

# Kidnapped by My Mate Novel

## Chapter 51 – 60

### Filed To Story:

I gritted my teeth.

“I’m sorry, Elijah,” I started, “but as your beta I command you to come to the packhouse and leave the luna.”

I’m not leaving her without giving her some sort of explanation. ~Elijah still resisted.

I looked at Zagan. “He wants to give her an explanation.”

“Tell him he can’t. He cannot risk worrying the luna and causing her to follow,”

Zagan replied.

I could feel Elijah starting to speak to the luna. My mouth opened in accord with Zagan’s orders.

“Stop!” I exclaimed through mind-link. He was trying to explain about the vampires. “As your beta, I command you not to tell her anything else.”

Elijah fought the command, which was painful. Defying the command of a higher-ranking wolf went against everything in our nature.

Kyle, why are you doing this? Stop. Please, ~he linked.

My wolf whimpered in my mind. We were hurting our mate.

“Stop fighting it, Elijah, you’re only hurting yourself.”

He wasn’t listening—he was still trying to communicate with the luna and go against orders.

“Elijah—as your beta, I command you to follow—”

I am not leaving her! he shot back in a strained growl.

“Tell him she will die if she comes with him,” Minnie said. “Tell him she’ll die unless she gets as far away as possible.”

I nodded in agreement.

“Listen to me, Elijah. The luna is in danger. There’s a war coming, and she can’t be here for it. Please trust me. This is for the best. Come back.”

What war? ~Elijah’s answer came back, confounded.

“Tell him to stop worrying her,” Casimir said.

Oh great, another vampire telling me what to do with his stupid mind powers.

“Tell him to say he has to go back to the packhouse and to put on his best smile and walk away. Tell him not to say anything else about what’s going on,” Casimir said.

The only reason I was so quick to follow his command this time was because I desperately wanted Elijah’s pain to stop. He needed to trust me.

“As your beta...” I ground my teeth. “... I command you not to upset the luna. Tell her you have to go back to the packhouse. Then put on your biggest smile and leave. Make sure she is not following you, or she risks death. Please, Elijah. It’s the only way to keep her safe.”

Finally, I felt his resolve through the bond. My words had gotten through to him.

We wanted the same thing.

“Is he doing it?” Minnie asked.

I nodded. “He’s leaving her now.” I focused on the mate bond. “She’s trying to come with, but he’s stopping her.”

Zagan nodded in approval. “Good.”

I looked down at the unconscious Grayson. Nothing had changed yet, but he was still breathing, thank God. I sighed.

The alpha, Elijah, and the luna were all safe. Things were going to be okay.

Suddenly, something sharp poked through the inside of my bottom lip. I tasted copper.

What the...?

I opened my mouth and touched the inside of my bottom lip.

I looked at the blood on my finger in confusion. How had that happened?

Then my teeth began to move. Pain shot through my face. I cried out.

Touching my canines, I realized they were growing larger. And sharper.

In fact, they were no longer canines at all.

They were fangs.

“Oh, yeah,” mentioned Minnie casually, “we should probably get you inside and lying down. Your transition is starting.”

GRAYSON POV

My wolf was practically screaming, waking me up from a sleep full of nightmares.

My head was pounding as he howled his displeasure, pushing me to wake up.

I groaned, shifting my weight on the mattress.

What the fuck is going on? Where am I?

“Alpha,” I heard a voice say in the distance, “Alpha, wake up.”

I groaned again, wanting to push away the too-loud voice until I figured out what was happening.

Why’s he yelling, anyway?

Something was off. Everything around me felt softer, harder, sharper, more textured than ever before. I gripped the sheets beneath me, tightening my hands into fists around them.

It was as if I could feel every thread in the fabric woven in the intricate design that made the sheet. There were strange scents in the air, too; new people that I had never met before were in the room, leaving traces of blood and woody cologne.

Their potency overwhelmed me, in fact made me want to cover my nose.

A small hand touched my shoulder.

“Alpha Grayson, can you hear me?” a squeaky, feminine voice said.

I ignored it. I didn’t like the voice. I didn’t like the touch. My wolf wouldn’t shut up: he kept repeating a name over and over again. I liked the name. I enjoyed the sound of it. I wanted to keep hearing it.

Belle. Belle. Belle. Belle. Belle! BELLE!

My eyes snapped open.

“Belle,” I growled.

Everything came rushing back in an instant.

Azazel. The war. Kyle. Belle. Belle was hurt. I had to get to Belle.

“Alpha,” a familiar voice said next to me, “thank God. I thought you’d had an aneurysm or something.”

I propelled my body off of the bed, moving faster than I’d expected, practically flying into the air. Then I composed myself. I hadn’t been in my body for a while; perhaps I’d forgotten how to use it. My eyes found the speaker—Kyle—and searched the room. Multiple people here, none of them the one I wanted.

My blind anger guided me as I grabbed Kyle by the collar.

“Where the fuck is Belle?” I snarled. I barely recognized my own voice—it sounded lower, scary even. My wolf added to the gravel in my tone, but he wasn’t the only presence speaking.

There was something I didn’t recognize sitting directly on my chest, hissing, turning my breath ragged and strained. Its soul was darker than my wolf’s, and just as powerful.

“She’s safe,” Kyle replied immediately, “she’s okay.”

That wasn’t good enough for me.

“Where?” I asked again, lifting him off the ground. “Where is my mate?”

Kyle swallowed harshly. I could hear his saliva travel down his throat and into his stomach. Strange.

“I don’t know,” he said in genuine grief, “I don’t know. I’m sorry.”

The loudest growl I’d ever heard came from my wolf, reverberating through my chest and out of my mouth. The floors and walls shook. I was close to shifting. Hair began to sprout from my arms. My muscles started to stretch. Something sharp pierced the inside of my lower lip.

“Now is not the time to shift,” a voice said behind me. “Control your wolf.”

There was no mistaking the powerful wave that washed over me.

It was the command of a Mortar.

My muscles tightened as I waited for the order to take me over and force me to do its bidding.

To my surprise, it never did.

I paused. The vampire's command hadn't worked.

And I could tell that no command coming from him or any Mortar would be successful anymore. How I could know this I wasn't sure, but I felt complete mastery over my mind and body—like a permanent mental block had been put up.

Fury raced through me like fire.

I swerved to meet the eyes of the Mortar. I was surprised not to see the face of Azazel.

Instead I was looking at Zagan Mortar, king of the vampires.

I had no idea what he was doing standing in my bedroom, but it didn't matter—at least not then. What mattered was that he had ordered me to rein in my wolf as if I hadn't just spent months in his brother's control.

I moved so quickly I barely comprehended it.

Soon I was in front of him, towering over him, though he didn't so much as flinch.

"Give me an order again," I hissed, "and I will not hesitate to tear you limb from limb. King or no king."

Zagan seemed surprised but unperturbed. Under different circumstances I would have smiled.

Vampires were fast, strong, and nimble, but nowhere near as powerful as werewolves.

The only clan that could pose a threat to us were the royals, and only because the Mortars had the power to control others with their words.

Without that power they were defenseless.

For some reason, Zagan no longer had that power over me.

Which meant—and we both knew it—that I could snap him like a twig right then and there if I so chose.

Zagan nodded once, never dropping his gaze from mine.

My wolf growled his approval and insisted we treat Azazel the same way next time we saw him. Only, with him, we wouldn't hesitate to kill.

## Chapter 52 –

### Filed To Story:

I looked back at Kyle.

“Belle,” I said again, trying to control my overflowing anger.

My wolf was pushing me to shift, howling in my head. I would give him what he wanted, but not just yet.

“Where did she go?”

I remembered everything from the last two months.

Every tear running down her beautiful face, every cruel word that she thought came from me.

Azazel had made her think I wanted her for sex and power; he had used her; he had laughed as she broke. And I had been stuck, trapped inside my own body, my heart breaking with every bit hers did.

While I stood here wasting time, she was thinking I had rejected her to be with another.

But I was going to find her, and once I did I was going to make sure she understood the truth if it meant groveling on my knees for the rest of eternity. She had to know how much she meant to me, how I would die without her.

Azazel would pay for what he did. He would die a torturous death by my hands, that I was sure of. He had hit Belle, marked her skin, touched her in ways only I was allowed to, hurt her because he had known it would weaken me.

But now I was only fueled by the anger he'd put in me.

I felt better and more balanced and centered than ever. It was almost strange how powerful I felt. If I hadn't been planning to protect my mate with this newfound power, I might have cause for concern—but I was ready to kill.

Kyle hesitated as he formulated an answer.

It was then that I noticed just how big he had gotten. He looked stronger, more sinewy, huge beside the doorway. Even though I had been seeing him through a small lens while Azazel had had control of my body, I knew he looked different from the last time.

What happened to him?

I gritted my teeth.

“Kyle, you had better tell me what happened after she walked out of this room yesterday, or so help me God—”

“She was with me,” broke in a new voice, “it’s my fault.”

Both our heads snapped toward the doorway, where Elijah stood.

I fixed my eyes on him.

“What’s your fault?”

GRAYSON POV

I was about a second away from burning the entire world down.

The mate bond was clouding my ability to think clearly; my thoughts revolved around finding Belle and never letting her out of my sight.

In the back of my mind, common sense was telling me none of these people here deserved my anger—especially not Kyle and Elijah, who had cared for my mate when I couldn’t.

But that didn’t stop me from nearly grabbing Elijah and throwing him across the room when he didn’t immediately tell me what I wanted to know.

“It’s my fault, Alpha,” he repeated, stepping in. “I left her.”

“Elijah,” Kyle growled, blocking him from my view.

He said something over mind-link before turning back to me.

“I ordered Elijah to leave. You can’t blame him.”

“I don’t give a flying fuck about blame! Tell me where she is,” I spat.

They exchanged worried glances before Kyle opened his mouth.

“When we found you and that girl yesterday, I knew we needed to get her away from here. She...she wasn’t doing well, Alpha.”

My wolf snapped his teeth in anger inside me. I remembered her face when she had walked in and witnessed what she thought was me mating with someone else.

She had been beyond sad—she had been devastated.

Kyle swallowed roughly before continuing. “I told her to go with Elijah so I could stay here and figure out what the hell was going on with you. I knew something was wrong. Elijah was going to take her wherever she wanted to go, somewhere you couldn’t find her.”

“But then something happened,” Elijah interjected. “It wasn’t you who was in control of your body but Azazel. Kyle... He almost died fighting him.”

“I remember,” I said curtly, “I was there.”

“What you don’t remember is what happened after Azazel left your body.”

Kyle stepped in front of Elijah protectively.

“You were unconscious for hours. We didn’t know if you were going to live, so we had to make some hard decisions for you. Belle, well...” He paused, nervously looking over at the vampires and then back at me.

“We ordered him to leave her,” King Zagan finished.

My head snapped toward him.

They did what?

“We thought it would be best for her and for your pack if she wasn’t here for the battle.”

My anger spiked. I tilted my head to the side, approaching him slowly, like a deer in the forest I was about to pounce on.

“And you thought that was your decision to make, Mortar?”

Zagan met my gaze straight on. “She wouldn’t be safe here. Azazel knows she is your weakness. We already know he is willing to hurt her to get to you. He wouldn’t hesitate to do it again if the opportunity presented itself during battle.”

I considered his words as I stopped in front of him, breathing heavily. Somewhere deep down, the logical part of me knew he was right. While he’d had control over my body, Azazel was in my head just as much as I was in his.



He saw my dedication to my mate and knew I would do anything to keep her safe, even if it meant dying slowly as a result of his constant control over me. Likewise, I saw his determination to win back the throne.

He was willing to kill anyone who stood in his way, and there was no doubt in my mind that he would look for Belle and use her to lure and kill me.

But even knowing that, the compulsion to find her and never let her leave my side again was unbelievable, almost blinding me to sense. Her feelings were tangible, sitting on my chest, constricting my lungs.

She felt broken, alone, confused—most of all unlovable, as if she were responsible for all the people who had abandoned her.

I could feel her thoughts as they ran their course.

Everyone she cared for and she thought cared for her all eventually left in one way or another: Her father, who had died and left her to fend for herself... Her mother, who had gone to build a new family... Elijah and Kyle, who had promised to stay until reneging at the last minute...

And me. She especially thought of me.

She was going over our months together, all the things she thought she'd done wrong.

She had come to the conclusion that she had pushed me away.

She thought she had done something to make me stop loving her, just as everyone had stopped loving her, no matter how hard she'd tried to keep them happy.

She was building a wall in her mind, brick by brick, to ensure that no one had access to her heart or the ability to hurt her ever again.

She was also unwittingly cutting off my access to her, making it impossible for me to know what she was feeling or how to find her. She thought our bond was broken, but it wasn't.

She thought she was protecting herself by blocking herself off, but she was only weakening our already struggling bond.

She needed me by her side, and soon, or she would become weak and sick.

It could even kill her—not for a while, probably a few months, but ultimately. But not if Azazel killed her first.

The bond wouldn't even get the chance to hurt Belle if Azazel found her tomorrow.

And he would, inevitably, find her: he was smart, he knew my mind, and he would figure out where I was hiding her if I brought her here.

Then he would hold her hostage, persuading me to do whatever he wanted.

I knew then that the only way to keep her and the pack safe would be to send her away.

It would be hard, but I would put someone in charge of caring for her until the battle was over.

I studied Zagan. He looked much too small to be the vampire king. My anger was dissolving.

“You will never make a decision concerning my mate ever again, do you hear me?”

Zagan scowled, most likely annoyed by my disrespectful manner, and didn’t answer.

I sighed. I didn’t want to admit what I was about to.

“But the decision you made was the right one. Although I would have liked to see my mate and explain it to her beforehand, I agree with the choice. Your doing that now has saved me the pain of having to let her go.”

Zagan waited a moment before speaking. “You’re a good leader, Alpha Grayson. I am sure you would have elected to do the same, had you had the chance.”

I could only hope so. I turned to Elijah, who straightened the moment our eyes met.

“You know where she is?” I asked.

“I think so. We made a plan before parting ways.”

“Good. Then you will go to her,” I said, adopting my alpha tone. “You will find my mate and keep her safe, mind-linking me the moment you have her in your sights.”

My wolf bristled, not liking to put the safety of our mate in the hands of another wolf, but knowing we had no choice. I needed Kyle here to command the warriors, and no one else knew Belle well enough to know where she would be.

Kyle seemed nervous. I paused.

I hadn’t considered the fact that Elijah was his mate and I was sending him away with a devastating war coming.

“Is this okay?” I asked him.

Kyle sighed and nodded glumly. “He’ll be safer there than here,” he muttered.

He took Elijah’s hand and squeezed it. Elijah smiled sadly. They both knew that this could be the last time they saw each other.

“Very well.” I took a deep breath. “I’ll meet you wherever you are when the battle is over, Elijah. For now, you will say your goodbyes and go alone.”

Elijah had not let go of Kyle’s hand.

“Yes, Alpha.”

I averted my gaze as they embraced and whispered their goodbyes.

It wasn’t long before Elijah was out the door and Kyle was looking back at me determinedly.

But something made me pause and do a double-take.

My heart rate picked up, my wolf came surging forward for a better look.

## Chapter 53 –

### Filed To Story:

“Kyle... Why are your eyes red?”

GRAYSON POV

In under a second, I had Kyle pushed up against the wall with my arm to his throat.

He yelped in surprise, looking up at me with blood-red eyes.

I sucked in a breath as I looked into those eyes, immediately put off by their unnatural color.

It was one thing to see a Mortar like this—but my own beta? It made my wolf whimper.

We didn’t want to hurt him but knew we wouldn’t have a choice if it came down to it.

Red eyes could only mean two things.

Either you were a vampire yourself, or a Mortar was taking control of your body.

Neither explanation was good.

“Get talking,” I growled, pressing him further into the wall.

Kyle whimpered slightly; his wolf was probably upset over the fact that his alpha was showing his distrust. It hurt me, too, but he had to know that I had no other option.

If he was being controlled by a vampire, possibly even Azazel, then I would have to kill him.

And if he was now somehow a vampire himself, no longer a werewolf, then he would still have to be dealt with accordingly.

Kyle swallowed.

“I...I...um...” He stumbled over his words in a panic.

I pushed him further into the wall, emphasizing that I didn’t have the patience for hesitancy.

“Alpha Grayson,” King Zagan interrupted from behind us, “you might want to look at yourself in the mirror before you do anything you’ll regret.”

“What the fuck are you talking about?” I retorted, still looking at Kyle.

“You can’t hurt him,” said the girl. “He was turned when Azazel bit his neck. You wouldn’t remember it because Azazel switched into his own body to do it. He transitioned while you were unconscious a few hours ago. Kyle’s a hybrid now—

one-third human, one-third werewolf, one-third vampire. But he’s still your beta.

His wolf is still in there.”

I searched Kyle’s eyes for confirmation. To my utter shock, they went from their normal brown, showing his human, to black, showing his wolf, and, finally, to red, showing the part of him that was now a vampire.

“It’s true,” he whispered sadly, “I’m one-third vampire now.”

But that means...

I dropped Kyle immediately and took a step back as a realization hit me. Azazel had bitten me as well before taking over my body. As fast as I could force myself to go, I ran to the mirror hanging in my room, my heart dropping when I registered what I saw.

Staring back at me were the same dark red eyes as everyone else’s.

So I, too, was a vampire. A hybrid.

And not only that, I was larger—much larger. I had grown over a foot, nearly too tall to see myself in the mirror. My muscles seemed to have exploded in size all throughout my body.

I had been a large wolf all my life, fitting the expectations for an alpha and then some after the rigorous training.

Now I was practically a tank. Steely. Unbreakable. Deadly.

I felt it then, the other species inside of me, sitting inside my chest and acknowledging me head-on. It was the vampire, the one I had acquired after transitioning.

It was different from my wolf, less innocent, containing a darker soul.

I expected it to feel as if something immoral and corrupt were trying to take over my being. But it didn't feel that way at all.

This new soul... It cared for me and my wolf. It wanted the best for us.

In fact, it was us, sharing all the same interests and motivators.

Just as my wolf was me in animal form, this new vampire was me as a vampire.

Both creatures sat inside, watching through my eyes, waiting until I needed them, like two puzzle pieces that made me whole. But what interested me most was that the vampire wanted Belle. He called her his mate and wished she was by our side just as much as my wolf and I did.

Vampires didn't have mates, so I found it strange that this one seemed to have taken her on the moment it entered me. There were now three possessive beings inside one body, all wanting to mate with Belle.

Oh, Belle's gonna just love that.

She had already called me a barbaric Neanderthal with just my wolf and me around.

Who knew what she would think now. The moment I got her back, neither my wolf nor my vampire nor I would ever let her out of our sight. Ever again.

Just you wait, baby, I thought, imagining her smiling face next to mine in the mirror.

No one, not even me, will ever hurt you again.

Being part vampire explained the strange feelings I had experienced since waking up.

My new strength, speed, size, and heightened senses were all a result of the vampire taking up residence in my body.

Curious about my new abilities, I opened my mouth in the mirror and watched as my canines, which were already large, grew and sharpened into piercing fangs.

I ran my tongue over them gently. As if the vampire was enjoying showing off, I felt my fingernails begin to grow and sharpen as well.

I looked down as they turned into long claws and studied them for a second before curling my hands into fists and feeling the claws retract, leaving my normal nails behind.

The girl suddenly stood behind me, moving in a blur across the room with vampiric speed. She spoke quietly.

“You were bitten by Azazel too. We’re not sure quite when, but we suspect you underwent the transition while you were unconscious. Both you and Beta Kyle are hybrids.”

I looked over at Kyle, who shrugged his huge shoulders in confirmation.

So I was right earlier when I thought he looked bigger.

He had grown substantially since transitioning as well.

“I’ve had a couple hours to get used to it, but I’m still just as shocked as you,” he muttered, looking down at his own hands and watching his nails turn into claws.

He looked back at me.

“Crazy, huh?”

That was the understatement of the century.

“But you’re still a wolf, right?” I asked. “I’m not going to have to find a new beta, am I?”

Still a wolf, boss, he said through mind-link before continuing aloud.

“Please don’t kick me out of the pack. I have literally no idea what I would do in the human world. I have no real skills.”

I smiled slightly. “I wouldn’t do that. Just don’t go getting bitten by any other creatures. I don’t know how I’m going to handle three souls inside of you, let alone four.”

Kyle nodded. “I don’t think Elijah would handle it well either.”

I laughed as I realized just how much I had missed talking to Kyle over the last few months.

He had a gift for calming my nerves and always knew what to say to keep my spirits light.

Which is why he made such a good gamma—well, beta now.

Suddenly I remembered something else, something painful.

“Oh, I’m guessing you heard about Adalee. I presume you’re okay taking on the role of beta, considering it was meant to be yours in the first place.”

Kyle’s eyes brightened. “More than okay with that, Alpha.”

I nodded, returning his smile. “Good.”

I turned back to the three vampires, my mind still full of questions that needed answers.

“Is this why it didn’t work when you tried to use your powers on me earlier?

Because I’m part vampire now?”

Zagan sighed, his brows coming together. “I have been wondering about that myself. I don’t know why. No vampire who has been turned, even by a member of the royal family, is able to resist the command of a Mortar. The only creatures who can do that are other Mortars.”

I found Kyle beside me, and his tone was bitter.

“He’s right. They’ve been treating me like their personal butler all day, Their commands still work on me and I was bitten by the same vampire as you.”

“So what does this mean?” I asked. “It isn’t like I could have magically grown the DNA to become a Mortar.”

Zagan nodded in agreement, exchanging glances with the boy vampire next to him.

“I do have a theory, but...” He looked back at me, dragging his gaze up and down, sizing me up. “If I am correct, you may very well be the most powerful being of the last few centuries.”

“Oh,” Casimir said. He studied me as well. His eyes widened with realization. “Oh.”

The girl gasped. “You don’t think...?”

“There is only one way to know for sure,” Zagan said.

“Know what for sure?” I said, exasperated.

Someone had better explain what kind of vampire mumbo jumbo this all is before I go insane.

Zagan hesitated only a second before answering. “There is a possibility that you have your own powers now. The same as the Mortars, controlling people with your words. And... That you are immortal.”

GRAYSON POV

I was positive that I had not processed Zagan’s words accurately.

“What the hell do you mean?”

“Perhaps it’s better if you sit, Alpha Grayson,” the girl vampire said. “Your intensity is going to scare your pack members. You need to calm down.”

I snapped my teeth. “Don’t fucking tell me what to do.”

“Easy, everyone,” chided Zagan. “Minnie, come over here.”

The girl joined Zagan and Casimir. Seeing them all together, it occurred to me that they were all part of the royal family. All Mortars.

## Chapter 54 –

### Filed To Story:

I was standing in front of Zagan Mortar, king of the vampires; Casimir Mortar, the second-born and head warrior of the clan; and Amelia Mortar, the fourth-born and royal healer.

I remembered what Azazel had said about Kyle snooping around in his things before attacking him.

Kyle had known Azazel was planning to wage war on the pack, but thought it was me who was in cahoots with the Clan of Azazel.

Even then, he’d been brave enough to get in touch with King Zagan and enlist his help.

He knew the royal family would be the only ones strong enough to defeat Azazel.

I looked over at Kyle and mind-linked him.



You invited them here. You invited the most powerful vampires in the world onto my territory without my permission.

Yes, Kyle began, already defensive and cautious, ~but only because~—

You did the right thing, I interrupted, stopping him before he went on a tangent.

~Remind me to thank you properly later.~

He smiled slightly.

Oh, okay. You got it. I'll be expecting an entire party in my honor, streamers and everything.

I rolled my eyes and chuckled.

Although, after all he had done to keep the pack safe the last few months, maybe he did deserve a party.

I turned back to the three royal vampires, who obviously knew that Kyle and I had just mind-linked and were watching with wary expressions.

“So,” I began, “this immortal power... Might it have something to do with my recent transition? Why isn't Kyle immortal too?”

Zagan looked to Casimir, who took a deep breath. “There was a king long ago who was a hybrid like you. Elijah Viotto.”

“My mate was named after him,” Kyle interjected. “He was the most powerful king ever known to mankind.”

Casimir nodded, continuing, “He ruled over all species, vampires and werewolves, back before the divide. He was extremely powerful, but the people loved him because he was a fair and decent ruler.”

Casimir hesitated, but his father nodded to him encouragingly.

“King Elijah was mated to a fairy. She must have been one of the last ones out there, because they've become extinct. As I'm sure you know, fairies lived forever unless they were killed by an unnatural cause.

I nodded, not wanting to interrupt his talking.

“According to legend, once the fairy and the king mated, King Elijah gained what we now know as the power of the Mortars—control with your mind. And he gained his mate's immortality.”

Hmm.

“People say the king was able to gift this control to those he deemed worthy. But it was too much for some, resulting in a great war between vampires and werewolves and the deaths of many. It was in this war that King Elijah was killed by the man he called his closest friend, Damian Mortar.”

“He took the throne,” I said. I had heard of Damian Mortar, the first-ever vampire king.

Casimir nodded, “Yes. King Damian took the throne, created the royal clan, and continued the Mortar line, gifting his offspring with the same power. We are all descended from him. But he could not repair the rift between werewolves and vampires, resulting in the current bad blood between the species.”

Surprise over the fact that I had never heard this story ran through me. It seemed to be an important part of the history of my kind.

“So the king gained immortality from mating with a fairy,” I said slowly, “but my mate is not a fairy. She is human. Nor have we completed the mating ritual. It doesn’t explain why I would be this way.”

“We don’t think all of this is because of your mate, but something else,” said Zagan.

“Although if this is true and you ~are~ the man we think you are, your mate will be impacted as well. You see, King Elijah left behind a prophecy.”

By now I was even more worried. Belle had been mentioned.

My wolf and newfound vampire were pressing up against my conscious, listening carefully.

“And what was this prophecy, exactly?” I said.

“You tell him, Casimir,” said Minnie. “You’re the one who found it and studied it.”

I watched Casimir closely. He was nervous about what he was about to say, his eyes never meeting mine.

“Well...years ago, I found a scroll in the royal palace. On it, King Elijah himself prophesied that there would be a powerful hybrid who would become immortal and possess the powers of the Mortars. “He would ascend the throne as the most powerful man alive, restoring peace between all species—even vampires and werewolves.”

I almost burst out laughing at the ridiculousness of this theory.

They can’t possibly think I’m the man from the prophecy.

Me, take over a throne that currently belonged to vampires?

No. No, thank you.

After a few seconds of silence, Kyle asked, “You don’t think Alpha Grayson is—”

“What did it say about this man’s mate?” I interrupted.

Casimir thought for a moment before replying, “It said that—that the mate of the new king, who knew hardship and loss, would undergo their own transition after the mating ritual. They would become...” He hesitated. “They would become a fairy, the only fairy in the world, and extremely powerful. Just as King Elijah’s mate, Queen Evangeline, was. Together, these mates would rule all mythical creatures, taking on King Elijah and Queen Evangeline’s roles.”

I stared at Casimir for a second. He thought there was a possibility that I was destined to become ruler of all mythical creatures. And that Belle, my sweet human mate, would become... A fairy queen?

Fairies were among the most powerful known creatures, born with the ability to pick up just about any skill—precisely why they had been hunted into extinction.

I struggled to find something to say.

“So...you think...I’m the man from the prophecy.”

Casimir shrugged a bit. “The prophecy said it would happen sometime in the decade after the scroll was discovered. It’s been nine years.”

“But that isn’t the only reason,” Zagan chimed in. “You meet all the expectations set for the new king, although some might be new developments. You’re a hybrid, you have a mate who knows hardship, you were able to resist my command, and you are basically impossible to kill. By all accounts you should have died after the period of Azazel’s occupation.”

“The only thing in question,” Casimir interjected, “is whether you will have the power of the Mortars.”

I sucked in a breath.

The power of the Mortars? I’m not sure I want that kind of power.

My alpha tone only affected pack members, but the power of the Mortars could affect any creature, including humans. It felt dark and unnecessary, as if someone were playing God.

“So the only way to find out,” concluded Casimir, “is for you to try issuing a command.”

“Hold on,” I said quickly, “if I’m this powerful man from an ancient prophecy, then why haven’t I had the power of the Mortars all my life? Or been immortal?”

Kyle spoke up next to me. “You were just turned into a hybrid. Maybe the power was latent and only activated once Azazel bit you.”

Zagan nodded. “That would make sense. Perhaps the same for the immortality.”

“Then again,” Minnie piped up, “who’s to say you haven’t always been immortal?

You haven’t died yet, have you?”

I growled to myself and ran a hand through my hair. “This is a lot of information to handle.”

“Try a command,” Minnie urged.

I sighed deeply. “On whom?”

Everyone’s gazes turned to Kyle, whose eyes promptly widened.

“Oh, come on, no way. Why me? Why not one of you guys?” He motioned to the vampires.

“It won’t work on Mortars,” said Minnie. “You’re the only one.”

Kyle groaned and kicked at the floor like a child. “But it hurts! I don’t want to be controlled again.”

I chuckled. “Just pretend I’m using my alpha tone. I’ve used that on you plenty of times.”

He sighed, turning to face me. “Yeah, just like your alpha tone, except you feel like you were run over by a truck afterward. Fun.”

I looked to Zagan. “And how exactly do I do this?”

Zagan crossed his arms, watching us closely. “If you’re truly the one from the prophecy, it will be clear. You won’t need to be told how.”

I nodded. “All right,” I said nervously, “Here goes nothing.” Kyle winced slightly, squaring his shoulders.

The vampires sucked in breaths of anticipation.

I opened my mouth.

GRAYSON POV

I wracked my brain, trying to come up with a command to give Kyle.

I needed to test, to see if I had the power of the Mortars. But how exactly was I supposed to go about doing that? I couldn't keep from asking myself what the hell I was doing. No way could I be the person from this prophecy.

They thought I was meant to become the next king of all mythical creatures, the most powerful ruler out there. They thought I could restore peace between werewolves and vampires and stop a war that had been going on for centuries.

Was that possible?

My wolf loved the idea; in my mind he was puffing out his chest in pride, communicating to me that he thought we were more than capable of ruling. He also thought that Belle would make an amazing queen. He liked the idea of her ruling by our side for the rest of eternity, having power, never dying.

A part of me, which one? Couldn't help but agree, not only with the fact that Belle would make an amazing queen but that we had the capacity to become king.

I had known ever since I was young that I was meant to lead, not because of ego but because I just knew it was what I had to do. I had known I would make a good alpha and had proven it over the years. But even after I had fought my old alpha to death and won, taking on the role myself, I hadn't been satisfied.

I had wanted more.

My wolf had kept telling me we were meant to lead thousands. Something was missing, he had insisted. Could this be what he'd meant? I sighed. Now was the time to find out.

"Quack like a duck," I told Kyle completely seriously.

Deep down, I hoped nothing would happen. If nothing happened, life would be a whole lot less complicated. It would mean things could go back to normal and I could eventually forget these last few horrible months.

But I already knew that was false hope. Because even deeper down, I knew Casimir was right. The moment I opened my mouth I felt my newfound vampire surge forward to the front of my consciousness, pushing against the inside of my skull.

A tingly feeling traveled through me, forcing me to suck in a quick breath.

Then, like a wave of energy, I felt the command travel from me and wrap around Kyle like a blanket. His eyes turned red, and then, just like a duck, he began to quack.

"Quack," he said, "quack, quack."

I stared in shock.

I had done it. I had used the power of the Mortars.

## Chapter 55 –

### Filed To Story:

After a moment, Minnie laughed from behind me. And then Zagan, and then Casimir.

The humor of the situation hit me as Kyle continued to quack with a dark scowl on his face.

“Can I—quack— please—quack—stop now—~quack~—?”

He obviously wasn’t finding this nearly as amusing as the rest of us.

I enjoyed watching an extremely large and intimidating werewolf quack and pout like a child. But I finally waved a hand.

“Okay, okay, you can stop.”

Just as before, the command traveled from me and made Kyle stop immediately.

“Really,” he complained, “a duck? You couldn’t have made me do something cool, like jump fifty feet in the air or something?”

I shrugged. “Only thing I could think of.”

Kyle huffed and rolled his eyes. “Right, because that’s the first thing everyone thinks of. Not turn around or say hi or something normal. No, you had to choose quack like a ~duck~.”

I could only shrug again, joining in on the others’ laughter.

After a moment, the lightheartedness vanished and the room suddenly became much more serious. I had given a command using the power of the Mortars.

Which could only mean...

“So it’s true, then,” I said, looking at Casimir. “The prophecy is about me.”

Casimir looked at his father with a worried expression before looking back at me and nodding slowly.

“Yes,” he whispered, distress evident in his tone. “You’re the new king of all creatures. The throne is yours.”

My gaze snapped to Zagan.

“Just like that? You’re giving up your title and the throne without any sort of fight?”

Zagan’s bright red eyes searched mine for a moment, his thick black brows coming together in thought. He didn’t look upset or threatened like I expected. He just looked pensive.

After a moment, he spoke, “Ever since Casimir found that scroll all those years ago, I’ve been waiting for this moment. Ready myself for when another would come and take the throne from me.” His eyes assessed me darkly. “If it had to be anyone, I can say with sincerity that I’m glad it’s you. You will be a worthy and fair ruler. I have no doubt in my mind that your throne will be one of dignity and strength.”

This all seemed so sudden.

And his confidence in me did not make it less daunting.

“Wait a second,” Kyle broke in, “You’re telling me Alpha Grayson is king now? Like, with a palace and everything?”

We all had those same questions.

“What about the pack? What about the luna?” he said.

Belle’s beautiful face flashed in my mind, making my entire body stiffen painfully.

My wolf growled, pushing me to shift, to go find our mate. He kept repeating that she needed us, over and over again, as if I weren’t very aware of the fact.

I gritted my teeth, forcing him to the back of my consciousness so I could concentrate.

“None of this needs to be decided now,” Zagan said. “You will have time. All the time in the world, in fact... King Grayson.”

I sucked in a deep breath as realization hit. My brain was going into overdrive, words running through it like a broken record. King. Immortality. Prophecy. Hybrid.

Fairy. Powers.

How the hell was I supposed to respond to all of this?

How was Belle going to feel?

Thankfully, I didn't have to think about it for too long.

A sudden pressure filled my head, causing me to stumble backward. I clutched at my head as the pressure increased to the point of throbbing.

It wasn't painful, but it sure as hell was annoying and invasive.

I groaned, shutting my eyes. What the hell was happening?

"Alpha," came Kyle's voice, "Are you okay?"

"I..." I stopped—speaking only made it worse.

The pressure was becoming more unbearable with every passing second.

I could no longer say it wasn't painful; it felt like a migraine was splitting my skull in half.

"Alpha Grayson," I heard Minnie say.

I opened my eyes to see her concerned face right in front of me. She reached out, placing her small hand on my arm.

"What's wrong?" she said.

I shook my head. The pain was starting to make me panic. I had never felt anything like this.

"Open your mind," Zagan suddenly said, "and stop resisting."

My head swerved toward him. "What the hell are you talking about?" I barely got out.

"It's Azazel," Zagan said as he shook his head. "I was afraid of this. Something's happened with Azazel. You have to let him in."

I wasn't sure what he was talking about, but the thought of Azazel trying to get into my mind, into any part of me again made me fume.

Fuck that.

Rage poured from my insides over the fact that he would even suggest I let Azazel in after all he had done. I braced myself against the wall, starting to lose my balance.

That fucker is going nowhere near my mind. He'll never control me again.

As if reading the thoughts I didn't have the strength to say aloud, Zagan reassured me.



“Azazel couldn’t take control of you again even if he tried. That isn’t what’s happening. He’s not trying to take over your body.”

My chest rose and fell with each ragged breath.

“Then what the fuck is happening?” I groaned.

“No time to explain,” Zagan said, obvious worry in his tone. “I promise you, nothing bad will happen if you let him into your mind. In fact, it will probably aid in the war to come. Azazel is likely not even aware that he is projecting onto you right now.”

None of what he was saying made sense. I let out a growl. The pain in my mind made my head feel like it was going to explode.

“Just do it!” exclaimed Minnie. “Whatever it is, you can handle it.”

I looked at her. She was right. As much as I wanted to deny Azazel all access to my thoughts, I could break him like a toothpick now that his commands didn’t work on me.

I nodded, my wolf and vampire both present in my consciousness, ready to attack if they needed to. Slowly, I stopped restricting the pressure in my head and let it do as it wished.

It was a strange feeling, as if the pressure turned from pain to energy in a matter of seconds.

Then it traveled through every inch of my brain and took over my thoughts, replacing them with the thoughts of someone else.

Azazel.

I was no longer standing in my bedroom but in a forest clearing, surrounded by hundreds of young vampires.

I sucked in a breath. My heart rate picked up as I realized this was the army I would be fighting tomorrow. They were a rowdy group, hissing and moving about as if none of them was able to stay still longer than a few seconds.

They didn’t look at me; their gazes were focused to my left.

I turned to look, already knowing who to expect.

Azazel.

“The time has come,” Azazel spoke loudly, addressing the newborn vampires. “I know you will all make me proud.”

He was at the end of a speech meant to invigorate his clan.

He had passion, and strong, well-thought-out words—but he didn't mean any of it.

His goal was to make the newborns think he cared for them in the way a father cared for a child, so they would fight for him and risk their lives.

In reality, he couldn't have cared less if they lived or died.

I could sense the way he was manipulating them as if I were in his mind, feeling everything he felt. He was determined to seize the throne, even at the expense of each and every vampire in front of him.

"Go," he finished suddenly. The command washed over the newborns, turning their eyes red.

In an instant, they dispersed into the forest, hissing and moving in one large blur.

Azazel watched with an evil sort of pride, a dark smile forming on his lips.

I gritted my teeth as I watched him.

I wasn't sure what was happening or how exactly I had gotten here, but it hardly mattered.

I was standing next to the man who had wreaked havoc on my life.

I growled loudly, not hesitating to launch myself at Azazel.

I had one focus: his blood on my hands.

I wanted him dead on the forest floor, wanted to watch the life leave his eyes. I reached out, intent on grabbing his throat and throwing him to the ground. But my hands closed around nothing but air, going directly through his neck as if he were a hologram.

I looked down at my hands in complete shock.

"Hello, Alpha Grayson," Azazel said.

I snapped up to look at him. His red eyes met mine, and he scowled deeply as he studied me.

"So it's true, then," he said grimly.

All I could do was growl and take another swipe at him, hoping to break his jaw with my fist.

But where I should have connected with his face, I felt nothing but air yet again.

“Azazel, what the fuck did you do?”

He scoffed, annoyed, glancing away from me and into the forest.

“How little you know, young alpha,” he muttered. “This is not my doing, and you should not be here.”

“Then why am I here?”

Azazel didn’t respond for a moment; his stare remained in place, almost as if he were lost in thought.

Finally he said, “Tell my brother to prepare himself. His time as king is over.”

His piercing red eyes returned to me, darkening to a shade I had never seen before.

“We are coming.”

## Chapter 56 – Kidnapped by My Mate Series II: His Lost Queen

### Filed To Story:

GRAYSON

My head was spinning.

Everything was a blur, my ears were ringing, and my stomach felt as if I were about to heave up my intestines. What the hell had just happened?

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

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

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

Although my body felt sore and weak—an effect of some sort of magic, I’m sure—

the pain coursing through me wasn't my initial worry. War was coming. And soon.

Azazel's threatening words were fresh in my mind.

"Tell my brother to prepare himself, Alpha Grayson. His time as king is over," he had said. ~"We're coming."~

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

They were arguing. One person, in particular, sounded very upset. I recognized his voice.

"Do something!" Kyle's angry tone rang out. "Why are we standing around when my alpha just fainted? Minnie—"

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

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

I groaned and rolled to my side, not wanting to listen to any more of their incessant arguing.

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

He crouched down next to me. "Alpha," he breathed out, "are you okay?"

I nodded and forced myself to sit up even though my body felt weak. "I'm fine.

Disoriented." I looked at Zagan, who had moved to stand next to Kyle. "What the fuck just happened?"

"You tell me," he replied in a gravelly voice. "What did you see?"

I stood slowly, grunting with effort. My wolf growled. He didn't like feeling weak, especially now when so much was at stake. "Azazel," I said. "He's coming."

I heard Kyle suck in a breath. "You saw Azazel?"

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

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

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

"The Clan of Azazel is back?" Minnie whispered. Her already squeaky and high-pitched voice seemed to rise an octave with fear. "Father, did you know about this?"

Zagan nodded. "The beta informed me in his letter. It is why we wasted no time in aiding this pack."

"We have to move quickly," I said to Kyle. "Prepare the pack for battle. Fill them in on what has happened."

Kyle was already halfway out the door. "On it!" he yelled as he sprinted down the hall.

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

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

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

As I studied their startling yet stunning red eyes, I couldn't stop myself from glancing in the mirror next to me, noticing that my own usually green eyes were also red at the moment.

However, unlike the three Mortars, mine were darker, clouded in blackness with the presence of my wolf. I could feel both my vampire and wolf pressing up against my conscience.

It wasn't invasive as neither of them was trying to take control; they were just revved up and ready for battle, anxious for any reason to break free.

I looked away from my reflection quickly, tensing in anger. The last time I had seen my eyes in this color had been when Azazel had taken over my body, showing his true eyes as he looked at our reflection.

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

I was watching my hand hit Belle, my mate, the love of my life, on her beautiful face, having no control, watching in horror as she flew to the side from the force of the blow.

But the worst part came after the strike had taken place. Belle had looked up at me, her teary blue eyes round with shame... and apologized.

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

Twice. Azazel had hit her two times, taking complete joy in the fact that she thought it was me who was doing it. And each time, Belle apologized to him.

They were genuine apologies, too, ones that made evident her regret. I didn't know what she was ashamed of, but God, I could feel it. I could feel her indignity growing with every passing day.

She was so hard on herself, beating herself up and racking her mind over what she had done wrong. She wanted to fix whatever it was, unaware that it had absolutely nothing to do with her.

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

I struggled so much trying to get past the control that Azazel had over me so I could go to my mate.

I knew she wasn't eating or sleeping. I knew she was basically being spat upon by all the pack members. I could feel how weak she was getting. But I couldn't do a damn thing.

Every day, I hoped she would leave and run far away. But every day that I still felt her in this house made me completely fucking enraged with Azazel for doing this to her.

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

Sure, Azazel had told her he wanted her for the power she could give him, demanding that she stay because of that. But, in reality, he wouldn't have noticed if she had left.

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

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

He had been unimpressed with the fact that she was human, and although he found her attractive—and loved to remind me of it— he wasn't actually interested in having her around.

He only tried to sleep with her because he wanted to taunt me and make me weak.

But, surprise, surprise, trying to mate with an alpha male's female doesn't make them weak.

No, it had the opposite effect—it made me furious. I became so blind with rage each time he laid a hand on her that, finally, my wolf was able to slip through the possession and take control to tend to our mate.

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

He knew then that the best way to truly weaken me was to stay away from Belle.

And he did just that. He starved the mate bond. And as I felt my mate slowly dwindle, I faded along with her.

It wasn't until two nights ago that Azazel tried mating with Belle again. Only, this time, it wasn't to taunt or anger me—although it definitely did both of those things.

Azazel realized that someone had gone through his desk, which meant that one of my pack members knew about the letters he had been sending to the Clan of Azazel.

It was the first time I felt him experience true fear.

Knowing that his war could be happening sooner than he was anticipating, he decided he wanted to complete the mating bond with Belle in order to be as strong as possible during battle.

When Belle refused—to my absolute fucking relief—he didn't hesitate to kick her to the side and choose another.

Azazel didn't know that that was the decision that had finally set Belle free. She was heartbroken, but in thinking I didn't want her, she was finally able to force herself to leave.

And while it had made me proud at the time, it caused me physical pain to think about how long it had taken her.

Why hadn't she left before then? The door was wide open. God, why did she stay in this damn pack house where she was being abused and treated like nothing more than the dirt on the bottom of someone's shoe?

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

She was worth so much more than all that, and I thought she would know that—

because, hell, she is so much stronger than anyone could ever imagine.

She had been through so much. And yet, every time her life burned down, she was still able to pull herself from the ashes.

I understood now, though.

With each passing day that Belle continued to endure my abuse without fighting back, it became more clear that perhaps she had come to face too many fires, that her life had burned down too many times.

She became convinced that, after a certain point, fires stop being coincidences or accidents. When fires follow the same person everywhere they go, it is evident that that person has an affinity for starting them.

And so, Belle let herself get burned. My strong mate watched in defeat as the fire began to consume her once again.

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

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

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

I wouldn't give up until I had her back in my arms. I would never let her go again.

Together, we would build her back up until she remembered just how strong she really was.

GRAYSON

"Go with the beta," Zagan told Minnie and Casimir after Kyle had left the room.

"Inform the wolves how to fight vampires during battle."

They nodded and followed in the direction that Kyle had gone.

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

How the king of vampires came to be standing in my bedroom, in front of the bed where my mate and I were meant to sleep, was beyond me.

Never in a million years did I think I would allow this to happen. My wolf and I were on edge with the entire situation. I was anxious to leave.



# Chapter 57 – Kidnapped by My Mate Series

## II: His Lost Queen

### Filed To Story:

I didn't want to stay here with him, knowing I should go help prepare my pack, but I had questions that needed to be answered.

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

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

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

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

Zagan wasn't fazed by my obvious contempt. He laughed under his breath, shaking his head. "I just saved your life, Alpha," he reminded me. "There's no need for disdain."

I growled softly. I didn't like that he talked to me as if I were one of his children who was pouting. "You'll have to excuse me if I have difficulty trusting vampires at the moment," I replied.

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

He met my gaze with the same intense fierceness. "I am pressed to remind you that I am not your enemy. We share the same goal. We both have much to lose if my brother takes the throne."

The tension in my shoulders didn't release at his words, even though I knew there was an aspect of truth to them.

As leaders, both of us would have the blood of our people on our hands if we failed.

Thousands of people would die if Azazel succeeded.

But none of this meant I had to trust him. At that moment, I would only consider standing alongside him during the upcoming battle.

This alliance was a difficult one for me to join, but I knew I had to do it for the well-being of my pack.

Kyle had done the right thing when reaching out to Zagan Mortar. But if Zagan was truly worthy of my trust, not just my partnership, he would have to earn it. I wouldn't be giving it away just yet.

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

Zagan raised his brows. "Which time? Just now? Or when he took control of your body two months ago?"

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

I knew how Azazel had taken control two months ago. I had access to his thoughts.

He had used black magic the night when vampires had entered my territory, the night that changed everything.

Azazel had practically planned out every single second. With the help of Adalee, the vampires were able to distract me and my warriors just long enough for Azazel to enter the territory unnoticed.

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

A few days prior to this, Azazel had stolen a dark potion from a witch. Specifically made for vampires, it allowed the user to enter the mind and take over the body of any person they bit.

All they needed to do was find a piece of the subject they wished to possess and put it in the potion. Perhaps a strand of hair or a nail.

I was sure that Adalee helped in this part of the plan as well. The vampire would then coat their fangs in the potion and bite the person they wished to control.

Afterward, they could enter the mind of their subject and take over their body. Just like Azazel had done with me.

"I'm sure you've heard the phrase 'All magic comes with a price?'" Zagan started to explain.

I nodded.

“Well, it seems as though the price that Azazel had to pay was creating a connection to you. You saw him with his army, am I correct?”

I nodded again. “He was preparing them for battle.”

“Which was a significant moment in Azazel’s life, a turning point. He was creating a core memory which I’m certain is why you were pulled there.

“He left a piece of his soul with you when he left your body. It’s not unusual for that to happen with dark magic.” Zagan frowned.

“The piece of his soul that he left with you wanted to be there for the significant moment in Azazel’s life, the moment when he started a war. So you appeared.”

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

“No. I believe the price you had to pay for participating in dark magic—whether it was voluntary or not—was losing your mate.”

I immediately felt my wolf and vampire surge forward at Zagan’s words. I growled, showing him my fangs. “I didn’t lose my mate. She is mine. She will always be mine.”

Zagan raised his brows in amusement, obviously not expecting my intense reaction.

This only made my wolf angrier.

I snapped my teeth at him and rolled my neck. I had to suppress the urge to shift.

My wolf wanted control. He had wanted control all night.

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

“I have never been in the presence of an alpha wolf. Forgive me if I said something to upset you. I’m sure your mate is fine, and the two of you will be together soon.”

My wolf calmed only slightly but stayed at the front of my consciousness. It enraged him to be reminded that we had failed to care for our mate in her time of need.

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

Afraid I would shift if I stayed in Zagan’s presence, I grunted and walked out the door of the room, intent on finding Kyle and helping to prepare for battle.

I could vaguely hear the sound of Zagan following behind me. I was glad he didn't talk. One more word out of his mouth, and Azazel wouldn't be the only Mortar killed today.

GRAYSON

The training grounds—a huge plot of land, only a five-minute walk from the pack house—were full of werewolves.

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

I wasn't surprised. Casimir was Zagan's second-born, a vampire prince.

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

They were an exceedingly gifted family and had been this way for centuries.

Depending on when they were born in relation to their siblings, each child that was conceived had a unique role.

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

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

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

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

The third-born was the smartest, born with an incredible mind and problem-solving skills.

Third-born Mortars were some of the most intelligent people in the world and were known for always having their noses stuck in a book.

And then, finally, the fourth child born into the Mortar family was the clan healer.

They were born with magical properties in their blood that could heal any injury when it was consumed.

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

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

The heir, the warrior, the scholar, and the healer. However, this plan quickly changed when Cordelia died during childbirth, along with their firstborn and heir to the throne.

Azazel was overtaken by grief after Cordelia died. Many believe that it was due to this grief that fate decided to pass the throne down to Zagan, his family's second-born, and warrior.

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

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

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

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

In a flash, she had basically flown across the large field and was standing next to her father. He smiled down at her when she wrapped an arm around him in greeting.

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

Zagan nodded in agreement, assessing the hundreds of werewolves before us.

Minnie's gaze snapped to mine. "I've never actually seen a werewolf in real life, only read about them in books.

"But you guys are way cooler in person! And so strong! I couldn't believe it when I got to see one of you guys shift. Fascinating!"

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

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

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

"Black," I grunted.

An awkward silence overtook us, and for a moment, I thought Minnie might be done talking. But then I heard her whisper to her father, “He’s not a very happy fellow, is he? Are we sure we want him to be king?”

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

I only saw Minnie’s horror-stricken face for a second before Zagan stepped in front of her protectively. Smart.

I wasn’t usually this on edge, but with everything that had happened over the last twenty-four hours, my wolf and I felt ready to bite someone’s head off. Minnie was one more smart comment away from being that person.

“Minnie, why don’t we go help the wolves train?” Zagan requested.

I didn’t hear her response. However, a second later, I saw a blur of movement fly from behind Zagan, and Minnie’s small form appeared on the other side of the field.

Zagan nodded at me once before following her.

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

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

## Chapter 58 – Kidnapped by My Mate Series II: His Lost Queen

### Filed To Story:

I was afraid that if I opened my mouth, I wouldn’t be able to stop myself from shifting out of blind fury. So, instead of talking, I stiffly motioned for them to continue with their training.

I didn’t even notice when Kyle started to approach me, too consumed with anger.

“Hey, Alpha,” he said warily when he was within hearing distance, taking small steps toward me.

“How ya doing?” He obviously sensed my touchy mood.

I grunted in response.

Kyle nodded slowly and stood next to me. He knew not to push me.

We watched in silence as Casimir continued to direct the wolves. He began splitting them up into pairs, telling them to go attempt to fight in the ways that he had just shown them.

Kyle sneered as he looked at Casimir in disdain. “This is so not fair. The dude’s taking my job.”

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

I knew that Kyle understood that. He wasn’t actually worried that Casimir would be taking over his position. He was just trying to lift my spirits.

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

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

Kyle’s brows rose in surprise. “Ouch,” he said.

I didn’t respond. Guilt touched me for a moment but was quickly replaced with anger once again.

After a few more minutes of silence, during which I continued to glare at my pack members, Kyle spoke again. “Okay, seriously, what’s got your panties in a twist?”

He just didn’t know when to let go, did he? I growled and turned to him, baring my teeth threateningly. “I mean it, Kyle. Drop it.”

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

“Look, you might kill me for saying this, but I don’t care. I don’t know what’s going on with you, and that’s fine.

“You’re going through it. I get it. But whatever this is”—he gestured up and down to my heaving form—“needs to stop.

“It isn’t the time for it. Your pack members are scared. They’re being thrown into a war without any warning. They need their alpha, not this sulking, scary, red-eyed, giant thing you’ve got going on.”

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

"Really?" Kyle asked in shock. His disbelief didn't last long. A large smile overtook his face. He looked very pleased with himself. "I mean... Of course, I am. I'm always right."

I rolled my eyes. I turned my gaze back to the several pairs of wolves, assessing them and their skills.

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

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

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

I was scowling? I hadn't even noticed.

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

I sighed. I didn't want to talk about it, but Kyle wasn't really giving me a choice.

"Azazel," I said after a moment. "He ordered all of the pack members to shun Belle."

"What?" Kyle asked. "He didn't order me to shun her."

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

It wasn't getting harder with each passing moment that we spent talking about this.

"Pack members refused to talk to her and snapped at her whenever she tried to reach out.

"She was terrified of them. I felt it. She wouldn't even leave that godforsaken room where she was freezing and alone because she was too scared to see anyone. She wouldn't even leave to get food. She was starving herself."

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

"She was hiding," I agreed.

Kyle ran a hand down his face. "Why didn't she come to me? Shit, why didn't she ask for help? Didn't she know I would have done anything to help her?"



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

Kyle nodded.

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

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

Usually, I could sense her overall presence and use it to pinpoint her general location. Now, though, she was completely closed off to me.

She had built up walls in her consciousness, and no matter how hard I tried to break them down, she didn’t give in.

Kyle looked pale. “So that’s why you’re glaring at your pack members? Because they mistreated the luna?”

“Yeah,” I grunted. “I guess so.”

Kyle didn’t say anything for quite some time as he processed what I had just told him.

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

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

Kyle gazed at the horizon, squinting at the sun. “If you’re going to be angry with someone for hurting your mate, be angry with Azazel.

“He’s the one who’s responsible—and he’s on his way here right now. And you get to decide how he dies.”

GRAYSON

I stood stoically at the edge of the training grounds as I watched my pack members train.

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

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

Zoe was only five years old, and one of my pack's more rambunctious young wolves.

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

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

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

We formed a bond a while back as soon as she could talk and ended up spending a lot of time together.

She would often sneak into my office and ask me what I was doing, constantly interested in pack affairs.

I had a sneaking suspicion that she would become a higher-ranking member of a pack someday, maybe even an alpha.

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

I sighed. "Zoe, what are you doing here? You're supposed to be at the pack house," I said, bending down to pick her up.

Zoe pried her gaze away from the warriors. Her brown eyes widened when she saw me. "Your eyes are red," she told me matter-of-factly. Her voice dropped into a whisper. "You look like a demon."

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

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

Zoe nodded. "Yeah, I know," she said, shrugging nonchalantly as if it were the most normal thing in the world. "My mom told me.

"She says you are really strong because you have a vampire and that it's good to have you as an alpha. That's also why you turned into a giant!" She spread her arms out wide, trying to express how large I'd gotten.

I chuckled. “Yeah, I have gotten pretty big, huh?”

Zoe gripped my shoulders, inspecting them. “Yeah, you’re basically the biggest person I know.”

I laughed, but before I had a chance to respond to her statement, Zoe placed her palms on either side of my face. “Your beard is scratchy,” she said. “Like my dad’s.”

I nodded, amused by how quickly her thoughts jumped around. “Well—”

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

I immediately tensed at the mention of Belle. Zoe must have seen her sometime before she left. My wolf whimpered in my chest. “Thank you,” I replied. “I think so too.”

Zoe frowned, wiping her messy brown hair out of her eyes. “She was sad. That’s why your wolf is sad and why you look so angry.”

It was hard to believe, but this five-year-old was calling me out on my shit right now, but here we were. “I guess you’re right.”

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

I nodded. “Right.” Once I had Belle back in my arms and explained everything to her, I would be very, very happy again.

Content with my answer, Zoe looked back out at the people training. “What are they doing?”

I followed her gaze, watching the several groups of wolves fighting each other.

“They’re training. There’s a war coming.”

“Yeah, my mom told me. But you’re gonna tell them to go away, right? You can do that, right? Because your eyes turn red and stuff?”

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

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

“There’s a special kind of stone that someone can put into their ear that blocks out any kind of command that comes from a Mortar. It works like an earplug.

“I have no doubt that Azazel has made sure that all of his warriors have them.”

# Chapter 59 – Kidnapped by My Mate Series II: His Lost Queen

## Filed To Story:

Zoe gasped. She cupped her hands around her mouth and then put them to my ear.

“Did you know that’s a real-life vampire, Alpha Grayson? You can tell from his teeth.”

“I think it’s time you return to the pack house, Zoe. Where you’re supposed to be,” I told her. Even though I knew that Zagan wouldn’t do anything to hurt Zoe, I still didn’t want her around him.

I set her down on the ground. “Brent!” I called out to one of the pack members nearby. He was in front of me in an instant.

“Will you take Zoe back to the pack house? And make sure someone is looking after her, so she doesn’t sneak away again.”

Zoe complained and fought with me for a while but eventually went with Brent in defeat.

Zagan looked amused when I turned back to him. “I would have never expected the great Alpha Grayson to have a soft spot for kids.”

“Is there a reason you came over here, King Zagan?” I asked, changing the subject.

“Is there something you wanted to tell me?”

“Yes, actually. I thought it might be a good idea to warn you before I brought an army of vampires onto your territory.”

My wolf and vampire came to the surface. “What?” I snapped.

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

I snapped my gaze to where he was looking, sucking in a sharp breath as I saw hundreds of vampires, all dressed in battle attire, approaching us.

I felt a burst of wind next to me. Kyle.

“Uh... Say, Alpha, are you seeing the scary group of vampires approaching us? Or is that just me?” he asked. “They’re definitely not the army of newborns we’re preparing for.”

They had to be the royal army. “Care to explain?” I asked Zagan.

Zagan smiled. “You didn’t think I was going to leave you and your pack on your own, did you? It’s my brother we’re about to fight. Therefore, it’s my battle just as much as it is yours.

“And I have a perfectly good army just waiting to be used.” In a flash, Zagan was on the other side of the field, meeting the leader of the army and who I could only assume to be his firstborn son.

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

Another hour of training passed by in a blur.

Casimir continued to lead my pack members, running them through different drills and scenarios to ensure they would be prepared for any sort of trick that a newborn vampire could pull on them.

Only, now, in addition, we had real vampires fighting with us. Zagan’s army was well-trained and lethal.

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

I watched from afar during most of the training, assessing the different skills of all my warriors.

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

However, due to the severity of the upcoming war, almost every single able-bodied wolf over the age of eighteen had volunteered to be here and was working their ass off for the sake of the pack.

People came and went for breaks or to get food, but for the most part, we had spent the entire day training. I had never been more proud of my pack in my entire life.

I eventually joined them in training, wanting to test out my own fighting skills, especially now that I had a new vampire species inside me. I was surprised by how easily the movements came back to me.

I hadn’t exactly had a lot of time to train over the last few months. Even though I had already been an exceptional fighter before, I found myself moving faster than ever.

It felt as though I was moving in slow motion, although I knew I was really moving so quickly that I was basically a blur in the wind. Each one of my actions was graceful and well thought out.

I had always enjoyed training and testing my skills. Even now, I put all of the anger and aggression I had been feeling over the last few months into the training exercises.

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

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

Seeing her beautiful face in my mind fueled my anger toward Azazel and made me fight harder.

None of my pack members stood a chance against me, even when I was fighting over ten of them at a time. Neither did the vampires.

The new strength that I held, thanks to the vampire within me, was unbelievable. I was basically unstoppable.

"All right, Alpha," Kyle said to me right after I had simultaneously taken down three of the best warriors in our army. He approached me with a look of determination in his eyes. "Let's do this."

I raised a brow, feeling an amused smile take over my face. "You want to fight me?"

Kyle shrugged and then turned his head to crack his neck, getting into a proper fighting stance. "Yeah. I can see how big your head is getting. I think you need to be taken down a few notches."

I laughed. "And you think you'll be the person to do that?"

"I am the only other hybrid here, aren't I?" Kyle replied.

I nodded. "Fair enough." I got into my fighting stance. "Let me know if you need to tap out, Beta."

Kyle laughed, rolling his shoulders back. "Fat chance."

"Alpha!" someone's frantic voice called out from behind us, interrupting Kyle's and my battle right before we started. One of my pack members was sprinting toward us, eyes wide in panic.

I was off in a second, meeting him halfway across the field.

"The Clan of Azazel," he panted. "I saw them. Just over the horizon. They'll be here soon."

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

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

Everyone around us fled in a nervous flutter, all preparing for battle.

"You ready?" I addressed Kyle.

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

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

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

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

We couldn't see the Clan of Azazel yet, but I had no doubt that would change very soon.

Elijah glanced at me nervously. "Um...", he started.

"Where's Belle?" I demanded. "Why the fuck aren't you with her?"

Kyle growled, tugging Elijah closer to him.

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

I stepped forward threateningly, about ready to murder everyone in sight. "What do you mean?" I growled out.

"She's not in Minneapolis," Elijah continued. "She left hours ago, based on her scent."

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

GRAYSON

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

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

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

I was torn—part of me wanted to protect my pack, to go fight with them and lead them, but the other part—perhaps the bigger part—wanted, needed, to go find my mate.

I wasn't anything without her.

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

I knew I didn't have an option. My voice came out gruff and deep—more wolf than man. "Shift. We have some vampires to fight."

We didn't approach the army of Azazel. Instead, we let them come to us.

It felt like they were moving in slow motion even though they were sprinting toward us, looking rabid and bloodthirsty, snarling and baring their fangs.

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

My pack, along with Casimir's army of vampires, stood in the field, their stance stiff and prepared for the violence we knew was to come.

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

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

All of his instincts were telling him to take out his fury and worry for his mate on Azazel, determined that he would not live to see the morning.

My vampire was at the surface as well, ready for a fight. I had no doubt my eyes were a dark red with the presence of both creatures.

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

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

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



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

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

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

Azazel's army was close now, so close that their scent of blood and sweat was nearly suffocating. My pack started stepping forward. We wouldn't wait any longer.

And then the fight began.

Everything happened so fast. We clashed together—wolves and vampires slamming into one another with such intensity that I was sure it could have been heard from across the large field.

## Chapter 60 – Kidnapped by My Mate Series II: His Lost Queen

### Filed To Story:

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

I took vampires down one by one easily and with efficiency. One bite to their neck was all it took for their heads to be off their shoulders and rolling on the ground.

I had no mercy for these creatures that were only created to kill and wreak havoc, who were standing between Azazel and me.

I worked my way through the crowd, knowing I would find Azazel at the back of it, looking over the destruction and mayhem he created.

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

Howling sounded behind me. I knew immediately what it meant. Kyle was trying to get my attention. It was the only thing that was able to interrupt my concentration.

I looked behind me, trying to locate Kyle, when a vampire threw himself at me, clamping its teeth into my neck. I growled and threw him off me just as another vampire bit into my leg.

I kicked her off with ease, my fury only growing. I was outside of the throng now, no one around me.

Kyle howled again in the distance. My eyes found him fighting directly in the middle of the battle.

As if he could sense my attention on him, I heard him speak into my mind. “Are you seeing what I am?” he asked me.

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

He jerked his head toward the pack grounds. “There’s something stopping Azazel’s clan from entering pack territory.”

I looked behind him, suddenly noticing exactly what he was talking about, although it was hard to pick out. It seemed as though a giant, glimmering dome was spanning over pack lands.

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

Were they hiding behind the protective field instead of fighting?

Then one of Azazel’s vampires—a younger boy, no older than seventeen or eighteen

—raced toward them, obviously looking for a fight, but as soon as he came in contact with the barely visible wall, he fell to the ground.

He screamed in agony and rolled around for a few seconds, twitching as if he had been electrocuted and fighting what seemed to be an intense pain before he eventually stopped.

Dead. He was dead.

“What the hell is that?” I asked Kyle.

There was a protective field around the pack for keeping outsiders out, but this was much different than that. That field didn’t kill—it only stopped unwanted guests.

Several more vampires raced toward the field without thinking, focused on attacking the few that were standing on the other side, only to meet the same fate as their friend.

Their screaming was louder than anyone else’s, ringing in my ears with its intensity as soon as they touched the field. Then it suddenly made sense.

The pack members standing on the other side weren't hiding or being cowards; they were using the deadly field as a way to kill Azazel's clan. They were pouring them into the force field like bugs to a moth catcher.

Little by little, more of my pack began to notice what was happening and took action. They entered the shimmering dome with ease—some dragging themselves and others to get to the other side.

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

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

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

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

They were killing each other—ripping each other's throats out, running into the force field. Azazel's army wasn't going to last much longer.

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

It didn't take long for Casimir to catch on or start yelling at his army members to get behind the force field.

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

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

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

He was panicking, cowering in the shadows.

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

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

I growled, sprinting to the tree line. I knew Azazel was out there. I could sense him nearby, could practically smell his fear.

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

“I’m going to find that motherfucker, and I’m gonna rip him to shreds,” I said.

BELLE

Evergreen, Maine, the town’s sign had read. ~The most delightful place on Earth.~

Yeah, delightful my ass.

I was sitting on the bench on the side of the road, watching people as they walked past. My suitcase sat next to me on one side, and my backpack sat on the other.

Why the hell had I come here?

This was never my plan. In fact, I hadn’t planned to go anywhere, really. When I got on a Greyhound bus back in Minnesota, I had no idea where I was going to end up.

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

And I had done exactly that.

I’d sat on that bus for hours upon hours, watching as we passed through city after city—state after state. I’d switched buses whenever we got to a new station, always choosing to go north.

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

Evergreen was beautiful and quaint. It was also a tourist destination—a nice one geared toward rich families looking to spend their vacation on the coast.

Its main street, where all the shops and restaurants were located, looked out over the Atlantic Ocean.

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

The beaches were filled with tourists tanning and swimming, basking in the hot summer sun.

In the main part of town, the shops were all uniform, spanning either side of the streets, luring people in with their beautiful window displays and expensive items.

Streetlights lit the scenic cobblestone roads, and everyone seemed to know everybody else. I passed families and smiling faces everywhere I went.

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

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

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

Sure, the town looked like it was straight out of a Hallmark movie, but the locals would've been better suited to participate in an episode of the Twilight Zone.

The only way I could think to describe them was... strange. It was like they somehow knew I wasn't some other tourist they could suck money from.

They stared at me as I passed as if I were some sort of zoo animal out on the loose in their picturesque town.

I kept hearing them whisper behind my back, and when I turned to look at them, they would look away quickly, acting like they hadn't been watching and talking about me.

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

I knew I looked out of place.

I was wearing the same old, wrinkly clothes I had been wearing when I left Grayson, my hair could definitely have used a good brushing, and my face was still healing from Grayson breaking my cheekbone several weeks ago.

Okay, so out of place maybe wasn't the best way to describe my current state... I was a hot mess. I might as well have had "Just escaped an abusive relationship"

written across my forehead.

Based on the looks I was getting from the locals, you would've assumed I had three heads or something.

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

Most evaded my questions, while others turned me away without even giving me a chance to speak. Some people even avoided me altogether as if they had seen me come in and assumed I had the plague.

It didn't matter, though. They could stare all they wanted. I had decided that I was here now, and I was going to make the best of it. I deserved to settle down in a town as nice as this.

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

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

It was almost as if I were incapable of thinking of anything other than my ex-mate, the man who ripped my heart out of my chest and tore it into a million pieces.

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

My muscles felt like I had just run an entire marathon without any previous training and then kept on going even after finishing, pushing my body beyond its limit until I was on the verge of collapsing.

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

Grayson's mark on my neck burned like it had when he had first given it to me all those months ago, and I had locked myself away in a hotel room in order to stay away from him.

It seemed to have become infected, too, becoming red and blotchy.

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

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

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

But as bad as all that was, none of it was compared to the pounding inside my head.

Before this, I had never been one to get headaches.

Every once in a while, I would experience a dull ache when I was about to get my period, but it was never anything like this.