

Kidnapped by My Mate Novel

Chapter 71 – Kidnapped by My Mate Series II: His Lost Queen

Filed To Story:

I struggled against her, but my dizziness made it nearly impossible. “W-What are you doing here?” I asked.

She stared at me with pitch-black eyes, telling me her wolf was at the surface. “I thought that was obvious.” Her smile grew. “I’ve come to kill you.”

Her hand flew to my throat, gripping it tightly and cutting off my airway. I grabbed her arm, digging my nails in and trying to pull it away from me as I gasped.

“You look awful,” Adalee continued, unfazed by my attempts to free myself. “I guess getting rejected by your mate really is as horrible as they say.”

“L-Let me g-go.” I struggled to speak over her grip on me.

“No, I don’t think so.” Her hand tightened even more, making me wheeze. “Tell me, Belle, how does it feel to know your mate doesn’t care about you? Doesn’t even care if I kill you?”

My mark burned at her words like someone was forcing scalding hot iron into my skin. I tried to scream, but it came out more like a gargled yelp.

Adalee’s expression was filled with sadistic glee. “That’s right, Luna,” she spat the title as if it were an insult.

“Your mate couldn’t give a damn about your miserable life. In fact...he’s sick of being tied to you. Remember that other she-wolf he mated with?

“He needs you dead so he can finally be with his real mate without you getting in the way.”

Every word she spoke was like a knife to my heart, agonizing and sharp. She had to be lying, right?

Grayson may hate me, may not want me as his mate, but I never thought he would consider killing me.

My head exploded with the worst blinding pain I had ever experienced. I screamed.

Grayson. I knew it was Grayson. He had never tried so hard to get into my head.

Adalee squeezed my neck so tightly that my vision went out for several seconds.

When I came to, I was coughing and gasping for air, her grip on my throat just loose enough that I could take in several deep, gulping breaths.

And then something incredible happened. Warmth, sweet and soothing, filled my form. The burning on my neck subsided a bit.

Even my head stopped hurting for the first time in months, although I could still feel the blood spilling down the back of my neck from where Adalee had shoved my skull into the hard wall.

I felt... relief. I felt safe. I felt like everything was going to be okay.

“Are you reaching out to your mate?” Adalee’s taunting voice said to me, pulling me out of my stupor.

“That’s good. Let him feel your suffering. Let him know how you felt—all the pain, all the fear—during the final moments of your pathetic life.”

I was reaching out to Grayson, I realized with shock. When I lost consciousness a few moments ago, I hadn’t been able to continue blocking him out of my mind.

My mental walls had finally fallen. He was in my brain now, sifting through my emotions. It wasn’t as though I could hear him or his thoughts, but I could feel him.

I felt his terror, anger, and stress. The part of me that still had feelings for him reached out to him, wanting to comfort him even though I knew it was wrong.

His beta was here to murder me, and he didn’t care. He would rather have me dead than have to think of me again.

Boy, did that hurt to know.

It didn’t matter, though. All that mattered was the peace that took over my form even as Adalee sneered in my face and her grip on my throat tightened once again.

I stopped fighting her, dropping my hands. Feeling that connection to Grayson made it easier to accept what I knew was coming. There was no way of fighting this.

My vision started to cave in. Strangely enough, I could feel Grayson's panic increasing more and more with every second I stood there, waiting for my life to end.

I couldn't help but wonder why he cared. This was his fault. None of this would be happening if it hadn't been for him.

And yet, I still gripped onto what little comfort Grayson offered me through what was left of our broken bond as if it were my lifeline. At least I wouldn't die still fighting him. At least I could die in peace.

Through my teary eyes, I could see that Adalee's expression was full of pure rage. It was the kind of hatred that developed through betrayal and pain.

I didn't know what Grayson had told her about me or why she looked at me with so much loathing in her gaze, but I wanted to tell her that I was sorry.

Whatever I had done to make her look at me that way had to have been evil. There was no other explanation.

And just as I thought everything was over for me, that my meager life was coming to an end, she dropped me.

I fell to the ground, gasping. I tried to breathe even though I still found it extremely difficult. I coughed, tasting the metallic flavor of blood. My head dropped to the wet floor.

Through my foggy vision, I could see someone standing over me. Hope filled my chest.

"Grayson?" I tried to whisper, but nothing but gasping breaths came out.

Liam's face came into view as he crouched down in front of me. Horror immediately gripped me.

Liam's mouth was covered in blood, dripping down his chin and to his neck. Fangs, sharp and long, were poking out from beneath his top lip.

He looked exactly like the Grayson from my nightmares.

I dragged my gaze over to the body on the ground next to him. It was Adalee. She wasn't breathing.

Her eyes were vacantly staring at me, her throat torn open, blood flowing from the open wound and pooling around her body.

Dead. She was dead.

I looked back at Liam, who met my gaze with concern and trepidation.

The last thing I thought before I blacked out was: Vampire.

GRAYSON

AN HOUR EARLIER

My wolf was being an asshole. He wouldn't stop forcing himself up against my consciousness, trying to take control and shift. He was pissed. Livid.

He kept reminding me that our mate was out on her own, completely unprotected and in extreme danger—and we were doing nothing about it. As if that weren't the only thing on my mind.

"You doing okay there, Alpha?" Kyle asked me from his seat across from me. "You're not looking too good."

I ignored his question and continued to pace back and forth at the head of the table with my fists in my hair, barely holding it together.

Of course I wasn't okay. I was the furthest thing from okay. I was barely eating or sleeping, unable to focus on anything but finding her.

My Belle.

The thousand-year-old wood of the table in front of me was completely covered in papers and documents, all pertaining to any clues as to where Belle might be.

I had any, and all information I could find on my mate spread out before me.

Where she went to preschool, her first job when she was fifteen, the name of her oboe instructor from fifth grade, and the doctor who treated her father for his cancer.

I even managed to get a hold of all of her yearbook pictures.

I reached out to anyone who might have known her in Minnesota, but no one had heard from her since before she left for Paris to visit her mother.

I went to her old apartment and took the time to visit her father's grave site to pay my respect, thanking him for creating and raising the woman I would be spending the rest of eternity with.

So far, however, all I knew was that she had boarded a Greyhound bus in Minneapolis. That was the last time she'd used her credit card.

She didn't have a cellphone or anything that could be used to track her, and her scent was long gone. Belle was too smart. She was evading me at every turn. And it was making me lose my fucking mind.

My wolf often let me know that he thought this whole thing was stupid. He was convinced that he would be able to find her if I let him out.

He would simply run and search every inch and crevice of this earth if he had to.

This was why I hadn't shifted in nearly three months.

I knew the moment I let him out that he wouldn't give me back control until he found Belle, and, as smart as my wolf thought he was, the only thing he would accomplish was prancing around the woods while our mate suffered.

A huge downside to keeping my wolf inside, however, was that I was extremely on edge. I moved myself and my pack into the palace of the Mortars in a complete trance.

I had only been here for a few weeks and had already proved to be the worst king in all of supernatural history.

Zagan Mortar, the former king, very quickly realized what a mistake he had made in sending my mate off on her own while I was still unconscious.

I snapped at anybody who bothered or inconvenienced me even the slightest bit and had no interest in ruling—or doing anything, really—until I had Belle by my side again.

She was my one and only concern. Zagan made up for his mistake by continuing to take on many of the responsibilities of king. I didn't have it in me to be grateful, though. I didn't have it in me to be anything.

The only thing holding me back from completely flipping my shit was the fact that I could feel Belle and knew she was alive and okay. She was in pain and felt incredibly uncertain and afraid, but she was okay.

She missed me. I could feel her longing to come back to me every day, and I wished with every part of my being that she would, even though I knew she wouldn't.

The worst part was that she hated herself for it. She thought it made her weak and pathetic to still want me after everything she thought I did to her, and it broke my heart.

I wanted nothing more than to pull her to me and tell her that there was nothing wrong with her and that it was completely normal to want to be with me. I was her mate.

My heart squeezed painfully in my chest to think she would ever hate herself for something so natural as loving her mate.

I had spent the last three days in the room I was in now. It was meant as a conference room.

It sometimes made me stall to think of all of the important, influential, and historical characters who had stood in my very spot.

The room was enormous, with dark wooden walls carved with intricate designs, bookshelves with ancient literature surrounding us, and a fifty-foot-tall ceiling made completely of stained glass.

It was a work of art, the stained glass, which told the story of Evangeline and Elijah Viotto, the former hybrid king and fairy queen of the supernatural.

Its breathtaking windows bathed the room in deep, rich colors throughout every hour of the day.

Even during the night, the moonlight shone through and covered the surrounding space in a blanket of iridescent light, making me feel like I was standing in a painting.

As beautiful as it was, I often found myself looking up at the stained glass above me after throwing my head back in frustration.

Only to be faced with even more anger as I studied it, seeing the unfortunate way that Elijah and Evangeline's story ended, with both of them dying at the hands of the first Mortar to take the throne, Damian Mortar.

Even now, my hands clenched into fists as I looked up at it through dark-red eyes.

Some said that Belle and I were Evangeline and Elijah reincarnated, as we were the two that, according to prophecy, were meant to take on their same roles, as king and queen of the supernatural.

I resented that. I would take the throne alongside Belle, but I would not have the same ending as they did.

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I would not allow myself or Belle to meet the same fate Elijah and Evangeline had come to. Azazel would not be our Damian.

But I had to find Belle first to prevent that from happening. Fuck, why couldn't I find her? Where the hell was she hiding?

If she would just open her mind to me, I could track her down and explain everything. But—as stubborn as ever—she continued to block me off.

As much as it killed me, I stopped trying to break through the surprisingly strong mental barriers she'd put up because I knew it just caused her more pain and reminded her of the horrible things she thought I had done to her.

So I would hold myself back until I had more information.

A fierce form of regret traveled through me as I thought about the wasted opportunity I was presented with during the battle on my pack grounds three months ago.

Azazel's army of vampires had lost—more than lost, they had been brutally defeated, in their attempt to kill my pack members, while also tearing each other apart in an untrained, savage hunger for blood.

The fact that his army was defeated didn't satiate my own need for blood, however—Azazel's blood.

Nothing and no one was going to stop me from hunting him down and killing him slowly, cruelly.

Breaking each of his bones, ripping flesh, bringing him to the brink of death, and then starting over time and again until I was completely satisfied with the amount of suffering I had put him through—if that were even possible.

My wolf salivated, and the fangs and claws of my vampire were unintentionally released, both of them just as tempted as I was by the thought of torturing Azazel for decades.

But Azazel had escaped before I had gotten to him, proving once again what a coward he was.

I had torn through the surrounding trees where he was hiding in wolf form, using my vampire speed, but found that he was nowhere to be seen, the only remnant of his being the faint scent he'd left behind.

He had quite obviously run when he realized he had lost, leaving his clan of new vampires to fend for themselves against my pack of hungry wolves.

He knew what I would do to him if I found him and was smart to run.

Azazel was after her. I could feel it in the very marrow of my bones. He was looking for her with the same intense determination I was.

He wanted to kill her in the most brutal way possible in a last-ditch effort to take me down. He knew as well as I did that I would be nothing without Belle by my side.

The only thing keeping me going right now was the knowledge that Belle was out there somewhere in an incredible amount of pain and danger. I had to get to her before Azazel did.

And time was running out.

“Alpha, why don’t you go get some sleep?” Kyle asked me in a tentative tone. “You haven’t slept more than an hour a night for the past week.”

He was right. It was nearly impossible to sleep without Belle sharing the bed with me. I could tell Kyle wanted to get back to Elijah and probably get some much-needed sleep himself.

He had put all of his heart and soul into this search and had been by my side every step of the way. Elijah too. They were both just as determined as I was to find her.

“I don’t give a fuck about sleep,” I growled. “I need to find my mate. You can go to bed if you want. I’m staying here.”

“Alpha, I hate to break this to you, but all you’ve been doing for the past several hours is growl and pace back and forth like some sort of possessed zombie dude thing.

“I don’t think you’re going to get much else done tonight. And the luna needs you at your best if you’re going to find her.”

My head snapped up to look at Kyle, my red eyes narrowing. “I’m not—”

I was cut off by the drastic shift of Belle’s emotions through the mate bond. She already hadn’t been having the best day—something that tore me up inside.

Something had happened to upset her this morning, and that poor mood had stayed with her throughout the entire day. But whatever she was feeling now was more than just sadness.

It was full-blown terror.

My entire body froze. Something was wrong. Very, very wrong.

“Alpha?” Kyle asked.

I held my hand up, silencing him. “Something is wrong with Belle,” I told him.

Having no other choice, I immediately attempted to push into her consciousness, even though I was aware that it would add pain to her fear.

I just needed her to know that I was here for her. I needed her to let me in, so I knew what was going on, why she was so afraid, and how to protect her.

Anger forced itself through the bond as Belle realized what I was doing. I didn’t give a fuck if she was mad at me. I needed to know what had her so scared.

My hands gripped the back of the chair I was standing in front of so hard that I could hear the ancient wood starting to split beneath my grip.

“Fuck,” I shouted when she still wouldn’t let me in but was clearly still very afraid.

“Fuck!”

“Alpha, what’s wrong? What’s going on?” Kyle demanded, standing from his chair.

Belle was in danger. Belle was in danger. Belle was in danger. It was the only thing repeating over and over again in my head.

Then, all of a sudden, it was like a door opened in my mind. And even as a wave of calm washed over me as the bond surged between me and my mate, Belle’s pain and fear were even more intense.

Belle’s walls were down.

I could just barely hear Kyle calling my name because I was already sprinting out the door.

“Where the hell are you going?” he called after me.

“Maine,” I grunted back.

BELLE

My eyes flew open, blinking under the bright light on the ceiling above me.

Memories of what had happened last night came crashing to the front of my consciousness like a freight train.

I was disoriented and drowsy from passing out and had no idea where I was or how I got there. And, even though exhaustion was pushing me to go back to sleep, panic gripped me like a vice, forcing my eyes open wide.

Adalee had tried to kill me.

Grayson didn't care if I was dead.

Liam was a vampire.

My hand went to my throat, touching the spot where Adalee's hand had been wrapped around my neck.

I whimpered when my fingers connected with the tender bruise there, my throat constricting with horrified tears.

I scrambled to sit up, pushing through the pain coursing through my body. My fight or flight instinct was telling me to get the hell out of dodge.

I looked around me, realizing for the first time I was in Liam's apartment, back in the room he used to let me stay in. I felt the tiniest bit of relief. I knew this place. I could get out of here quickly.

"Fuck," Liam's voice said from outside my door. "I think she's awake."

I moved faster, practically leaping out of bed—although my body was screaming at me—and looked for anything I could use as a weapon.

I reached for the closest object, a lamp, but was stopped right before I could grab it.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa." Liam was suddenly next to me, gently pushing me back down by my shoulders onto the bed.

I blinked up at him. How had he gotten here so fast? He moved like a blur. I had just heard him talking in the living room.

"Slow down there," he continued. "You're not fully healed yet. You need to take it easy."

I flinched away from his touch as if he had burned me. Visions of him covered in Adalee's blood assaulted my consciousness.

Vampire Vampire Vampire Vampire.

Liam was clean now—no more blood on his face—and he was wearing fresh clothes. He looked like his normal self again.

That didn't make me any less terrified of him.

Liam's eyes softened when I jerked away from him and retracted his hand from me slowly.

Laila appeared beside me as well, looking down at me with concern. “You’re not supposed to be awake yet. We thought you would be asleep for hours after everything you’ve been through.”

She tried offering me a gentle smile that I’m sure was meant to be comforting. “But you’ve always been one hell of a fighter, haven’t you?”

I barely comprehended what Laila was saying, unable to stop from glancing at Liam, feeling betrayed by the man I had once trusted. He’d lied to me.

What had I expected, though? Everyone I cared about turned their backs on me at some point or another. They all had secrets that they were preparing to use against me.

“Don’t look at me like that, Belle,” Liam begged, his tone pained. “You know I would never hurt you.”

“You hurt Adalee,” I croaked. My voice was hoarse and gravelly, but not as bad as I had been expecting, given all that had happened to me. “You killed her. How do I know you won’t do the same to me?”

“I saved you. That werewolf was trying to kill you, Belle. I wasn’t about to stand back and let you die. I had to do something.”

So he knew Adalee was a werewolf.

And he was a vampire.

What the fuck had my life become?

I recalled hearing Grayson tell me about a war between werewolves and vampires that had been going on for centuries. He said vampires were horrible, backstabbing creatures who only thought of themselves.

That couldn’t be Liam, could it?

My eyes filled with unwanted tears. “Are you a-a—” I asked Liam.

He interrupted me before I could say the word. “I’m a vampire.” He looked to Laila, who was worrying her bottom lip between her teeth.

She nodded her head once. “We both are. All... All of Evergreen is sort of full of vampires.”

And that was all I needed to hear.

I practically flew out of bed, planning to sprint to the door. I should have known that my efforts would be futile.

Liam grabbed me and forced me back onto the bed yet again. My exhausted, sore limbs protested, making me clench my jaw.

“Stop that,” Liam commanded. “You’re going to hurt yourself. You’re not fully healed.”

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I struggled against him, trying to push his hands off me. I wanted to scream in frustration. I was so sick of people using their supernatural strength to detain me.

After a few more seconds of fighting, I begrudgingly relented and lay back down in defeat. I glared at Liam, feeling tears running down my cheeks. Embarrassment reddened my face. I hated that I was crying in front of them.

“So, what?” I demanded, angrily wiping my tears. “I just walked into a crazy vampire cult or something?”

Liam frowned. “We prefer the term clan. Not cult.”

As if that made it any better.

Laila touched my hand. My head snapped up to look at her, and I jerked away from her touch.

“You have nothing to be afraid of,” she told me. “You lived with werewolves before, didn’t you?”

My jaw dropped. “H-How did you—”

“We all knew you had come from a werewolf pack as soon as you got to Evergreen.

You reeked of them.

“Plus, you have a werewolf mating mark the size of Canada on your neck,” Laila told me. “You really thought we wouldn’t notice that?”

I didn’t know how to respond. I touched my mark gently, wincing when it flared with heat. I wished I could just scrub the thing away so no one, including me, could ever see it again.

Laila sighed. "Look, I know this is a lot to take in, but I promise you, if you can handle werewolves, then you can handle vampires."

"At least we don't turn into monsters whenever we're in a bad mood," Liam grumbled. "We're not nearly as scary or dangerous."

Was that supposed to make me feel better? Nothing they said would make this situation any less messed up.

I had escaped a pack of werewolves who hated me just to walk straight into a vampire clan who probably wanted to have me for breakfast. Talk about out of the frying pan and into the fire.

"Werewolves don't kill people," I retorted.

Liam scoffed. "I wouldn't be too sure about that, hun."

We held each other's gaze for several long moments. A silent challenge. I was the first to look away. Although I hated him at the moment, some part of me knew he was right.

Liam definitely wasn't the biggest monster I had ever faced.

"I'm so sorry, Belle," Laila said. "I wish we could have told you. We wanted to, I promise."

"So why didn't you?" I whispered.

"Our father wouldn't let us. He didn't want us to associate with the mate of a werewolf. Especially one with a mark the size of yours," Liam said.

"Your mate is dangerous, isn't he?" Laila questioned. "Isn't it true that the bigger the mark, the more powerful the werewolf?"

I nodded stiffly. "He wasn't the friendliest person." That was the understatement of the century. "So that's why I couldn't get a job in Evergreen? Your father wouldn't let me?"

"Yes," Liam grumbled, actually looking upset about it. "He was being an asshole."

I tried to keep my breathing calm, although my chest was tightening more and more by the minute.

"So when you told me your father was the leader of the town...what you really meant was that he's the leader of...of a vampire clan? "

Liam sat down on the edge of the bed next to me. "Yes," he said slowly. "Our father may or may not be one of the most powerful vampires in the world."

“Because why wouldn’t he be? It makes perfect sense.” Of course I left one of the most powerful werewolves in the world just to move in with the son of one of the most powerful vampires in the world.

“And let me guess—he hates me because I was mated to a werewolf, right? That’s why he wouldn’t let me get a job?”

Liam and Laila hesitated for only a second before they both nodded.

I couldn’t help the bubbling laughter that left my lips at the irony of the entire situation. “Well, isn’t that just peachy?” I laughed.

“We tried to convince him you wouldn’t be a problem, but he didn’t want your mate, whoever he is, coming to our town,” Laila said.

I shifted. “Would you do something to him if he did? Would you...hurt him?”

“We don’t kill anyone,” Liam cut in, sitting on the edge of my bed. “Yesterday was the first time I had ever taken anyone’s life.”

“But then how...” I swallowed. “How do you—”

“If you’re trying to ask about our diets,” Liam provided, “we drink blood. They got that much right in the movies.”

“Human blood?” I asked quietly.

He nodded slowly. “Yes. Human blood.”

“But we don’t kill them,” Laila cut in. “They don’t even remember anything after we take their blood.”

“They may feel a little disoriented for a couple of days—they might even think they have the flu or a bad hangover or something—but they are otherwise unharmed.

“Vampires have evolved to be able to inject our victims with a toxin in our fangs that can make them forget everything if we want them to. Not all vampires care to do this, but we do.”

All the nights I had spent here came racing to mind. I had no idea that I had been living under the same roof as a bloodthirsty vampire.

I didn’t remember Liam touching me but...Was it possible that he drank my blood without me knowing about it?

“No one has touched you,” Liam suddenly said, as if he had been reading my thoughts. “No one in this town, including us, has fed from you. I’ve made sure of it.”

“He’s not kidding,” Laila said. “He almost killed a couple of people, so you wouldn’t become someone’s next meal.”

I winced at her choice of phrasing.

Suddenly, it all made sense. “So when you kept insisting on driving me to and from work, saying you didn’t want me to get murdered while I was walking home alone

—”

“I was literally making sure you wouldn’t get murdered,” Liam explained, sounding more than a little defensive.

“I can tell people not to feed from you when you’re in Evergreen, and they have to listen to me because of who my father is.

“But the moment you moved to Woodhurst and started working at that stupid diner, I lost any authority over you.

“Anybody could have wandered over there and done whatever they wanted with you, and I wouldn’t have been able to do anything to stop it.

“And when I didn’t invite you to that party, it was because I knew someone would try something on you if you were there. Your blood is especially appealing for some reason.

“It’s most likely because you’re a werewolf’s mate, and vampires are hardwired to kill and harm werewolves.

“So even though I warned people to stay away from you, I never wanted to risk leaving you by yourself for too long.” His fists clenched at his sides.

“But you were always so damn persistent about being independent and not needing anyone’s help; it was as if you wanted someone to kill you—”

“Liam is strangely protective of you,” Laila interrupted, giving her brother a look. “I don’t really get it. No one does. Ever since you came to town, you’re all he thinks or talks about.

“He gets really upset if you’re ever alone.”

I shifted uncomfortably at this revelation. “Is that true?” I asked Liam.

Liam ran a frustrated hand through his curly hair. “I don’t know how to explain it.

It's not a romantic thing, so don't get the wrong idea." His jaw clenched, looking frustrated as he eyed me up and down.

"Well, fine, maybe it was when I first saw you sitting on that park bench alone. I mean, look at you." He gestured to my body.

I blushed.

"But then I saw the mark on your neck and...well, I knew you had a mate and were off-limits. The last thing I wanted was an angry monster werewolf thing trying to kill me because they thought I touched you.

"So I don't want you to think I did all of this because I have hopes of you ever wanting to be with me in a romantic way because that's not the case."

I didn't miss the way his eyes dropped to the bruising around my damaged neck.

"I should have left you alone after I found out you had a mate. But one look at your bruised face and tear-stained cheeks and...I don't know.

"Something in me switched the day I met you; some instinct took over. I couldn't leave you after that. I needed to protect you. I needed to know you were okay at all times."

I studied him for a few seconds, trying to process all the crazy things he was telling me, but I couldn't seem to wrap my head around it all. None of it made any sense.

It explained his strange behavior and his need to control my life, but I still didn't understand why. Why did Liam feel like he had to protect me? Why did he care at all?

I wasn't his responsibility. And, seriously, the last thing I needed was another possessive, overprotective supernatural creature claiming they had some magical bond to me, connecting himself to me.

"Well, thanks for looking out for me, I guess, but you don't have to anymore. I'm leaving town. I can't stay here anymore."

"What?" Laila practically screeched. "You're leaving? Why?"

I snorted. "Besides the fact that I have unknowingly been living right next door to a vampire clan for the last few months? I can't let anyone get hurt because of me.

"If Adalee was able to find me, then I'm sure other people will be able to too. I need to get out of here before it's too late."

"This has something to do with whoever the hell put that ~on your neck, doesn't it?"

Liam glared down at Grayson's mark. "Your mate."

My mark burned as if it knew who we were talking about. I nodded once.

A hissing noise left Liam's chest. My eyes widened. I had heard that sound before, back when I had been living with Grayson.

Grayson had made that noise the first night we slept apart from each other, right after pushing me out of his bed for refusing to have sex with him.

Then he'd done it again when he'd hit me for talking to Kyle about our relationship, and once more right before I'd refused him for the last time, and he'd mated with someone else.

Liam's hand touched my shoulder, dragging me out of my thoughts.

"He's the one you are running from, isn't he?" he asked. "Now that you finally know everything, we can be honest with each other. Was he the one who hurt you?"

My throat was suddenly dry. I didn't want to answer. I didn't want to talk about Grayson or all the horrible things he had done to me.

Laila handed me a glass of water that I hadn't even noticed had been sitting on my bedside table. I chugged it down, grateful for the feel of the cool water on my sore throat.

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Setting the glass back down, I realized with a start that my injuries didn't hurt nearly as much as they had when I had woken up.

There was absolutely no pain in my head—not from Grayson trying to force himself into my mind, nor from Adalee slamming my skull into a wall multiple times.

I tentatively reached up and touched the back of my head. I wasn't sure what I had been expecting, but all I found was a mild bruise and dried blood.

It was a similar case with my neck. Bruises that I was sure were in the shape of hands wrapped themselves around my throat, but the pain wasn't anything I couldn't handle.

I had definitely been through worse.

I distinctly remembered Adalee's hand crushing my airway last night. This should have left me dead or, at the very least, in the hospital.

And I wouldn't have been surprised if the wound on the back of my head caused internal bleeding or brain damage.

When Adalee had slammed me against that wall, I could have sworn I felt my brain rattle in my skull.

I should be dead right now—it was the only thing that made sense after the trauma I had gone through.

How was it possible that I was sitting here, experiencing barely any pain after the beatdown I had received last night?

My gaze went back to Liam and Laila, giving them a questioning, flabbergasted look. They glanced at each other, neither of them seeming like they wanted to give me an answer.

After another moment of hesitancy, Laila was the first to speak. "We gave you Amelia Mortar's blood. It has healing properties. It's the only reason you're alive right now."

I stared at her. "Yeah, I'm gonna need you to back up there for a second. You gave me whose what?"

Laila shifted uneasily. "Amelia Mortar's blood. She's the royal clan's healer and the daughter of the king of vampires, Zagan Mortar. Her blood can heal someone on their deathbed with just a few drops.

"Thankfully, she packages it and gives it to clans all over the world. We had some stashed away for moments like this. Perks of being related to our father."

"One of the only perks," Liam grumbled.

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. "You injected me with some vampire princess's blood?"

Liam shook his head. "It's not in your bloodstream. You took it orally."

I moved around slowly, testing out my limbs. Everything felt completely normal.

"And that's why I feel okay now? That's how I healed so quickly?"

Healing wasn't the only difference I noticed. I felt better than I had in months.

"You're not fully healed yet. You still have a nasty bruise around your throat, and the gash on your head will take a bit longer to close up," Laila said.

I brushed my hair out of my face in frustration, needing to take a moment to try to process all of this. I squeezed my eyes shut. There was a lot of information being thrown at me way too fast.

“You okay?” Liam asked in a calm, even tone. “How’s your head?”

My eyes opened. I touched the wound. “Fine. Well, better than fine, actually. I don’t remember the last time I was able to think this clearly.”

Liam still looked concerned. “So that migraine you’ve been dealing with the last few months has finally gone away?”

I sighed. “That wasn’t a migraine,” I told him dryly. “My former mate was trying to break into my consciousness so he could keep tabs on me.

“He was finally able to last night when Adalee almost killed me. Even though I’ve blocked him out again, I don’t know what information he got from me while I was blacked out.

“He might know where I am. He might come for me.”

I thought about how I had unintentionally let him into my mind last night while I had been unconscious and felt embarrassment rise up my throat.

I had clung to the comfort he provided me during what I thought were my last moments, even though I knew he was the one who had ordered me to be killed.

Embarrassment made my heart rate pick up and my palms sweat. I could only imagine what Grayson had thought of me.

“But he marked you,” Laila stated, confused.

“I don’t know a whole lot about werewolves or their fated mates, but I thought once they marked their other half, wolves were bonded for life. Don’t you want him to come for you? Don’t you miss him?”

“I found him in bed with another woman,” I explained, the words tasting like vinegar in my mouth.

“It doesn’t matter whether or not I miss him. I can’t be with him. He rejected me.

He mated with someone else. He doesn’t want me.”

There was a long pause. Nobody knew what to say.

“I’m so sorry, Belle. I can’t even imagine what that must be like,” Liam said.

He hesitated before continuing. "But if that's the case, you have nothing to worry about, right? He's not going to come for you if he doesn't...want to be mated with you anymore."

I looked up at him. I could feel tears starting to pool in the corner of my eyes again, threatening to fall the longer we talked about Grayson.

Liam was right, though. What the hell was I afraid of? Grayson wasn't going to come for me. He hated me. He didn't even care if Adalee killed me.

I nodded, wiping under my eyes. "Yeah, you're probably right."

"Besides, there's nowhere safer for you," Liam continued. "If he does come here, you have a bunch of vampires willing to back you up."

Laila grabbed my hand in hers. "So you'll stay?"

I gave her a small smile. "I'll think about it. I mean, what's the worst that could happen?"

BELLE

After leaving Liam's apartment, he gave me a ride back to my place so I could take a shower and change out of my bloody clothes.

He wasn't happy when I came out of my bathroom dressed in my waitress uniform.

"You are not working today," he stated. "You need rest."

"What I need is to make money so I can afford my apartment instead of being forced to live under a bridge like some sort of troll. My shift is about to start."

I walked past him, grabbing my heels by the front door and sliding them onto my feet.

Liam looked huge in my tiny apartment. Although I suppose that wasn't necessarily a hard thing to do. Anyone would look big in here. Hell, I looked big in here.

The entire space consisted of a single room with a sink, a few cupboards, a dresser, a tiny round table, and three chairs, and just enough room for the twin-sized mattress that was lying on the floor in the corner.

There was a communal bathroom just a few doors down.

So, yeah, the apartment wasn't much, but it was mine. I was just happy to be living on my own instead of depending on someone else.

“Belle, you opened and closed the diner last night.” Liam continued to argue. “They cannot expect you to keep going on like this. It’s not healthy. Or legal. You’re overworking yourself.”

I rolled my eyes. He was so dramatic. “I think I can handle it.”

He glared back at me, clearly not about to let the subject go. “I’ll be fine, Liam. I feel great—the best I have in months. I’m still a little freaked out over everything that happened last night.

“But I’m not in any pain, and I feel well-rested for the first time in forever. That vampire blood you gave me really is magic. Even my mark doesn’t hurt as much.”

It was a miracle, really. Grayson’s mark on my neck still looked horrible—I think it may have been infected at this point—but it didn’t hurt nearly as much as it usually did.

The deep, under-the-skin throbbing had lessened significantly, and it didn’t burn anymore. It made me want to cry in relief.

Was it possible that I might be able to actually enjoy my day rather than being incapacitated by horrible pain?

Or maybe, just maybe...it meant that Grayson had finally decided to leave me alone after feeling what I had gone through last night. Maybe he thought I was dead.

But that was probably just wishful thinking.

“I don’t care,” Liam continued badgering me. “You hardly slept last night. You need rest. Especially after everything you’ve been through.”

I laughed humorlessly. “Yeah, no thanks.” Sleep meant nightmares, and nightmares were the last thing I needed right now. I wanted Grayson out of my head, thank you very much.

Liam continued to argue with me for another ten minutes. He finally relented when I walked out the door without him, threatening to walk to the diner by myself, which I knew he would hate.

He begrudgingly followed behind me, leading me to his car and muttering under his breath about how I was going to work myself to death one day.

The diner was busy today. I was grateful for the distraction. Saturdays always brought in a huge crowd, making the time go faster.

When we got to Pom Pom’s, Liam reluctantly followed me in, still grumbling under his breath about how I hadn’t gotten any sleep last night and needed more time to heal.

When I ignored him, he found a booth in the corner and sat down to order breakfast.

“What’s up with you?” another waitress, Candice, asked me about twenty minutes into the breakfast rush.

“What do you mean?”

We both grabbed food from the cook’s window to put on trays and bring to our customers.

It was still early morning, and the general chatter of the cafe’s breakfast rush added to the pleasant atmosphere around us.

The sun shone in through the windows, painting the walls with a warm glow.

Candice grinned at me. “You’re smiling.”

I gave her a weird look. “Are you insinuating that I don’t normally smile?”

Candice shrugged, grabbing her last plate of food. “You’re just happy, that’s all.” She lifted the tray filled with meals over her shoulder. “It’s a good look on you.”

I watched her walk away, a warm, fuzzy feeling spreading through me. I was happy.

Every second that passed, I felt better and better.

I sighed in contentment, picking up my own tray of food and carrying it around the counter, making my way to a table of high schoolers.

Before I got there, though, the front door to the diner suddenly slammed open. The glass door smashed into the wall, shattering, covering the floor in glass.

Everyone in the diner jumped, some letting out surprised exclamations, before turning to look at the man standing in the doorway.

My gaze clashed with the red eyes of my former mate.

Grayson.

Chapter 75 – Kidnapped by My Mate Series II: His Lost Queen

Filed To Story:

But, no, this wasn't Grayson, was it? It couldn't be. Everything about the man standing in front of me was larger, more refined, and far, far more terrifying.

His huge muscles strained against his black shirt and casual jeans, bigger than I ever remembered them being. He was at least a foot taller, barely even fitting in the doorway.

His eyes stared at me from across the room, dark red and swirling with black, as his chest heaved up and down with breaths that were laced with low, malicious growls.

His arms were sprouting with dark hair, and his entire form was shaking intensely, making it clear he was close to shifting.

No, this wasn't the Grayson I remembered. If his red eyes and ginormous form were any indicators... this was the Grayson of my nightmares.

"Belle," he said. His voice was deep and rich but somehow strained at the same time. "My Belle."

I couldn't think or speak or react. I was frozen in petrified fear. Sweat pooled on my forehead and the palms of my hands. My heart was beating rapidly in my chest.

A loud clattering noise sounded at my feet, and I realized that I had dropped the tray of food I was holding. The dishes shattered the moment they hit the floor.

Voices murmured around me, but my eyes stayed glued to the monster in front of me.

This wasn't happening, right? I was in one of my nightmares.

He started to move. He took several long strides toward me, his steps only faltering when I stumbled backward in terror.

I couldn't let him get to me.

His expression hardened, and he immediately began approaching me with even more determination. I didn't have any time to react or come up with a plan.

All of a sudden, all the pain I had been feeling over the last few months came crashing back into me, only now it was somehow ten times worse than it had ever been before.

I doubled over, letting out a horrified scream.

I knew this intense pain was my body's way of pushing me to go to my mate. My subconscious recognized him and knew he was near.

The bond was pushing me toward him, promising relief if I made contact with him.

And, oh God, did I want to go to him.

I wanted to run to him and wrap my arms around his large form until I was sure there wasn't an inch between us, and then never let him go.

However, even as my body demanded that I give in to the bond, my mind—the more logical part of me—was going into complete panic mode.

I could feel terror settle in as I watched him, almost as if he were in slow motion, get closer and closer to me. I knew I should move, run away, do something, but all I seemed capable of was standing there.

My chest tightened. I couldn't breathe. Oh God, I couldn't breathe. My lungs were refusing to take in air.

Memories of the last time I saw him came crashing to the surface of my conscience.

I was suddenly back at the pack house with him on top of me as he tried to force himself on me.

I was standing in his room, watching his massive fist swing toward my face. I was opening his bedroom door to find him and some other girl about to have sex in his bed.

What was he doing here? What more could he possibly want from me? Hadn't he already taken it all?

A terrifying thought entered my mind. Was he here to play with me some more?

Take me back to his pack house and cause more turmoil to my already broken heart?

I didn't think I would survive if that were the case, especially now that he was so much bigger, so much scarier than he used to be.

My heart was beating too fast, drowning out every other sound around me until all I could hear was the sound of my own raging pulse and gasping breaths in my ears.

The edge of my vision started to darken as I began hyperventilating. Oh no, oh no, oh no.

I was barely aware of someone stepping in front of me, blocking my view of Grayson and his path to me. I registered the person's dark hair through my blurry, whirling vision.

Liam. Liam was standing in front of me. Why? I could barely make out what he was saying, but I knew he was yelling something at Grayson.

He was holding his arms out, trying to protect me. I nearly laughed. He wouldn't be able to do anything to save me. The monster had found me.

And if he wanted me, no one could stop him from taking me.

Their voices faded away. I braced myself on the counter behind me, my legs suddenly too shaky to hold myself up.

I grasped at my throat, willing it to open up and let the air in that I so desperately needed, but it didn't help.

My legs suddenly collapsed beneath me, and I slid down until I was on the ground between two bar stools, my back against the wall.

Just as I was sure I was about to pass out, I registered two massive arms wrapping themselves around me.

I was pulled into a lap, legs on either side of him, my body being set against someone's huge, hard chest. Delicious, familiar, explosive sparks danced across my skin everywhere I touched him.

It was Grayson.

At first, I fought against him. Having him anywhere near me only made my panic worse.

I gasped and wheezed and pounded my fists against his chest, trying desperately to remove myself from him. My terror rose when I realized it wasn't working. His grip was unyielding.

He had me. Oh God, he had me in his control again. He was going to take me with him and do to me again what he had done the last time I was at his pack house. I fought harder.

I was surprised when Grayson allowed me to hit him, sitting back and taking everything I had to give him. He never let it affect his grip on me, but he also didn't fight back or try to dodge any of my punches or slaps.

At some point during my fit of rage and gasping breaths, my body began to slow, exhausting itself. I could feel Grayson breathe out in relief as he also recognized my surrender.

It was then that he tightened his hold around me, bringing me so close that I was safely secured to his chest and unable to do anything other than lean into him, giving him all of my weight.

One of his hands gently cupped the back of my neck and tucked my head into the warm spot where his neck and shoulder met, nuzzling his face into my neck.

He kept me there, clutching me like that even when my gasping breaths turned into heart-wrenching sobs. I began to cry, soaking his skin and T-shirt with my tears.

The bliss of being held by my mate began to settle in. My body recognized his and craved him.

My heart lurched in my chest, filling with love and adoration for him all over again, almost as if nothing had ever happened between us.

I gave into his embrace, melting into him, accepting the affection that my body so desperately needed and which he seemed so willing to provide.

I knew it was wrong. So, so wrong. But I didn't care. I had been in pain for far too long to deny his comfort.

My breathing and heart rate slowed, and my vision cleared even as I continued to cry. The blood stopped pumping in my ears, finally allowing me to hear again.

It amazed me how he was still able to calm me even after all this time, even though he wasn't my mate anymore. It also terrified me. This proved just how much power he still held over me.

I had been in his presence for mere minutes, and I was already reduced to putty in his arms.

Jesus, what was wrong with me?

Relief, pain, and misery all came pouring out of me as Grayson rocked me against his form. I felt pathetic for reacting to seeing him like this, but the floodgates were open, and there was no closing them.

I let myself sob into his neck, clinging to him as if he were my lifeline.

The last time I had cried in front of Grayson, he reacted by yelling at me and calling me pathetic. I almost expected him to react like that again in this scenario. But he didn't.

He simply continued to hold me and caress my back in a soothing up-and-down motion, leaving those familiar sparks everywhere he touched.

I was completely baffled but didn't have it in me to acknowledge my confusion at that moment.

All of the emotions I had been holding in over the last couple of months were pouring out of me, leaving me incapable of doing anything other than sobbing my eyes out into the chest of the man I loved but who never loved me.

"Shhh, baby...I know. I'm so sorry. God, I'm so sorry, Belle," I heard Grayson whisper against my hair. His voice sounded hollow and pained.

He moved his hands up and down my back, rocking us back and forth in a consistent rhythm, keeping his head in the crook of my neck. "It's okay. I've got you."

Everything is okay now. I'm so, so sorry."

Shock flooded my system. Had I heard him right? Had he just... apologized to me?

I didn't have time to worry about it. Although the rest of my body had calmed the moment Grayson touched me, the mark on my neck only seemed to worsen.

I was already in his lap, every possible inch of me touching him, but the mark wanted more; it wanted to be even closer.

As if Grayson were reading my mind, I felt his lips press down on the part of my neck where he had bitten me, leaving a gentle kiss there.

I let out a breathy sigh. My shoulders loosened. Then, ever so slowly, his tongue ran over it, licking it. My entire body was immediately filled with fire.

I gasped and pressed closer to him, arching my back against him. Grayson growled, and the sound only added to my needy whines.

He didn't hold back. His mouth latched onto the tender mark, kissing and suckling it.

My arms seemed to develop a mind of their own and wrapped themselves around his neck, tangling my hands into his hair and pushing him closer to my skin.

I slumped in relief as, for the first time since Paris, my mark didn't hurt. There was no throbbing, no pain, and no shaking. My entire body was at peace.

I was home.

But this isn't your home, I reminded myself. ~It never can be again. ~

He had rejected me and then slept with another. Even though he was here, holding me and apologizing, nothing had changed. He had still abused me. He was still mated to someone else.

Those thoughts only made me cry harder.

Grayson let me sob into his chest for Lord knew how long. He just held me, alternating between telling me how sorry he was and kissing and lapping at my mark.

Eventually, my crying slowed to a stop. I breathed in slowly, finally able to process things now that my body had calmed down from its panic attack.

My anguish was quickly replaced with awareness. I peeked up from the skin of his neck, looking around us. The diner was empty. Grayson and I were completely alone.

Everyone's food was still on the tables, and coats were strewn in the booths, forgotten. It told me that everyone had left in a hurry. I didn't blame them.

If I hadn't been overwhelmed by my panic attack, I would have run too.

Grayson's nose pressed into my hair, and he inhaled deeply, taking in my scent. He sighed in a way that imitated bliss and relief.

Relief over what? Finding me and ruining my plans to stay away from him forever?

His hand drifted down my back and along one of my bare legs, peeking out from beneath my skirt on either side of his huge body, straddling him.

Chapter 76 – Kidnapped by My Mate Series II: His Lost Queen

Filed To Story:

I sucked in a breath, basking in the sparks he left behind everywhere he touched. I could feel myself heating up as he started to slowly lap at my mark again before kissing and nibbling on it.

It felt intimate. Far too intimate for a man who was in a relationship with another woman.

That thought snapped me out of my trance, like ice-cold water being poured on me.

What the hell was I doing?

This man ruined my life, and I was simply allowing him to hold me and kiss me as if nothing had happened between us!

Grayson must have sensed my change in demeanor because his entire body stiffened, and his arms tightened around me.

My heart rate spiked. My mind was racing with scenarios as to why he was here.

None of them were good.

He has a mate! I thought bitterly, flinching when my heart clenched painfully. ~He hurt me, broke me. Why is he here, holding me like this? ~

And, better yet, why am I letting him?

Without loosening his grip on me, Grayson leaned back until his eyes met mine. I expected to see his terrifying red eyes again but was instead met with his green ones.

Seeing him up close, I noticed for the first time how tired he looked. His beard had grown out slightly, leaving him with a dark, scruffy face, and there were deep bags under his eyes.

Somehow though, he was still gorgeous—by far the most beautiful man I’d ever seen, even in his obviously exhausted state. But I couldn’t let myself be taken in by his beauty or the sweet way he held me.

Grayson was able to change his personality to be whatever he wanted—correction, to get whatever he wanted. He might look sad and sincere now, but there was no way he actually felt that way.

He was putting on a show. Why he was doing that or what his goal was, I wasn’t sure. But I knew I wasn’t going to hang around long enough to find out.

He finally spoke.

“Belle.” His voice was barely a whisper. He sounded sad. Desperate.

The complete and utter anguish in his voice tugged at my heart. Even though he had treated me so horribly, there was still that instinct that urged me to comfort him and make him feel better when he was in pain.

But it didn’t matter. I had been moving forward. I was getting better. His being here was a huge step back for me. He didn’t deserve my comfort or pity after all he had done to me.

And he especially didn’t deserve it when he had a perfectly good mate at home, probably wondering where he was.

“Let me go,” I whispered.

He shook his head, his arms only tightening. Flashbacks of him holding me down on his bed and restraining me with his crazy strength came racing into my mind.

I gasped and pushed harder against his arms, trying to get out of his iron grip with even more ferocity.

“Belle, please,” Grayson said, fighting against me. “You don’t—”

“Let me go!” I yelled. I could feel panic creeping up my chest once again with every passing second that he continued to restrain me. “Let me go right now!”

Grayson's hold on me finally loosened, and I was able to free myself from his arms.

He whimpered when I scrambled away from him and ran to the other side of the room.

The sound came from deep within his throat, telling me it was his wolf. My body stiffened. I missed his wolf. Even when Grayson didn't want me, his wolf did. He fought for me.

But that wolf was trapped inside the body of a monster.

I stood and backed away from him. My arms automatically wrapped themselves around my waist as if I could somehow protect myself from the undeniable pain I was about to endure.

I wanted to seem strong and unaffected by his presence, but that was impossible to do. I sucked in a breath when my mark began to throb with pain again, even though I was only a few feet away from him.

Shit, what the hell was wrong with me?

I shut my eyes tightly and took a deep breath, still standing on the opposite side of the room, putting as much space between us as possible.

It was hard, though. He was like metal, and I was the magnet. I was drawn to him.

After a few more seconds of silence, Grayson spoke. "Belle," he whispered. "I'm so sorry."

My eyes snapped open. So I had heard him right before. He was apologizing to me.

"W-What?" I asked, my voice breaking. "What did you just say?"

Grayson stood but didn't approach me. "I'm so, so sorry. You have no idea how much I regret what I put you through. You have to believe me."

Something strange happened to me then. Hope filled my system. Hope that maybe this nightmare was over. Maybe Grayson wanted me back.

I stuffed that feeling down quickly, completely disgusted with myself for even having that thought. I wouldn't let this man ruin my life again. I wouldn't live in fear of him.

And I definitely wouldn't let him walk into my life and try to apologize for something that was simply unforgivable. Never again would I let Grayson be a part of my life.

Grayson opened his mouth to speak again.

"No," I snapped before he could continue. "Get out." I pointed at the door.

Grayson's brows shot up in shock. "What?"

I continued to point at the door, never losing my stance. "Get the fuck out!"

Grayson's confusion was replaced by panic. "I know you're upset, Belle, and you have every right to be. But you don't understand what really happened—"

"And I don't care," I interrupted. "I don't know why you're here, and I don't care. I don't want you here. I don't ever want to see you again."

"No, please don't say that. Belle, please, you have to listen to me—"

I swallowed down the scream of rage that threatened to bubble up in my throat.

Was he seriously making demands of me?

"I don't have to do anything!" I yelled.

"I don't know what you're doing here, but the fact that you think you have any right to just waltz back into my life after everything you did to me confirms that you're some kind of insane person.

"I don't owe you anything, not even a conversation. So leave," I stated. "Now."

Grayson stared at me for a moment, but he didn't move, his eyes flashing with something unrecognizable. Was it anger?

A tiny bit of hesitancy filled me, worried that he might lash out. I tried not to let it affect my confidence.

I told myself I didn't owe him anything—not my heart, not comfort, not even my time. I was in control now. And I wasn't going to let him boss me around anymore.

"Okay," he finally said. I could tell he was trying to rein in his wolf, his eyes switching from their normal green to a deep black. "You're right. You don't owe me anything. You aren't obligated to listen to me."

I crossed my arms over my chest, not sure what to say. I hadn't expected him to admit defeat so easily.

"But I'm not leaving," Grayson continued. There it was. "I'm not leaving this town until you know what really happened between us.

"I'm going to be one step behind you everywhere you go, protecting you, making sure your pain is as little as possible."

He licked his lips, looking my body up and down, pity filling his eyes as he took in my battered form. I wanted to punch him in the face.

“And when you’re ready—if you’re ever ready—I hope you’ll let me explain.”

I blinked. “But—”

Grayson was suddenly in front of me, moving so quickly that he looked like a blur. I nearly screamed in terror, but he grabbed my face and crushed my lips to his, silencing me.

I squeaked in shock. He started to move his mouth against mine the way he had done so many times before.

For a moment, I forgot where I was, and all that mattered was Grayson’s lips against mine. I kissed him back, the longing in my chest too painful and persistent to ignore.

His tongue swept over the seam of my lips, and I automatically opened for him, letting his tongue into my mouth. His flavor burst across my taste buds, and a needy moan left me.

Grayson growled and tugged me closer, wrapping his arms around me. Heat flooded my system and pooled at my core. My legs pressed together as the most intimate part of me started to throb, longing for attention.

After a long moment, he carefully removed his mouth from mine, even though I tried to pull him back to me. He kept his hands firmly placed on either side of my face.

My breath caught when his forehead met mine, and he looked deep into my eyes.

Keeping eye contact, he muttered, “Please don’t make me leave. Not after I’ve just found you again.”

I studied him, memorizing every part of his face so I could remember him after he was gone.

“You broke me,” I whispered.

His huge frame shook at my words. “I know.” His thumb wiped away a tear running down my face. I hadn’t even realized I was crying again.

“But, please, just listen to what I have to say. I need you. I need you, Belle.”

More tears started to pool in my eyes even though I tried to stop them. “No, you don’t,” I replied, trying to step back and detach myself from him but failing as his grip on my face only tightened.

It wasn't painful, but it was unrelenting and final. "You've never needed me."

He shook his head, keeping his forehead against mine. "Yes, I do. I do need you. So badly. I love you, Belle," he said.

My heart did a flip in my chest. "And I know I don't deserve your love in return, but I need you to know it. I love you. There is an explanation for everything. Please, if you would just let me—"

I jerked back so suddenly that Grayson was taken off guard and not able to keep his hold on me. I shoved his hands off of me, suddenly completely furious with myself for giving in to his touch so easily.

He knew that physical contact with him was my weakness, and he was taking advantage of that knowledge. I couldn't believe I had let him go as far as he did. I let him kiss me. And I kissed him back!

"Don't touch me!" I screeched. "I'm not going to let you explain because there is no explanation good enough to excuse what you did to me. It was unforgivable."

I took a deep breath. "You don't love me. People who love each other don't treat one another the way you treated me. They... They just don't." My voice broke, which only made my fury grow.

"Which is why, if you come near me again, I won't hesitate to call the police. I'll get a restraining order if I have to or do whatever I need to do to get you out of my life.

"I want you out of my life, Grayson. Do you understand me? I never, ever want to see you again."

He sucked in a breath. His hands curled back into fists by his sides, and, for a moment, I couldn't tell if he was holding himself back from comforting me or attacking me.

At this point, I wouldn't be surprised by either, which terrified me.

Chapter 77 – Kidnapped by My Mate Series II: His Lost Queen

Filed To Story:

"I'm not leaving you," he finally said. "Call the police if you want, but you won't like what happens when they get here. No one is going to take me away from you."

"I'm here, and I'm not leaving unless it's with you by my side. You're mine, Belle, whether you like it or not. And sooner or later, you will hear me out."

"No." I shook my head, swallowing down my never-ending tears. "Leave. Now."

Grayson watched me for a few silent seconds before nodding stiffly. "I love you, Belle. Please come back to me soon."

He turned and left the diner.

BELLE

The moment Grayson left me, severe pain started. I shouldn't have been surprised.

My body knew he was close and was punishing me for sending him away. I wanted him by me so badly.

I sank down into one of the booths near me. Tears came pouring out of me. I dropped my face into my hands and sobbed.

I could feel Grayson's eyes on me, his gaze feeling like a warm blanket on my skin.

Sparks danced along my body, soothing me even though I would have never admitted it.

He was near, probably watching me from somewhere outside. I didn't allow myself to look for him, though.

After a few long moments, I was finally able to get my crying under control. I breathed through my pain and went to grab my phone.

My hands were shaking when I pressed Liam's contact and lifted it to my ear. I had no idea what had happened to him.

I knew Grayson was intimidating, but I still hadn't expected Liam to run away when he showed up.

I remembered him standing in front of me, attempting to protect me when Grayson tried to grab me, but he disappeared after that. And Grayson had gotten to me anyway.

What if he had done something to Liam? What if he'd hurt him?

After ringing for a minute, it went to Liam's voicemail. I hung up and looked down at my phone in confusion. My worry grew. What the hell had happened to him?

I sent him a quick text, telling him how sorry I was about what had happened, that I was fine, and to call me as soon as possible.

My eyes glanced around the empty diner in dismay. Had everyone just run away when Grayson showed up? How had he cleared the place out like this?

I sighed and grabbed a broom before going over to the broken door, starting to sweep up the glass all over the floor from Grayson smashing it when he'd come in.

I needed a distraction, and cleaning up this mess would have to do.

"What the fuck is going on here?" a voice suddenly yelled.

I jumped, turning to look at my boss, Jerry. He walked through the broken door I was cleaning up, his face furious.

His eyes scanned over the shattered glass door and then all the empty booths before stopping on me. "What the fuck did you do?" he demanded.

Before I could respond, my mark flared with pain. I gasped. I immediately looked back at the window, knowing Grayson was the cause. I couldn't see him, but I could definitely feel him. My mark could too.

Jerry waved his hand in front of my face, grabbing my attention once again. "Hey, I asked you a question! What the fuck did you do to my diner?"

My eyes widened. "I-I..." I stood slowly on shaky legs. "Some, uh, guy showed up, and he broke the door."

Okay, so not the best excuse, but it was the best I could come up with, given my current state.

"Some guy? Did this guy also chase all of my customers away?" Jerry asked. He seemed a little fidgety and nervous. "What did he look like?"

"He...He was my ex." I swallowed. "I don't know why he was here."

Jerry's eyes narrowed. "You steal from this guy or something? What did you do to make him so mad?"

"I don't know why he was here," I repeated. "But he won't do it again. He won't be coming back."

Jerry didn't look convinced. "Can you promise that?"

I hesitated. No, I really couldn't promise that. In fact, I had no business saying that at all if everything Grayson had told me was true. I could just hope he would stay away from me as I asked. "Well, no—"

Jerry scoffed.

“But I’ll work for free for the rest of the day,” I quickly continued. “To make up for any profit that was lost.”

That made him pause. “The next two days,” he demanded. “To make up for lost profit and for breaking the door. Or you can kiss your job goodbye, baby doll.”

“Fine,” I agreed. I had to bite my tongue, so I didn’t say anything about his new pet name for me. “The next two days.”

Jerry grunted before walking past me. “I want all of this cleaned up before I come back.

“And go fix your makeup or something before the customers return,” he said, gesturing to my puffy eyes and tear-stained face. “You look like a mess.”

He shook his head before disappearing behind the kitchen doors.

My relief was strong. Grayson may have been back in my life and insistent on ruining it, but at least I wouldn’t be losing my job today.

“The hunk in the corner booth is checking you out,” Candice whispered to me as she set her tray down next to mine behind the counter.

“He’s been staring at you since he walked in. He even asked to be put in your section.”

I didn’t need to look up to know who she was talking about. I had felt his presence the moment he walked in.

God, Grayson, why can’t you just leave me alone?

About an hour had passed since Grayson had found me and turned my world upside down. Customers filed in pretty quickly after that, some coming back from before, although they seemed disoriented.

I didn’t blame them. Grayson was a pretty scary dude—especially now that he looked like a giant on steroids.

When I asked Candice what had happened, she just shrugged and said she had no idea what I was talking about. I found this strange but didn’t have the time to think about it.

We were now just as busy as before, and although that was what I thought I wanted when my shift started, I was finding it hard to keep up now.

All of my energy from earlier was gone, probably because Grayson was nearby.

It was pretty obvious now that I had been so happy this morning because the mate bond was strengthening as Grayson got closer to me.

But now that he was literally less than twenty feet away from me, my body was trying to give me the final push, pressing me to go to him by causing me excruciating pain I knew only Grayson could end.

I hated that my mark burned once again, worse than it ever had before and that my body ached as if I had just finished a vigorous workout.

I tried my best to smile politely at Candice. “You know what? I give you full permission to take his table if you think he’s so cute. He’s all yours.”

“Are you sure?” Candice squeaked, her voice going up an octave with excitement.

“He seems way more interested in you than in me.

“Don’t look now, but he’s literally staring at you like he wants nothing more than to throw you down on one of these tables and have his way with you. Definite Christian Grey vibes.”

My cheeks turned bright red. I knew for a fact that Grayson could hear every word that Candice was saying and probably found it all very amusing.

I would bet money that he would be sporting a huge, cocky grin on his face if I were to turn around and look at him right now.

“How long do you think a person needs to spend at the gym to look like that?”

Candice continued dreamily.

“I’ve literally never seen a person more perfect than him. He’s lean but huge at the same time, and, oh my god, those green eyes! I could get lost in those suckers.

“And I bet he has some insane abs under that shirt he’s wearing. Just look at the way it’s stretching over his muscles. I would love to—”

“Okay!” I interrupted before she could tell me exactly what she wanted to do to my former mate’s abs. I hated the uncontrollable jealousy that threatened to consume me.

It almost made me regret giving Grayson’s table to her. “No need to elaborate. You obviously like him, so you go ahead and take his table. I’ll take one of yours.”

“No,” someone grunted behind me. I turned to look at Jerry, who I hadn’t even noticed had walked up behind us. How long had he been standing there? “No switching tables,” he said.

“Why not?” Candice asked, her voice coming out whiny.

“Because Belle needs to prove to me that she wants her job,” Jerry responded.

“Which means dealing with difficult customers.”

I gave him a tight smile even as my palms began to sweat at the thought of having to talk to Grayson again. “That’s fine,” I replied stiffly.

“Lucky bitch,” Candice whispered in my ear, smiling as she walked past me.

Jerry was still watching me as I walked over to Grayson who was sitting in the corner booth. Every step I took toward him made me feel all warm and fuzzy inside, and I hated it.

“What the hell are you doing here?” I demanded when I finally reached his table. I was sure to keep my voice low so that no one around us could hear.

Grayson raised a brow. A hint of a smile appeared on his lips. “Come sit, beautiful.”

He patted the seat next to him. “Eat breakfast with me. You need food.”

I glared at him. I knew this act. Grayson could be charming and caring when he wanted to be. I wasn’t falling for it. “I’m working,” I snapped. “And I thought I told you to leave me alone.”

Grayson leaned back casually, crossing his massive arms over his equally massive chest. “And I thought I told you that I wasn’t letting you out of my sight ever again.”

“So you have been watching me then,” I accused.

Grayson grinned. “Do the mating sparks dancing along your skin from my gaze feel good, baby?” His voice was as smooth as butter. “I know I’m liking the feel of them now.”

My hips abruptly hit the edge of the table I was standing in front of. I looked down, realizing that I had been unconsciously gravitating toward him.

The only reason I hadn’t fallen into his lap was due to the huge metal table separating us.

My attention went back to Grayson. I felt my cheeks turn red, hoping he hadn’t noticed what I just had. But, of course, he had.

His brows raised, his eyes looking down at my hips, licking his lips.

“Stop that!” I chided, shifting uncomfortably.

Grayson's gaze lazily raked up my form before he met my eyes once again.

Chapter 78 – Kidnapped by My Mate Series II: His Lost Queen

Filed To Story:

My nails dug into the palms of my hands, extremely close to punching Grayson's stupid smirk off his stupid face.

"What did you do to Liam?" I demanded.

Grayson's casual expression quickly turned into a scowl. "Who?"

I rolled my eyes. "You know who I'm talking about. Liam, Liam Blackwood. My friend. He's about this tall"—I held my hand up over my head—"brown hair, obnoxiously charming.

"He disappeared after trying to protect me from you. Tell me what you did to him."

Grayson shook his head, a muscle jumping in his jaw. "I have no idea what you're talking about. But any man who you call charming shouldn't be around you anyway."

My nostrils flared. He was acting way too casual to be telling the truth.

"If you hurt him," I started, "I swear I'll kill you. I don't care how big and intimidating you've gotten. I will not allow you to hurt the people I care about."

His eyes narrowed at my threat, automatically darkening. "Care about?" he repeated. "Exactly what is the extent of your feelings toward this man?"

I knew at that moment I had said the wrong thing. I didn't want Grayson to have any more of a reason to hurt Liam.

"As I said before, he's my friend. Nothing more. And I would like to know what you did to him."

"I have done nothing to harm your friend," Grayson responded. "I think it's a good thing that this man isn't hanging around anymore. I don't like other men around my mate."

My temper rose, hot and sharp. I was extremely close to grabbing the silverware on the table and stabbing it into his hand.

"I'm not your mate. You have absolutely no right to act possessive of me. You gave

~me~ up.”

A low growl left his chest, causing me to take a step back. “I did no such thing. You are mine, Belle. You always have been and always will be. Now, come sit and eat some breakfast with me.

“You look exhausted, and I can hear your stomach growling from across the room.”

“I already told you I’m working.” I quickly peeked over my shoulder, relieved when I saw that Jerry wasn’t watching me anymore.

“And if you think I’m serving you, you’re very, very wrong. I would rather eat glass.”

His expression softened. “I don’t want you to serve me, Belle,” his voice was much softer than before. “I just want you to eat. When was the last time you had a proper meal?”

“That’s none of your business.”

“It most definitely is,” Grayson retorted.

My jaw clenched. “I seriously don’t get why you even care. You didn’t care when I couldn’t get any food at your pack house. I was starving, too scared to get food for myself and you—you...”

I swallowed roughly, remembering Grayson hitting me and telling me that I was more trouble than I was worth after he found out I hadn’t been eating.

“I don’t even know why I’m telling you any of this. I’m not eating with you. I’m not serving you. I’m never doing anything with you ever again. Now leave me alone.”

I turned to leave but was stopped when Grayson caught my arm. He stood, looking at me with determined eyes. His dark expression only softened when he zeroed in on the unshed tears pooling in my eyes.

I quickly wiped them away.

“You don’t have to serve me. You don’t even have to eat with me, but I’m not going anywhere. As long as you’re here, so am I. You’re my mate. You’re in pain. The closer I am to you, the better it will be for you.”

“I’m fine,” I bit back. I yanked my arm out of his hold, taking several large steps back to prove my point.

What I didn’t tell him was that my mark just burned more and more with every step I took. “I’ve gone several months without you and have done just fine.”

Grayson glared at the new space between us. “You don’t have to lie to me, Belle. I can feel your pain through the bond. And I can see it in your eyes.”

He stepped forward, gently placing his hand on my upper arm. His thumb caressed the skin soothingly. “You’re not alone,” he said quietly. “I’m in pain too.”

I knew I should push his hand off of me, but the sparks that came from his touch felt too good. “You are?” I asked.

Even if I was mad at him, something inside me hated hearing that. I didn’t want him to be in pain. I mean, I wanted him to go jump off a cliff, but...

Grayson nodded. “Of course I am. I may not be experiencing the same thing you are because I’m not human like you, but I’m still suffering just as much.

“You have no idea how much it killed me to be away from you. And it kills me now being so close to you and not being able to touch you—to comfort you. Our mate bond is starving.”

“Keep working on that whole ‘not touching’ thing,” I told him, yanking my arm away from his grasp yet again, even when my body screamed out its opposition.

“I have to get back to work. Leave me alone. I mean it.”

I didn’t look back at him as I walked away, and thankfully, he didn’t fight me as he watched me go.

GRAYSON

My jaw clenched as I watched Belle rush around the diner, working her butt off.

It was physically painful to stay in my seat while my mate, the absolute love of my life, was pushing her body past its breaking point right in front of me.

And there wasn’t a damn thing I could do about it.

I had been sitting there for hours. The only reason I hadn’t already pounced on her and dragged her ass back home was that I understood where she was coming from.

I had been there; I had witnessed everything that Azazel had done to her. And she thought it was me. She had every right to be upset. She should be upset.

This was a shock to her. She needed time to process that I was back in her life and that I still wanted her.

She needed to see that I wasn't going to push her—that I was willing to work to earn back her trust and let her come to me. This entire situation was in her hands.

But that didn't mean her constant rejection of me didn't frustrate the hell out of me.

I was extremely tempted to use the power of the Mortars to persuade her to listen to me, but I knew that wasn't the right thing to do. It wouldn't fix anything. She needed to be in control.

I needed her ~to decide to come to me and hear me out. I couldn't expect to earn her trust back by using my powers to force her to listen to me.~

But staying away from her was killing me. Not holding her in my arms, relieving her pain, taking care of her mark, telling her how much I loved her—I wasn't sure how much more I could take.

I couldn't get the way she had looked at me when I had found her out of my head.

There was so much fear, so much pain in those gorgeous blue eyes. I never wanted her to look at me like that.

And then the panic attack started...

I knew she saw my red eyes that I was unable to hide when I first came crashing into the diner. I couldn't keep my vampire back, no matter how hard I'd tried.

He wanted to see our mate and fought to the front of my consciousness to do so.

Thankfully though, Belle didn't ask about my change in appearance or red eyes, and I was able to hide them before she saw them again.

Maybe she thought she imagined them, although that was probably just wishful thinking on my part.

The moment Belle started panicking, I ordered everybody out of the diner, using the power of the Mortars, telling them not to return until I had left the diner.

It didn't cause them any harm; in fact, they wouldn't remember a thing.

The only person I hadn't ordered out of my way immediately was the vampire boy.

Liam Blackwood.

I knew who he was right away. The son of Jeffery Blackwood and a powerful vampire in his own right.

He knew who I was too. I saw the recognition in his eyes when he stepped in front of my panicking mate, trying to protect her from me.

To his credit, though, he didn't seem nearly as afraid as I would have expected him to be.

It still took everything in me not to rip his heart out and shove it down his throat when he attempted to keep me from my Belle.

The only reason I didn't do exactly that was because I could smell Belle's scent all over him and his all over her. They were obviously friends.

Or used to be. I wasn't allowing him anywhere near my girl ever again.

That's why I told him to walk to Canada. Perhaps it was a strange order, but I needed him away from her, and it was the only thing I could think of.

He was a vampire, so he should have been less than a quarter of the way there by now.

Yes, I lied to her when she asked me if I had done something to him. But she would have liked the alternative far less.

He wouldn't be back for days, giving me just enough time to earn Belle's trust back and get her as far away from here as possible—without causing a scene by killing her friend in the meantime.

Murder probably wasn't the best way to get her to talk to me again, although it was becoming increasingly difficult to convince my wolf and vampire sides of that fact.

I looked for Belle for months. I thought of nothing else. How could I? She was my mate, and she was missing.

I had no idea where she was or if she was safe because she kept her damn mental barriers up the whole time.

It only took my former beta attempting to kill her for her to drop her walls and finally let me in for me to figure out where she was. And now...

Now she was standing right in front of me, and I had to force myself to stay away from her.

She was in pain. She was moving slower, and she looked exhausted, with huge bags under her eyes. I could tell she wasn't sleeping. Was she not eating either?

I watched as she took an order from two women at a booth across the diner, my fists clenching beneath the table when I noticed for the hundredth time that she had lost a considerable amount of weight.

She was still as gorgeous as ever, without a doubt, but was no longer healthy. My wolf was buzzing in my chest, fuming over the fact that our mate wasn't well taken care of.

Male werewolves took great pride in providing for their females, and I was completely failing mine. It was killing me.

The little outfit she was wearing didn't help hide all the weight she had lost either.

It also didn't help stoke the fire building within me.

The short skirt stopped right beneath her ass, and the top she was wearing wrapped around her breasts like a second skin.

The white apron she had on helped to accentuate her already generous-looking curves, matching the black heels on her feet, which elongated her legs. God, she was beautiful.

But, unfortunately, I wasn't the only person who noticed her beauty. Every time I caught another man's eyes lingering on her a little too long, uncontrollable fury consumed me.

I couldn't even stop myself from growling at them, flashing my fangs and red eyes, barely satisfied when they scampered away in fear. They were lucky I didn't kill them on the spot.

Chapter 79 – Kidnapped by My Mate Series II: His Lost Queen

Filed To Story:

But, yet again, I didn't think killing people would be a good way of earning back Belle's trust. It was tempting, though. Extremely tempting.

I watched with an unyielding gaze as Belle rushed behind the front counter to submit an order she had just taken. After handing it off to the kitchen, she made a move to turn but then abruptly stopped.

I stiffened, watching as her shoulders rose and fell with a deep breath, and her entire body slumped forward, leaning slightly against the counter in front of her.

She was exhausted. She had been working nonstop since I had gotten here this morning, and it was well into the afternoon now—almost 5 p.m.

It was clear to me that my mate wasn't sleeping, wasn't eating, was in more pain than I could even comprehend because I was here, and, to top it all off, she was working herself to the bone.

I didn't know how much longer I could just sit back and watch this.

I grew extremely close to breaking my promise to myself not to use my alpha tone or power of the Mortars on her and force her to hear me out so we could be done with this whole mess and I could have her in my arms again.

But I forced myself to be patient.

Belle tried to turn but fell forward, stumbling over her feet. Thankfully, she was able to grip the counter next to her, so she didn't fall. She looked disoriented and tired.

I was up and across the room in seconds. I stood behind her, pressing myself up against her in case she needed to lean on me for support. I carefully placed my hands on her waist.

Her body tensed, and her breathing picked up.

"You need a break," I growled in her ear.

She squeezed her eyes shut. "You can't be back here," she whispered back to me, making sure her voice was quiet enough so no one else would hear her.

She pushed at me with her elbow, but her attempts were weak and futile.

"You need a break," I repeated.

"I'm fine," she fumed, as stubborn as ever. "Leave me alone."

Her annoyed little huffs were adorable.

"You've been working for nine hours straight without stopping for food or water.

And don't even get me started on the damn shoes you're wearing if you can even call them that."

I glared down at the heels encasing her feet. "You need to sit down, eat some food, and rest. I'm not asking."

She tried to squirm out of my grip, but I wouldn't let her. She looked around at all of the customers. Their heads were turned, watching our interaction. "Please, Grayson. You're making a scene."

I didn't give a shit. "You won't like the scene I'll make if you don't do as I say.

“I would be more than happy to put you to sleep right now and throw you over my shoulder the same way I did on that plane to Paris if that’s what it takes to get you to take care of yourself.”

Her eyes snapped to mine, widening. “Y-You put me to sleep? How?”

“You became a member of my pack the moment I laid eyes on you. I used my alpha tone on you to calm you down when you were panicking.

“I haven’t used it since, but I would have no problem using it now as this is a matter of your health.” I didn’t bother mentioning that I now had the power of the Mortars too. All in due time.

Her eyes blazed with anger. “How dare you? You have no right to control or take advantage of me that way.”

She shoved at my chest but stumbled backward when another dizzy spell hit her from lack of food.

I growled and grabbed her before she could fall, tugging her against my chest. I took pride in how her body relaxed against mine, forced to give in to the mate bond even when her mind still struggled.

“I would never use it to take advantage of you, only for your own safety.” I pressed her as close as I could to my body before bending down and gently kissing her infected mark.

I needed her to calm down, and kissing that spot did exactly that. She melted against me even more, letting me take all of her weight with a breathy sigh.

And then the sweet scent of her arousal filled the air around us.

I held in a groan as I breathed her in, loving the effect I had on her and the way she squirmed against me, trying to get closer.

She was always so responsive when it came to my touch, and I couldn’t get enough of it. Obviously wanting more, Belle tilted her head to the side, her small hands gripping my shirt.

It was extremely unusual that we, as a mated couple, hadn’t completed the mating process yet. Her arousal was the mate bond pushing us together.

And now that I had her, it would only get worse until I took care of her in the way she needed.

But now wasn’t the time for this. She needed to rest, not get turned on.

With great difficulty, I was able to pry my lips from her mark and look at her. She was obviously still a bit disoriented from the kiss. Her eyes were glossy, and her pretty lips turned down in a frown.

My own body was buzzing from her touch. My wolf howled in my mind, urging me to continue with what we had been doing. I was tempted to follow his orders.

It felt so good to finally hold her again, even under the circumstances.

But the exhausted look in Belle's eyes and the way her body swayed, barely able to support itself, was enough to hold me back.

We could— would—do all of that later and only when she was ready, not when the bond was pushing her. Right now, though, she needed me to take care of her.

"You're exhausted, Belle," I whispered to her, running my nose against her temple.

She was slowly starting to come out of her trance. Realizing what I had just done to her, her expression turned into a scowl, accompanied by a sweet blush. "Let go of me. I'm fine."

I shook my head and then ran my thumb over the dark bags under her eyes.

"You're not. You need rest and food. And I'm not leaving you alone until you get it."

She studied me for a moment, deciding what to do. Finally, she said, "Why do you care?"

I veered back. "What?"

"Why do you care?" she repeated, her voice tired and quiet as she glanced again around us. People had started to lose interest in what we were doing, but she still looked wary.

"You didn't care when I was starving at your pack house. Or when you sent me to sleep in a freezing cold room in the basement.

"Or when you left me to fend for myself while all of your pack members ignored and shunned me. Oh, and do I even have to mention the time you hit me so hard you broke my cheekbone?"

She laughed bitterly. "You don't care about me, Grayson. You're just trying to get on my good side so you can take me back to your pack and use me for power.

"I'm not falling for it. I don't believe for a second that you don't have some ulterior motive in all of this."

Hearing about everything Azazel had put her through made my blood boil and my wolf surge forward, turning my eyes a deep black.

I was grateful the vampire side of me seemed to have better control of his emotions and chose to stay deep within me, worried about scaring our mate while she was in such a fragile state.

A loud growl reverberated from my chest before I could stop it. If the customers weren't looking at us before, they definitely were now. All conversation ceased, leaving the diner in complete silence.

None of that mattered to me. They could look all they wanted. The only thing I cared about at that moment was how Belle's expression turned from enraged to terrified in a matter of seconds.

I hadn't meant to scare her. I just needed her to know that what I was about to say next was serious.

"I care because you're mine," I growled in a low tone. "And if you would let me explain what really happened back at my pack house, then you would know that."

I gripped her waist, pulling her backside against my front. "You're lucky I haven't thrown you over my shoulder like a caveman and dragged you back home.

"Especially since I've had to watch you prance around in this little outfit all day, showing off skin in places only I'm allowed to see and wearing heels that make your legs look far too sexy for your own good."

My hand drifted over the bottom of her skirt, lifting it up the tiniest bit. Her breath hitched when my fingers brushed the crease of her cute little ass, leaving delicious sparks behind.

She slapped my hand away, but it was a weak hit with no drive behind it. The corners of my lips turned up.

My mate was so stubborn, so strong-willed. It was one of the things I loved most about her. Even now, when I could so clearly smell her arousal clouding the air, she struggled against me.

Because she knew she deserved better. And she did. If I had really done all those things to her, I would hope she would run away from me and never look back.

But I hadn't done any of those things, and her refusal to listen to what I had to say was doing more harm than good at this point.

“Grayson, please,” she begged, pushing on my chest. “People are looking. If my boss comes out and sees this, I could lose my job.”

“You think I care about whether or not you lose your job, baby?” I laughed.

“You getting fired would just be more of a reason for me to take you back to my pack with me, where I can provide for you and make sure you’re well taken care of.

You get that?

“It’s my job to take care of you. It’s what I’m doing right now. So you ~will~ sit down and take a break right now or so help me God—”

“Is there a problem here?” someone said behind us.

We both turned around, looking at Belle’s boss, who I knew was named Jerry based on the chatter I had overheard throughout the day.

I had also happened to overhear that he was secretly using the diner to launder drug money for some drug dealers.

It was fair to say I hated the man. And didn’t want him anywhere near my mate.

Even right now, he was too close to her for my liking.

Belle’s face brightened when she realized Jerry had been watching our interaction, and my automatic response was to pull her closer to me, wanting to comfort her.

It pleased me when she unconsciously leaned into me.

I stepped in front of her before she could say anything. I heard her huff with annoyance behind me but ignored it.

“Belle has been working for eleven hours straight,” I said. “She needs a break and will be taking it now.”

BELLE

My mouth fell open as I stared up at the back of Grayson’s head. I couldn’t believe he had just spoken to my boss like that! He seriously didn’t care if I got fired, did he?

I shoved at his shoulder, trying to get him to take a step forward so I could get out of the corner he had caged me in. Of course, he wouldn’t budge.

“I’m fine—” I started.

“And who exactly are you?” Jerry asked before I could continue. I could hear the challenge in his voice. Oh God, this was not good.

“I’m her... husband,” Grayson stated. “Belle is my wife.” He sounded far too pleased to be saying that.

“No,” I immediately disagreed, shoving at his back even harder. “You’re not—”

Chapter 80 – Kidnapped by My Mate Series II: His Lost Queen

Filed To Story:

“So you’re the asshole who broke my door,” Jerry said.

I huffed. Seriously, why was no one letting me talk? Stupid men. Now Jerry knew that Grayson was back here, even though I had promised him that my so-called ex wouldn’t ever return.

“I hate to break it to you, buddy, but you’re the reason she’s even working right now,” Jerry continued, scanning Grayson’s massive form with a sneer.

The fact that he wasn’t intimidated by Grayson was just further proof that he was an idiot.

“Belle isn’t scheduled for a break tonight because she’s working to make up for the loss of revenue she caused this morning.

“So I suggest you let her get back to work before I decide she doesn’t have a job here anymore.”

I could feel Grayson starting to shake. His square jaw looked like it was ready to pop free of its hinge. “Belle’s not getting paid?”

He looked back at me, his eyes darkening, starting to swirl with black once again.

“You’re not getting paid to work?”

I swallowed. “Just for tonight,” I told him, trying to speak calmly so he wouldn’t lose his cool. “It’s fine though, really—”

“No. It’s not fine. It’s the furthest thing from fine.” His voice sounded like gravel. He turned back to Jerry, openly glaring.

Jerry finally seemed to come to his senses when he saw Grayson's furious expression and took a step back in fear. "I'm taking Belle home right now."

Jerry's brows rose in surprise. "Excuse me? She's not done with her shift."

My pulse started to pound. "Grayson," I whispered. I hated how desperate I sounded. The last thing I wanted to do right now was beg, but I didn't have a choice.

I squeezed his arm, hoping that the contact with him would make him more understanding, even if I wasn't his mate anymore. "Stop. Please. I can't lose my job."

Grayson looked down at me, studying me for a moment. It seemed to cost him an effort to inhale steadily.

He turned back to my boss. "You will allow Belle to go home for the night. You will not speak of this again. In fact, you won't even remember it happened."

Then, before I could even comprehend what was happening, I was abruptly thrown over Grayson's shoulder and marched straight past my boss and all the other people in the diner.

"Grayson, put me down!" I screamed. I was able to lift myself slightly, shocked when I saw Jerry walking in the opposite direction from us. My brows furrowed.

What the hell? He was giving up just like that? "Grayson, put me down right now!" I screamed even louder, pounding on his back and kicking my legs.

I winced when my fists felt like they were connecting with solid rock rather than flesh. I doubted that this man had any sort of body fat on him at all.

"Stop," Grayson ordered, tightening his hold on my legs until it became nearly impossible to move. I huffed in anger. "You'll hurt yourself."

He carried me through the back entrance of the diner, where thankfully, no one could see the embarrassing predicament I was in.

"I'm not done with my shift!" I yelled.

Grayson shrugged his massive shoulders, lifting me up and down with the movement. "Don't care."

"I cannot get fired, Grayson! Please! Put me down!"

Without warning, Grayson stopped walking and shifted my body so that his arms were under my butt, holding me up, so my feet were dangling a few feet off the ground.

We were at the same eye level in this position. My breathing hitched when my gaze met his black eyes, showing me just how close he was to shifting into his wolf.

“You will not be fired,” he growled out, his tone deep and definitive. “If you want to keep that damn job where they treat you like shit, then so be it.

“I’ll ensure that you do not get fired for leaving tonight. But I’ll be damned if I let them force you into working like a dog for hours without paying you.”

“You don’t know my boss, Grayson. He’s let people go for far less. And he hasn’t liked me since I started working there. How are you going to keep him from firing me? By threatening him?

“I don’t think that’s going to work in my favor.”

“I have my ways,” Grayson replied calmly, completely unbothered by my panic. I gave him a dubious look.

“Stop worrying. Everything will be fine, I promise.” He leaned forward and kissed my forehead gently.

I whipped my head back, disgusted that he would even think to put his lips on me after all he had done.

Grayson’s eyes darkened even more, obviously not liking my reaction. I took a step back. Would he take his anger out on me like he had done so many times in the past?

“We’re done talking about this,” he fumed. “Where do you live? I’m taking you home and making sure you get something to eat and then a good night’s sleep.”

I immediately shook my head. “No. I’m not telling you where I live.”

One of Grayson’s brows lifted in a challenge. “You think I don’t have ways of finding out, baby?”

My heart fluttered when he called me baby.

I never thought I would be much for pet names if I ever got into a relationship, but there was just something about Grayson calling me those things that made me feel...

loved. Special.

Ugh. Gross. Why did I suddenly feel like puking?

I must have gotten caught up in my thoughts for a while because I felt Grayson’s large hand massaging my hip as he continued to hold me, his touch bringing me back to reality.

What the hell was I doing? He was able to make me lower my guard far too easily.

“Put me down,” I snapped yet again, wriggling in his arms. “And don’t call me baby.”

“No and no,” he shot back in the same final tone I had used. His grip on me never faltered. “Tell me where you live.”

I nearly screamed in frustration. “You don’t get to make demands of me, you...you buttface!”

Grayson’s eyes glittered in amusement. “Buttface?” he repeated.

I couldn’t even let myself be embarrassed over the terrible insult I came up with, too consumed by my anger. “Yes, you’re a buttface! And a jackass and a...a jerk!

Now put me down! And leave me alone!”

Grayson ignored me, chuckling with amusement as he once again threw me over his shoulder like I was nothing more than a sack of potatoes.

I screamed in fury and kicked my legs, but nothing I did made him loosen his hold on me even the slightest bit.

“Stop!” I finally screamed as loud as I could manage. My irritation was so intense at this point that I couldn’t help my cries of frustration. “Put me down! Put me down right now!~”~

To my surprise, that actually made Grayson pause. He stopped and lifted me from his shoulder, placing me on the ground gently.

His brows tugged together with concern when his dark eyes met mine. “Belle, baby, why are you crying? I didn’t hurt you, did I?”

I hadn’t even realized I was crying. I wiped away the tears quickly. God, why did I have to be so weak?

I shoved his hands away from me harshly when he made a move to reach for me again. “Don’t touch me!” I screamed. “Don’t you ever touch me!”

Grayson looked like he was in physical pain as he watched me. “Okay, I won’t touch you,” he agreed. “Just tell me what I can do to make you feel better. It fucking kills me to see you cry.”

I laughed in disbelief, the sound getting clogged in my throat. “You’re why I’m crying!” I yelled. “If it weren’t for you, if I hadn’t ever met you, I wouldn’t be crying right now.

"I would be back in Minneapolis, completely content and oblivious to the fact that there is a man as evil and manipulative as you out there." I sucked in a breath, my voice dropping to a hoarse whisper.

"I wish I hadn't met you."

Grayson stiffened. I had to look away from the expression of pure torture he was sporting. "You don't mean that."

"Oh, don't I?" I asked. "Don't you understand what you did to me, Grayson? You ruined me. You completely and utterly ~destroyed~ me."

"I've been in agony for months, walking around like a zombie, only a shell of my old self. I'll never be able to recover from what you did to me. It'll forever plague me."

"And now here you are, acting all sweet and messing with my brain and making me think you might want me again and asking me to listen to you when I know what you did wasn't right and..."

I paused, my lip quivering and my throat constricting as I desperately tried to hold back my tears.

"I-I want you," I cried quietly, my words barely comprehensible. "I want you so bad that it hurts to look at you and be near you and just... I can't want you. I can't have you."

Grayson stepped forward. "Yes, you can—"

"No, I can't!" I interrupted. "Not after everything you did to me, and especially not when I know what you're really capable of."

I wrapped my arms around myself, shaking my head and sniffing through my runny nose.

"What you're doing right now is cruel. Acting like you care about me when you and I both know you don't. It has got to be one of the most horrible things a person could do to another person."

"I'm not acting, Belle," Grayson said, a muscle sliding up and down his throat. His eyes were back to their normal green, boring into me like he wanted to make me permanently drown in his gaze.

"I do want you. I want you more than anything in this entire world."

I angrily wiped at my tears, hating that I was letting him see me cry once again. I didn't want him to know how much of a hold he still had on me.

“You mated with someone else. You rejected me. You-you left me on my own during the worst pain of my life after you decided you would rather have someone else.

“What would you do with me if you took me back? Huh? Would you keep me hidden away somewhere like some whore you screwed in secret because you’re too ashamed of having me as your real mate?”

Something that resembled realization flashed in Grayson’s eyes. “You still think I mated with someone else,” he whispered. He cursed under his breath. “Fuck, Belle, no wonder you’ve been so upset.”

He reached for me, but I dodged him, stepping back. I searched his eyes, confused as hell.

“I don’t understand,” I said.

Grayson took in a deep breath. “Belle, I never mated with that she-wolf.”

My heart turned upside down. I stared at him for several seconds, suddenly feeling dizzy. I couldn’t have heard him correctly.

“What?” I choked out.

“I never mated with anyone else,” he repeated. He took a step closer to me, so he was now less than a foot away from me. “Nothing ever happened. You’re still my mate. You’ve always been my mate.”

“You...You never slept with anybody else?” I asked, needing to hear him say it one more time.

Grayson shook his head, bringing his hands up to cup my cheeks. I was too busy trying to suck air in and out of my lungs to fight his touch this time.

“No. God, no, baby. Shit, I thought you knew. I thought you felt that we were still connected. This should’ve been the first thing I told you when I found you.”