. "And you know what? This is a date, whether you want to admit it or not. You have no say in the matter."

That made me fume. Why did he think he could control me? "I—"

"Shh..." He interrupted me. His voice became deeper. "Do you want to know what else I think?"

"No, I really—" I started.

"I think..." Grayson interrupted yet again as I huffed, "that you haven't been able to stop thinking about kissing me since the last time in our bedroom." He wrapped an arm around me and brought me into his chest. Shivers ran up and down my spine.

"Because I know that I haven't been able to stop thinking about your sweet lips on mine, and it's been driving me mad."

I tried to pull away from him, knowing where this was heading and that kissing him would definitely give him the wrong idea, but I couldn't escape his firm grip.

Before I could protest, his lips were on mine. And I melted. I melted into a slimy puddle of goo in his arms.

Oh God, how am I ever going to leave him?

Once I had finally pushed Grayson away from me, feeling embarrassed to be having a hot make-out session in public, we caught a cab to a place where Grayson said there were a lot of cute shops that we could walk through.

The architecture of Paris amazed me. All the buildings were so beautiful and cohesive. The shops were all cool too. It was too bad that they were all way out of my price range.

As we continued to walk, I couldn't help but wonder if we were anywhere near my mother.

This area kind of looked like where my mother lived based on my memory of the last time I'd gone to visit her. It was so long ago, but I remembered the trip so vividly.

She lived in an apartment above a shop called E.Dehillerin, a cute little cooking shop.

I'd loved walking around it, browsing when I'd come to visit with my dad years ago, especially because it had gotten me away from my mother.

"Grayson?"

He looked at me.

"Do you know if we're anywhere near a shop called E.Dehillerin? A friend told me about it before I came, and I was just wondering if we're close to it."

"Let me check," he said and took out his phone. I watched him type in his password, and I quickly put it to memory as it would be helpful to know for later.

"It's actually only a few blocks from here—about a five-minute walk."

My eyes widened. I was much closer to my mother than I'd thought.

"Did you want to go there?" Grayson asked.

"Hmm..." I thought about it. Did I want to go see my mother? This trip was supposed to be a visit to her, and she hadn't heard from me since I'd gotten on the plane back in Minnesota.

I did sort of owe her an explanation as to why I hadn't shown up to her house a couple of weeks ago. Plus, who knew when the next time I'd be able to contact her would be?

Grayson had taken my phone, and I had no money to buy another one. Now would be my only chance to talk to her. I was about to tell Grayson that I wanted to go there when I thought of something: I already had a plan to get back to Minnesota without him knowing.

If everything went smoothly, I would be on a plane tonight and back in the normal world by tomorrow.

I knew that Grayson would freak out. The last thing I needed was for him to go to my mother and demand information from her about how to find me.

What if he hurt her? I knew he was capable of violence, and I wouldn't be able to live with myself if my mother got hurt because of me. Grayson couldn't come with me.

But I had to go see her.

I shook my head quickly.

“No, I actually like the shops around here. But maybe later?” I asked.

Grayson smiled. “Of course.”

We continued walking, and Grayson kept one arm tightly around me. I couldn’t help but notice that no one was looking at us.

They all bowed their heads as we passed, keeping their eyes low to the ground.

It only happened once or twice that someone would accidentally look at us, and Grayson would let out a low growl under his breath and tug me closer to him.

The person would immediately look away and bare their neck to him. It shocked me how much power Grayson seemed to have over these people. Is everyone in Paris a werewolf?

We came across a small bookstore and I quickly pulled Grayson inside.

“C’mon,” I said. “I want to find a book.”

My anxiety was skyrocketing. Now was the time.

We looked around for a while as I came up with my plan. This store was actually cute. It was two stories and full of all sorts of books in both French and English.

There was an adorable old lady behind the front counter, helping people with a kind smile.

I turned to Grayson. “Will you help me find a book?”

Grayson looked at me. “Sure.”

I swallowed hard. I really hope this works.

“Okay, it’s called Hands of Gold and it’s by Michael Johnson. It was my dad’s favorite book, and I can’t think of a better place to buy it than in Paris.”

I felt guilty lying to him, but I didn’t have a choice. There wasn’t actually a book called Hands of Gold that I knew of, but I needed to get Grayson away from me for enough time to get to my mother.

“Absolutely. Let’s go find it,” Grayson said as he walked away.

“Wait,” I said, grabbing onto his hand. He stopped and turned to look at me.

“I don’t know what genre it is, so I thought that I would look down here and you could go upstairs and look for it. It could be science fiction, or fantasy, or horror, or mystery. I don’t know what the book is about, only that it was his favorite.”

“Okay...,” Grayson said slowly. “Are you sure you’re okay being away from me for a bit? I saw how freaked out you were at the coffee shop.”

I smiled, trying to calm my nerves. I actually was a bit worried about that.

“Well, we have to try it out sooner or later. You won’t be that far from me. And I really want to find this book.” I touched Grayson’s arm. “It would mean a lot to me.”

Grayson nodded, looking a bit hesitant as he took a step back.

“Okay,” he said. “I’ll be right back. Just shout if you need me, and I’ll be at your side within seconds.” He leaned down and gave me a kiss.

My body warmed up as his lips moved softly against mine.

## Chapter 22 –

### **Filed To Story:**

Before the kiss could get too heated, I pulled away from him and smiled.

“The sooner we find the book, the sooner you can come back to me.” I kissed him one last time. “I’ll look down here while you look upstairs.”

Grayson nodded and stepped away from me. “Okay.”

I watched as he walked up the stairs to the second floor, never looking away from me. I could feel the dull ache grow in my chest from being apart, but it wasn’t nearly as bad as the pain before.

I let out a relieved breath. Okay. I can do this.

I smiled at him one last time before he reached the top of the stairs and turned the corner onto the second floor.

I immediately ran to the lady at the front desk.

“Hi, do you speak English?” I asked her.

She looked up from her computer, seeming a bit shocked.

“Um, of course. What can I help you with, miss?” she asked in a thick French accent.

“Oh, thank goodness,” I said.

“I need your help, please. In a few minutes, a man is going to come down those stairs looking for me, and when he realizes that I’m no longer in the store, he may freak out.

“I need you to tell him that there was something important I needed to do and that I’ll be back in a little bit. Tell him not to freak out.”

The woman gave me a strange look. “Miss, I don’t know...”

“I’m sorry, this is a strange thing that I’m asking you to do.” I quickly opened my purse and took out a twenty euro note and handed it to her.

“Please do this for me. If he gets too upset, just keep reminding him I will be back soon. Do not call the police.”

The woman’s eyes widened. “Miss, are you in danger? Do you need me to call someone?”

I shook my head quickly. “No, no. It’s nothing like that. I have something I need to do and my...my boyfriend can’t come. Nothing is wrong, I promise.

“But—” she said.

“Now, I have to go. I don’t have much time. Can you do this for me?”

The woman glanced down at the money in her hand and then back at me. She nodded. “I can do this.”

My heart lifted. I felt like hugging this sweet old woman.

“Thank you so much,” I said, stepping away from the counter. “You have no clue how much this means to me.”

She gave me a sweet smile. “Of course, my dear. Please stay safe.”

“Thank you,” I said. And then I turned and ran out the door, beginning my sprint down the street.

I could hear my heart beating in my ears as I ran down the streets of Paris to where I hoped my mother lived. I couldn’t stop looking behind me, waiting for Grayson to come around the corner and chase after me. But he never came.

By a stroke of luck, I was able to slip into my mother's building, and in very little time, I found myself standing in front of the door of her apartment. I knocked on the door quickly, hoping to God that someone would be home, otherwise this would all be for nothing.

"Just one second!" I heard someone shout from the other side of the door.

I nervously ran my sweaty palms over my jeans as I looked up and down the extremely fancy hallway, hoping I wasn't about to see Grayson come up the steps behind me before I got the chance to talk to my mother.

This place was really nice. I'd known that my mother's husband was rich, but I hadn't remembered her living somewhere this nice.

The door opened and my mother stood in front of me, wiping her wet hands on her apron. She didn't look at me just yet.

"Sorry, about that. I was making dinner and had my hands are covered in chicken fat."

Then she lifted her head, and her eyes widened as they met mine.

I gave her a small smile and shrugged. "Hi, Mom."

"Belle!" She pulled me to her, wrapping her arms tightly around me. It was the sort of hug she used to give to me when I was younger—after I'd won a soccer game or gotten home from a long day at school.

It made me feel warm.

I was surprised that she was showing me any affection at all. I couldn't remember the last time she'd hugged me.

"Oh, my darling girl, you have no idea how worried I was!" She held me tighter and then moved back. She took my face in her hands. "Oh, you've gotten so beautiful."

I pulled away a bit. "You were worried about me?"

Her face dropped and then turned sympathetic. She glanced down the hall in both directions, as if she was making sure that no one was watching, and then looked back at me.

"Why don't you come in?" she motioned to the inside of her apartment.

I nodded and hesitantly followed her inside.



She led me to a lavish living room that was very well decorated. It was all white with accents of gray and cream. I didn't even want to sit down in case I stained her furniture.

My mother smiled at me as she sat, removing the apron tied around her waist. She fit perfectly with her decor.

She was wearing a black A-line skirt and a white blouse, with pearls in her ears and her hair up in an elegant bun. She looked beautiful—like the perfect housewife.

After I'd sat down, she spoke: "You came at a good time. The kids are at school and Carl is at work. We have the entire apartment to ourselves." She was wringing her hands nervously. "I'm so happy to see you, Belle."

I nodded, not knowing how to react to all the affection that she was giving me. I looked around me. It didn't seem like any children lived here.

Everything was so pristine—like I had just walked into a very fancy hotel.

"You have some explaining to do," my mother said. "Will you tell me where you've been?"

I took a deep breath. I hadn't really thought about what I would tell her once I got here. "I've been in Paris."

"This entire time? Where have you been staying?"

"Well, I...", I said. "It's a long story—one that I don't think I can explain right now. I just wanted to come here and let you know that I'm okay and that I'm going home tomorrow."

"I don't know when I'll be able to get in touch with you again." I watched to see if she would react to what I was saying. "I figured I owed you an explanation. You are my mother, after all."

Not that you've acted much like one.

My mother's eyes narrowed, and I wondered if I had said that out loud. I looked away from her piercing eyes.

"What's that on your neck?" she asked suddenly.

My hand immediately went to my neck, to where my mark was. It burned a bit at the touch, and I knew that it was because I was so far away from Grayson.

"It's nothing," I said.

My mother rose slowly from her seat. "That isn't nothing." She approached me and then sat down next to me. I moved away from her a bit.

She had this frightening expression on her face that was making me nervous.

“Let me see,” she said.

I shook my head. I had no way of explaining a giant bite mark on my neck without sounding insane. “No. Really, it’s nothing.” I stood.

“I actually should probably get going. I’ve done what I came here to do.”

Before I could even take a step though, my mother grabbed my hand. She stood up next to me so fast that I didn’t have time to react. Just as quickly, she moved my hair away from my neck, revealing my mark.

She gasped and stepped back.

“Mom, I can explain,” I started. “I—”

“You have the mark of an alpha,” she stated with a frightened expression. “And it’s fresh.”

My eyes widened to the size of saucers. “How do you know that?”

As if in slow motion, she reached up and pulled aside the collar of her own shirt.

There, sitting on her porcelain skin, were puncture wounds in the shape of teeth.

They were covered over by years’ worth of scar tissue, telling me they were very old. I gasped.

“Because I have my own mark,” my mother whispered.

I stared at her. I couldn’t believe what she was telling me.

“Is that why you didn’t come here once you got to Paris?” my mother asked.

“Because you met your mate?”

I nodded my head slowly, still shocked that we were even having this conversation.

She looked away from me with a pained expression on her face.

“Mom?” I asked. “Are you a werewolf?”

She turned back to me and shook her head. “No, no, of course not. I’m human just like you.”

“But you have a mate?” I asked.

She nodded. “Yes.”

I swallowed. How common was it for humans to have mates? And how did I not know that my mother had one? How did I not know that she was part of the werewolf world?

Had my mother really not wanted me in her life that much? To not tell me about one of the biggest parts of it?

“What is his name?” she asked. I assumed that she was asking about Grayson.

“It doesn’t matter,” I said. “I’m going home tomorrow.”

“You’re not staying with him?”

I shook my head. “No. No, I can’t.”

My mother stared at me for a few seconds, looking hesitant. “Belle, is your mate violent?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean...” my mother started. “I’ve heard stories about how abusive alphas can be toward their mates. They’re possessive and controlling.

“I know what it’s like to be with a normal wolf; I can’t imagine being with an alpha.”

I sat down in shock. Grayson had never hurt me, but it seemed like my mother was implying that he would. She sat down next to me and took my hands in hers.

## Chapter 23 –

### Filed To Story:

“You know what I’m talking about, don’t you Belle? Have you seen your mate express his anger through violence?”

I nodded slowly. “He nearly strangled someone to death. He growls at every person who looks at me.”

My mother’s shoulders slumped as a panicked expression took over her face. She squeezed my hands harder. “That’s why you’re trying to get away from him?”

Until that moment, I hadn’t actually been afraid that Grayson would hurt me. He was a rough guy, sure —but with me, so far, he’d been pretty gentle.

I had different reasons for wanting to leave him.

I just knew that I would probably be better off on my own. It seemed like every person who came into my life got hurt, and I would not let that happen to Grayson.

I couldn't let that happen to Grayson.

I cared too much about him.

"No, that's not why. I just need to go home," I said.

My mother let go of my hands and crossed her arms. She nodded in understanding, but still looked skeptical.

"Do you have a plan? Because there is no way an alpha male is just going to let his mate walk out of his life," she said.

"I was just going to sneak out while he was sleeping and catch a flight home. He doesn't know where I live," I replied.

"No, that won't work. He'll notice you're gone the second you leave him." She stood and began wringing her hands again. "And if he doesn't notice, his wolf definitely will. Dominant males typically sleep with their noses pressed up to their mates to smell them throughout the night. It calms their wolf and helps them sleep. If your scent isn't near him, then he'll immediately wake up."

I didn't know what to say to that, to any of it.

She looked at me. "Is that what you've been wearing all day?" she asked, pointing at my sweater.

I nodded.

"So it has his scent on it and yours?"

"Yes," I said.

"Okay. Okay, then that is what you will put near him when you try to escape. It must smell like you, but it must also smell like the new environment that you are in."

She sat down next to me again. "And Belle, the minute you get away from him, you run like hell and you don't look behind you. Bring nothing. It will only slow you down. If he catches you..." She paused. "If he catches you, you will never have another opportunity. You will be trapped with him forever with no way out." Her expression was so intense, so frightening.

"Mom, you're scaring me," I whispered.

She gave me a sad smile and lifted her hand to cup my cheek.

“Oh, my sweet Belle, mated to an alpha.” Tears formed in her eyes. “I never wanted this life for you.”

My brow furrowed.

“What do you mean?” I asked. “Mom, does your mate hurt you?”

She didn’t answer me. She just continued studying my face as if this was the last time that she would ever see me. Tears flowed down her cheeks.

“I’m so happy to finally be able to talk to you about this, to explain myself. You have no idea how hard it was to keep this from you and your father,” she said.

At the mention of my dad, I pulled away. She shouldn’t have been talking about him. She hadn’t even come to his funeral.

“Why didn’t you tell us?”

She fidgeted a bit. “I—”

Before she could say anything else, I heard the front door opening. I thought it would be Grayson, and my heart plummeted into my stomach.

My mother immediately stood and fixed her makeup that had run due to her crying.

“Claire, is that dinner I smell?” a deep voice asked from the other room. “It better be ready on time tonight. We don’t want a repeat of last night, now do we?”

A man walked into the living room. I hadn’t seen him since I was a kid at the wedding, and even then, we’d barely met, but I recognized him immediately as Carl, my mother’s husband—and, apparently, her mate.

His eyes found my mother and he approached her slowly, his gaze moving up and down her figure. He touched the hem of her skirt when he finally came to stand in front of her.

“Is this skirt new?” he asked. “It’s a bit short, don’t you think?”

My mother nodded. “I’ll change as soon as I get the chance.” She smiled and placed her hand on his shoulder. She leaned in. “We have a guest,” she said to him. She motioned to me.

I stood. “Hi,” I said. “I don’t think we’ve gotten the chance to officially meet. I’m Belle.”

I reached out my hand, offering it to him to shake.

He walked toward me, crossing his arms and looking me over in a slow and threatening way.

“So you’re the daughter she never wanted.”

“Carl!” my mother gasped.

He apparently doesn’t want to shake my hand.

He held up his hand to her and gave her a look that made her shrink in on herself.

He turned back to me. “Do you have any idea how worried your mother was when you didn’t show up weeks ago? Did you stop to consider how it would make her feel, or did you only take your own selfish feelings into account?”

My mouth fell open in shock. Who gave him the right to talk to me like that?

He knew nothing about my situation or what I had gone through in the last couple of weeks.

“Carl, stop it right now!” my mom yelled.

“I—” I began, but was immediately interrupted.

“No. Do you have any idea how lucky you were that I was going to let you into my home in the first place?” Carl shouted. He pointed a nasty finger at me. “And you took that opportunity for granted and hurt your mother in the process!”

I didn’t know what to say. I hadn’t been expecting this reaction at all.

“I’m sorry I didn’t make it. Something came up and I had no way of contacting her. I lost my phone.”

A growl came from Carl’s chest. He was getting closer and closer to me. “Something came up? Something came up?” he asked. “That’s the best excuse you can come up with?”

My mom walked up next to him and grabbed his arm. “Carl, stop it,” she tried to say calmly.

He let out an ear-shattering growl and shoved her away; she fell to the floor, knocking into the coffee table.

“You will not give me orders!” he yelled at her.

“Stop!” I yelled when he approached her again. I grabbed him, trying to tug him away from her.

A powerful blow hit my face, and an immense amount of pain radiated from my cheek throughout the rest of my body. It sent me flying sideways, to the ground. For a second, I couldn't see anything. I only felt blinding hot pain. Yeah, that will leave a mark.

"Carl, no!" I heard my mother yell. "She is an alpha's mate! Look at her neck! She is an alpha's mate," she sobbed out.

I didn't do or say anything. I just continued to lie on the ground, holding my cheek, as tears of pain ran down my face.

I felt someone move the hair away from my neck. "Luna," Carl breathed out. He dropped onto his knees next to me. "Luna, I am so sorry! I didn't know."

Before I could answer, the door came crashing open. A weight lifted off me and I breathed out a sigh of relief. Grayson ran into the room, his chest heaving. His eyes were the blackest that I had ever seen them. He was twice the size that he normally was, and there were veins coming out of his neck and forehead.

He looked livid.

His eyes found mine.

"Grayson," I said. Without even knowing what I was doing, I reached for him, longing for his arms to be around me.

He immediately ran to me and knelt down next to me. He wouldn't stop growling and, with every passing second, he was looking more and more like a wolf instead of a human.

He gently touched the bruise that was already forming on my face. I expected it to hurt, but somehow the sensation just brought me more comfort. His hand came away with blood on it.

He growled so loudly that I'm sure the entire building shook.

"Who did this?" he asked. His voice sounded almost demonic.

"Alpha Grayson, I am so sorry," Carl said.

When I looked at him, I noticed that he was already baring his neck to Grayson, kneeling on the ground next to us.

"I did not know she was your mate. I never would have hurt her had I known."

Grayson moved faster than I could comprehend. His hand was around Carl's neck and he lifted him up against the wall in mere seconds.

“You dare hurt my mate?”

He punched Carl’s face so hard that one of his teeth went flying out of his mouth.

I heard my mother’s sob from the other side of the room. She was on her knees, watching as my mate attempted to kill hers. I knew I had to do something. Grayson was throwing punch after punch at Carl’s face at the same time that he was strangling him. Carl did nothing to fight back. He was going to die if Grayson didn’t stop soon.

I ran up to him, attempting to put myself between him and Carl, but Grayson wouldn’t stop punching him long enough for me to succeed. I grabbed his face and said his name, but he wouldn’t look at me.

“Grayson, please stop,” I said in a panic. “Please stop. I’m in pain. I need you.

Please, I need you.”

Grayson looked at me. There was foam dripping from his mouth. His canines were piercing his lips, drawing blood.

I wasn’t sure if he’d heard me, so now that I had his attention, I repeated myself:

“I’m in pain, Grayson.” I touched my cheek softly. “It hurts. Please take care of me. I think I might pass out. I need you,” I said desperately.

Of course, that was a lie. With all the adrenaline that was running through my body, I could barely feel anything. But he didn’t need to know that. Grayson shook his head violently as if he was having an internal argument. Take care of his wounded mate or kill the man who did it?

Now that he had stopped punching Carl, I could stand in front of him.

His eyes watched me closely and zeroed in on the handprint on my face. He growled.

“Please, Grayson. Please, I just want to go home with you. I’m so tired. Please, just take me home,” I whispered.

He huffed, and I knew that he had come to a decision. He got so close to Carl, who he was still holding up by the neck, that I was sure Carl could feel Grayson’s breath fanning his battered face.

He looked in Carl’s swollen eyes. “Touch my mate again and you’re a dead man.

There will be consequences for this,” he growled.



When Grayson dropped him on the ground, Carl began gasping for air and coughing. My mother was at his side in an instant, cradling his head to her chest.

Grayson didn't waste any time. He picked me up in his arms so he was carrying me bridal style and began walking to the door.

I looked at my mother on the floor with her mate. "I'm so sorry, Mom. I'm so sorry."

## Chapter 24 –

### **Filed To Story:**

She shook her head as she watched me being carried away.

"Don't come back here, Belle. Never come back here."

Neither of us said anything during the entire ride back to the hotel.

Grayson kept me in his lap, alternating between nipping at the mark on my neck and licking the wound on my face.

At first, I was completely disgusted by him licking my face, but one loud growl from him had me shutting right up. I'm sure our cab driver thought we were insane. I considered talking to him and trying to explain myself, but I couldn't tell if he was mad at me or mad because I was hurt.

Maybe it was both. I didn't want to risk pissing him off even more.

It took him the entire ride home to calm down. His body returned to normal, although his breathing was still ragged.

Once at the hotel, he picked me up and carried me all the way to our room. We got a few strange looks on the way up, but nobody said anything, thankfully.

In our room, he immediately brought me to the en suite bathroom and set me down on the counter. He stepped between my legs.

"Kyle!" he yelled as he grabbed a towel and ran it under the faucet. "Get me ice!"

He brought the damp towel to the part of my face that had split from Carl's punch and gently cleaned it. I winced. Grayson growled.

"What were you doing there?" Grayson asked as he washed away the blood.

I hesitated. I knew I shouldn't tell him, but I really didn't feel like lying to him.

“That was my mom’s house,” I mumbled. “The man who hit me was her mate.”

Grayson nodded his head, not making eye contact with me. “Why didn’t you take me with you?”

“I...” My shoulders slumped. I looked down at my hands. “I was afraid of what you could do to her if you knew who she was and where she lived.”

Grayson sighed. Carefully, he took my chin with his hand and tilted my head up so I was looking at him. His eyes softened.

“Listen to me, Belle, and listen well. I will never do anything to hurt you. Ever. I know you and your mom don’t have the best relationship, but know that I’d never do anything to her if it risked losing you.”

He leaned down and kissed my forehead. Then he placed his forehead on mine and looked deep into my eyes. He cupped the uninjured side of my face.

“I need you to trust me, Belle. I care about you too much to have you running off because you’re scared. Talk to me. Communicate. We’ll figure it out together.

Always.”

I took in a shaky breath, then closed my eyes. “Okay,” I whispered.

Someone suddenly cleared their voice. Both Grayson and I snapped our heads up to see Kyle standing in the doorway.

“Sorry to interrupt this touching moment,” he said, smirking at the two of us.

“I have the ice pack you asked for, Alpha.” He handed it to Grayson. “Now I can see why you needed it. You look like hell, Luna.”

“Gee, thanks, Kyle,” I said sarcastically.

He laughed. “Any time,” he said. He winked at me before walking away.

Grayson finished tending to my wound, bandaging it and lightly pressing the ice pack to it.

“You’re keeping that on there until all the ice has melted. I don’t care how long it takes. Your face is already swelling too much.”

I nodded. It hurt like hell.

“I’m going to go get you some ibuprofen for the pain,” Grayson said as he tucked a stray piece of hair behind my ear. “Stay here, okay?”

I nodded again.

Once he had left the room, I sighed and leaned against the mirror behind me. My life had turned completely upside down in just a couple of weeks.

I felt overwhelmed—no, I felt more than overwhelmed.

I felt completely out of my mind.

I felt tears form in my eyes. This was all too much for me to handle. I wanted everything to go back to normal. I wanted to jump in a time machine. Go back to staying with my dad and working at the diner—back before I’d needed to worry about money or where I would live.

I looked around me, trying to control my breathing.

But since a time machine’s not available... I want to go home and regain control over my life!

Even my mother, who had always seemed so well put together and in control, had been wearing a mask. She was obviously living in an environment that prohibited her from making any of her own decisions. I didn’t want to live like that. I just wanted to go home.

I just want to go home.

I noticed then that Grayson’s phone was lying on the counter next to me. I glanced out the door to see if he was coming, then slipped the phone into my pocket.

Grayson returned a few seconds later, holding a glass of water and some medicine.

When he saw the tears in my eyes, he set down the glass and pills on the counter and was in front of me within seconds.

“Why are you crying?” he asked.

Because I have to leave you, I thought.

“My face just hurts, that’s all,” I said.

He frowned and brushed his knuckles lightly over my bruise.

“I hate that you got hurt. I wish I would’ve been there before it happened. That bastard will pay for this, I promise you that.”

I shook my head. “No. No, please don’t do anything to him. I don’t want to hurt my mom.”

Grayson sighed. He handed me the glass of water and ibuprofen.

“Drink all the water.”

After I had taken the medicine, Grayson brought me to the bedroom and sat on the bed so that his back was against the headboard. He took me into his lap and cradled me in his arms.

“You have no idea how worried I was,” he breathed into my neck.

“I’m sorry,” I said. “I needed to see my mom.”

He hummed as he continued to breathe in my scent. “Never leave me like that again, okay?” He placed a kiss on my neck. His kisses continued down my neck before I could reply. He kissed my mark and then moved back up to my chin, placing wet kisses all along it.

Finally, he came to my lips, moving his against mine so passionately that it took my breath away. As I got more and more distracted by the occurring events, I slowly forgot to keep the ice pack against my cheek. Grayson growled and grabbed my hand, pressing it back up to my face. I rolled my eyes.

He lay me down on the bed and hovered over me without taking his lips from mine.

His hands moved under my shirt, tracing the lines of my rib cage.

Wow, this escalated quickly.

“Grayson,” I said through his kisses. He didn’t stop.

“Grayson,” I tried again.

He lifted off of me a bit and brushed his nose against mine affectionately.

“We need to stop,” I said.

“I know, I know,” he said. “You have no idea how hard it is not to ravish you every second of every day.”

I swallowed. I could feel my cheeks turning bright red. “Um, thanks?”

He chuckled and lifted all the way off me. He brushed a hand through his hair.

“I need to go take a shower, probably a cold one. Would you like to join?”

My blush intensified. “No! That was a onetime thing, buddy.”

He laughed again. He leaned down and placed one more quick kiss on my lips before standing up. “Yeah, we’ll see about that, baby,” he said.

“Now, are you going to be a good girl and stay here and not run away while I’m in the shower, or do I need to handcuff you to the bed?”

I shook my head quickly. “I’ll stay here.”

“Good,” Grayson said and then walked into the bathroom.

I sighed and stared at the ceiling. All I wanted was to go to sleep, but I knew that now might be the only time I had alone. I took out his phone and typed in the password I’d seen earlier.

Do I really want to do this?

I stared at the phone, my thumb hovering over the screen. Deliberating.

My plan had been to book a flight when Grayson wasn’t looking. Then I’d sneak out to the airport sometime during the night. Maybe I could even be home by the morning.

I knew that now would be my only chance to do this.

I glanced at the bathroom door, a deep part of me almost hoping that he would come out, see what I was doing, and stop me. I was just so scared. This was all too much.

I opened up the internet browser on his iPhone but couldn’t bring myself to type anything, even though I knew I was running out of time.

Even just thinking about leaving Grayson made the pain in my chest grow more and more. My mark throbbed and tears were starting to well in my eyes.

But what about my apartment? My job? It had already been really irresponsible of me to spend even an extra night in France rather than racing home.

My rent was already late, and my landlord wasn’t exactly the forgiving type.

And I knew that if I brought it up with Grayson he would just smooth talk me into staying another day. I was afraid to disagree with him. I’d seen what he was capable of.

I’ll never do anything to hurt you, he had said. But was that true? ~Talk to me.

Communicate. We’ll figure it out together.~

But what would he say if I told him that I was planning on escaping tonight and going home? And that I wasn't sure if I still had a job or even an apartment, and I might be homeless?

I had always taken so much pride in being able to provide for not only myself but also my father after he became unemployed because of his illness.

Would Grayson still want me if he knew about all the baggage that I came with?

How pathetic I was? And then there was the problem with my mom and her mate.

Would Grayson treat me the way that Carl treated my mother?

She had seemed so worried when she found out that my mate was an alpha, and had even helped me come up with a plan to get away from him.

But I couldn't imagine Grayson hurting me. I took in a deep breath. I trusted him. I trusted him with my life. If he was planning on hurting me, then I would deal with that later.

## Chapter 25 –

### Filed To Story:

For now, I just wanted to enjoy being with him without overthinking it.

I suddenly heard the shower turn off. My heart jumped. Seconds later, Grayson walked out of the bathroom with a towel hanging dangerously low on his hips.

He ran a hand through his hair, his muscles rippling with his every movement.

"I didn't realize how much of your mother's mate's blood I had on me. Sorry if it freaked you out."

Without even knowing what I was doing, I launched myself at him, throwing my arms around his neck. He immediately wrapped his arms around me to stabilize himself.

"Whoa, what's going on, baby?"

I began sobbing into his neck, letting all the emotions from the last couple of weeks flood my body and take me over. I couldn't help it.

Grayson probably thought I was insane.

His grip on me tightened.

“Belle, baby, what’s wrong?” he asked in a panicked voice. “Why are you crying?”

I just shook my head. I couldn’t speak through the intense sobs racking my body.

Grayson rubbed my back in a soothing way, then picked me up so that my legs encircled his waist. He walked us to the bed and sat us down, with me straddling him.

“Talk to me, Belle,” he said, forcing my face out of his neck. Once I was looking at him, he ran the pad of his thumb over my cheek, wiping away my tears.

“You’re freaking me out, beautiful. What’s wrong?”

I took in a shaky breath. “I don’t want to leave you,” I said through my tears.

Grayson’s body stiffened. “Why would you leave me?” he growled out.

I sniffled. I slowly reached beside us and grabbed his phone that was lying on the bed. It was still on. I held it up for him to see.

“What?” he asked, obvious confusion lacing his voice. He took the phone from me.

I shut my eyes tightly, preparing myself for what was to come next. “I grabbed it from the bathroom counter when you weren’t looking. I was going to book a flight home and then sneak out of here tonight.

“My mom said that if I left something that smelled like me next to you while you were sleeping, you wouldn’t notice I was gone until morning.”

He gripped my hips tighter, and his breathing became uneven.

“Belle, look at me.”

I shook my head. I didn’t want to see how mad he was.

He grabbed my chin and squeezed it softly. “Look at me, mate.”

I opened one eye and peeked at him. He didn’t look as angry as I’d thought he would be. I bit my lip.

“First of all,” Grayson started, “that would have never worked. Maybe a normal wolf wouldn’t notice their mate missing, but not an alpha. I would have noticed right away, or my wolf would have. We’re attuned to every part of your body, even during sleep—everything about you, not just your scent.”

I began fumbling with my shirt, my cheeks turning bright red.

He grabbed my chin again and forced me to look back at him. His expression became intense.

“Second, you are never leaving me. No matter where you go or how many times you run, I will always find you. Always. Without fail. You are mine, Belle. I don’t know how many times I have to tell you that. You’re my mate, my soulmate, my everything.

“Maybe I wasn’t clear enough when I explained all of this to you, and for that I am sorry. But we will spend the rest of our lives together. I love you.”

I gasped. Did I hear him right? “You love me?”

Grayson nodded. “With all that I have.”

“But there are so many things you don’t know about me. You don’t know about all the baggage I come with,” I said.

“Then tell me,” Grayson said as he stroked my hair lovingly. “I want to know everything about you. “

“Are you sure?” I whispered.

He nodded and bent down to kiss my nose. “Nothing would make me happier.”

I looked deep into his eyes, searching for a reason not to open up to him, but I couldn’t find it. Maybe it’s time to let somebody else take care of me for once.

“I’m homeless,” I said.

Grayson’s expression went from adoring to furious within seconds as he processed what I had said. His grip on my hips tightened almost to the point of pain before he stopped himself and instead began kneading them.

“For how long?”

I looked down at my hands, suddenly feeling sick to my stomach.

“Well, I’m not officially homeless yet, but I will be when I go home. My landlord isn’t very understanding when it comes to late rent. I’m sure all of my stuff is already out on the sidewalk.”

Grayson growled. “Is that why you were so worried about going home?”

I nodded my head slowly, still not meeting his gaze. I could feel the embarrassment coursing through my body.



Grayson said nothing for a while, and it forced me to look up at him to decipher what he was thinking. His face was twisted in disgust, and all of his muscles were tight.

Was he wondering what he had gotten himself into? Was he wishing that he had been given a different mate?

My shoulders slumped as I voiced my next question: "Do you still want me?"

Grayson's eyes snapped to mine and he growled ferociously. He yanked my body into his chest. "You are mine!"

His wolf seemed to speak now as the darks of his eyes took over. "I will always want you!"

I nodded to show that I understood. "I'm sorry," I whispered into his chest.

He pulled away so he could look at me, his animal eyes penetrating mine. "Why are you sorry?"

"I'm sorry that you're stuck with me. I'm sure I wasn't what you were imagining when you thought of your mate. I might not even have a job, either, so who knows when I'll be able to get back on my feet."

"Is that why you didn't tell me any of this?" Grayson asked. "You thought I would be ashamed of you?"

I nodded again. "Aren't you?"

To my great surprise, Grayson just laughed. He ran a hand down his face. "I have done a terrible job explaining all of this to you," he said darkly.

"I meant it when I said that I will make sure you never pay for another thing in your life. You will move in with me as soon as we get back to Minnesota. You will no longer have or need a job. I will provide for you just like any good male mate does.

It is the way of all werewolves. It is not in our nature to have it any other way."

I gaped at him. "You want me to move in with you? After only knowing me for a couple of weeks?"

He chuckled. "No, baby girl, I don't want you to move in with me. You will move in with me. You don't have a choice in the matter. I will tie you to my bed if I have to, just to ensure that I get to wake up next to your beautiful face for the rest of my life."

I knew that I should be afraid, that I should run for the hills. This was exactly what I had feared when I'd thought about getting into a relationship with Grayson: not getting to

make my own decisions anymore. But I didn't feel scared. I felt warm. For the first time in my life, it felt like I had nothing to worry about. Grayson would take care of me.

"As for the being ashamed of you part," Grayson added in a disgusted tone, "that is not possible. I wasn't mad at you for your situation. I was furious with myself for not being there to take care of you when you needed me most. You were so close to me and I had no idea. I could've had you in my arms so long ago."

Relief surged through me. I smiled and leaned my head on his chest.

"I never want to leave your arms," I whispered.

He smiled slightly and pressed his mouth to my hair. "Then you won't," he said.

I sighed as I nuzzled into him further. "It feels good to finally be honest with you. I didn't like all the lies I was telling you. I was just so scared."

Grayson rubbed my back again, massaging the tight muscles that were slowly starting to loosen. "What other lies did you tell me?"

I bit my lip. "Uh, I don't live in Winona. I live in Minneapolis."

Grayson chuckled. "You don't think I knew that? The minute I met you, I had one of my pack members dig up all of your records."

I gasped and looked at him. "You what?"

He laughed again. "Don't look so offended, my love. You belong to me, remember? I have every right to know everything about you."

"Yeah, whatever," I said, still a little upset about the invasion of privacy.

He leaned down and began to playfully nibble on my ear and jaw, obviously trying to lighten my mood. I laughed and shoved him away. He chuckled.

"Anything else you lied to me about?" Grayson asked.

I thought over the last couple of weeks.

"Um, there is no book called Hands of Gold?"

Laughter shook through Grayson again.

"Yes, I figured that one out as well," he said happily and brought me closer in his arms.

And, for the first time in a long time, everything was okay.

The next morning, I woke up to the feeling of Grayson squeezing the absolute life out of me from behind.

I attempted to shift my weight to find a more comfortable position, but he was making it impossible with how tightly he was holding me. It wasn't painful, but it was very uncomfortable.

"Grayson," I said, trying to wake him up. I rubbed his arms that were wrapped around me. "Grayson, wake up."

I noticed as I continued to caress him that his entire body was shaking and that long, dark hair was growing out of his skin. He was close to shifting. I couldn't see his face, but I could feel his hot breath on my neck and hear his low growling in my ear. What was happening? He must have been dreaming.

With every passing second, his grip was becoming tighter and tighter. I knew that I had to wake him up or he would literally squeeze me to death.

I leaned down as far as I could and pressed a kiss to his arm, then another one.

Small huffs came from Grayson with every kiss I pressed to his skin. His arms loosened the tiniest bit.

I continued to kiss his arms and hands, then began to lick and suck. His growls turned into groans.

His hold on me loosened to a normal level, and I breathed out a sigh of relief.

But then he threw one of his legs over me and buried his face into my neck and hair. I could tell that he was still asleep. I could feel something hard poking my butt. Uh-oh.

I grabbed onto one of his hands and traced the lines on his palm. "Grayson," I whispered. He huffed and stirred a bit. I brought his hand up and kissed his palm softly. "Grayson, I need you to wake up."

When he didn't move yet again, I slowly turned my body so I could face him. This proved to be very difficult as Grayson growled and tightened his arms around me once again in his sleep.

Whatever he was dreaming about must have been pretty intense.

Once I was facing him, I noticed how stressed he seemed to be. His face was tight and set in a frown, and his entire body was rigid and unmoving except for his rapid breathing and trembling. I didn't like seeing him like this. I didn't want him to be stressed out or to be having a bad dream.

