



SEQUESTRADA
POR UM ALFA

SBD

Synopsis

Belle doesn't even know that werewolves exist. On a plane to Paris, she encounters Alpha Grayson, who claims that she belongs to him. The possessive Alpha brands Belle and takes her to his suite, where she desperately tries to fight the passion building within her. Will Belle succumb to her desires, or will she be able to hold back?

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Chapter 1

BELLE

I took a deep breath as I walked through the airport, luggage in hand. I couldn't calm down no matter how hard I tried.

I hated flying.

And an eleven hour flight to Paris was the last thing I wanted to do the day before Christmas Eve. But my mother had begged me to come spend the holidays with her and her husband.

I knew she only invited me out of guilt. I hadn't seen my mom in over five years, and she didn't seem to mind leaving me behind after my dad got sick.

It took her just a year to remarry, and another year to have a child. She completely forgot about my dad and me, and started acting like we never existed.

So the fact that she invited me to come see her now made me very angry.

But I didn't have anyone else. Paris was my only option if I didn't want to spend Christmas alone.

Getting through security was easier than I thought, and I found my gate without too much trouble. But even with all that luck, I couldn't help but feel uneasy.

I've flown only two other times in my entire life, both times for reasons I wish I'd avoided.

The first time was for my grandmother's funeral in Florida. The second was for my mother's wedding in Paris to a man I'd never met before—a man who wasn't my father.

So not only was flying absolutely terrifying, it always got me into an unwanted situation. I knew this flight would be no different.

I waited for boarding for half an hour. I wanted to arrive early to make sure I didn't miss my flight. I didn't want to have to pay for it.

next.

Once on the plane, I couldn't stop my hands from starting to shake. A stewardess smiled at me as I passed her and, noticing my nervousness, nodded reassuringly.

I did my best to return the smile.

When I finally made it to my seat at the very back of the plane, I looked up at the man I would be sitting next to for the next eleven hours.

His gaze moved up and down my body, stopping at the my bust for a moment before meeting my eyes.

He smiled.

“Well, hello.

Excellent. Simply perfect.

I'm going to have to spend the next eleven hours getting dried off by some weirdo.

“Hi,” I murmured.

Ignoring Mr. Awkward, I grabbed my carry-on bag and lifted it above me to put it in the overhead bin.

Realizing that the asshole—who was now just looking at me as I picked up the luggage—had placed his bag in the middle of the compartment, I huffed, trying to move it with one hand as I struggled to shove mine in next to it.

I had almost managed to fit my luggage in when I felt hands curl around my waist, touching the bare skin of my stomach where my shirt had ridden up.

Thinking it was Mr. Awkward, I tried to pull away but stopped as hands tightened around me and sparks spread through my body.

I shook my head to see who the hands belonged to, and felt my eyes widen as I took in his image.

He was breathtaking... large to the point of being almost comical. inside our little plane.

His muscles strained against his black shirt and jeans.

blue, telling me he must have spent a lot of time at the gym.

He had chocolate brown hair, mesmerizing green eyes. dark eyes, and a jaw that looked like it could cut paper.

His lips were full and sensual, and I leaned in unconsciously, imagining what it would feel like to press my lips against his.

A sudden, deep growl brought me back to my upright position, and my eyes met his to find we were watching each other. My cheeks immediately flushed, but before I could feel too embarrassed, he said.

“My mate,” he said, his deep, husky voice hissing in my ears. He squeezed my waist gently as his forehead lowered to meet mine, and deeply.

I probably should have slapped him, but instead I let my eyes drift closed and reveled in the feel of his arms around me as delicious sparks spread through my body.

I didn't even know it was possible to feel so good.

I felt his head move away from mine as he bent down to nuzzle my neck. I tilted my head to give him better access, and he let out an approving grunt.

And then I felt him leave a soft kiss right where my neck and shoulder met. First my knees went weak, then my whole body went numb and a weak sigh came out of my mouth.

He smiled against my neck, chuckled and took all of my weight in his arms as I leaned fully against him so I wouldn't fall over.

I was on cloud nine.

A clearing of my throat jolted me out of my trance, and I let out a little squeal and I tried to pull away, remembering where I was.

Unfortunately, in trying to push the mysterious and impossibly handsome man away from me, I forgot the hand that was still holding my luggage in the overhead bin.

I heard my suitcase slide towards me and I quickly

I ducked, expecting the hard corner to crash into my head.

But nothing happened, and instead I heard,

“Careful, beautiful.

I looked at the man across from me, who still had one hand resting possessively under my shirt, on my lower back. His other hand now held my suitcase above my head.

He smiled at me and winked before pushing my bag into the compartment and close it.

Still keeping his hand on my back, he turned to look at the woman behind him, who had been trying to get our attention during our intense moment. The woman looked shocked and hesitantly cleared her throat once more.

“Sorry, I just need to get to my seat, and you guys are blocking the hall. I didn't mean to interrupt your meeting. You two clearly haven't seen each other in a while. She smiled sweetly.

Wanting to correct her, I opened my mouth to say we'd never met before, but the man holding me got there first.

“We were just looking for our seats. We will be out of your way in a second. His voice was soft and reassuring.

The woman nodded gratefully.

I went to walk away, eager to escape the embarrassing situation, but the man just held me tighter.

He leaned over and whispered in my ear:

"Not so fast... You won't get away so easily." ' Then he looked at the weirdo who would be sitting next to me on the flight. “Move,” he told her.

Mr. Weirdo just sat there and looked at us for a second, probably still processing the entire encounter that had just taken place. I was very uncomfortable to think that he had been watching us.

- What? he asked.

"Out," repeated the handsome old man. “I'm sitting over there.

- Sorry? I will not change. This is my place.

The man holding me growled low.

"Here, take mine." — He handed the note to Mr. Weird. "It's first class," he said, watching the man staring at the ticket with a raised eyebrow.

"Now, move," he said slowly—almost menacingly—as if daring the man to question his orders again.

The scoundrel looked at us one more time before standing up and quickly grabbing his bag, rushing past us without making eye contact. I watched, stunned.

What the hell just happened? This had become a strange day.

"Go on, beautiful," said my mysterious new neighbor, pushing me gently into the window seat as he followed close behind me.

I sat and watched as he sat down next to me. I wasn't sure what to say, still a little bewildered and embarrassed by what had just happened.

"Um, sorry about earlier," I mumbled, tucking a strand of hair behind my ear and lowering my gaze. I wanted this guy to like me. "I don't usually go around touching strangers like that, I promise.

I laugh nervously. When he didn't respond, I cleared my throat.

"Okay...so why did you give up your first-time ticket? class to sit back here?"

Suddenly, a hand cupped my chin and turned my head. My eyes met his, and his hand moved to cup my cheek.

"Because I wanted to be by your side," he said huskily. He caressed my cheekbone as he examined every inch of my face.

"Wow, how did I get so lucky?"

I pulled away from him, not sure how to respond. I must have misheard.

"Sorry, what did you say?"

He just smiled and shook his head.

- Anything. Don't worry about it, beautiful. He leaned toward me over the armrest. We were close for two strangers.

"I'm Grayson. What is your name?"

Almost as if in a daze, I heard myself say, "Belle.

His smile widened.

"Belle," he said to himself. "My Belle.

His eyes were so beautiful. I couldn't help but stare at them.

"Uh-huh...", I said absently.

He let out a hearty laugh. Did I say something funny?

"Our bond is strong; I can see. "Is it just me, or does nothing he says make sense?"

- What? Our tie? - I asked.

He pushed a loose strand of hair away from my face.

"Don't worry your little head about it.

Once again, I woke up from the daze he seemed to keep putting me in when a baby behind us squealed loudly. Realizing how close I was to the man—Grayson—I jumped back.

I had managed to feel his breath on my face.

Again I let out a nervous laugh, then put my hands in my lap, trying to look less embarrassed than I felt.

This guy probably thinks I'm crazy.

"So, business or pleasure?" Grayson asked.

Chapter 2

BELLE

- What? I looked at Grayson one more time.

— Are you going to Paris for business or pleasure?

Oh right. I almost completely forgot where I was. I felt anxious again when I remembered that it was possible the plane would probably take off any minute.

“Oh, neither one nor the other, I guess. I'm going to visit my mother and her husband.

I must have been grimacing because Grayson asked, "And aren't you happy to see your mother and husband?"

I shook my head.

- No. Not since she left me and my sick father to run away to Paris and marry her rich lover," I heard myself say.

I took a break. I can't believe I just said that.

I hadn't told anyone about my mother, and now I had just told a complete stranger.

I looked at him. His expression was thoughtful.

- I am really sorry. I don't know why I said that. I promise I'm not the kind of crazy person who shares their entire life story with the stranger sitting next to them on the plane.

Grayson looked deep into my eyes—almost like he was looking for something—and then he grabbed the armrest between us and lifted it so it wasn't a barrier anymore. I watched his movements carefully.

"Um... What are you doing?"

"Shh...," Grayson said. He grabbed my hips, which were already turned towards him, and pulled me so that my knees were touching his.

The delicious sparks spread up and down again

as his hand found a way under my shirt and onto the surface of my back, where his thumb began to make soothing circles.

I let out a breath coming from the back of my throat. His other hand came up to caress my face.

"You don't have to worry about anything right now," Grayson whispered. - I will take care of you. He bent down so his lips touched my ear. - You are mine.

I leaned back so I could see his eyes.

- What do you mean by that?

He smiled.

"I mean..." His thumb touched my bottom lip, and I gasped.

— Everything — he kissed my eyelid — whatever — he kissed my other eyelid — with you — the top of my nose — is mine. Finally, his lips found mine.

My eyes closed at his kiss. The feeling was euphoric, like fireworks and explosions. My hands moved to his massive, muscular shoulders and squeezed.

I moaned softly.

I felt him smile against my lips, and I paused for a second. No, don't smile. Smiling meant he could stop kissing me, and I didn't want that to happen at all.

Never taking my lips from his, I knelt down and pressed my chest against his, enjoying the sparks that came from where our bodies met.

My hands went up into his hair and pulled his face closer to mine.

He groaned in approval.

Suddenly he gripped my hips firmly, and he pulled me onto his lap so that my knees were on either side of his. I pushed my chest against his, and he deepened our kiss, plunging his tongue into my mouth.

His hands massaged my hips and then slid up under my shirt to cup my waist, his thumbs touching the underwire of my bra.

Oh my god, is it getting hot in here?

Someone cleared their throat beside us, and it was as if a switch had been flipped in my brain: I suddenly realized what we were doing.

I threw myself back, but Grayson held me tighter, keeping me in his lap.

I looked at the flight attendant who was next to us.

"I'm sorry, miss, but I'm going to have to ask you to go back to your seat and fasten your seat belt. The plane is about to take off.

I nodded quickly, feeling my face turn bright red. I moved to get off Grayson's lap and thankfully he let me go this time. I sat in my seat and quickly fastened my seat belt.

The flight attendant saw that Grayson was wearing it too, and she he nodded and walked away.

Oh my God. Oh my God. Oh my God.

I put my hands over my face to cool my cheeks that burned with embarrassment.

I can't believe I just did this. What is wrong with me?

I was so embarrassed, I couldn't even look at Grayson. I had crawled into his lap and pressed myself against him like a slut begging him to take off my panties.

"Hey, hey, hey," I heard Grayson say. - What it was? "He touched my arm.

I pulled my arm away, ignoring how much I wanted him to keep your hands on me.

"Don't touch me," I snapped.

Grayson made a scary noise deep in his throat. I looked at him and saw a grim expression on his face.

His jaw was clenched and his breathing was deep, his chest

went up and down quickly. And, oh yes, his eyes were pitch black. The pupils, irises and whites of his eyes were all black.

I gasped and moved backward until my back hit the wall behind me.

- Oh my God. Your eyes.

Her eyes widened and then closed.

He took a deep breath, and when his eyes opened again, they were back to normal.

I was going crazy. That was the only logical explanation. My father's death and the fear of seeing my mother again were finally getting to me.

"I'm sorry," he said. "It's just...you can't tell me to not touch you.

My heart started to beat faster. Maybe he was the crazy one.

- What do you mean by that?

He leaned forward, an intense look in his eyes.

"Oh, sweetie, have you forgotten already?" His hand squeezed my knee and stroked my leg up and down.

"You're mine, remember?"

My blood boiled. It was the third time he'd said I was his property. Who did this guy think he was?

Of course, he was beautiful. I had thrown myself on top of him and I was extremely attracted to him, but that didn't mean I belonged with him. I was my own person. I didn't belong to anyone.

I didn't especially belong with a man I was over to know and who did not know personal limits.

I opened my mouth to say what I really thought, but stopped when I felt the plane suddenly move.

I must have completely missed the part where they explained where all the emergency exits were and how to buckle your seat belt. But it was probably for the best: it would only have made me more nervosa.

As the plane picked up speed, my heart slammed against

my ribs and my hands started to shake. I grabbed Grayson's hand that was still anchored to my leg and squinted.

I tried to take a deep breath to calm myself, but it came out as a series of quick, gasping gasps.

Oh, my God... Am I hyperventilating?...

"Belle," I heard Grayson say. "Belle, darling, what's wrong?" I felt his hand come up to grip my shoulder.

I shook my head frantically, unable to find my voice. I was afraid that if I spoke, I would cry.

"Belle," Grayson's voice told me. This time, she was calmer.

"Look at me, Belle. I need you to look at me, beautiful. Let me see those beautiful blue eyes.

I just shook my head again. The plane jumped as it rose from the floor. I let out a groan and pressed myself further against the wall.

"Belle, I swear to God, if you don't look at me, I'll kiss you again, and who knows where that will lead..."

Did he really say that...? I was basically about to have a heart attack, and he was threatening to kiss me?

I opened my eyes. Grayson's face was half a meter away from mine. He smiled.

"There are those beautiful eyes.

My breathing calmed down a bit. he was so unbelievably beautiful. How could anyone be so beautiful?

Fantastic, charming, sweet and comforting, and such an amazing kiss...

The plane suddenly shook again — this time most of the passengers gasped.

The pilot's voice came from the overhead speakers to apologize for the turbulence, saying the weather looked more serious than originally expected.

I looked out my window and saw that it was raining, and the sky was full of lightning.

"Oh my God, this is how I'm going to die," I said. My body

whole trembled.

The plane shook again just as a thunderous rumble came from outside. I let out a terrified scream as tears started to well up in my eyes.

"Belle, honey, come here," Grayson said in an agitated tone. I looked over at him and saw that he was offering his arm, encouraging me to lean against him.

- What? I asked in a shaky voice. "Nn-no!"

Something squeezed my hand tighter. I looked down to see that I was holding his hand in mine. I quickly released it and pushed it away from me.

Why am I so sensitive to this guy?

He ran a hand through his hair as he watched me panic. He looked like he was in pain.

"Please, Belle, let me help you.

I gripped the wall behind me, hoping it would steady my shivering body.

- As? "Before I could get my answer out, the plane was jolted by a loud thunderclap and a bright bolt of lightning that I swore had hit us. People screamed as the bags fell from the overhead bins.

I screamed desperately and covered my face with my hands.

- Oh my God. Oh my God. Oh my God," I sobbed. This one it was my worst nightmare.

"Belle," Grayson said. His voice was clearer than before, and suddenly all other noises disappeared. - Look at me.

As if I were under his control, I removed my hands from my face and I looked at Grayson. His eyes were black again.

But this time, it wasn't scary. This time it was almost comforting.

"Come here," he said slowly.

I nodded and practically dove into his chest, going as far as my seat belt would allow. I wrapped my arms around his torso and grabbed his shirt in my fists.

He also wrapped his arms around me, lifting my shirt so that her bare skin was touching my back and stomach.

- What are you doing? I asked, shivering from the feel of her skin against mine, and the delicious sparks that shot down my spine once more.

I felt him tighten my hair.

“Sorry, I know this must be weird for you. Is that how much the more skin-to-skin contact we have, the calmer you will feel.

He took my arms away from him, and for a moment, I felt let down. But then he lifted his shirt and put my arms back where they were.

I could feel your abs...

— See? better, right? Touching me helps. I felt him kiss the top of my head.

Was he right. I could feel my heart rate slow down and my nerves begin to calm down.

“How is this happening? - I asked. I was overwhelmingly confused.

What is happening?

Before he could respond, there was another burst of thunder. I cried and pushed my face into his chest as far as he could go. His arms tightened around me and his hands massaged my back.

“Shh, little girl. “Relax for me...” he whispered, his mouth touching my ear. I felt my shoulders slowly releasing their tension. His voice was so soft, so comforting—it was as if he had magical powers.

I would have done anything he told me to do as long as I continued to hear your voice.

- Here we go. That's what I like to see.

More thunder shook the plane. I pressed my face deeper into his chest and gasped.

“Nuh-uh,” he said. “None of that. - His lips pressed together

my ear, leaving a kiss.

"Pay attention to my voice. All you can hear is my voice baby. He kissed me down the neck.

Was he right. Once again, the other noises faded away. The crying babies, the screaming passengers, the roaring thunder, the rumbling rain—everything else was silent.

All that was left was him and me.

"The only thing you can hear is my voice. Is not true?"

I nodded.

- Good. "Now, slow down your breathing.

My breathing went from quick, gasping breaths to slow, deep gasps.

- Good girl. His lips continued to move along the my neck. - Do not panic. I got you. I'll take care of you.

His kisses felt like magic. His voice was like magic. Everything about him was magical. I was no longer on a plane. I was nowhere else.

It was just me and Grayson—his arms around me, his lips on my skin. I was calm.

And then his lips found a spot on my neck that sent fire through my entire body. I choked.

Grayson smiled against my skin.

"Hmm..." He started sucking right away, his tongue running over my skin, leaving a tingle that went all the way to my toes.

His fingers were digging into my waist, and I felt something building up inside me—a feeling I hadn't had in a long time.

My entire body shuddered, and I tilted my head to the side to give him better access. His deep chuckle vibrated through my body.

"Hmm... So, us?" he whispered against my skin.

I couldn't even respond. it looked like i was

drugged. Everything was moving so slowly.

I let out a deep breath that sounded more like a whimper because he had stopped kissing me. I didn't know exactly what I wanted, but I needed something more—something I knew Grayson could provide.

I tilted my head a little more, hoping he would keep kissing me.

He sighed.

"I know, beautiful, I know. But not here. Not now." He put more a kiss on the spot. "But I promise, I'll make you mine." Shortly.

I didn't understand what he meant. So I approached him, breathing in its heavenly scent. "What kind of cologne does he wear?"

"That's right," he said. "I'm here and you're safe. Nothing bad will ever happen to you again. Let's create the most amazing life together. I will never let you go.

What did he just say?

"But for now," he said, "you need to rest.

I looked at him. His eyes were still black.

- Don't stop.

And my world went dark.

Chapter 3

BELLE

I woke up with the sensation of movement. I was vaguely aware of the fact that someone was unbuckling my seatbelt and then lifting me up. I opened my eyes.

Grayson pulled me onto his lap so that my knees fell on either side of him.

He laid my head on his chest and wrapped me in his arms again.

I suddenly remembered that I was on a plane and my heart raced once more. How long have I been sleeping? I tried to lean back to look at Grayson, but he just tightened his grip on me.

“Nuh-uh. Not so fast. You're not going anywhere, — Grayson told me calmly. He kissed my forehead. “Go back to sleep, Belle.

And once again, I went out like a light.

I dreamed of hands moving along my back and waist, playing with my hair, massaging my hips. I dreamed of sweet lips landing on my ear, my nose, my forehead.

I dreamed of touching fireworks and then watching as they traveled up and down my body, finally exploding in my chest, leaving a warm glow around my heart.

But mostly, I dreamed of your forest green eyes.

When I woke up the second time, the only thing I noticed was that I felt warm and peaceful.

It all felt so... right.

I dove deeper into that heat and focused on the little fireworks that kept traveling up and down my back. It was amazing. I sighed deeply.

And suddenly, my sigh was echoed by someone else and I felt a

kiss on my forehead. My eyes flew open. Where am I?

I looked up and saw Grayson. He had an arm around me, one hand stroking up and down my back and playing with my hair. The other hand held a cell phone, texting someone.

His face creased as he concentrated. Oh my God. I was on his lap.

My back straightened and his eyes suddenly locked with mine. He smiled.

- Good morning beautiful.

He really likes pet names.

I moved to get away from him. He grabbed my hips.

“Where do you think you're going?”

I remembered him pulling me into his lap. I looked at him blankly.

"Why am I on your lap?"

He shrugged.

“You kept coming towards me in your sleep, trying to get your face into my neck and whimpering. So when the seat belt sign went out, I brought you where you wanted be.

I felt the blood drain from my face as I imagined crawling towards him in my sleep; and immediately it rushed back to my cheeks when I remembered his lips on my neck.

Guessing where my head was going, he said, “Not that I care.

He smiled.

Smiled!

I huffed and tried to get his hands off me so I could go back to my seat.

- You can stay here. Seriously, it's okay. - he said.

"No, really, it's not," I said, finally breaking out of his grip. I let out a sigh of relief as I slid back into my seat. I was embarrassed beyond measure.

Why do I have to be so awkward in front of the first guy for
Who have I been attracted to in years?

- I'm very sorry. I usually have personal boundaries. I don't know what's wrong with me today.

He just dismissed my words saying it was no big deal.

"How long did I sleep?"

He looked at the clock.

"About eight hours.

I sighed.

"Did I sleep for eight hours?"

He nodded, a smile growing on his face.

"You let me sleep on top of you for eight hours?" I asked, completely mortified. He nodded again. - Oh my God. — I hid my face in my hands.

"If it helps," he said, "I fell asleep for a while, too. It was the best sleep of my life.

I looked up at his smiling face and narrowed my eyes.

"You know, when you switched places with the guy who was supposed to be next to you? my side, I was very relieved.

"But maybe it would have been better to sit next to the creepy guy who looked at my breasts. Maybe I hadn't crawled into his lap in my sleep.

It was supposed to be a funny joke, but when I looked at Grayson, I realized he didn't take it that way.

His eyes were back to black, his jaw had clenched, and there were veins standing out on his neck and forehead. He looked like a killer.

- Oh my God. Are you well?

He did not answer. Instead, he closed his eyes, grabbed the

sides of the chair tightly and took a deep breath.

I started to get worried. I wasn't sure what was going on, but for some reason, I wanted Grayson to be okay. I wanted to comfort him.

"Can I do anything?"

He did not say anything.

"Grayson? "I tried again.

When I said his name, his eyes locked on mine, their darkness startling me. A rumble came from deep in his chest as he grabbed the back of my neck and brought my face to his.

He pressed his nose into my neck and started to breathe deeply. His entire body was shaking.

"I love it when you say my name," I heard him say. His voice sounded deeper now, rougher—a far cry from the tenderness of before.

He leaned back and looked deep into my eyes. I knew I should be scared by how black his eyes were. I mean, he looked possessed.

But somehow I liked his black eyes, almost as much as the green ones.

"Stay here," he said grimly. - Do not move.

I nodded, not wanting to go against his orders when he looked so dangerous.

I watched him get up and make his way to the front of the plane and beyond the small door that led to first class.

I reclined in my seat. Maybe he just needs to go to the bathroom...

But then I heard people screaming, and the stewardess ran down the aisle. Passengers were getting out of their seats.

I jumped up and ran to the first-class section, wanting to see what it was all that commotion.

When I walked in, the scene before me made my heart stop.

Grayson was holding Mr. Bizarro in the air by the neck.

Is he trying to kill you? There were people all around them, trying to

get Grayson's attention, pulling him to stop strangling the worm.

But Grayson wasn't moving. He was like a statue.
He was trying to kill him.

Chapter 4

BELLE

Grayson's hand on Mr. Bizarro was getting tighter and tighter with each passing second.

Of all those begging him to stop, one of the men was more persistent. He was yelling, "Alpha! Alpha! Stop! You will kill him!"

Grayson paid no attention to him and just pressed the bastard's neck harder. I pushed through the crowd of people, making my way to where he stood.

"Grayson! I yelled when I finally reached him. I stopped right in front of him, trying to get his attention.

- What are you doing?

His eyes met mine and I took a step back. He was scary.

His neck had doubled in size and veins ran across his face and around his black eyes.

Fangs protruded from its lips and foam formed around its snarling mouth.

"Dude, get out," he said to me, his expression leaving no room for argument.

With pleasure.

I took several steps back, scared to death, then a hand grabbed my wrist and pulled me closer to the door. I turned around in surprise. It was the man who had called Grayson "Alpha" before.

"Are you his mate?" he asked me frantically.

I don't know what he meant.

- What? No! I said, trying to escape his grip. He wouldn't let me go.

But then I vaguely remembered Grayson calling me that before.

- I don't know! - I screamed.

He lifted his nose and sniffed the air.

What the hell?

"You're human," he concluded. "But you smell like Alpha's mate.

- What? — I squealed.

"Look, there's no time to explain. If you don't calm him down, he's going to kill that man.

I looked back at Grayson and saw him still strangling Mr. Bizarro, whose face was now turning purple as he gasped and clawed at Grayson's hand.

"Calm him down? How am I going to calm him down? He's strangling someone! - I screamed.

"Touch him, talk to him, anything!" Just make him stop!

I looked at the man in front of me. His expression was one of pure panic.

"Touch him?" - I asked. I could do this. I could touch it.
Hell, I played him the entire flight.

The man nodded encouragingly and pulled me along.
back to where Grayson was.

The suffocated man's movements were slowing, his head started to fall to one side. Shit... I have to do something.

I took a deep breath and then lifted a shaky hand and placed it on Grayson's shoulder.

"Grayson? - I asked. His head snapped as he looked at me.
I swallowed hard. - Please stop. You are hurting him.

He growled... he really growled.

- No. His gaze returned to the worm.

Well... that didn't work.

I turned to the man behind me.

- Keep trying! - he screamed.

I whimpered, and stepped in front of Grayson and placed my hands on either side of his livid face, forcing him to look at me.

“Grayson, stop now. You are scarring me. “That stopped him. His eyes softened a little. His grip must have loosened because I suddenly heard frantic breaths of air.

I am getting it! It's working!

But suddenly his expression hardened.

“Dude, move, or I'll move you. I'm dealing with the threat. I'm protecting you.

His voice was deadly.

I took a step back and turned to face the man who had gotten me into this mess. I could be back in my nice, cozy seat by myself, not dealing with any of this.

But not! “Touch the livid demon man,” he said. “Talk to the psycho who's strangling someone!” - he said!

- And now? — I asked him.

- Kiss him! - he screamed.

- What? - I screamed. - No! I will not do it!

"I know it's scary, but we have no choice!" Either you kiss him, or that man dies. You decide.

This made absolutely no sense. Why would kissing Grayson be good? I looked at the man Grayson was holding. Mr. Bizarro was almost limp, his feet moving just a little bit. Grayson was about to finish the job.

I had to do something.

“Fuck off,” I said. I grabbed Grayson's face and crushed my lips against his.

At first, he didn't answer. It was like kissing a very warm, soft statue. But then he muttered something against my lips, “Dude.

Grayson pulled my body against his and thrust his tongue into my mouth, claiming dominance over me immediately.

He traced the curves of my body with his huge fingers, then grabbed my ass and lifted me into his arms. Then he wrapped my legs around his waist and carried me out of first class.

No no no no! This was not what I wanted. I thought this would be a quick peck on the lips. I thought that would stop him from suffocating the worm, and then fleeing for my life.

I didn't think he would guide me to my impending disaster.

I pulled my lips away from his, expecting him to stop and put me down, but he just growled and started kissing my neck, still walking towards God knows where.

"Grayson, what are you doing?" Put me down! I exclaimed, pushing on his shoulders.

Dude, is this guy made of steel or something?

He didn't even stop.

- Face. My. he said, and continued his openmouthed kisses along my chin.

I looked over my shoulder at the "helpful" man from before. He was standing by the door to first class, watching us as people crowded around the idiot who almost he died.

- Help! "I yelled at him.

He just shrugged and shot me a look that said, What do you want me to do?

I wanted to scream.

What the hell was going on? I mentally prepared myself for a long and uncomfortable flight. This was way beyond that...

Grayson carried me into the plane's bathroom and quickly placed me in the small sink. He positioned himself between my legs and gripped my hips.

"Grayson, or what..."

His lips were suddenly back on mine.

And, oh my god, it felt good.

There was something about Grayson that made me lose all control over myself whenever he touched me. I mean, he almost killed a man, and there we were, making out in the bathroom.

He pulled my bottom lip into his mouth and sucked. I groaned loudly.

"Grayson," I whimpered.

He groaned.

"Keep saying my name like that, baby.

He brought my ear into his mouth and bit down gently, then moved his lips to my neck to suckle, leaving behind several hickeys.

He ground his hips against mine, hitting me in just the right spot, and I gasped, my head falling back against the mirror behind me.

I saw stars — real stars.

"Grayson! - I screamed.

How could he make me feel so good without even taking off a single item of clothing? This man had to be some kind of sex god.

There were people knocking on the door, probably worried about me. being alone with the psychotic man who nearly killed someone...

But we were both caught up in our euphoria to pay attention to anything else.

His lips found the spot on my neck he'd kissed earlier, and my body literally convulsed as he sucked and licked.

I rubbed my core into his hips like I was some animal in heat...

Until blinding pain shot through my system when his teeth suddenly sank into my neck.

I screamed and tried to push him away from me, but his arms they just held me tighter against his torso.

Just when I thought I would pass out from the pain, that pain turned

into something else.

Warm pleasure coursed through my body and I let out a sigh of relief and then a moan. Wow, this is the best thing I've ever felt in my entire life.

I was suddenly overcome with the need to be closer to Grayson and never let him go even though his teeth were still lodged in my neck.

I ran my hands over his chest, shoulders, and then around his neck.

I pulled his chest against mine and wrapped mine around his hips. My forehead rested on his shoulder.

Grayson slowly withdrew his teeth from my neck, licked the wound he'd just made, and stroked up and down my back.

I shuddered. His touch was ten times better than before.

Is that even possible?

I leaned back to get a look at him. Your eyes already they were no longer black.

"You bit me," I said. My eyelids were closing, all the energy starting to drain out of my body.

Grayson nodded. His expression looked pained.

"Yes, I'm sorry. I needed.

I nodded like I understood, but really, I had no fucking idea what was going on. I felt drunk.

"Fine," I muttered, patting her cheek lightly.

"Just don't do it again, okay?"

He smiled.

— OK.

I smile back. I held her face in my hands, squeezing her cheeks.

"Wow, you're so handsome, like really handsome..."

He laughed. The sound made me happy.

- Thanks. I'm glad you think so," he said. I laughed.

"I'm glad you're glad I think so, because I really do. I smiled at him.

My head landed on his neck.

I decided I wanted to keep kissing him. I pressed my lips to his neck, trying to move them the same way he did against his neck.

my.

He groaned deeply.

- No. No, stop, girl. No more kissing today. "He pushed me away.

I pouted.

- Why not?

He smiled and tucked a strand of hair behind my ear then stroked my cheek with his thumb.

"Trust me, there will be lots of kissing later. You need to sleep.

I yawned at the thought. Sleep. Sleep sounded like a good idea. It wouldn't be as good as kissing, but similar. I nodded and leaned against her shoulder again.

"Okay," I said, snuggling into his neck. "Can we kiss when I wake up?"

He laughed again.

"We can kiss as much as you like when you wake up."

The thought made me happy and I sighed. It is good then.

He tightened his arms around me and rubbed his nose right where he'd just bitten. I shuddered.

Huh. That was good.

"Go to sleep, Belle. I protect you.

And for the third time during the flight, I passed out in Grayson's arms.

Chapter 5

BELLE

When I woke up again, everything was dark.

The only light I could see came from what I assumed was a window behind from me, the moonlight illuminating the entire room.

Where am I?

For a second I thought I was back home in my room and, letting out a sigh, I shifted, snuggling back into the pillow.

But then I stopped.

Wherever I was lying there wasn't a pillow.

It was hard and hot, moving up and down. I lifted my head to see better.

I was lying on the chest of a very, very muscular sleeping man.

I looked into his face.

Oh my God. It was Grayson.

Everything that had happened during the last day came flooding back to me suddenly: the plane, his eyes, him strangling someone.

My hand flew up to touch my neck and I whimpered when I touched the sensitive wound.

He bit me!

Grayson stirred and I panicked for a second. Did I wake you up? Then he pulled me back into his chest and tightened his arms around me.

He nuzzled my hair and let out a satisfied grunt.

I held my breath, waiting for another movement, but none. he came. He was still sleeping.

Thank God.

I panicked for a moment, wondering why I was alone in a room with him asleep. I didn't remember how

had arrived there.

Oh God, did I sleep with him?

I quickly searched for my clothes and breathed a sigh of relief when I saw that I still had on the leggings and t-shirt I wore on the plane. Grayson, however, was only in a pair of boxers.

I felt my face heat up. Why wasn't he wearing clothes?

I looked around the room. This was definitely not my room at home. As far as I could see even in the dark, I was in a hotel room—a very fancy hotel room.

It was huge, and the bed I was in looked bigger than a king-size.

I noticed my luggage in the corner. Okay, that was good. I was still wearing all my clothes. I craned my neck to see out the window. Many of the lights seemed to be coming from below — I was definitely in a city.

But what city?

Was I in Paris or had this sociopath taken me somewhere else?

I sighed deeply when I saw something through the window. It was far away, almost invisible, but it was there: The Eiffel Tower.

I was in a hotel in Paris with a man I met in a plane and it felt like it had kidnapped me. This was not good.

I looked back at Grayson. Obviously, I needed to get away from him. There was no doubt that he was crazy.

But how?

My legs were tangled with his and his arms were wrapped around me.

Could I escape without waking him?

I tried first to move my legs slowly freeing them from his. I looked back into his face. He didn't move.

Success! Okay, I can do this. I slowly held one of his arms and took it off my waist.

Grayson muttered something incoherent. My eyes shot to him.

A frown formed on his face, but it looked like he still hadn't woken up.

I waited a few minutes for his face to return to normal before moving again, then finally removed his other arm and placed it next to him on the bed.

My body was cold now that I wasn't inside his embrace, but I ignored the feeling.

I started to pull my body away from his slowly and silently, then crawled to the edge of the huge bed and turned until my feet touched the cold floor.

I was free!

But I didn't have time to celebrate. I had to find a phone or a way out of here before Grayson woke up.

I looked in the room for a phone, but there was none to be seen. Okay, so my only option was to go out and run like mad until I found the nearest human being and call for help.

I tiptoed to the door closest to me, cringing every time the hardwood floor creaked.

When I was about to put my hand on the doorknob, a voice spoke:

— Belle.

I jumped and let out a terrified scream. I quickly turned around and saw Grayson lying on his side on the bed, his head resting on his hand as he watched me with an amused gaze.

“Go back to bed,” he said, his voice husky, sending shivers down her spine. my spine. “It's too early and I'm exhausted.

He rolled onto his back and put his arm over his eyes, sighing. Her chest began to rise and fall rhythmically.

Had he gone back to sleep?

I turned to the door and turned the handle.

“That's a closet, baby doll,” his voice said.

I looked at him over my shoulder. He was still lying on his back, not looking at me.

I opened the door and looked inside. Was he right. That was a closet.

I ran to the door across the room and opened it. But before I could leave, I heard Grayson speak again.

“Belle, please go back to bed. I know you're scared, but I promise I'll explain everything to you later. I don't have the energy to deal with this after almost shifting and marking you.

I had no idea what he was talking about. Transform? To mark? He was now looking at me with a lazy, annoyed expression, as if I was bothering him.

Was I bothering him?

He had kidnapped me! I was scared to death, and he was just lying there enjoying his beauty sleep!?

Fuck talking to him later! Fuck talking to him again! I turned toward the door, ready to bolt, but his voice stopped me once more.

“Belle, if you leave this room, you're going to start to feel dizzy and nauseous. You can't be away from me right after the appointment. I bet that bite on your neck is already starting to hurt, isn't it?

I hadn't noticed before, but now that he'd mentioned it, the wound pulsed—almost as if it had its own heartbeat.

I touched the mark on my neck and groaned when it started to throb. in excruciating pain.

Grayson sat, watching my indecision as I continued to look between him and the door.

I instinctively took a step towards him, and immediately felt the pain slowly subside. Strange...

“Look, I know what I'm talking about, okay? I know it hurts, baby, but come back to bed, and I can make all the pain go away. I will take care of you.

His eyes got a shade darker when he smiled. What he was implying? Oh my God, is he going to get what he wants from me?

I shook my head quickly and backed toward the door, my feet

tripping over themselves. I would not be raped. I wouldn't spend another second in the presence of this psychopath.

Without breaking eye contact, I turned and dashed out of the room. fourth, running for my life.

Chapter 6

BELLE

I heard a loud, angry growl behind me as I ran down the hall. I assumed the sound was coming from Grayson.

At the end of the hall, I reached a staircase and ran down, holding on to the wall so I wouldn't fall on my wobbly legs.

When I got downstairs, I expected to find another floor with hotel rooms, but I was surprised to find myself in a luxurious open living room, with a huge kitchen off to the side. Does this hotel room have two floors? What kind of hotel is this?

I frantically searched for something that could help me.

"Luna?" What are you doing? Where is Alpha? someone called from the other room.

There was a man standing at the kitchen counter. he was holding a cup of coffee and looking at me like I'm crazy.

I recognized him! He was on the plane! He was the one who told me to kiss Grayson!

—Oh! Thank God! I yelled, running into the kitchen.

"You..." The room suddenly began to spin, and the bite on my neck throbbed and burned painfully. I shook my head to clear my thoughts.

- Help me! That man kidnapped me! I need to call emergency!

He got up and approached me slowly, as if I were a wild animal that would bolt if he made any sudden movement.

- Hey Hey. Everything is fine. He didn't kidnap...

His words stopped and his eyes suddenly turned gray. He stared into space, as if in a trance. I pulled away from him, startled.

- Yes. Yes, she's here," he said.

- What? - I asked. Is he talking to me?

He didn't pay attention to me. He just kept looking at nothing.

"Of course, Alpha," he said. His eyes returned to normal and he fixed on me. "I'm sorry, but you can't leave.

Okay, so he's crazy too. Noted.

I turned and scanned the room for an exit. There was one door across the kitchen. The front door, it seemed. Yes!

I ran past Grayson's crazy friend and tried to fight my way to the door, but I tripped on my feet. I leaned against the wall beside me. The burning sensation from the bite on my neck was traveling around my body in slow, excruciating waves. My stomach lurched.

I felt like I was going to throw up.

What the hell is happening? Was this what Grayson was talking about when he said I'd start to feel bad?

I tried to endure the pain as I trudged toward the door. But the world was spinning too fast and my knees were too weak, and I fell to the ground.

"Luna!" the man shouted after me.

Tears streamed down my face; the fire inside me was too much to endure. I screamed.

"Make it stop!" - I screamed. "Make it stop!"

"I'm sorry Luna! The Alpha will be here soon!"

the man next to me said. He touched my shoulder, but that only seemed to fan the flames that moved through my body.

I took his hand away from me.

"Don't pull over!" I cried, curling up in the fetal position.

"Alpha, please come quickly!" the man shouted.

Through my sobs, I could hear quick footsteps entering the room.

"Belle! Grayson yelled. Just his voice made the fire dim a little, and I called out to him, desperate for the pain to go away. He ran across the kitchen and pushed the other man away from me.

I felt a twinge of disappointment when I realized that Grayson was wearing sweatpants instead of boxers—I wanted as much soothing skin-to-skin contact as possible.

At least he's still shirtless.

As soon as he reached me, he immediately took me in his arms.

I wrapped myself around him like a sloth around a tree, making as much contact as possible.

My legs were propped up on either side of him, my arms tightly around his neck. Thankfully, the fire subsided as I sobbed into his chest, but the pain was still unbearable.

"Shh..." Grayson said, taking a seat in a nearby chair with me still wrapped around him. "I know, baby, I know.

"Please make it stop," I begged.

Grayson suddenly put his mouth on the bite mark and sucked on it, running his tongue over it.

I groaned loudly. Not only was it amazing, it made all my pain melt away.

Still shaking from the trauma, I clung to Grayson for dear life as his deft mouth continued to work on my neck.

I was so ecstatic with the incredible feeling that I barely registered when Grayson's friend muttered something and finally left the room.

I thought once the pain was gone he would stop kissing me, but he didn't. He just kept going, up my neck to my jaw, until he finally reached my mouth.

His lips felt like silk against mine.

His kiss was sweet and slow, but I could feel the hunger that overflowed inside him.

It was such a passionate kiss. I had never kissed anyone like that.

I've never felt like this before.

Grayson pulled away briefly, then laid his forehead against mine. We were both panting. He kissed my lips one more time
turn.

"I'm so sorry," he whispered, rubbing his nose against mine.

I looked deeply into his eyes.

"I didn't know our bond was so strong." I thought I'd let you walk around a bit, get more comfortable, and then come find her. I didn't know your pain would be so strong. I'm very sorry.

He kissed me again.

"I don't want you to feel pain, ever.

"Did this happen because I was away from you?" - I questioned.

He nodded and buried his face in my hair, taking a deep breath. We stayed like that for a while, just holding each other, my body slowly calming down.

I gave up trying to understand everything that was going on.

I was mentally exhausted, unable to process anything.
information that was thrown my way.

The most confusing part of all of this was how attracted I was to Grayson. I had seen him strangle that bastard on the plane. I was aware of the fact that he had kidnapped me. I knew how volatile he was.

But for some reason, when he was close, I wanted to be closer to him—keep touching him and talking to him.

In fact, I wanted to meet my kidnapper.

There must be something wrong with me. Why am I so obsessed with him?

Grayson's hands massaged my waist and roamed up and down my sides. He leaned back so he could look at me.

"Are you going back to the damn bed now?"

I knew I should say no. But I just didn't want to.
That simple. I didn't want to say no.

So I said yes.

Grayson smiled and kissed my lips one more time. He put his hands under my ass and stood up, still holding me in his arms.

God, he's strong.

"You can put me down," I said as he
it led towards the room we woke up in. - I can walk.

He leaned down so that his mouth was touching my ear.

- I don't mind.

All is well then.

He entered the room and placed me in the middle of the bed gently. I frowned when he stopped touching me. He stepped back and took off his sweatpants.

I watched his muscles ripple with the movement.

I swallowed.

- What are you doing?

He smiled.

— I don't want to be hot while we're sleeping.

He slowly walked towards me, maintaining intense eye contact. He put his hands on my shoulders and pushed me so that I landed on my back.

He crawled on top of me.

"You smell great," he said, running his nose up and down my neck.

I couldn't answer. I was very emotional. He dropped a quick kiss on my lips and then looked up at me.

"Let's go to sleep, eh?"

I agreed.

He lay down beside me so that he was facing me and put his hand on my waist. His eyes searched my face.

- You are so pretty.

I looked away from his, not knowing how to respond. I felt his hand move under my shirt and up my back, where

he started fiddling with my bra clasp.

I immediately grabbed his arm and glared at him.

- What are you doing?

“Shh...,” he said and unclasped my bra. “This can't be comfortable.

Never taking his eyes off mine, he guided my arms out of the sleeves and into my shirt, encouraging me to remove my bra.

I slipped my arms through the straps and Grayson slowly reached under my shirt and grabbed the offending article of clothing, pulling it off and throwing it to the floor.

He watched me slip my arms back into the sleeves and pull my shirt down.

- It saw? That's better,” he said. And then he turned my body so that my back was to him.

He pulled me back onto his chest and stroked me, enveloping my waist with one arm and rubbing my stomach.

“Calm your heart, Belle. It's beating a mile an hour. Breathe deeply.

Was he right. My anxiety was through the roof. I tried to take a deep breath.

- That's right. Grayson kissed the back of my neck. - That's my girl.

I couldn't believe how exhausted I was. I felt like I had done nothing but sleep the day before, but even so, I was slowly drifting off.

I had no idea how long I had been asleep the next time I woke up. All I knew was that I was burning up. I was incredibly hot.

Still half asleep, I pulled the blanket off me and writhed. It made no difference.

Grayson's body around me wasn't helping either. I readjusted my legs, trying to get more comfortable.

My leggings felt like they were on fire against my skin.

Grayson shifted behind me, so I felt his hand wrap around my leggings and pull them down.

With my eyes still half-closed, I placed my hand over his and mumbled something incoherent, trying to ask what he was doing.

“Just take it off, baby. I promise I won't look. You are burning.

I was very hot and still exhausted. everything i wanted to do was to snuggle into Grayson's chest again and go back to sleep.

I shook my head.

I felt Grayson sit up and hover over me so that his knees were on either side of me.

He hooked his thumbs in the sides of my leggings and pulled. I shifted so he could move them over my ass.

When they finally came out, Grayson threw them to the ground.

I was extremely relieved when the cool air hit my legs. He lay down next to me and brought me to his chest. I put a leg around him and buried my face in his neck.

Grayson let out an appreciative grunt. His hand moved across down my shirt and on my lower back.

The last thing I thought of before falling asleep was. I think he lied when he said he wouldn't look.

Chapter 7

BELLE

I woke up before Grayson did, and I had no idea what to do. I could feel his breathing on the back of my neck, slow and steady.

I thought of my mom and wondered if she was worried after I didn't show up to her apartment last night.

Maybe she'd call the police and they'd come looking for me.

But there was a very good chance that she hadn't even realized that I wasn't there—or I just assumed I wasn't just in a rage.

It felt like something I could do. So it would make more sense to believe that she wouldn't try to find me.

I was alone. I had to find my way out of here. But how?

I could try to run away again, but the memory of the pain I experienced this morning flashed through my mind.

I wouldn't do it again under any circumstances.

So, I had a few options: I could

give up completely — just lie there and wait for Grayson to wake up, and let him do whatever he wanted to me.

Why does this seem like a good option?

I could wait for Grayson to wake up, then pretend he was still asleep and hope he left the room and then try to find a way out.

I could act sweet, like I trust him, and then do a sneak attack and try to knock him out with a lamp or something, and run away.

I could be horrible and mean to him and expect him to be disgusted with me and kick me out of the house. That could work, right?

I could hope that my mother really cared minded my absence enough to call the police.

It's unlikely, but it can happen.

It suddenly occurred to me that it was Christmas Eve. I should be with my family celebrating Christmas in Paris, enjoying life for the first time since my father died.

My father. God, I missed him.

If I had known that last year would be the last Christmas I would spend with him, I would have appreciated it more.

We always had the best Christmases together.

Since I had no contact with any of my grandparents in any
On my family's sides, it's always been just the two of us.

We watched Christmas movies and ate our fill.

We exchanged gifts, sang carols, decorated the tree, and enjoyed each other's company.

It's always been my favorite day of the year: no problem, just me and my dad on Christmas Day.

I felt tears well up in my eyes and I sniffled, trying to make up my mind.
how they stop.

This wasn't the time to feel sorry for myself. I had to figure out how to get out of this hotel suite, which was starting to feel more like a prison.

I didn't even care about seeing my mom for Christmas anymore — I just wanted to go home.

I have a life to live!

Yes, my father was dead. And that was incredibly devastating, and I missed him every day. But just because he was dead didn't mean I was.

I was alive.

And there was nothing stopping me from living. I had no one to look after but myself.

I could go to college. I could make friends.

I could go dancing and drinking in bars and meeting boys and making bad decisions and getting a new apartment and a cat and a fancy job.
Nothing was stopping me.

Okay, so there was one thing stopping me.

And that thing was breathing down my neck and it had its arms around me and it was incredibly beautiful.

That thing was the huge man nestled on my back that he had kidnapped me and claimed I belonged to him.

God, what is wrong with me?

I thought about last night and how I'd basically let Grayson do whatever he wanted to me.

I had just fallen into his arms and given up. I had spent so much of my life giving up, feeling helpless and alone, letting life treat me like a doormat. No more. I would live my life.

And nothing would stop me.

I felt Grayson stir behind me. Oh God, he's waking up.

I immediately closed my eyes, pretending to be asleep. With luck, he would go away and I could jump out the window or something.

It was time to live.

Chapter 8

BELLE

Grayson's arm tightened around me, then he moved in slowly and pressed his lips to my ear.

"Good morning, baby," he whispered.

He brought my ear into his mouth and bit down gently. It was amazing, but I wouldn't give him the satisfaction of that knowledge.

Oh God. Oh God. Oh God. Don't move, Belle. Do not make noise. You're sleeping, remember?

"Hmm... I know you're awake, Belle. He kissed my neck.

He is lying. He doesn't know that. How could he know that?

"You're faking it, aren't you?" Okay, let's play.

What? What the hell did he mean by that?

I wasn't in the mood for jokes. Well, I didn't want to be in a good mood, but I also couldn't deny the heat starting to build between my thighs...

I felt him move and get on top of me. I instinctively opened my legs a little so he could fit his body between them.

Grayson chuckled.

Shit, did he realize I did that? You noticed, didn't you?

I tried to keep my body soft and my breathing regular. No matter what Grayson does, no matter how much I like it, I'm asleep.

One of his hands grabbed my waist and then ran over my stomach. Then he leaned in slowly and brought his lips to hers.
my.

That's not fair! His lips felt so good against mine—like fireworks. I wanted to scream or kiss him back, but I couldn't.

I was trying to prove a point. I wouldn't stay with

my kidnapper!

No matter how much I want...

Don't move, Belle.

But as he continued to press his soft lips to mine, I couldn't help but open my mouth just the tiniest bit, inviting him in.

I felt the deep rumble of his laughter. Even with my eyes closed, I knew he was smiling. Shit. Cum. Shit, fucking hell.

I kept my eyes closed. What is wrong with me?

Why can't I control myself?

He leaned over and whispered in my ear:

"I like this game.

He kissed along my jaw and squeezed my waist tighter, lifting his hand until his thumb grazed the underside of my breast. I squirmed the slightest bit.

"Just open your eyes, Belle.

I didn't move.

- No? - he asked.

I did not answer. Maybe he gives up?

Oh, please give it up. I didn't know how much longer I could hold out. I was two seconds away from sticking my tongue down her throat.

- OK. Do it your way.

He started tracing openmouthed kisses along my jaw again.

Shit. So he's not giving up.

His lips continued to move down my neck as his hands massaged my waist through my shirt. For a second, I wished I wasn't wearing one.

And then Grayson found the spot where he'd bitten me. I gasped and my back arched so that my chest was touching his.

God, that spot was like a second G-spot.

I groaned but still kept my eyes closed.

"Uh-huh. That's what I thought," he said. He licked the side of mine neck and I squirmed. He backed up a little.

"Aren't you going to open your eyes yet?"

I was just being stubborn. We both knew I was awake. But I wouldn't let him win this battle. I wouldn't miss it.

I would not open my eyes.

So I shook my head.

He chuckled.

"Huh, my betrothed is stubborn. He pressed one of his knees against my crotch. I could feel your breath on mine face.

"Fine by me," he whispered.

His mouth latched onto my neck once more and I moaned. He kissed my collarbone and then ran his nose up and down between my breasts.

I arched my back again, breathless.

He lifted my shirt a little and kissed my navel.

Is it getting hot in here or is it just me?

Then his hand went into my panties and grabbed my hip bone.

Wait, what? My panties? What happened to my leggings?

I suddenly remembered Grayson taking them off last night. He no had my bra taken off too?

So that meant... I was lying in bed, braless, wearing only my sheer white T-shirt and blue lace thong.

So that was it.

And the man who kidnapped me had one hand under the blue lace strap and the other on my chest, under my breast as his mouth traveled closer and closer to, ahem, a very personal area.

My eyes flew open.

I screamed and started kicking Grayson. Luckily, I hit him in the face.

Still, I think I broke your nose.

I pushed his hands away from me and jumped out of bed.

I ran my hands through my hair and started pacing back and forth. He definitely hadn't won that battle.

Drug.

I looked at Grayson. He was sitting on the edge of the bed, leaning back in his arms and looked at me with an amused look.

His eyes moved up and down my figure, and he licked his lips.

I had forgotten that I was practically naked. I was basically naked!

I quickly grabbed the blanket off the bed and wrapped it around myself, looking over at Grayson.

His smile only grew.

"You know, this whole situation could have been avoided if you just had opened his eyes.

I snorted.

- Oh yes? - I asked. "You will never touch me again." Never. More.

His eyes darkened, not quite black, but a darker green.

He got up. I took a step back.

He saw me move away from him in fright and paused. He closed the eyes tightly and took a deep breath.

When he opened them again, they were back to normal. He looked at me and sighed.

"Go take a shower, baby. I'll make breakfast. - He walked past me and out the door.

For a few seconds, I stayed there. I rubbed my face with my hands. OK then. He's gone. This was easier than I expected.

I think it's time to get out of here.

Chapter 9

BELLE

No way was I going to shower like he wanted.

Who knew how long I had until he came looking for me?

I dropped the blanket I was holding around me and then quickly walked over to where my bra and leggings were lying on the floor and picked them up.

I went to bathroom. First, I turned on the shower.

It would buy me more time if he thought I was doing what he said.

Then I used the bathroom — I haven't been to the bathroom in a long time — and then I put on my bra and leggings.

I looked at the bathroom door. Okay, time to get out of here.

Leaving the shower running, I left the bathroom and walked over to the window.

I hadn't realized it before, but there was a balcony connected to the room. Convenient.

Before leaving, I looked anxiously at my luggage. I wanted to bring her with me, but I couldn't let her slow me down.

I would have to send the police to come get her later, after I was out of here.

I went out onto the porch. Wow. It was tall. There were several floors of the hotel below me. I looked up. There were no other floors.

We were on the top floor. We were on the top fucking floor.

Was there another way out of there?

The front door was near the kitchen, and there was no way to get there without passing Grayson, as he was making breakfast. That was not an option. And I hadn't seen any other doors.

I looked to my left. There was a ladder outside the window of the next room. I believed it would be a fire escape.

This could work!

I ran out of the room and into the next door. This room was identical to the one Grayson and I spent the night in.

I went to the window and opened it. I got out of her and walked the fire escape.

Oh my God, this might work.

As quietly as I could, I ran down the stairs.

I was aware that the next window I would pass through was the one on the floor Grayson was on. I needed to be careful, quick and silent.

Just before stepping in front of her, I paused. It was open. The window was fully open. It made things much more difficult.

I can do this. I need to do this.

Quickly, I walked past the open window without even looking inside.

As I was about to reach the stairs that would take me to the next floor, a hand closed around my wrist and pulled me back.

I screamed desperately as I was pulled through the window and thrown over someone's shoulder.

I tried to kick and hit whoever was holding me in the back, but they wouldn't let me go.

- No! Put me down! - I screamed. - Let me go!

At first I thought it was Grayson who was holding me back. But there were no sparks, and this person's touch made my skin tingle.

And then Grayson said,

"Bring her here, Kyle.

I was carried into the kitchen and placed on a counter. Grayson was standing beside me, stirring eggs in a skillet on the stove.

"Hi," he said casually, looking over at me.

I swallowed. Was he mad? He knew I was trying to escape.

"Hi," I sighed.

He turned to his scrambled eggs.

"Kyle, can you turn off the shower upstairs, please?"

Kyle nodded.

"Of course, Alpha. He gave me one last look and bit his lip, trying to suppress his laughter. I glared at him.

He chuckled and walked away, shaking his head.

So trying to escape didn't work. Now it was time for plan B: be sweet and nice until Grayson trusts me, and then somehow get out of here.

Grayson turned to the kitchen island behind him and began slicing strawberries.

"So you didn't want to shower, huh?"

How do I respond to this?

- Hum no.

"Uh-huh..." Grayson opened the cupboard next to me and grabbed a bowl, then turned back to the strawberries he'd just cut and placed them there.

"What were you doing out there?"

"Um... I-I..." I stammered. "I wanted to get some fresh air!"

This is believable, right?

"Outside on the fire escape?" he asked, placing the bowl on the counter beside me.

"Why didn't you just come out onto the balcony in our room? He went back to the scrambled eggs and turned off the heat.

Yes, why didn't I just go out on the porch? That was a great question. I looked down at my lap.

"I... Uh, well, I..."

Grayson's hand was suddenly on my knee.

"Here, prove this. He put his finger in my mouth. What you want whatever was on her finger tasted amazing. It was sweet and citrusy.

With his finger still in my mouth, I lifted my gaze to Grayson. His eyes were pitch black. I moved my head

back until his finger leaves my mouth in a satisfying pop.

- Do you like it? he asked, his voice deep and husky.
I agreed.

"It's for the lemon cake," he explained. Your eyes never left my lips. "You've got a little thing right there.

He positioned himself between my legs and placed his hand on mine. neck, guided my face closer to his.

I seriously considered pushing him away, but then my act of pretending to be docile would be over.

He took my bottom lip in his mouth and sucked it clean.

I leaned closer to him, unable to control myself and already wanting to press my lips to his, but he abruptly pulled away.

"Oh, sorry," he said. "I forgot you didn't want me to touch you.

Honestly, I had forgotten too.

I looked at him. I knew what he was doing. He couldn't just get me all bristling and stop. It just wasn't fair.

He arched his eyebrows at me as if he were daring to take back my words.

No, I wouldn't.

He placed his hand on my cheek.

"The next time I kiss you is when you ask me to.

Well that would work fine for me. It meant I never would kiss again. And I do not want! I told myself.

He pulled away from me after I nodded.

Noticing how dark his eyes were, I tried to change subject.

"Why do your eyes turn black?"

The first time his eyes turned black, it really freaked me out. I mean, this is not normal. But now that I've seen it

happen several times, I was used to it.

In fact, not only was I used to it, I found it almost comforting. There was something about Grayson's black eyes that drew me in, made me feel protected and safe.

His eyes locked on mine. They were still black. - It's a long story.

- I have time. "Especially now that it looked like I didn't."

I was going to get out of here so soon.

He took a plate from the cupboard and filled it with the scrambled eggs he was making.

Then he walked over to the extravagant dining table in the farthest corner of the room. I hadn't noticed before, but the table was covered with breakfast food.

There were croissants, pancakes, fruit, pastries, hash browns, eggs, bacon strips, sausages and much more—not to mention coffee and juice in crystal glasses.

I gaped at the huge feast.

Grayson paused when he saw my shocked face.

"I didn't know what you liked, so I took everything I could think of. Some of the food I made myself and some I ordered from room service. "That's a lot of

food," I said.

He walked towards me, smiling.

"Just eat what you want, love.

He stopped in front of me and lifted me up, wrapping my legs around him like I was a child.

I was about to protest and demand that he put me down, but then i remembered i was pretending to be nice now.

I needed Grayson to trust me.

So I wrapped my arms around his neck and rested my head on his shoulder.

A deep growl came from his chest as his arms tightened. tightened around me.

He sat in a chair at the table, keeping me on his lap. He pulled two plates in front of us. I was uncomfortable sitting on his lap. I twitched a little.

"I can sit in my own chair," I said.

- No. The closer you are to me, the easier this transition will be for you. — He put some eggs on my plate. And then some pancakes. And some bacon strips. And a muffin. And everything else that was within arm's reach.

"Is that all for me?" - I asked. He couldn't have expected I ate all that.

"Just eat what you want, baby. I know you haven't eaten since you got on the plane yesterday. I just want to put some calories on you. "Well, that's kind of cute. He wants to take care of me. As far as the kidnappers were concerned, he was a good guy.

But I still eyed the food warily. What if he did something to her? What if it's poisoned?

I felt his breath in my ear.

"While I'm very happy that you're wary of strange foods, I just need you to eat. I promise there's nothing wrong with the food, Belle.

He took a bite of my muffin to prove his point, then put it back on my plate.

— Now, eat.

Shivering, I picked up my fork and popped some eggs into my mouth. He nodded in approval and started filling his own plate.

We sat in silence for a few minutes while I ate. I hadn't realized how hungry I was. Besides, I'm going to need strength if I'm going to get out of here.

I would eat as much as I could.

And the food was really good too.

When I finally slowed down, I noticed that Grayson was rubbing my leg and watched me as he ate his own plate of food.

I squirmed nervously but decided not to remove his hand.
I could handle him touching me as long as it didn't get too intimate.

"Eat some more," Grayson said.
I leaned back and shook my head, pushing my plate away.

"If I eat any more, I might explode."
- Right. I forgot you can't eat as much as we do.
I looked back at him.
- Us? We who?

Grayson shook his head and sighed.

"Now that you've rested and eaten a little, I think I can begin to answer your questions.

He rubbed his hand over his face and slowly turned my body so that I was straddling him.

"Please don't be afraid.

"Okay..." I didn't expect what happened next.

Chapter 10

BELLE

Grayson began hesitantly, "Well... I probably should... I think I'll start with my eyes."

I nodded, encouraging him to continue.

— My eyes turn black when I lose control. and usually it has something to do with you.

- With me? What do you mean?

He moistened his lips.

"Normally, I have incredible control. In fact, I haven't lost control in years. Not since puberty. But since you came into my life, things have changed. You bring out my strongest emotions.

- What do you mean? - I asked.

"It usually comes from one of two emotions. One is anger. Like when I found out that man on the plane was harassing you...

"He wasn't harassing me," I interrupted. "All he did was..."

Grayson's hands gripped my hips tightly.

"Belle, don't say another word. You don't want to argue with me on this matter. The protectiveness and possessiveness I feel for you is overwhelming.

I started to cringe, not liking his words.

"What's the other emotion?" I whispered.

He brought his fingers to his temples, massaging them for a moment, then looked at me with a pained expression.

"That's when... Well, that happens when I... When I..."

"It happens when he's horny." When he's feeling a little excited. When he wants to put his dick in your..."

"Kyle, enough!" Grayson's booming voice interrupted.

Kyle was now at the bottom of the stairs, smiling widely for us both. He shrugged.

"I'm just trying to make it easy for you, Alpha.

Grayson growled as I quickly got off his lap, trying to put as much distance between us as possible.

- That is true? I asked once we had the table between us.

"Your eyes turn black when you're angry or when...

"Yes, when I'm attracted to you. I wish Kyle had used nicer words, but he's telling the truth.

I shook my head.

— I understand why they turn black... But... How is that possible? This is crazy!

Grayson stood up and crossed his arms over his chest. He did not say anything. I think he didn't like being called crazy.

I let out a shaky breath.

"Why am I here? What do you want from me?

His shoulders slumped as he stared at me.

"Belle," he sighed. "I wish I could take your fear away."

"You are the cause of my fear," I snapped, not quite convinced of my own words.

Pain flashed in his eyes and then a deep growl came from his chest.

I took another step back.

"Can I please go home?" Will you let me go?

- No. His voice came out sharp, leaving no room for argument. - I will not let you go. You are mine.

- What do you mean? I asked, starting to feel extremely frustrated.

- I'm not yours! I don't belong to anyone but myself!

I watched as his eyes slowly darkened. I knew this time it wasn't because of lust. Could not be.

And if what he told me was true then his eyes were darkening with... anger.

"Your eyes..." I said.

"You pissed him off," Kyle said, coming toward us. - He no likes you to deny its ownership.

"But I'm not his property!" I yelled stubbornly.

Grayson's chest began to heave and his entire body shook.

I took another step away from him, my back finding the kitchen island.

"Luna, don't say another word," Kyle said. "His wolf is getting extremely upset.

"His wolf?"

Grayson let out another low growl.

Kyle looked at Grayson and nodded.

"That's something he'd like to explain to you, Luna.

I shook my head.

"Explain what to me?" I don't understand! and stop me call her 'Luna'! My name is Bella!

Grayson started to get irate, moving his head as if there was something uncomfortable in his neck.

Kyle turned to me. I must have been completely freaked out because his expression softened, like he was trying not to tell me. scare.

"You should touch it. You need to calm him down," he said.

- I will not do it! I will not touch that lunatic!

I heard a snap, and my eyes went to Grayson.

His face creased into a pained expression as his entire body convulsed and slumped forward.

He ducked, and his shoulder blades popped and popped upward as his ribcage cracked and propelled against the skin of his chest.

other side of your body.

Dark fur sprouted from his arms and neck, and he cried out in pain.

I screamed as he crouched down on the ground, watching as his body contorted and morphed into something else.

The sight before me grew more and more horrible as Grayson he let out another cry of pain that turned into a loud growl.

In my state of complete shock and terror, I frantically searched the kitchen for an exit—realizing that Grayson's body was still blocking the front door and window that led to the fire escape.

I ran to where Kyle was and shook his shoulders.

“Kyle, we have to get out of here! Please, we have to run!

Kyle shook his head.

“You can't touch me, Luna,” he said as he took my hands away from him.

“The Alpha won't be happy if he sees you touching me.

Okay, so he's officially a lost cause.

I glanced back at what used to be Grayson, just in time to see his nose elongate and turn black.

He was now on all fours, with his ears sticking up like those of a dog and the lower jaw going up to the pointed nose.

His clothes were in tatters—his entire body was twice its normal size.

For a moment, time stopped.

Kyle and I didn't dare move or make a sound. I held my breath, my heart pounding so hard I felt it reverberating in my chest. And then the thing that used to be Grayson stirred.

He looked at me and I gasped.

It was a huge wolf.

Grayson had turned into a wolf.

Chapter 11

BELLE

I screamed and felt tears of complete terror run down my face.

I ran.

I wasn't even sure where I was running; I just let my legs carry me away from the nightmare my life had become.

I heard heavy paws running behind me as I ran upstairs, knowing it was Grayson on my heels.

I panicked and ran into the first room I found.

That happened to be the room I woke up next to him in for the first time.

I slammed the door, locked it and walked away from her.

It took precisely a second for something hard and large to start slamming against the door.

I cried as the entire room shook.

I continued to back away until my back met the window across the room. I slid down, hugging my knees to my chest.

He's trying to break down the door.

Oh my God. This is how I will die.

The door shuddered as if it were seconds from falling apart. Mid-slamming, the doorknob wobbled.

Suddenly, I heard Kyle's voice.

"Luna, let him in!" He won't hurt you!

Never in a million years would I do that. And from the looks of it, I didn't need to let Grayson in. He would do it himself. Any moment now, the door was going to cave in.

And then I would be at your mercy.

And just like that, the door burst off its hinges and flew into the room, skidding a few feet across the floor.

Grayson came running over and their eyes immediately connected to my.

I whimpered, hugging my body tighter, as if that would hide me from the huge wolf in front of me.

He approached me in a regal manner, his chest puffed out and his head held high.

When he was only half a meter away, he let out a growled low and bared his teeth.

"He's trying to establish dominance over you, since you've denied ownership. He wants you to give yourself to him," Kyle said, standing in the doorway, his eyes wide as he watched us.

"I-I..." I said, trying to speak even though I was panicking.

"Luna, just do what he wants. You won't like the result if you don't.

I looked into the wolf's frightening black eyes, and he bared his teeth once more.

I shook my head slowly, knowing it wouldn't be smart to antagonize the animal any more than I already did.

I looked at Kyle.

"How do I turn myself in?"

"You must show him your neck.

When I gave him a confused look, he cocked his head to the side. side and pulled his shirt collar down to reveal his collarbone.

- Like that. Show that you trust him and recognize his superior position.

Well, that was the last thing I wanted to do. But I knew not he had no other choice—not if he wanted to get out of this situation alive.

I agreed.

I slowly brought a trembling hand up to the collar of my shirt and I pulled it down to reveal my collarbone.

So I cocked my head to the side.

A purring noise came out of the appreciative wolf's chest. He leaned forward and put his nose on my neck, right where he'd bitten me as a human.

He snorted and then ran his tongue up and down my neck.

At first, I backed away from him, not liking the fact that an animal was licking me. But then I felt sparks move through my body, originating from the licking site.

I felt my head tilt to give Grayson better access, almost as if my body was moving on instinct.

I whimpered at the conflicting feelings coursing through my system. He licked my jugular and a sob rose in my chest.

“Don't be afraid, Luna,” Kyle said from his spot in the doorway. - O Alpha would never hurt you.

Grayson froze and turned to Kyle.

He snapped his teeth at him and crouched down on the floor, moving closer. him slowly and menacingly.

Kyle held up his hands in surrender and turned to me.

“Alpha would like me to leave.

He left the room as Grayson got closer and closer, snarling nonstop at him.

Panic spread through my chest. Kyle couldn't leave. Then I I would be alone with the dire wolf who wanted to kill me.

“No, Kyle, please don't go. You can't leave me alone with he. Please, please don't leave.

More tears ran down my face. Grayson looked at me, her eyes softening a little.

He let out a low yelp.

- I can not stay. It's not in my nature to disobey you. And he really wants me gone. He believes I'm a threat to you with your emotions overloaded like that.

I had no idea how Kyle knew these things, but he seemed

so sure of himself and so calm, even Grayson looked like he was about to kill him.

Grayson growled again and Kyle took another step back.

“No, Kyle,” I said frantically, my voice cracking. - Do not leave me. Please.

He gave me a sympathetic look.

“He won't hurt you, I promise.

I cried. I was terrified.

Kyle looked at me one more time before saying,

“I'm sorry,” and left the room.

Leaving me alone with Grayson.

Chapter 12

BELLE

The wolf approached me with slow steps, eyeing me intently. I stared back at him, trying to control my erratic breathing.

He stopped right in front of my face and blew out a breath.

I faltered. More tears ran down my face.

Grayson whimpered. His wet nose touched mine. Then his tongue moved up my cheek and then moved to the other side to do the same.

I realized then that he was licking my tears away—but I couldn't tell if he wanted to comfort me or if he was deciding whether or not he wanted to fuck me.

I faltered again in disgust. I didn't want your saliva on my face.

Grayson whimpered again. He backed up a little.

I felt something pulling at my shirt and I looked down to see Grayson tugging at it with his teeth.

“Oo what?” - I asked.

He continued tugging at my shirt, pulling me slightly forward.

I looked at him, confused.

- What do you want?

I wasn't sure if he could understand me, but he jerked his head toward the bed and barked loudly.

- The bed? - I asked.

He nuzzled again in confirmation.

Why did he want me to go to bed? And most importantly, the what was he going to do with me when I got there?

- Why? I whispered.

He did not answer. He just grabbed my shirt with his mouth and continued to pull, harder this time.

I was dragged forward a little and gasped.

"Okay, okay.

I got up off the ground slowly, never taking my eyes off the wolf in front of me. He moved with me, watching every move my.

As soon as I straightened up, I realized how massive he really was.

Even when I was standing, he was taller than me, big as a horse.

I approached the bed on shaky legs, realizing that Grayson was close, his fur brushing against me, as if he expected me to fall over at any moment.

I sat up slowly and took a deep breath.

I looked back at the wolf with a questioning look that said, "What now?"

Grayson came and stopped in front of me. He pressed his nose against my chest and snuggled.

- I? What? I lost my balance and ended up on my back, looking up at the ceiling. I blinked.

I felt the bed shake violently and realized that Grayson was climbing onto the bed. bed to lie next to me.

I watched cautiously as he got comfortable. He lay down and It rested its head on its paws, then whimpered.

- What? - I asked.

He closed his eyes and then growled, a sound that sounded like snoring. very suspicious. He opened his eyes again and looked at me.

- Do you want to sleep?

he barked. He stepped forward and touched my arm with his nose. Then he looked at me and barked again.

"Do you want me to sleep?" "I was confused beyond belief on this one. time.

Why did he want me to sleep? What good would that do?

Grayson barked once more and nodded his big wolf's head quickly. He stared at me as if he expected me to fall asleep right there, but I didn't.

I mean, how could I?

He really was a beautiful specimen—terrifying, but beautiful. He it was completely black, matching his eyes, and strong.

I looked away. I shouldn't be admiring a monster. I looked up at the ceiling as the tears continued to fall. I was a little calmer, but my body was still shaking.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Grayson rest his head back on his paws as he huffed. I could feel his gaze on me, which was unsettling.

So Grayson could change into a wolf. I was kidnapped by a werewolf who claimed I belonged to him. One with absolutely no self-control.

Fantastic as fuck!

It explained a lot, though. That explained his eyes that changed color, his muscles insanely huge and his strength.

I also assumed it had something to do with why Kyle called him "Alpha".

The word Alpha had to do with wolves, didn't it? or was it just related to the Greek alphabet?

I still wasn't sure why they were calling me "Luna", though. Or why she was kidnapped.

Or what he was planning to do to me.

We stayed like that for an hour and a half, my mind racing and him watching me, until finally the adrenaline left my system and my body stopped shaking. The tears on my face finally dried up.

I looked at Grayson, and he lifted his head at the movement.

"Can I get up now?"

He shook his head.

- Why not?

He just put his head back on his paws and closed his eyes.

Well, that wasn't an answer. And if he was going to take a nap, nothing prevented me from getting up.

I sat up slowly. Grayson didn't like that at all. He got up and placed one of his huge paws on my shoulder, putting enough pressure for me to lie down again.

I snorted.

"You know I won't be able to sleep, right?" Then why do I have to stay here?

Grayson just lay down, resuming the position he was in before.

I stared at the ceiling and sighed. I could feel your eyes roaming my body.

"I'm sure I won't be able to sleep with you looking at me."

I looked at him and saw that his eyes were closed.

Well, that's better than nothing.

Another painfully long hour passed in this way. My confusion only grew. What was he waiting for? Did he want me to stay like this forever?

I couldn't take it anymore. I didn't care how big he was or care that he could tear me apart. I couldn't lie there any longer.

I sat up and quickly started crawling towards the foot of the bed, hoping to get there before Grayson could stop me.

I hadn't gone very far when he pounced on me, placing its paws on either side of my body and growling.

"I can't lie there any longer!" I need to move! "I yelled at him.

He growled and pressed his nose to my chest.

He forced me back so I was lying down again. I tried to fight him, but to no avail. He was a million times stronger than eu.

I huffed in annoyance.

I thought he would pull away as soon as I got back, but he didn't.

Instead, he lowered himself down so he was lying on top of me, his stomach pressed against mine, his legs supporting his weight on either side, and his head between my breasts—making sure I couldn't go anywhere. .

- What are you doing? - I asked.

I squirmed a little, trying to get him to move.
He just put more weight on me, immobilizing me completely.
Even my arms were trapped underneath it. I couldn't myself
to mix.

It would be a long day.

Chapter 13

BELLE

The first thing I noticed when I woke up was that I had fallen asleep. After all the protests I made, insisting to the wolf that I wasn't going to sleep, I fell asleep.

The second thing I realized was that I was wrapped around another human — a man.

And he would run his hand up and down my back calmly.

— Grayson?

He kissed my head.

“Yes, beautiful, it's me.

I realized I was curled around his body like a koala in a tree.

I quickly disentangled myself from him and sat up, feeling my face heat up.

I looked at him. Did I dream of all this?

"Are you human again?"

He smiled a little.

- Yes. After you fell asleep, my wolf gave me back control, and I changed back.

"I didn't want to sleep," I muttered, angry that I'd lost another battle against Grayson.

He pushed a strand of my hair behind my ear.

“I know you didn't. You were being stubborn. But thank God you slept because my wolf wouldn't give me back control until you fell asleep.

“He was extremely worried about you. It was either forcing you to sleep or completing the mating process, but I managed to convince you that you needed sleep.

With the word mating, I realized something.

"Grayson, if I look down, will you be wearing pants?" I wasn't sure when you shifted you would still be dressed.

He smiled widely.

"Curious about that, aren't you?" Why don't you check it out baby

I was flabbergasted.

"Ew, no! I grabbed a pillow and shoved it into his face. - You are disgusting!

He laughed out loud and pulled the sheet from his body. I was afraid to look, but I was grateful when I saw boxers covering him.

"Someday you're going to stop feeling this way," he said. "Someday you'll be looking at all this with longing. In fact, you'll be doing a lot more than just looking. - He smiled.

My mouth fell open in shock at his words.

"Ugh, you're so disgusting!" - I screamed. "That's all you can you think? Sex?"

He ran a hand through his hair and shrugged, still smiling widely. God, he was so beautiful.

"Yes, basically. If we were a normal couple, we would have had sex several times already.

It surprised me.

"If we were a normal couple?" A normal couple? I asked angrily. "We're not a couple!" You forced me! I didn't even want to be here!

He sighed and sat down. He lifted his hand and cupped my face, running his thumb across my cheekbone.

"I'm sorry, Belle. I know how confused and overwhelmed you must be feeling. I promise it shouldn't be like this. God, if we hadn't met on a plane, this whole mess could have been avoided.

"Why would that make any difference?"

"I could have wooed you properly, asked you out, and marked you when you were ready.

“But turmoil happened, and that idiot who looked at her breasts also had to face the consequences. Marking you was the only thing that would keep me from ripping his head off.

His hand grazed the bite mark on my neck, and I could only assume he was talking about when he bit me in the bathroom on the plane.

Chills ran down my spine.

“You're just a human... You're so, so vulnerable, and I could see that you've been through so much. So my wolf forced me to do it.

“I had to protect you. I guess I could have just let you go as soon as the plane landed.

“But I knew you'd need to stay close to me. The pain of separation would have been unbearable, especially after I marked you. I had to bring you with me. I'm very sorry.

He sounded truly and genuinely sorry, and for that I was grateful. But that didn't make things better.

“I need answers,” I said. “I've never been so confused in my entire life.”

He nodded.

- I know. Ask freely. I will answer anyone.

I let my shoulders slump in relief. I was surprised that he was being so accommodating.

“Um...” “Where do I begin?”

As I sat down next to him, I felt his hand on my leg, starting to travel up and down.

My body relaxed a little. I leaned towards him. Your another hand found my waist and squeezed.

Our bodies gravitated toward each other, getting closer and closer.

- No! — Suddenly, I came out of the trance. I took his hands away from me. “No, you can't touch me. I can't think when you touch me.

I took one of the pillows and placed it between us, then

more pillows on top and around him.

- What are you doing? Grayson asked.

"This is my side of the bed," I said, pointing to where I was seated. I pointed to Grayson's side.

"That's your side of the bed. You stay by your side, I'll stay by mine side. So I think I'll be able to resolve this.

"You think a wall of pillows is going to keep me away from you?"

I shook my head.

"Well, if your touch didn't turn me into a puddle of molten goo, we wouldn't have this problem!" - I screamed. When I saw him trying to contain his laughter, I sighed.

"Please just stay by your side, okay?"

He raised his hands in surrender.

- As you wish.

"Okay," I said. "Okay, so you're a werewolf."

Chapter 14

BELLE

"Okay, so you're a werewolf.

Grayson raised an eyebrow.

"You got that, didn't you?"

I looked at him.

- As? - I asked.

- Like what?

"How are you a werewolf?"

He leaned back, thinking about it for a second.

"Well, it's complicated. We're not sure. I was born this way, my wolf manifested itself when I hit puberty. You don't become a werewolf or anything like that.

"We know our ancestors must have had something to do with wolves, but we're not sure what exactly it was, or how our species came to exist.

"We can only assume it has something to do with magic.

- Magic? - I asked.

He nodded.

"Yes, some kind of ritual that strengthened our ancestors or something. He shrugged.

"So... are other things real too?"

He shot me a questioning look.

- Other things?

"Yeah, like witches and wizards, or fairies or vampires?"

His eyes darkened a little.

"Yes, it's all real. But we all keep a secret. Our species don't... get along, exactly. Vampires and werewolves have been at war for centuries.

I stopped for a second.

"What about the Easter Bunny?"

Grayson looked at me for a second. He tried to contain himself, but finally burst out laughing.

"I told you about a war between werewolves and vampires, and you're worried about the Easter Bunny?"

I looked down at my hands. Was he right. It looked like it was five years old.

I felt his fingers slide under my chin and lift my head. My eyes connected with Grayson's.

"I'm sorry," he whispered. "That's not what I meant. That's a very valid question after everything you've been through the past few days. No, the Easter Bunny is not real. Not the tooth fairy or Santa Claus.

He smiled.

"I'm sorry if this ruined your childhood.

I felt a little disappointed, but I tried not to let it show.

I took her hand that was still under my chin and pulled it away. I pointed to where he was sitting.

"Your side," I reminded him.

He growled under his breath but followed my orders, not seeming not happy about it.

I took a deep breath, bracing myself for the next question I was about to ask.

"Why am I here? What do you want from me?"

He sighed.

— Belle...

He leaned forward, and I could tell he desperately wanted to touch me. He glanced at the pillows between us before looking at me once more.

"You are my mate.

"Yes, you said that. But what does it mean?"

He seemed hesitant to tell me as he shifted restlessly on his side of the bed, "It means we were made for each other." We were meant to be a couple and love each other. We are soulmates.

I stared at him for a few seconds. I guess I didn't understand what he meant.

Grayson looked deeply into my eyes. I felt like he could see straight into my soul.

"We're kindred spirits.

- What do you mean? It makes no sense.

"I know, but let me try to explain. Wolves are usually committed for life. The lifetime commitment is especially true for werewolves.

"Every werewolf has what we call a 'mate', someone you're destined to be with forever.

"Like...like you mean"—I hesitated with my next word—"romantically?"

He smiled.

- You are adorable.

I blushed deeply and he chuckled.

"Yes, I mean romantically. As husbands and wives in human terms. More like husband and wife at first sight, because we know we're meant to be together right away.

"I-I..." I didn't know how to respond. "And you think I'm your mate?"

His expression intensified.

"I don't think you're my mate, I know.

I pulled away from him and his eyes narrowed. I felt extremely conflicted.

It was like half of me wanted to jump into his arms and never more go out, and the other half wanted to run for the hills.

Was he making all of this up?

- How do you know? - I asked.

"Well, it starts with the scent. You smell your mate when you are near him. It's the most amazing thing you've ever smelled in your entire life.

He leaned forward, breathing deeply.

"I smelled you when I got on that plane and I knew you were mine.

"Is that how you knew?" I asked skeptically. —
Because I smelled good?

He nodded.

"There are other things too. Like when we touch. Sparks fly.

I looked away. He was talking about the little fireworks that traveled throughout my body whenever he touched me.
I felt them.

And that freaked me out because that meant at least one of the things he was saying had to be true.

"Belle," Grayson said, "I know you know what I'm talking about. You felt the sparks too, didn't you?"

I licked my lips.

"Um... I don't, I don't know..."

He held up his hand.

"Touch me.

I looked at him skeptically.

"I already told you, I don't..."

"I'm not going to do anything, Belle," Grayson interrupted. "Just touch my hand."

His voice left no room for argument, so I slowly
I lifted my hand and placed it gently against his.

Immediately my hand began to tingle, and the sensation worked its way up my arm and then down to my toes. I sighed.

- You feel? he asked as he intertwined our fingers.

I nodded, surprised at how good the sparks were.

As crazy as it sounded, there was something magical about his touch, and what he was saying to me kind of made sense.

He smiled widely as he looked down at our intertwined fingers. His smile took my breath away. "It's our bond

traveling between us. You can tell our bond is strong based on the intensity of the sparks. And for your reaction when I touch you.

His smile now had a hint of mischief.

I immediately removed my hand from his.

"My reaction to your touch?" I have no reaction to your touch!

He raised an eyebrow.

"Weren't you the one who said just now that you couldn't think when I touched you?"

My cheeks turned red. I really said that, didn't I?

Grayson riu.

- Everything is fine. I feel the same when you touch me.

My eyes lifted to meet his.

- You feel?

His eyes softened.

"Of course I am. In fact, I also know that my feelings for you are much stronger than what you feel for me.

I'm an Alpha, so my instinct is to protect you, love you, and provide for you.

I blinked at him.

"An Alpha?"

"You know how wolves live in packs?"

I agreed.

"Well, there's also a pack leader. It's always the strongest wolf

who takes over the pack — the 'Alpha'. I am the Alpha of my pack.

I shifted my weight to the side.

"Are you the strongest wolf in your pack?"

- Yes. And my pack is probably the strongest in the world. I took over as Alpha at sixteen, after fighting the previous Alpha and winning.

"But I and the people around me knew I was likely to become an Alpha early on, because of my wolf's size and my fighting and leadership skills.

I was a little intimidated by his power and strength. I already felt like he could squash me like a bug, but now that I knew he was some kind of superpowered human, I felt even more afraid of him.

Grayson sighed.

"You have nothing to worry about, beautiful. I would never hurt you. My wolf would never allow that.

I still wasn't sure I trusted him.

"So that's why Kyle keeps calling you 'Alpha'?"

Grayson nodded.

- Yes. It is a term of respect.

"And why was he calling me 'Luna'?"

"That's because you're the Alpha's mate, and the name for that is Luna. He would never call her anything else.

"So it's like calling someone 'King' or 'Queen'?" Is it to demonstrate someone's hierarchy? - I asked.

He smiled and nodded.

"Yes, that's exactly how it is. You are my queen. I tried to ignore the intense look in his eyes and how much my instincts were telling me to touch him, but it was getting harder and harder.

The bite mark on my neck hurt.

It reminded me of another question I had: "Why did you bite me?"

He ran a hand through his hair.

"Yes, I knew this would happen. he sighed.

"A male wolf will bite his female to show all the other wolves that she belongs to him. The higher the mark, the higher the female's partner rank. Your mark is big," he said proudly, eyeing the mark on my neck.

I rolled my eyes.

"How arrogant, isn't it?" I whispered softly.

When I looked up, Grayson's face was right in front of me. I could feel his breath on my cheeks. I sighed.

"What was that, man?"

I shook my head.

"N-nothing," I stammered.

"Hmm... something else you should know about werewolves, love..." Grayson's eyes searched mine. "We have incredible hearing.

His mouth was so close to mine. If I moved forward, my lips would meet his.

I leaned toward him, instinctively seeking the warmth of his mouth on mine. But before we could kiss, Grayson pulled away.

He looked at me smugly.

"Sorry I forgot to stay on my side of the bed." He leaned back on his arms. "Besides, I'm not going to kiss you until you ask me to, remember?"

I looked at him. I didn't like this game he was forcing me to play.

He laughed at my attempt to sound angry.

"Ask me to kiss you, and the problem will be solved.

I scoffed. Like I was going to do that.

- Absolutely not!

He shrugged.

"You know, dear.

I shifted uncomfortably and hardened my gaze.

"So you bit me as a way to claim ownership?"

His gaze traveled up and down my body slowly, and he smiled.

- Yes. You were already mine, but the brand only consolidated that fact and it let other people around us know that too.

I swallowed hard. I took a deep breath, bracing myself for my next question.

"Are you ever going to let me go?"

Chapter 15

BELLE

Grayson's eyes darkened the second the words left my mouth, and I immediately flinched, worried he'd turn wolf again.

He watched me closely. When he saw me move away from him, he closed his eyes and took a deep breath. When her eyes opened again, they were back to their normal color.

"Belle," he sighed. "You don't know why I'm with you now, but if I, for some reason, let you go, you'll find your way back to me somehow."

I shook my head, ready to disagree and argue, but he kept talking.

"Do you remember how you felt when I was away from you?" yesterday? How did you feel immense pain and almost pass out?

I shuddered at the memory, but shook my head morosely.

"Now imagine that pain intensified by ten. You were downstairs, one floor away from me, when this happened. I don't even want to think about what would happen if you went any further."

"Besides, your instincts would tell you to come back to me if I don't get to you first. In the end, you would. The mate bond would force you to."

My heart started to beat faster.

"Will I always feel this pain when I'm away from you?"

I saw Grayson clench and unclench his fists. I wasn't sure if it was anger or something else.

- No. It will stop. Our bodies are slowly adapting to being away from each other. But we will always long for each other's presence.

My shoulders slumped.

"So I'm never going home?" "Tears filled my eyes.

Grayson cursed under his breath as he watched me. your expression told me everything I needed to know. He wouldn't let me go.

He intended to keep me close to him forever. I cried more with this realization.

Grayson looked down at the pillows between us.

"Oh, fuck," he said.

He came towards me, knocking over the pillows in his path.

I held up my hand, stopping him.

- No! No, please stop, I just...I just, I can't," I sobbed.

Grayson groaned.

"Belle, please let me touch you. Please, it's killing my wolf to see you like this. It's my job as your mate to take care of you.

I looked at him. I had finally reached my breaking point.

- Do not call me like that! I'm not your... your mate! It's not your job to do things for me! - I screamed. I was hysterical. I couldn't control myself anymore.

It was all too much for me.

"Belle," I heard Grayson growl. He got up, running a hand through his hair with an agonized expression on her face.

"I just...fuck you!" he yelled and punched the wall.

The entire room shook; his fist left behind a giant hole.

I jumped back and cried some more. How did I get myself into this mess?

I hugged my knees, letting all my emotions flow.

My stomach lurched and I felt like I was about to throw up.

I tried to ignore it, but the throbbing where Grayson bit me was getting unbearable.

Grayson crouched down on my side of the bed. He seemed calmer, but his eyes were still black, which scared me even more.

"It's your mark, isn't it, baby? I know you must be in a lot of pain. Please let me make you feel better.

I watched him as the tears continued to run down my face.

He slowly lifted his hand and brought it close to my face, almost touching my cheek.

I wanted this to happen so badly, to let him touch me and feel the sparks running through my body.

I leaned towards him a little. I wanted to jump on your arms and hold him for life.

The truth is, I didn't just want him to touch me because the pain would stop.

I wanted to touch him because I wanted that agonized look to leave his face.

I wanted to comfort him... because I liked him.

I liked my kidnapper. How is this possible?

I snorted.

No, I couldn't let that happen. I wasn't going to sit down and give up because he'd told me a crazy story.

This could be your world, but it wasn't mine. I couldn't give in to that—mate bond.

I ran to the other side of the bed.

"Please just leave, Grayson," I cried. "I just want to be alone. Little sobs left my mouth.

He didn't move.

"No," he snapped. - I will not leave you.

I felt defeated. I covered my face with my hands and sobbed as I whispered, "Please leave. Please just leave. Please, leave. - I repeated.

I heard more curse words come out of his mouth and a few seconds later I heard footsteps coming out of the room.

And that's when the pain really started.

Chapter 16

BELLE

The days that followed were hellish. I had no idea how long I stayed in that room, writhing in pain thanks to the stupid bite mark Grayson had placed on my neck.

I spent most of the time lying in bed, screaming and shaking, while losing consciousness and waking up because of the pain.

I lost count of how many times I got sick.

I kept running between the private bathroom and the bed every time my stomach was churning.

I knew that now I was just throwing up bile.

I finally gave up trying to get back into bed and slept on the bathroom floor instead.

I would wake up screaming as wave after wave of immense, throbbing agony coursed through my body.

Kyle came to the room a few times with food, begging me to let Grayson in.

After he left, I heard Grayson trashing the downstairs living room, breaking things and arguing with Kyle.

It was so loud, I could only imagine what the beautiful hotel room looked like now.

It just made me feel better about my decision to keep Grayson at arm's length.

He had no control over his anger, and I didn't want him near me. Sometimes I felt him outside my door.

My pain got a little better. He would stay there for hours. Sometimes I heard his wolf whining.

It made my heart ache a little, but I ignored it as best I could.

Every time Kyle asked me to let Grayson in, I

I just repeated again that I didn't want him near me.

I would get over it on my own.

Grayson said the pain would stop in the end. Once that happened, I could finally get out of here. I just had to keep fighting.

For days, the pain only got worse until I was a motionless mess on the floor.

I couldn't eat. I could not sleep. I couldn't do anything.

And what made things even worse was the fact that all I could think about was Grayson. No matter how much I tried to stop it, my mind kept returning to him.

I couldn't feel if he was outside my door anymore.

I couldn't feel anything but pain.

I wondered if he was out there or if he had completely forgotten about me and was doing something else to pass the time. The thought made me sad.

I thought of her hair, her eyes, her chin, her mouth. I thought about her smile and how it felt to have her arms around me.

I thought about my irrefutable attraction to him and how safe he made me feel—much more than he scared me.

Somehow he made me feel like I wasn't alone.

He was so kind to me, like I was a piece of glass about to break. He told me that he would always take care of me.

He's shown me nothing but kindness since I've known him, and yet I rejected it.

I mean, he kidnapped me. He almost killed a man.

He was huge and strong and no doubt could snap me in half like a toothpick. And, oh yeah, he could turn into a rabid wolf at any moment.

I can't forget this.

But despite all that, I still yearned to be by his side and

feel your skin against mine. I wanted to kiss him again—hold his hand and stroke his hair.

I wondered how he was feeling.

God, he looked so heartbroken when I begged him to leave me alone. I wondered if he really felt that way or if it was all an elaborate act.

He could just be a kidnapper playing mind games with his victim.

But what if I really was his mate and I sent him away feeling awful after he opened his heart to me?

My heart squeezed.

I remembered that I didn't know if he was telling the truth about the whole mate thing.

But I think he had turned into a wolf right in front of my eyes.

So he sure as hell hadn't lied about being a werewolf.

Which was a little scary when I thought about it, but your wolf hadn't hurt me.

So he probably wasn't lying about me being his mate.

And deep down, I secretly hoped he was telling the truth because, first, it would mean that I really was safe with my kidnapper. I mean, the guy said we were soulmates. No way would he really hurt me.

Second, it would explain why I was so visibly attracted to him without even knowing him, and it would provide a simple explanation for all the embarrassing fantasies that had been running through my head since meeting him.

And third, I mean... Have you seen the guy?

He was incredibly handsome. He's kind and charming and protective, and the first person to make me feel anything but sad in a long time.

Oh God. Why did I make him leave again?

Why was I pushing away the first good thing that happened to me after my dad died?

I felt myself moving before I even understood what I was doing.

I practically ran to the door and opened it.

I was a woman with a mission.

I didn't know where Grayson was, but I decided I wasn't going to stop search until you find it.

When I walked out into the hall though, my eyes immediately connected with his. I took a deep breath.

He was sitting against the wall at the end of the long hallway, his knees drawn up.

He looked exhausted.

His beard had grown and he had huge dark circles under his eyes. My heart broke when I saw him.

His eyes widened when he saw me, and he slowly got to his feet, as if he was afraid he might startle me.

Hesitantly, I took a step toward him, and then another, and then he was practically running towards her.

He met me halfway and I threw my arms around his neck.

And suddenly everything was fine.

Chapter 17

BELLE

Sweet relief from the pain I had endured for the last few days hit my body and a sob escaped my lips.

Grayson wrapped his arms tightly around my waist and then moved them under my ass so he could lift me.

I wrapped my legs around his waist and clung to him like my life depended on it.

"I'm so sorry," he whispered into my hair. "God, I'm so sorry.

I nodded to show I understood and pulled him closer.

"I'm sorry too," I whispered into her neck.

He squeezed me gently. Words were no longer necessary.

We stayed like that for a few minutes, just hugging each other and inspiring each other.

It was pure bliss, and I wanted it to never end.

But then Grayson moved. I panicked. Would he put me down? Would he leave me again?

Grayson must have sensed my panic because he gently stroked my back as I walked.

"Shh..." he said. - I am here.

He carried me past the room I'd spent the last few days and into the room next to it.

Without letting go of me, he closed the door and led us to the bed.

He laid us down so that we were on our sides, one facing the other. another, our bodies intertwined.

Our foreheads touched and for a while we just looked at each other.

Our breaths fell into sync and everything felt so...right.

After some time, I raised my hand to touch the stains.
dark under your eyes.

"When was the last time you slept?" — I asked him.

He gave a little shrug.

"Probably the last time you slept."

I furrowed my brow.

"I've slept a lot the last few days.

He pulled me closer, tightening his grip on me.

"No, you fainted. And it was never just for a few minutes. There is a difference between passing out and sleeping.

"How did you know I passed out?"

"Because I felt it. I felt everything you went through.

- Felt? I asked in surprise.

He shook his head slowly and ran his thumb across my cheekbone.

"Our bond is more intense than usual for a werewolf couple. Not sure why. I can feel your emotions more intensely. Typically, this doesn't happen until after you've completed the joining process.

I shuddered when he slipped his hand under my shirt and stroked my back.

"Do I want to know what the joining process is?"

He smiled slightly.

"I'm probably not the best person to tell you. But I promise you will enjoy every second of it. You will beg me to continue.

His eyes roamed between us, roaming over my body. He licked his lips hungrily.

I scoffed and pushed his shoulder lightly. He growled playfully and held me tighter against him. His teeth bit into my ear.

"T-so, um," I stammered as he leaned back to

look at me. — The joining process. Does this, uh, have to do with, um — I cleared my throat a little — this?

Grayson's eyes sparkled with amusement.

"You mean sex, man?" My cheeks flushed a dark red. I nodded.

Grayson licked his lips and smiled.

- Yes. It has to do with lots and lots of sex.

His voice was deeper than usual, and I noticed that his eyes were slowly getting darker the more we talked about the subject.

I shifted, uncomfortable with the thought of Grayson and me having sex.

He noticed that I was pulling away from him and immediately pulled closer.

"Nuh-uh, you're not going to run away from me. I don't care how nervous sex makes you.

I looked everywhere but his eyes. He didn't know it, but I had never had sex before. I just didn't have time for dating when my dad got sick.

The idea of having sex for the first time with someone who looked as experienced as Grayson made my stomach drop.

Grayson's hand found my chin and he lifted my head until my eyes met his.

"You have nothing to worry about, beautiful. Nothing will happen until you are one hundred percent ready and comfortable. And still, I will take care of you. I will always take care of you.

I relaxed a little, though the idea still made me nervous.

Hearing his words, I wanted to melt into a puddle.

He pressed his forehead against mine again, and we stayed like that for a while. It was interesting to look into his black eyes. It was like they were sucking me in.

I found myself reaching out and cupping his face. I ran my thumb under her eyes.

"Is that your wolf?" I asked quietly.

Grayson placed his hand over mine and turned his head to kiss my palm softly.

- Yes.

"Are you going to change into a wolf now?"

"No, don't worry about it. He's just watching you. I mean, he's always looking through my eyes. He is more present now because you are so close.

I continued to stare into his eyes as the black swirled around his irises like mist.

It was mesmerizing.

- What is he doing now?

"He's been worrying about you. He doesn't like to see you so sad. It also keeps reminding me of the fact that you haven't eaten or slept in days. He's mad at me for not taking care of you.

"Can he talk to you?"

Grayson shook his head.

- No. He does not speak. After all, he is a wolf. But, somehow, we understand each other. We are the same being. My wolf is me as much as I am him.

"Huh," I sighed, intrigued by whatever Grayson was saying. It was all very interesting.

"He likes that you're curious about him. He likes to captivate your attention.

- Serious?

"Yes, you make him very happy. — He put a lock of hair behind my ear. "You make us very happy.

I wasn't sure how to respond, so I just kept quiet.

"Belle," Grayson said, "I need you to know how sorry I am for everything you've been through since meeting me. I know how scary and distressing this has all been for you.

He squeezed my waist.

“And what's even worse is that I'm the cause of all your anguish. It kills me to see you so upset. I wish I had done all of this differently.

“It was just the circumstances under which we met that made it all so difficult. Just know that it was never supposed to be like this. I am really sorry.

He looked like he was carrying so much pain—like he was going to collapse at any moment. time.

I leaned closer to him. So I stopped for a moment.

What am I doing?

I realized that I wanted to comfort him.

The more time I spent with Grayson, the less afraid I felt. In fact, I was starting to trust him.

As strange as it seemed, trusting him felt natural. It looked easy.

It's like being in your arms.

And lying there, so close to Grayson, there was nothing I wanted more than just being with him.

“I'm sorry too,” I whispered.

He furrowed his brows.

“Why are you apologizing?

I sighed.

“I never gave you a chance. I was scared and I refused to hear. Even after you were so sweet to me, I refused to listen.

Grayson smiled slightly.

“As happy as I am to hear this, you had every right to be scared. I couldn't imagine being in your shoes.

His thumb began tracing circles around my hip bone as he held me around the waist. I moved closer to him.

“You were right,” I said.

He raised an eyebrow.

- About what? I looked deeply into his eyes.

"I found my way back to you.

His smile widened until it took over his entire face.

He didn't say anything, just pulled me closer, laying his forehead against mine.

He gently rubbed my nose and hummed contentedly.

I breathed in his essence and reveled in the feeling of being in his arms.

"Grayson? I asked after a few minutes.

He raised an eyebrow in response as his hands continued to dance across my skin.

"Can we, um, can we try something?"

He stopped for a moment.

"What do you want to try, baby?"

I took a deep breath and looked deeply into his eyes. So intense as he waited for me to speak.

"Um... I, um, well, can we...?"

He took my hand and intertwined our fingers.

He gave a gentle squeeze, telling me to keep going.

"Never mind," I snapped.

"Well, that won't work," Grayson said. He moved so that his face was hovering just a few inches above the my.

He put his hand on my waist.

— House.

I shook my head.

- No. It's not important.

His hand wandered under my shirt. I tried to stop him, but he said, "Are you ticklish, beautiful?"

I gaped at him. Was he planning to tickle me?

"I'm not ticklish," I said quickly.

He leaned in until his lips grazed my ear.

"I can feel when you lie, baby," he whispered. - Just tell me what you were gonna say and i'll do nothing.

"Seriously, it doesn't matter!" I promise!

"I don't believe you," he stated.

He moved his fingers against my skin in a way that made me laugh hysterically. I squirmed and grabbed his hands, but he continued to tickle me mercilessly.

- Stop! ' I yelled between giggles. "Grayson, stop!"

"Just tell me what you were going to say and I'll stop!"

- No no! - I laughed. - I'm not telling you! I tried to push him away from me, but he wouldn't budge.

He laughed with me.

- Just tell me! He started tickling me harder, and I nearly wet my pants laughing.

"Okay, okay!" "I finally gave up. "I was going to ask you to kiss me!"

Grayson immediately stopped and sat back.

I put my hand over my mouth. I couldn't believe I had just said that.

- What? Grayson asked in shock.

I couldn't even look at him. I was mortified.

"Well, I, um, I didn't mean that I, you know, wanted you to. kiss me, I just, um..."

Grayson's face was suddenly right in front of me.

"Thank God," he whispered.

And then he kissed me.

Chapter 18

BELLE

Grayson's lips moved against mine, smooth as silk. A satisfied growl escaped his throat as he moved to stand between my legs.

He ran his hands up and down my sides, igniting intense sparks that coursed through my entire body.

I wrapped my arms around his neck, tangling my fingers in his hair. He put his hands under my shirt and lifted it.

I immediately pulled away and grabbed his hands to get him to stop.

"Sorry," I said.

He also pulled back and looked at me. He smiled slightly and he rubbed his nose against mine.

"It's okay, beautiful. I'm not in a hurry.

I let out a sigh of relief and lay back on the bed.

"Thanks," I whispered.

Grayson smiled and lay down next to me. He moved me so that we were facing each other again and wrapped his arms tightly around me. He rubbed his face into my neck.

"I'm so glad you're feeling better. It hurt inside knowing how much pain you were in and knowing it was all my fault.

I agreed. I held her hand and played with her fingers. I traced the lines of his palm smoothly with my fingernails and smiled when he shuddered and pulled me closer.

"It wasn't all your fault. I pressed my face into his chest, feeling my cheeks heat up at my words. I couldn't believe what I was saying. "I was being stubborn.

I was just scared. But...

He cupped my face in his hands, turning me to look at him.

- But...? "He encouraged me to continue.

I sighed as I looked into his beautiful green eyes. I myself
you twitch nervously.

"But...do I kind of like you?"

His eyes flashed black for a second when a huge
smile appeared on his face.

- Do you like?

That wasn't the answer I wanted. I expected him to reciprocate my feelings, not
mock them. I buried my face in his neck and moaned.

"Hey, hey, hey," he chuckled, rubbing my back. "Belle, look at me. I shook my
head. "Belle, baby, look at me. He squeezed my side slightly.

I slowly lifted my head from his neck and looked up at him.
He smiled and placed his hand under my chin, then lifted my face and placed his lips
on mine.

He moved his mouth slowly and smoothly, letting his actions do the talking.
I could feel his passion in the kiss...lust and...love? I moaned softly.

He pulled away and looked at me once more.

"I'm so glad to hear you say that, Belle. And believe me, the
feeling is more than mutual.

I took a deep breath and shook my head nervously.

"Okay," I heard myself say.

OK? OK? Is that really how you answered, Belle? Ugh.

Grayson chuckled.

— OK.

Before I could give a better answer, he had buried his face in my neck, trailing
openmouthed kisses up and down.

And I mean open mouth kisses with tongue. I shuddered and gasped.

I licked my lips.

"Grayson? I asked shakily.

— Mmm? he murmured, never taking his lips from my neck.

"Um..." I cleared my throat. He was being a huge distraction. - Can I ask you something?

"Mmm...", he repeated. His lips were now on my jaw.

I smile a little.

"Will you stop kissing me so I can talk?" I pushed his shoulders slightly.

He smiled against my skin and kissed all the way to my ear. He dropped a kiss there and then whispered, "Babe, if it were up to me, I would never stop kissing you.

Something in my stomach tightened. I squirmed in his arms.

He groaned loudly.

"God, I can smell your perfume and you smell so...

He paused. He laid his forehead against mine and I noticed his eyes were black again.

"So good," he finished.

He kissed me again, this time harder. I sighed content and pressed my body against his.

He lifted himself up to stand above me and between my legs.

He grabbed the sides of my thighs and moved them until my legs were wrapped around his waist.

Our bodies moved in sync, as if we were magnets, pulling us closer and repelling each other. Grayson made my head spin and my entire being started to burn like never before.

And then, suddenly, his lips weren't on mine anymore.

I whimpered and tried to grab his body and bring him closer to mine, but he sat up and ran a hand through his hair as he kept his eyes on me.

I threw him a questioning look.

I'm pretty sure it was a complete mess — my hair

oily and matted from not washing or brushing in days, dark circles under my eyes, my chest heaving.

He swore under his breath, looking at me with his intense black eyes.

“This is getting difficult.

I cringed at your comment.

I knew he thought I looked gross. He could probably smell all the sweat and vomit that had come off my body the last few days, especially with his keen wolf sense of smell.

“Oh,” I whispered. I sat up and shifted until my back was against the headboard. “Sorry, I haven't showered in a while.

He laughed out loud, something that was becoming music to my ears. It seemed that everything was in its place in the world as long as Grayson kept laughing.

He slowly moved towards me and grabbed my ankles.

He pulled my body towards him with enough force to lie in bed. I let out a yelp of surprise.

He got back on top of me and placed his hands on either side of my head.

“That's not what I meant, my sweet, sweet Belle. You could never smell bad to me even if you were covered in garbage,” he said.

“What I meant was, it's getting hard not to devour you here, right now. You are making things very difficult.

His words were so intense, matching the fire in his eyes. He brushed his thumb across my lips.

Wait, is he talking about sex? Does he want to have sex with me? Oh God, I think that's what he meant. Oh God. Oh God. Oh God.

“Oh,” I said. - I'm very sorry.

He smiled.

“You have nothing to be sorry for. I have self-control. Only

I need to take some cold showers. I turn around.

I nodded slowly and swallowed. He sat next to me and groaned.

"You're going to be the death of me, Belle. He looked at me and wrapped his arm around my waist.

"Why don't you tell me what you wanted to ask?

"Oh, um," I laughed a little, grateful for the change of subject. "Actually, I was going to ask if I could have a shower." I feel really disgusting.

Grayson made a face.

"But then I have to let you out of my arms," he said.
grumbled.

I laughed.

- Yes. I am really sorry. I took his arm from around my waist.

"But seriously, I need to do this. I haven't showered since before I came to Paris.

Grayson

groaned, "Okay, okay." But please be quick. I don't know how long I'll last before I break down the door. And my wolf really wants you to sleep.

"I promise I'll be quick," I agreed. I didn't want to be away from him either.

I fled towards the foot of the bed.

I stopped for a moment before getting up. I took a deep breath I plucked up courage and quickly made my way back to Grayson.

I dropped a quick kiss on his cheek and pulled away from him before he could see my face turn red.

Grayson growled from deep in his chest.

"You're not making this easy, Belle.

I smiled as I stood up, proud of the effect I had on her.
he. I felt very fulfilled.

"I know," I said.

He growled again and I laughed.

I walked up to the bathroom door happily. But right before I walked in, I looked back at Grayson.

He was still lying on the bed with one arm behind his head.

He looked at me with that satisfied, lazy look on his face, like he didn't have a care in the world. He raised an eyebrow when I didn't go into the bathroom.

- What is it?

I shifted my weight slightly, playing with the hem of my shirt.

"I..." "Should I say that?" Probably not.

"I don't think I'm ready to be away from you.

I immediately stared at the ground, avoiding his gaze.

I heard him get up and walk towards me. When he stopped in front of me, he placed his fingers under my chin and lifted my head so I could look at him.

His eyes were the darkest I had ever seen them.

"Then let's take a shower."

Chapter 19

BELLE

Grayson put a hand on my back and pushed me towards the bathroom.

"Grayson, no!" That's not what I meant! Let's not shower together!

Grayson was silent as he walked to the shower and turned it on. He turned to me and placed his hands on either side of mine. face.

"We can keep our underwear if that makes you more comfortable."

He bent down to play with the hem of my shirt, never taking his eyes off mine.

I pushed his hand away.

- No! I'm not going to shower with you!

He wrapped his arms around me and gently brought me to close to your body. He leaned down and placed a kiss on my ear.

"Just let me take care of you." Please.

My heart melted. I took a deep breath.

"I...well, I..." I sighed, feeling defeated.

"I can't think of any excuses. But I'll stick with my underwear and you too!

He smiled and placed a quick kiss on my lips.

Then, without looking away from me, he took my shirt off and pushed my leggings to the floor.

I stepped out from between them, wearing only my bra and panties, then looked at Grayson. I felt vulnerable as his eyes roamed over my body.

I could feel the familiar sparks everywhere they played.

I tried to feel confident and stand my ground, but the more
The longer I stayed there with him looking at me, the more insecure I felt.

What if he didn't like the way I looked?

I wrapped my arms around my stomach and my shoulders slumped. It
wasn't fair that I was standing in front of him practically naked while he was still
fully clothed.

- Hey Hey hey. None of that.

He grabbed my hands and pushed them back to my sides, holding them
there.

"Never do that to me, Belle. Did you understand? Not with me.

His thumbs grazed my palms.

I nodded, still feeling incredibly small in front of him.

He kissed my forehead and then rested his chin on top of my head.

"Do you even know how beautiful you are, Belle?" - he
whispered.

I did not answer. I didn't know how.

"How the hell did I get so lucky?

An intense blush crept up my neck. I was pretty sure it looked like a tomato.

Grayson let out a chuckle.

"I don't think I'll ever get tired of that innocent blush of yours."

That just made me blush more.

I took a step away from him and tucked in a lock of hair.
loose behind my ear, trying to control my nervousness.

"Can we please just shower now?" - I asked.

Grayson riu.

"These words coming out of your mouth are like music to my ears.

I rolled my eyes and pushed his shoulder.

"Just take your clothes off!"

"Oh, those words are even better. Grayson waggled his eyebrows suggestively.

Eu ship.

"Okay, that's enough!" You can go out. I'm going to shower alone. — passed by him, trying to get into the shower.

He grabbed my wrist and pulled me back to his chest.

"Okay, okay," he said. "No more jokes, I promise.

I narrowed my eyes. "One more and you're out there."

He raised his hands in surrender. He then slowly brought her hands to the opening of her sweatpants and tugged at the drawstrings.

My eyes widened and I immediately turned around.

"Belle," Grayson said through a laugh. "You can look if you like. My body is yours as much as your body is mine. Look at ease.

I waved my hand dismissively without turning around.

"Okay," I said nervously.

The truth was, I really wanted to look, but the fact that all I wanted to do was turn around and run my eyes over her luscious abdomen scared the shit out of me.

The intense attraction she felt for him was starting to weigh on her. my mind. Things needed to slow down between us—like a lot.

I was thinking about it right before I got in the shower with him...
Opa?

I felt his hands gently slide down the sides of my ribcage in a smooth, gentle motion.

A shiver ran down my spine.

Then I felt his warm breath on the back of my neck.

"You don't know what you're missing," he whispered in my ear.

I gasped when I felt him reach down and kiss the mark on my neck. I closed my eyes and instinctively leaned against him, unaware of my own movements.

He wrapped his arms around my waist and squeezed.

"Belle? he asked, his face still buried in my neck.

— Mmm? I said breathlessly.

"Are you going to get in the shower?"

"Oh," I laughed nervously. I took a step forward, putting some distance between us. - Yes.

I walked over to the shower and leaned over to turn it on, testing the temperature of the water with my hand before stepping under the jet. The hot water felt wonderful and I moaned as my muscles relaxed.

I heard Grayson move towards me.

"Wait," I said before he got in the shower.

I turned to look at him. I kept my gaze above her neck, refusing to let my eyes roam her luscious body. He raised an eyebrow in question.

"This is weird," I said.

- What?

I huffed, irritated.

"Stay there," I said.

I closed the sliding shower door, which, thankfully, wasn't transparent.

So I took a deep breath...

I lifted my hands behind my back and unzipped my bra, and then slowly slid my panties down my legs.

I knew Grayson was looking at me through the glass and that he could see the outline of my body because there was a loud growling noise coming from outside the shower.

I grabbed my bra and panties and threw them over the door so that hang there, wet.

I looked at Grayson through the glass. The contours of his body were moving, and I could hear his deep, rapid breathing.

- Then? - I asked. My voice shook a little, but I tried look confident. - You come?

A groan came from the other side of the glass.

"Dear Moon Goddess, give me strength," he whispered softly.

There was a sound and then I watched the glass door slowly open as Grayson stepped into the shower.

I didn't look down, but I knew he was naked too. I swallowed
em dry.

Before his eyes could slide over my body, I grabbed his chin and forced him to meet my gaze.

"Eyes up here, got it?" One peek and you're out.

He nodded and growled, his eyes darkening more and more with each passing second.

I watched his eyes warily.

"Are you going to change into a wolf?"

He chuckled darkly.

"There's no way my wolf is going to take over while you're wet and naked in front of me.

He rested his hands on my waist, maintaining eye contact.

"Besides, I would never allow that.

I swallowed hard.

"Turn around, baby," he whispered. "Let me take care of you.

He turned me around at the waist and then gently pressed my back into his body.

I gasped when I made contact with his, you know, um, thing, and he he let out a deafening growl.

I tried to step forward, but he tightened his grip on me and let out a warning growl. I froze when he took the shampoo.

— I can wash myself.

- No. It is customary in werewolf culture for mates to bathe each other. My wolf desperately wants to clean you up and take care of you. Just let it happen naturally.

I sighed and shook my head.

— OK.

I noticed he got the men's shampoo instead of the hotel shampoo.

— You should use the hotel shampoo. I don't want to smell of a man," I said.

"No," Grayson said sharply. - I want you to smell like me as much as possible. This is the shampoo I use.

I nodded again, not really having the energy to argue with him.

He put some shampoo in his hand and ran his fingers through my hair. He spread the shampoo throughout my hair, massaging my skull with his fingers.

I groaned loudly as all the tension left my body.

I leaned into his touch and closed my eyes in absolute bliss. He moved me to rinse the shampoo and then repeated the process with the conditioner.

Then he took a bar of soap and soaped my body.

He massaged the soap into every inch of my body. I would smack his hands whenever he tried to touch any area that was considered a little too personal.

He would just laugh and playfully nibble my ear or neck and then move on to another part of my body.

When he was done, he placed me under the stream of water and rinsed off all the soap.

I turned and looked into his pitch black eyes. he touched my cheek gently.

"You have no idea how much I want to kiss you right now.

I shifted my weight to the side.

"After I wash you," I said, picking up the shampoo.

"You don't have to do this. I'll probably need a cold shower after this anyway. His voice was gravelly, much huskier than usual.

I shook my head, trying not to let his words get to me.

I put some of the shampoo in the palm of my hand, rubbing until

form a foam.

I wanted to do for Grayson what he had done for me.

I reached up and massaged the shampoo into her hair. Grayson grunted in approval and gripped my waist tightly. His height made it difficult to do a good job.

“You're too tall,” I grumbled. “Down.
He smiled.

- The pleasure is mine.

He knelt down until his face was right in front of my stomach.

Well, that's not what I wanted him to do.

I figured he'd just bend over so he'd have better access to his hair.

“You're not leaving your eyes where I told you to,” I said. The steam in here must have messed with my brain because I definitely wasn't thinking straight.

“I noticed,” he said, not moving an inch. I snorted.

Strange as it may seem, I wasn't angry or embarrassed to be in the shower with Grayson.

Being this close to him felt instinctive—like a second nature.

He placed his hands on my hips as I continued to massage the shampoo into his hair. Groaning softly, he rested his forehead on my stomach.

He gripped my hips harder when I used my fingernails to scratch your scalp.

I grabbed the detachable shower head and held it over her hair to rinse all the shampoo out. As I was about to put conditioner in his hair, he started kissing around my belly button.

I pulled his face away a little.

“Stop,” I chuckled as he teased, rubbing his nose around the my belly. “You're distracting me too much.

“I know,” he said again and continued to kiss me.

I huffed in annoyance but went back to conditioning her hair.

When I finally finished, I took a step away from him. He growled.

“Get up so I can wash the rest of you,” I ordered.

He did as I said but grabbed my hand gently before I could start soaping his body.

“As much as I would love to have your soapy little fingers running up and down my body, I don't think my wolf or I can take any longer of this sweet torture. Not without doing something we might regret.

“Oh,” I said. And I looked away from him, unable to meet his tender gaze. - OK.

He gave me a soft kiss on the lips and turned off the shower.

He left before me and came back with a towel wrapped tightly around me. around her waist and another in her hand.

I stood there covering all my important parts as he approached me with a gentle expression. He wrapped the towel around my shoulders.

His hand came and brushed my wet hair from my face.

“Well, that was the best shower I've ever had,” he said.

I laughed.

“Of course you would say that. I'm sure you say that to every girl you bring into the shower with you.

I felt my shoulders slump at my words. I didn't like the idea of him being with other girls.

- No. Only with you.

I met your eyes. He smiled.

"How about we get dressed, eat a little, rest, and then we take a walk around Paris? Have you been here before?

I shook my head.

“Not since I was little and it was only for one day. I couldn't see anything.

He flashed a beaming smile.

“Well, I'll give you the best Paris experience you've ever had.

Chapter 20

BELLE

After our hot shower, Grayson dressed me in one of his shirts and a pair of sweatpants, even after I told him I could wear my own clothes.

He ignored my request, saying something about feeling better with me wearing his clothes.

Then he stood there for several minutes and told me he was debating with his wolf whether we should eat first or sleep.

I wanted to sleep, so I was glad when Grayson took me to the bed.

But honestly, I probably would have gone to sleep regardless of whether he told me if I could or not.

I tried to keep some distance from him while we slept, but he wouldn't let me.

When we lay down, he grabbed me around the waist and pulled me close so I was lying on his chest.

His arms wrapped around me tightly and our legs intertwined.

It was by far the best sleep of my life. Not that I would say that to him. He doesn't need a bigger ego.

I woke up to the feel of Grayson playing with my hair as I lay on his chest.

My entire body hummed with electricity and contentment.

I remembered a few days ago when I first met him and how absolutely terrified I was.

I had every right to be terrified.

And I didn't regret pushing Grayson away, even though I hurt us both more than I could imagine.

It gave me time to think. It gave me time to really

accept our bond and the connection we had.

There was no denying the bond between us now.

I was one hundred percent certain that Grayson was my mate and that I was his. I was tired of denying it. I tilted my head at him and smiled.

- Good morning.

He smiled at me and kissed my forehead.

“Actually, good afternoon. It's like four o'clock in Paris now. 4 pm?
How

is this possible?

I sat up and looked out the window. Sure enough, it was dark outside.

- Oh my God. How long do we sleep?

He shrugged, turning onto his side.

- I am not sure. I'm glad you got some rest. My
wolf was getting ready to sit on you again.

He reached out and tucked a strand of hair behind my ear.

I laughed again, thinking about the last time he'd done this: he almost crushed my lungs.

“Well, I'm glad he didn't.

Grayson sat up and hugged me again.

- Come here. I'm not ready to let her out of my arms. “He lay down and took me with him. I laughed. On pure instinct, I reached up and kissed her lips. When I pulled away, my eyes widened as I realized what I had just done.

“I didn't mean to do that.

Grayson growled and pulled me closer when I tried to pull away.

“Trust me, mate, I didn't mind one bit.
You can kiss me whenever you want.

I rolled my eyes.

“I knew you'd say that. You only like to kiss me because I am

his supposed companion.

"Even if you weren't my mate, girl, I would still be extremely attracted to you. People only come together when they form a good couple, even without the bond.

"The bond just makes it easier for us to come together and know at a glance that we're meant for each other. This speeds up the process.

His eyes darkened a little.

"Besides, it makes sex ten times better."

I gasped and tried to push him away, but his arms were like steel traps.

"Is your mind always thinking about nonsense?"

He smiled.

"Baby, you're on top of me, straddling me, wearing my clothes. How could my mind not think of bullshit?"

I didn't know what to say, but thankfully my stomach answered for me. He let out a loud snort. I blushed.

Grayson riu.

"Come on, let's get some food inside you."

As we walked down the stairs, he kept one hand on my back, making sure at least a part of him was always touching me.

I never thought I'd say this, but I was glad he kept physical contact.

The thought of feeling pain again—the pain I felt when he wasn't around—terrified me. Kyle was already in the kitchen when we entered. He smiled at me and wiggled his eyebrows.

"Well, it's good to see you're feeling better, Lu..."

"Don't talk to her until she's eaten," Grayson snapped, cutting Kyle off completely.

I gaped at him, but he kept pushing me towards the table, where a bunch of food for breakfast was laid out, although it was closer to dinner.

I stopped in my tracks and turned to look at Grayson.

"Excuse me, he can talk to me if he wants to." You need to stop bossing people around.

I noticed that Grayson's eyes were black again. I knew then that I probably shouldn't get him mad. Without saying a word, he scooped me up in his arms, bride style, and carried me to the mesa.

He sat up, keeping me on his lap.

"No," he said. - Food! He pushed a plate in front of me and nodded toward it, signaling for me to get some. When I squirmed in his lap, he tightened his arms around me and growled loudly in my ear. I shuddered.

Clearly, Grayson wasn't in the mood for arguments.

I gave Kyle an apologetic look, which he returned with a shrug and a smile that said he dealt with this kind of thing all the time.

Grayson grabbed my chin gently and moved my head to that I was looking at him.

"Don't pay attention to Kyle. With the.

I rolled my eyes.

"Bossy isn't he?"

Grayson squeezed my hips in warning, and I smirked as I grabbed some food.

I could feel his warm breath on my ear as he ate, and it only made me squirm in his lap even more.

— Tomorrow we're going to the best restaurant in Paris.

I glared at him as I took a big bite of a croissant.

"So you've been here before?"

He nodded, then grabbed my wrist and brought the croissant in my hand to his mouth, taking a giant bite out of it.

- Hey! I exclaimed, pulling the croissant back. "Get your own croissant!"

He smiled.

"But the one in your hand tastes much better."

I heard a gagging noise coming from behind us and looked over to see Kyle pretending to throw up.

Grayson growled softly.

"Careful," he said. "You were no better than that when you met Elijah."

I raised my eyebrows.

"Have you met your mate yet?"

Kyle nodded and smiled dreamily.

"Yes, about two years ago. His name is Elijah."

My heart melted a little at Kyle's expression. I was happy to see him happy. I wondered if Grayson felt, or would feel, the same way about me.

Or if I would ever feel this way about Grayson.

Grayson put his chin on my shoulder and poured himself some coffee.

"To answer your question, Kyle and I go to Paris once a week, year for the annual Alpha Conference.

"Kyle is my gamma, my third-in-command, so he accompanies me. My beta, or second-in-command, Adalee, stays behind with the pack. She keeps an eye on things while we're gone.

"Paris has the largest werewolf community in the world, so it makes sense that most of the world's alphas would meet here. He smiled a little. "That's probably why

everyone says the people of Paris have a reputation for being so mean.

I laughed.

"This is really hilarious. — I started to play with some fruits, so I stopped. "How long are you staying?"

Kyle spoke this time:

"We were only supposed to stay for two days. He looked at Grayson. "But someone has forced us to stay.

"He's just grumpy because he's never been away from his mate for more than five minutes," Grayson said.

"Of course I'm grumpy!" Would you like to be away from Belle for two weeks?

Grayson growled at his words and held me against his chest.

"Mmm, that's what I thought," Kyle muttered.

"Wait, two weeks? No, no, no! I pulled away from Grayson and got to my feet.

"I was only supposed to be in Paris for five days! I have a job I need to get back to! I have friends who will be worried about me!

"Belle, come here," Grayson said. He kept his arms open, still sitting, gesturing for me to sit on his lap.

"Come on, it'll help you calm down—you know it will. I looked at him warily. His arms open like that, welcoming me, were so tempting that I couldn't help but give in.

I practically jumped into his arms and buried my face in his neck, soaking up whatever comfort he could give.

"I need to go home," I whispered.

- I know. And you go. I'll take you home soon, I promise. But we're going to stay one more night in Paris and you'll enjoy being here without worrying about when to go home.

I lifted my face from his neck.

"Grayson, I have a job to go to. I have rent to pay. I need to go home now," I said half panicked.

Grayson ran his hand up and down my back a comforting way.

"I'll take care of everything. I have a lot of power that you don't know. Any issues you may have when we get back will be taken care of. I promise.

- What do you mean? How could you...

"Just trust me, beautiful. I will take care of you. You have nothing to worry about. One more day in Paris, that's all I ask.

Tomorrow I want to make you fall in love with this city.

I took a deep breath as I looked into his eyes that looked so sincere.

I had responsibilities I needed to get back to. I was supporting myself — I had no one else to do it for me. I had to keep a roof over my own head now that my dad was gone.

But I couldn't help but trust Grayson's words.

I sighed.

- OK. One more day. But day after tomorrow, I need to be on one plane back home.

Grayson

smiled. - Excellent. Now eat some more. He turned me onto his lap so I was facing the table again. I rolled my eyes at his bossy tone but did as he told me.

"So where are you from?" I asked through my mouth.
full of delicious pastry.

"Minnesota," Grayson said as he took a sip of coffee. "The northern part, deep inside the forest.

"I'm from Minnesota too!" - I said.

Grayson nodded.

"I noticed that since we were both at the Minneapolis-Saint Paul airport. What part of Minnesota?"

I opened my mouth to tell him, but stopped myself. What if I finally changed my mind and decided I wanted to leave? Then I would definitely regret telling him.

I was from Minneapolis, but I decided I wouldn't tell him that.

"Winona," I said, blurting out the first city that came to mind. - It's in the south.

Grayson narrowed his eyes, but nodded. Could he know that I was lying?

"So we're four to five hours away from each other," he determined.

I looked away and continued nervously eating my food. "Yes, I think so.

The hand on my hip tightened as if Grayson wanted to question me, but he didn't say anything else.

We continued to eat in awkward silence.

Kyle finally sat down and ate with us when Grayson decided I probably couldn't finish the massive amount of food on the table.

Once I finished my coffee, I leaned back against Grayson's chest and rubbed my full stomach.

Grayson's chest rumbled behind me and he leaned in to kiss the top of my head.

"Are you ready for a night in Paris?"

Chapter 21

BELLE

"So where are we going?" I asked Grayson as we walked out of the hotel lobby.

"Well, first we need a taxi," he said. He walked towards the street and hailed a cab with ease.

"Wait, why don't we just walk? It's a very pleasant night.

Grayson opened the cab door for me.

"We're on a tight schedule, love. "He signaled to me. come in.

Seeing no point in arguing, I got in the car and Grayson got in. behind me. He had a plan.

The driver said something to us in French, which I assumed was him asking where we were going.

Taking me by surprise, Grayson gave him the location at which it sounded like perfect French.

- Do you speak French? I asked him, shocked.

"I can speak several languages," he replied, as if it was no big deal. "It's normal for an Alpha to learn to speak different languages. This makes it easier to communicate with other packs around the world.

I nodded and quickly reached for my seat belt as the car pulled away from the curb. How the hell could one person be so perfect?

He was handsome, strong, kind and smart. what the hell is he possibly see in me?

Before I could buckle my seat belt, Grayson wrapped his muscular arm around my shoulders and pulled my body into his. He stroked my hair.

"You will sit here. I'm not ready to be away from you yet.

"There's literally less than a foot between us.

Grayson shrugged.

- Very far away.

I decided not to argue, instead I settled contentedly on his chest.

Grayson's vast expanse and watched the beautiful streets of Paris pass by outside the window.

As we were on our way to our destination, the driver was looking at ourselves in the rearview mirror whenever possible.

I squirmed, uncomfortable.

I wasn't sure why he was watching us, but he seemed extremely interested in whatever we were doing.

Grayson was too busy playing with my hair and rubbing my leg to notice. But he immediately stiffened when he saw my discomfort. He followed my gaze to the driver.

His eyes narrowed and he let out a rumbling growl that made me shudder.

The driver took a startled breath and quickly looked away, keeping your eyes glued to the street for the rest of the trip.

As soon as we got out of the cab, I turned to Grayson and poked him in the chest.

"You need to stop growling at people.

Grayson wrapped an arm around my shoulder and guided me down the street. He snorted.

"I have to be the only one who can look out for you.

"Was that really why he was looking at us?"

He sighed.

- No. As beautiful as you are, I'm sure he was just curious about the girl on the Alpha's arm. He was probably wondering if you were my mate. It would be serious business if they found out I'd found my mate.

"Was he a werewolf?" I asked, in shock.

- Yes. As I said before, Paris has one of the largest populations

of werewolves in the world.

"Yes, I'm still trying to figure it out. This is crazy. And did he know who you were?"

Grayson smiled.

"I don't mean to brag or anything, but your mate is a very important in the world of werewolves.

I rolled my eyes.

"Looks like he's humble too.

He growled playfully in my ear, nibbling on it gently. I laughed.

He pulled up in front of a fancy liquor store and opened the door for me. I gave him a skeptical look as I entered.

The store was filled with custom-built wooden cabinets with countless varieties of wine. It was the definition of elegance. Everything was immaculate.

I felt a little out of place in my jeans, sweater, and coat I bought for ten bucks at a thrift store.

My eyes widened when I noticed the price on the bottle closest to me. It was seven hundred dollars.

I looked at Grayson.

- What are you doing?

He just winked at me and grabbed my hand as I pulled through the store, completely ignoring my question.

He walked over to a man in a suit who was setting up a display case on a table. The man looked at us and smiled as we approached.

He said something in French, to which Grayson replied in English, "I'd like your best bottle of wine." He hugged me, bringing me closer to him.

The man just smiled and nodded, unfazed. Obviously, this happened often. He walked to the back, where he passed through a door.

"The best bottle of wine?" I asked Grayson. - Will not

be too expensive?

Grayson shrugged.

"It's nothing I can't buy, I promise.

I turned to him.

"Are you planning on spending hundreds of dollars on a bottle of wine?"

"Probably thousands," he said nonchalantly.

My jaw dropped to the floor.

"Thousands?"

Grayson smiled, placing his hands on my waist.

- It's really not a big deal. I've spent a lot more than that before.

"Could be, but have you ever spent that much on a bottle of wine?"

Before he could respond, the man came back holding two bottles of wine.

"These are the two I would recommend, sir. This one comes from..

"Let's take the cheapest one," I interrupted immediately.

The man looked a little surprised, but quickly masked his shock.

"Of course, miss. "He brought one of the bottles.

"This will be the cheapest, eight thousand US dollars.

- What? - I choked.

"We'll take it," Grayson said.

I turned to him.

"You can't buy that.

Grayson raised an eyebrow and gave me an amused smile.

- And why not?

I looked at the man standing in front of us.

"Would you excuse us for a moment?"

The man nodded.

- Yes of course.

I grabbed Grayson's arm and pulled him towards the front of the store.

"I won't let you buy this," I stated.

"Belle, you deserve only the best. And I'll give it to you.
Starting with the best wine money can buy.

"I don't even like wine, Grayson. There are so many better things
you can do with that money.

He raised an eyebrow.

- Like what?

"Like donations. It would serve a real purpose rather than paying for
an overpriced bottle of grape juice.

He didn't look convinced.

"Okay, fine, if you really want to make me happy, then give me your
credit card and I'll buy the wine.

Grayson looked very confused.

"Will this make you happy?" Buy the wine alone?

I nodded and held out my hand.

He still looked skeptical, but even so, he slowly reached into his
pocket and pulled out his wallet. Then he handed me the credit card.

And I ran out the front door of the liquor store.

Chapter 22

BELLE

I ran down the street as fast as my legs could carry me, still clutching Grayson's credit card in my hand.

I thought I saw a grocery store when we got out of the cab earlier, and luckily, I was right. It's

where I needed to go. I ran faster.

I didn't look back to see if Grayson was following. I had no doubt that he would catch up with me.

In fact, I expected him to catch up. I had given up on staying away.

But first, I had to get to that supermarket.

I knocked on the store doors and smiled brightly. It only took a second to feel arms around my waist. I was pulled back into a firm chest.

"Where do you think you're going? Grayson growled in my ear.

I turned to face him and wrapped my arms around his neck, smiling. He looked taken aback by my display of affection.

"Took a while to catch up to me," I said.

He tightened his arms around me.

"I wanted to see where you were going.

"Weren't you afraid I'd run away and spend all your money on you?" money? I said, waving the credit card in his face.

- What's mine is yours. You'll never crave anything, ever again. You can spend as much of my money as you like.

I stared at him for a moment. I never had enough money to spend on anything other than what was strictly necessary.

Sometimes I didn't even have enough to buy food.

I lost count of how many times I went to bed hungry after my dad got sick.

Back home, I was just starting to be able to support myself.

I rented a small one-room apartment and was paying for it with a lousy waitressing job. It wasn't the most luxurious life, but it was enough for me.

And I was very proud of the fact that I was doing all of this alone, supporting myself.

Of course, sometimes I didn't have enough money to buy groceries. But maybe now that I no longer had to save my entire paycheck for a plane ticket to Paris, I could finally start living instead of just surviving.

Of course, that was before I missed my flight home and failed to show up for several shifts I was scheduled for. Shifts I needed to pay my rent...which was already due.

I didn't even want to think about how I was going to pay for another flight home. I figured maybe I wouldn't get groceries for a while yet.

I remembered that I had peanut butter in the cupboard and I could always steal some chips off people's plates in the cafeteria if I still had a job.

Hopefully my boss would understand. That would have to be enough for now.

When I didn't respond, Grayson squeezed my sides.

“Why did you come here anyway?”

I smiled.

“If you need your sour grape juice, this is the only place I'll let you get it.”

He raised an eyebrow, looking amused. - And even?

I agreed.

- Yes. And I have to choose.

He shook his head, looking like he was going to protest.

— Belle

I cut him off, crushing my lips against his. Grayson let out a grunt of surprise but didn't protest.

A low growl came from deep in his chest, and he immediately deepened the kiss, pulling my body against his.

Knowing how quickly things could get worse when it came to kissing Grayson, I pulled my lips away from his when I felt him run his tongue across the opening of my lips, asking for entrance.

He groaned in disapproval and tried to kiss me again, but I placed my hand over her mouth as a barrier. he growled.

"Give me what I want and I'll kiss you again," I said.

He narrowed his eyes and I slowly removed my hand.

"You're lucky to be my mate," he said in a low voice that said his wolf was close to the surface.

"If someone else tried to manipulate me like that, I would put them on back in their places in seconds in the most painful way possible.

I swallowed hard.

He leaned in so his lips were almost brushing mine. "It's a good thing

I'd do anything to have your sweet lips on my mine," he whispered.

I could feel my cheeks heating up. Grayson laughed softly.

"Come on, let's get your wine." He pushed me toward one of the hallways.

After choosing a reasonably priced bottle of wine for about six euros, I glanced at Grayson.

"Okay, we have the wine. And now?"

Grayson had an arm wrapped possessively around my waist, his thumb rubbing my flank.

"Now let's get the bread." — He pushed me over to where the bread was located.

- Bread? Why do we need it? What are you up to? - I asked.

Grayson smiled.

"I was really surprised when you came here. This place was our next stop.

- Same? Why?

Grayson picked up a pretty baguette.

— Let's buy French bread and cheese.

'Wine, bread and cheese?' Shall we have a picnic? - I asked. I looked out. "The sun is almost down.

Grayson shrugged.

"Guess you'll just have to wait and see."

After purchasing our wine, bread, and five different types of cheese, Grayson and I hopped into a taxi and headed to our next destination.

Which by chance was the Eiffel Tower.

When I stepped out of the cabin, I couldn't help but gape at the massive cast-iron structure. It was much bigger than I had imagined.

"Wow," I said. — This is my second time in Paris and I just now managed to see the Eiffel Tower.

Grayson came up behind me and wrapped his arms around me, leaning down to place his chin on my shoulder.

"I'm happy to be here with you for the first time you can see the tower," he said. He kissed my cheek softly and then held my hand.

- Let's go. — He led me towards a bench.

There were already people seated when we approached, but when they saw Grayson, they immediately got up and ran away, muttering, "Sorry, Alpha.

"Why don't we sit on that bench?" - I asked, pointing to an empty bench.

"It had to be this bench," Grayson said sharply as we sat down.

Mr. Bossy, as usual.

I was finally starting to enjoy my time with

Grayson, but maybe that was because I knew the end was near. Soon I would go back to work and try to forget all about my trip to Paris.

I shook my head to get rid of that thought, returning to the present.

The sun was starting to set, painting the sky in beautiful shades of pinks, purples and oranges.

There were people sitting around us, looking up at the tower.

I noticed that several other people were also arriving, arranging blankets on the grass and sitting on benches around.

"Why are there so many people?" I asked as I looked around.

"You'll see," Grayson said.

I raised an eyebrow but didn't say anything.

He opened the paper bag that contained wine, bread, and cheese and took them all out. I tried to grab the bread, but he took it out of my reach.

I fixed him with a questioning look.

He looked at the clock.

"Just a few more seconds.

And then our night became truly magical.

Chapter 23

BELLE

The Eiffel Tower glowed with a million twinkling lights. It was breathtaking.

The radiant monument flashed across Paris, casting a warm yellow glow as we all stared at him.

I couldn't help the smile that crept over my face. "Is this what you've been waiting for? I asked Grayson.

He nodded as he watched me, giving me a smile that took my breath away.

"When I was a kid, my mom and I used to come here every year after the Alpha Conference and watch the lights come on. She would take me to that store we went to and buy the most expensive bottle of wine they had.

"Afterwards, we'd go buy some bread and cheese at the grocery store down the street, and then we'd sit here and watch the Eiffel Tower light up under the stars.

"She even let me drink my own glass of wine. It was one of my favorite days of the year — one of the reasons I love Paris so much. "I've never seen this side of Grayson before. I'd seen him as an aggressive lover and as my caretaker, but I'd never seen him vulnerable.

I didn't even know this strong, possessive Alpha male had a vulnerable side.

I was thrilled knowing that Grayson was willing to sharing that side with me—made me like him even more.

- What? he asked suddenly.

It snapped me out of my daze of wonder.

- What? I asked back.

He chuckled.

"You were looking at me. Not that I minded. I just I would like to know what you were thinking.

I blushed. She couldn't let him know that she was thinking about how much she cared about him.

"Nothing," I said quickly. "I was just imagining what a beautiful scene it must have been, you and your mother sitting under the stars in Paris.

He nodded and looked at the tower solemnly.

- Yes. He was.

'She's not coming with you to Paris anymore?'

His eyes gleamed and he was quiet for a moment.

- No. She and my father died almost five years ago.

"Oh, Grayson, I'm so sorry. "I put my hand on his shoulder. "I can see how much they meant to you. It must have been terrible.

He took a deep breath and then turned his head to place a kiss on my hand.

- It was a long time. There is no need to dwell on the past.

He bent down to serve our food and wine.

"I try to do this every year to honor her memory. He opened the wine and held the bottle out to me. "And now you can join me."

I smiled.

- I am honored.

We spent the next few hours talking and drinking our bottle of cheap wine.

Soon all the people around us were gone, just Grayson and I stood there, looking at the city lights ahead of us.

The Eiffel Tower lights went out for the night, but Grayson and I continued talking about anything and everything.

Talking to him was so easy.

We spent the whole night like that, and the moment the sun rose no horizon, I was completely delighted with Grayson.

I was lying on the bench with my head in his lap as he played with my hair when he finally said, "Do you want to get some coffee?" I know a great place down the street.

I smiled and shook my head.

Once in the cafe, Grayson told me to find a seat while he placed our order, but I quickly grabbed his hand, pulling him back to me.

Grayson shot me a questioning look.

"Don't leave me," I said quickly, afraid of the pain I might feel if I didn't have contact with him again. I didn't think I could handle it.

My cheeks reddened at the plea, but Grayson just smiled. He reached up and pushed a strand of hair behind my ear.

"We've been together long enough for our bond to grow stronger. Nothing will happen now if we're apart. Nothing but a dull ache.

My eyebrows rose in surprise.

- He is sure? I asked nervously.

Grayson leaned over and kissed my forehead.

- I am sure. And if you feel any kind of pain, all you have to do is come close to me and touch me, and it will all go away. I'll be just a few steps away.

He tried to pull away slowly, but I didn't let go of his hand.

"I, um..." I gripped his hand tighter. I didn't want to be away from him, not even a little bit.

"I think I'd feel better if I went with you."

Grayson didn't protest. Instead, his face split into a breathtaking smile.

He wrapped me in his arms and pulled me to him, nestling his face in my hair and breathing deeply.

“I'm more than satisfied with that.

Chapter 24

BELLE

After eating our coffees and croissants, Grayson and I wandered the streets of Paris, talking and watching the city wake up.

I was beginning to understand why Paris was considered such a romantic city.

I can definitely imagine myself falling in love here.

We walked to Notre-Dame cathedral and sat on the steps for a bit before going to lunch at a very fancy restaurant nearby.

I felt awkward sitting there in my jeans and sweater, but the food was worth any discomfort I might have had.

"Oh my God, that was amazing! - I said when I finished eat.

"I told you I'd take you to the best restaurant in Paris," Grayson said.

"Yeah, well, you didn't lie.

Our waiter appeared and left the bill.

"When they're ready," he said in a thick French accent and then walked away.

I grabbed the check, ready to pay any price since Grayson had paid for our food last night and our coffee this morning, but he snatched it away before I could touch it.

"No," he said firmly.

I rolled my eyes.

"Grayson, please let me pay for this. You've already spent too much. I'll feel terrible if you don't at least let me buy you lunch.

He was already reaching into his pocket for his wallet.

- No way. As long as you're with me, you never

will pay for nothing. In fact, I'll make sure you never have to pay for anything again.

I scoffed. No way would I let that happen.

"At least let me pay for my food, how about that?" It will make me feel better and not like I'm taking advantage of you, stealing all your money.

"You can argue as much as you like; This will not happen.

He placed his card along with the bill and held it up to the waiter to see. But before he closed the folder, I glimpsed the price of the meal.

My eyes widened. Maybe it was better if I didn't pay.

My meal alone would have cost me several hours at the cafeteria.

"Where do you get all that money, anyway?" - I asked.

Then I realized what I had just said.

"Oh, sorry, was that a rude question?"

- No, it was not. My family owns a large hunting company with thousands of workers who keep my pack afloat and then some. We provide live and dead animals for anyone who wants to buy them.

At that moment our waiter appeared. He approached our table when he saw Grayson waving.

"Please take this away before my date tries to pay again," Grayson said in an amused tone, handing the man the folder.

I looked at him.

When the waiter left, I asked:

"So you kill animals?"

Grayson chuckled and took my hand across the table.

"Don't look so scared, beautiful. It is the circle of life. And I have to provide for my pack somehow.

"Besides, what else would you expect from a pack of werewolves?" We already hunted in our wolf forms to keep them sane. We might as well make some money out of it.

I still didn't like the idea, but I decided not to discuss it.

Once Grayson had officially paid for our meal, we got up and left the restaurant, continuing our exploration of Paris.

I had never walked so far in my life; my feet were starting to hurt, but I didn't want my time with Grayson to end. Everything felt so magical.

"This day doesn't even seem real. It was probably the best day of my life," I told Grayson, my voice full of sincerity.

Grayson nodded in agreement and smiled.

- Just wait. Tomorrow, I'm taking you to the Louvre. You will be delighted.

I stopped walking.

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

Grayson glared at me.

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

"Do you own a private jet?" I asked in complete shock.

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

He shrugged.

"I just bought it yesterday." I always had this weird stubbornness at the time than buying my own jet, I have always preferred commercial flights.

"I couldn't understand until I met you on that plane. It was because fate was preparing me to meet her.

He walked over and pulled me into his chest, placing a kiss on my forehead.

"Now, there's no reason why I shouldn't have my own jet. Will be much more convenient. His body shuddered with laughter.

"Besides... I'm kind of not allowed to set foot in the MSP or the Paris airport anymore after what happened on the last flight. "I was blown away by him.

- Well done! You nearly killed a man!

Grayson laughed again.

"I'll say it one more time. He deserved. No one looks at what's mine.

I huffed and pushed him away from me.

"You're a Neanderthal.

I continued walking and he quickly caught up with me, holding my hand and kissing the back of it.

"I'll be a Neanderthal as long as you stay by my side.

I blushed a deep red.

I thought about what he said. I couldn't stay another day in Paris. I had to go home...

I was already risking getting kicked out of my apartment for not paying the rent.

In fact, I would probably get evicted.

I hadn't worked in so long that I probably couldn't pay the rent. Which meant I had to find a way to escape Grayson and get back to Minnesota.

Perhaps I could convince the airline to rebook my return flight cheaper?

I didn't bother to say anything to Grayson. I knew he would just try to talk me out of going.

I was sad to think that I would have to go home tomorrow and carry on with my mediocre job at the cafeteria, with my annoying boss.

But I knew this bizarre and beautiful dream couldn't last forever, as much as part of me wanted it to.

As we continued to walk, Grayson wrapped his arm around my waist, pulling me closer to him and looking down at me with a satisfied smile.

It made me feel warm in my chest.

He's getting really attached to me. Upon realizing this, that warm feeling left my heart.

There was no way this relationship was going to continue once we got back to Minnesota.

Of course, we lived only a few hours away from each other, but I didn't have a car, so there was no way I could get to him. And I wouldn't force him to drive to me every time I wanted to see him.

I would feel very guilty.

I knew with the feelings he aroused in me, leaving him and going back to real life would only get harder for me.

The thought made me stop...

Grayson also stopped and looked at me.

- What it was?

I took a deep breath and wrapped my arms around myself. same.

"This isn't a date," I said firmly. The words hurt to say, but I kept my composure.

Grayson raised his eyebrows.

- Sorry?

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

He licked his lips and approached me slowly. - And even?

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

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

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

He leaned down so that his lips touched my ear.

"I think you really want this to be a date. He put my ear to his mouth and bit down lightly.

- And you know what? This is a date whether you want to admit it or not. You can't say anything about it.

It pissed me off. Why did he think he could control me?

— EU...

"Shh..." He cut me off. His voice deepened. "Do you want to know what else I think?"

"No, I really..." I started.

"I think," Grayson interrupted once more when I huffed in affront, "that you haven't been able to stop thinking about kissing me since the last time we were in our room."

He wrapped an arm around me and pulled me into his chest. Chills ran down my spine.

"Because I know I couldn't stop thinking about your sweets. lips on mine, and it's driving me crazy.

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

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

Oh God, how could I leave him?

Chapter 25

BELLE

After I finally pushed Grayson away from me, feeling embarrassed about having a hot make-out session in public, we took a cab to a place where Grayson said there would be loads of cute shops we could wander through.

The architecture of Paris surprised me. All the buildings were so beautiful and cohesive.

The stores were nice too. It was a shame they were totally out of my price range.

As we continued walking, I couldn't help but wonder if we were close to my mother.

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

She lived in an apartment above a store called E. Dehillerin, a cute little kitchen supply store.

I loved walking through the store when I had visited with my dad years ago, especially as it took me away from my mother.

— Grayson?

He looked at me.

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

"Let me see," he said and picked up the phone. I watched him enter his password and quickly committed it to memory as it would be useful to know later.

"Actually, it's only a few blocks from here—about five minutes on foot.

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

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

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

I kind of owed her an explanation as to why I hadn't shown up at her house a few weeks ago.

Besides, who knows when the next time I'd be able to contact her?

Grayson had taken my phone and I didn't have the money to buy another. This would be my only chance to speak with her.

I was about to tell Grayson I wanted to go there when I thought of something: I already had a plan to go back to Minnesota without him knowing.

If all went well, I would be on a plane tonight and heading back to normal world tomorrow.

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

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

But I had to see her.

I shook my head quickly.

"No, I really like the stores around here. But maybe later?"
- I asked.

Grayson smiled.

- Clear.

We kept walking and Grayson kept one arm firmly on back from me. I couldn't help noticing that no one was looking at us.

They all lowered their heads as we passed, keeping their eyes on the ground.

It only happened once or twice that someone accidentally looked at us and Grayson let out a low growl and pulled me closer.

from him.

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

We found a small bookshop and I quickly pulled Grayson inside.

“Come on,” I said. — I want to find a book.

My anxiety was skyrocketing. Now was the time.

We looked around for a while as I worked out my plan. This store was really cute. It had two floors and was filled with all kinds of books in French and English.

There was a lovely little old lady behind the counter, helping people with a kind smile.

I turned to Grayson.

— Will you help me find a book?

Grayson looked at me.

- Right.

I swallowed hard. I really hope it works.

“Okay, the title is Michael Johnson's Golden Hands. It was my father's favorite book, and I can't think of a better place to buy it than in Paris.

I felt guilty for lying to him, but I had no choice. As far as I knew there wasn't really a book called Golden Hands, but I needed to get Grayson away from me enough to get to my mother.

- It's true. Let's find him,” Grayson said as he walked away.

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

“I don't know what gender it is, so I thought I'd look down here and you'd go upstairs and look.

“It could be science fiction, or fantasy, or horror, or mystery. I don't know what the book is about, just that it was his favorite.

"Okay...", Grayson said slowly. "Are you sure you're going to be okay being away from me, even just a little bit?" I saw how scared you were in the cafe.

I smiled, trying to calm my nerves. I was actually a little worried about it.

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

Grayson nodded, looking a little hesitant. while taking a step back.

"Okay," he said. - I'll be right back. Shout out if you need me and I'll be by your side in seconds. He leaned down and gave me a kiss.

My body warmed as your lips moved softly against mine.

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

"The sooner we find the book, the sooner you can get back to me. "I kissed him one last time. "I'll look down here while you look up there.

Grayson nodded and walked away from me.
— OK.

I watched as he climbed the stairs to the second floor, never taking his eyes off me. I could feel the muffled pain building in my chest from being apart, but it wasn't as bad as before.

I breathed a sigh of relief. OK. I can do this.

I smiled at him one last time before he reached the top of the stairs and around the curve to the second floor.

I immediately ran into the lady at reception.

- Hi, do you speak english? I asked her.

She looked up from her computer, looking a little shocked.

"Hmm, sure. How can I help you, miss? she asked in a thick French accent.

"Oh, thank God," I said.

"I need your help, please. In a few minutes, a man will come down those stairs looking for me, and when he realizes I'm not in the store anymore, he might lose his mind.

"I need you to tell him there's something important I need to know. I need to do and I'll be back soon. Tell him not to freak out.

The woman gave me a strange look.

"Miss, I don't know...

"I'm sorry, I know it's a strange thing to ask. - I quickly opened my purse, took out twenty euros and handed it to her.

"Please do this for me. If he gets really upset, remind him that I will be back soon. Don't call the police.

The woman's eyes widened.

"Miss, are you in danger?" Do you need me to call someone?

I shook my head quickly.

- No no. That's not it. I have something I need to do and my... my boyfriend can't come. There's nothing wrong, I promise.

- I have to go now. I do not have much time. Can you do it for me?

The woman looked at the money in her hand and then at me. She nodded.

- I can.

My heart lifted. I wanted to hug this sweet old lady.

"Thank you so much," I said, pushing away from the counter. "You have no idea how much this means to me.

She gave me a sweet smile.

"Of course, my dear. Please stay safe.

"Thanks," I said. And I turned and ran out the door and started walking quickly down the street.

Chapter 26

BELLE

I could hear my heart pounding in my ears as I ran through the streets of Paris to where I hoped my mother lived.

I couldn't stop looking back, expecting to see Grayson turn the corner and run after me.

But he never came.

By a stroke of luck, I managed to get into my mother's building and, soon after, I found myself standing in front of the door of her apartment.

I knocked on the door quickly, praying to God someone was there. at home, otherwise everything would have been in vain.

- Just a second! "I heard someone yell from the other side of the door.

I nervously wiped my sweaty palms on my jeans as I looked up and down the extremely chic hallway, hoping Grayson didn't appear, walking up the steps behind me before I had a chance to speak to my mother.

This place was really beautiful. I knew my mother's husband was rich, but I didn't remember her living in such a luxurious place. The door opened and my mother was in front of me, wiping her wet hands on her apron. She still hadn't looked at me.

- I'm sorry. I'm making dinner and my hands are covered in chicken grease.

Then she lifted her head and her eyes widened as found mine.

I gave her a small smile and shrugged.

- Hi Mom.

"Belle! She pulled me to her, wrapping me tightly in her arms. It was the kind of hug she used to give me when I was younger—after winning a football game or coming home from a long day at school.

It made me feel warm.

I was surprised to see that she was showing affection. I couldn't remember the last time she had hugged me.

"Oh, my dear girl, you have no idea how worried I was. She held me tighter and then pulled back. She cupped my face in her hands.

"Oh, you look so beautiful.

I backed away a bit.

"Were you worried about me?"

His face saddened and then became sympathetic. She looked down the hall in both directions, as if she was making sure no one was looking, and then she looked at me.

"Why don't you come in? She pointed to the interior of her apartment.

I shook my head and hesitantly followed her inside.

She led me into a luxuriously decorated living room. It was all white with hints of gray and cream. I didn't even want to sit down in case I stained your furniture.

My mom smiled at me as she sat down, taking off her apron. tied at the waist. It blended in perfectly with the decor.

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

After I sat down, she said,

"You've come at the right time." The kids are at school and Carl is at work. We have the whole apartment to ourselves.

She was wringing her hands nervously.

"I'm so glad to see you, Belle.

I shook my head, not knowing how to react to all the affection she was showing me. I looked around. It didn't look like children lived here.

Everything was so immaculate—as if I'd just walked into a very fancy hotel.

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

I took a deep breath. I hadn't really thought about what I would say to her when I got here.

'I've been to Paris.

- All this time? Where did you stay?

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

"I don't know when I'll be able to get in touch with you again.

I watched to see if she would react to what I was saying.

"I thought I owed you an explanation." After all, you are my mother.

Not that you acted like one.

My mom's eyes narrowed and I wondered if I'd said it out loud. I looked away from his piercing eyes.

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

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

"It's nothing," I said.

My mother slowly rose from her seat.

- That's nothing. "She walked over to me and sat next to me. side. I pulled away from her a bit.

She had a scary expression on her face, which was making me nervous.

"Let me see," she said.

I shook my head. I had no way of explaining a giant bite mark on my neck without sounding crazy.

- No. Really, it's nothing. "I got to my feet. "Actually, I probably have to go. I did what I had to do.

Before I could take a step though, my mom grabbed my hand. She got up so fast I didn't even have time to react.

Just as quickly, she brushed my hair back from my neck, revealing my mark.

She gasped and took a step back.

"Mom, I can explain," I began. - I...

"You bear the mark of an Alpha," she stated with an expression scared. "And it's fresh."

My eyes widened to the size of saucers.

- How do you know that?

As if in slow motion, she reached out and tugged at the collar of her own shirt. There, on her porcelain skin, were teeth-shaped wounds.

They were covered in years of scarred skin, which indicated that they were very old. I gasped.

"Because I have my own brand," my mother whispered.

Chapter 27

BELLE

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

"Is that why you didn't come here when you arrived in Paris?" — my mother asked. "Because you met your mate?"

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

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

- Mommy? - I asked. "Are you a werewolf?"

She turned to me and shook her head.

"No, no, of course not. I'm human like you.

"But do you have a mate?" - I asked.

She nodded.

- Yes.

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

Did my mother really not want me in her life? not to me tell about one of the most important parts...

- What's his name? my mother asked. I assumed she was asking about Grayson.

"It doesn't matter," I said. "I'm going home tomorrow.

"Aren't you going to stay with him?"

I shook my head.

- No. No, I can not.

My mom stared at me for a few seconds, looking hesitant.

"Belle, is your partner violent?"

- What do you mean?

"I mean..." my mother began. "I've heard stories about

how alphas can be abusive to their mates. They are possessive and controlling.

"I know what it's like to be with a normal wolf. I can't imagine what it would be like to be with an Alpha. — I sat up in shock. Grayson never hurt me, but it looked like my mother was implying that he would. She sat beside me and took my hands in hers.

'You know what I'm talking about, don't you, Belle?' Have you ever seen your partner express their anger through violence?

I nodded slowly.

"He almost strangled someone to death. He snarls at anyone who looks at me.

My mother's shoulders slumped and a panicked expression took over. account of your face. She squeezed my hands tighter. "Is that why you're trying to run away from him?

Until that moment, I wasn't really afraid that Grayson would hurt me. He was a rough guy, to be sure—but to me, so far at least, he'd been very kind.

I had different reasons for wanting to leave.

I just knew that I would probably be better off alone. It seemed like every person who came into my life got hurt, and I wasn't going to let that happen to Grayson. I couldn't let that happen to Grayson.

I cared a lot about him.

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

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

"Do you have a plan?" Because there was no way an Alpha male would let his mate walk out of his life.

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

"No, that won't work. He'll realize you're gone the second you leave him. She got up and started wringing her hands.

again.

“And if he doesn't notice, the wolf definitely will. Dominant males typically sleep with their noses pressed against their mates to catch their scent during the night. This calms the wolf and helps them sleep.

“If your scent isn't near him, he'll wake up right away.

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

I agreed.

"So it smells like him and you?"

“Yes,” I said.

- OK. Okay, so this is what you're going to put next to him when he's trying to escape. It should smell like you, but it should also smell like the new environment you're in.

She sat next to me again.

“And Belle, the minute you walk away from him you run like there's no tomorrow don't look back. Don't take anything. It will only slow you down. If he catches you...

She paused.

“If he catches you, you'll never get another chance. You'll be stuck with him forever, with no way out. His expression was so intense, so frightening.

“Mom, you're scaring me,” I whispered.

She gave me a sad smile and reached up to cup my cheek.

“Oh, my sweet Belle, mated with an Alpha. — tears formed in his eyes. “I never wanted this life for you.

My brows furrowed.

- What do you mean? - I asked. — Mom, does your partner hit you?

She did not answer me. She just kept studying my face

like this was the last time she would see me. Tears ran down her cheeks.

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

At the mention of my dad, I pulled away. she shouldn't be talking about him. She hadn't even been to the funeral.

"Why didn't you tell us?"

She stirred a little.

— Eu...

Before she could say anything else, I heard the front door opening up. I thought it was Grayson, and my heart plummeted.

My mother immediately got up and fixed the makeup that had oozed due to her crying.

"Claire, is that dinner you smell?" a deep voice asked from the other room. "Better be ready on time tonight. We don't want a repeat of last night, do we?"

A man entered the living room. I hadn't seen him since I was a child in the marriage, and even then we'd barely known each other, but I recognized Carl immediately, my mother's husband—and, apparently, her mate.

His eyes found my mother and he approached her slowly, his gaze moving up and down her figure.

He fingered the hem of her skirt when he finally stopped in front of her.

"Is this skirt new?" - he asked. "It's a little short, don't you think?"

My mother nodded.

"I'll change as soon as I get the chance." She smiled and placed a hand on his shoulder. She bowed. "We have a visitor," she told him. She gestured to me.

I got to my feet.

"Hi," I said. "I don't think we've had a chance to meet. meet officially. I'm Belle.

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

He walked towards me, crossing his arms and giving me a slow, menacing look.

"So you're the daughter she never wanted.

"Carl! my mother gasped.

So apparently he doesn't want to shake my hand.

He lifted a hand to her and shot her a look that made her flinch. He turned to me.

"Do you have any idea how worried your mom was when you didn't show up weeks ago?

"Did you stop to think about how that would make you feel, or just Did you consider your own selfish feelings?

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

He didn't know anything about my situation or what I'd been through the last few weeks.

"Carl, stop it now!" my mother shouted.

"I—" I started, but was immediately cut off.

"No, do you have any idea how lucky you are that I let you into my house in the first place? Carl shouted. He pointed a nasty finger at me.

"And you took that opportunity and hurt your mother in the process!"

I didn't know what to say. I didn't expect that reaction.

"I'm sorry I didn't come. Something happened and I had no way to get in touch. I lost my phone.

A growl came from Carl's chest. He was getting closer and closer to me.

"Did something come up?" Did something come up? - he asked. "Is that the best excuse you can come up with?"

My mom walked over to him and grabbed his arm.

"Carl, cut it out," she tried to say calmly.

He let out a deafening growl and pushed her away; she

it fell to the floor, hitting the coffee table.

"You're not ordering me around!" he yelled at her.

- Stop! I yelled as he approached her again. I grabbed him, trying to pull him away from her.

A powerful blow hit my face and an immense amount of pain radiated from my cheek to the rest of my body. It sent me flying sideways, and I landed on the floor. For a second, I couldn't see anything.

I just felt a burning, blinding pain. That will leave a mark.

"Carl, no!" "I heard my mother scream. "She's an Alpha's mate!" Look at her neck! She's an Alpha's mate," she sobbed.

I didn't do or say anything. I just continued to lie on the floor, holding my cheek, as tears of pain ran down my face. I felt someone brush the hair off my neck.

"Luna," Carl sighed. He dropped to his knees beside me. "Luna, I'm so sorry!" I didn't know.

Before I could respond, the door opened. A weight lifted off of me and I breathed a sigh of relief.

Grayson ran into the room, his chest heaving. His eyes were the blackest I had ever seen. He was twice the size he normally was, and there were veins poking out of his neck and forehead.

He was livid.

His eyes met mine.

"Grayson," I said. Not even knowing what I was doing, I reached for him, wishing his arms were around me.

He immediately ran to me and knelt beside me. He wouldn't stop growling, and with each passing second, he sounded more and more like a wolf than a human.

He gently touched the bruise that was already forming on my face. I expected it to hurt, but somehow the sensation only brought me more comfort. When his hand left my cheek, there was blood.

He growled so loud I'm sure the whole building shook.

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

"Alpha Grayson, I'm sorry," Carl said.

When I looked at him, I noticed that he was already showing his neck to Grayson, kneeling on the floor beside us.

"I didn't know she was your mate." I would never have hurt her if I'd known. Grayson moved faster than I could comprehend. His hand was around Carl's neck and he threw him against the wall in seconds.

"How dare you hurt my mate?"

He punched Carl in the face so hard that one of his teeth flew out of his mouth.

I heard my mother's sob from across the room. She was from knees, watching as my mate tried to kill hers.

I knew I had to do something. Grayson was throwing punch after punch at Carl's face while choking him. Carl didn't try to fight back. He would die if Grayson didn't stop.

I ran to him, trying to get between him and Carl, but Grayson wouldn't stop punching him long enough for me to succeed. I grabbed his face and said his name but he wouldn't look at me.

"Grayson, please stop," I said in a panic. - Please stop. I am in pain. I need you. Please, I need you.

Grayson looked at me. There was foam dripping from his mouth. His canines pierced his lips, making them bleed.

I wasn't sure he heard me, so now that I had his attention, I repeated, "I'm in pain,

Grayson." I touched my cheek gently.

"It hurts. Please take care of me. I think I'm going to faint. I need you," I said desperately.

That, of course, was a lie. With all the adrenaline coursing through my body, I couldn't feel anything else. But he didn't need to know that.

Grayson shook his head violently as if he were having

an internal discussion. Care for his injured mate or kill the man who hurt her?

Now that he was done punching Carl, I could get in front of him.

His eyes watched me closely and focused on the mark of the hand on my face. he growled.

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

He snorted and I knew he had made a decision. He got so close to Carl that he still had him by the neck that I was sure Carl could feel Grayson's breath on his bruised face.

He looked into Carl's puffy eyes.

“Touch my mate again and you're a dead man. There will be consequences,” he growled.

When Grayson dropped him to the ground, Carl started wheezing and coughing. My mother was at her side in an instant, cradling her head in her lap.

Grayson wasted no time. He took me in his arms, carrying like a bride and started walking towards the door.

I looked at my mom on the floor with her mate.

“I'm sorry, Mom. I'm very sorry.

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

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

Chapter 28

BELLE

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

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

At first, I was completely disgusted by him licking my face, but a loud growl from him made me shut up. I'm sure our taxi driver thought we were crazy.

I considered talking to him and trying to explain myself, but I couldn't tell if he was mad at me or mad that I was hurt.

Maybe it was both. I didn't want to risk pissing him off any further.

It took all the way home for him to calm down. Your body returned to normal, although his breathing was still erratic.

Once at the hotel, he picked me up and carried me all the way to our room. We got a few weird looks on the way there, but luckily no one said anything.

In our room, he immediately took me to the private bathroom and placed me on the counter. He placed himself between my legs.

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

He brought the damp towel to the part of my face that had been ruptured by Carl's punch and gently wiped it away. I shuddered. Grayson growled.

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

I hesitated. I knew I shouldn't tell him, but I really didn't want to lie.

"It was my mom's house," I muttered. "The man who hit me was your mate.

Grayson nodded, not making eye contact.

"Why didn't you take me with you?"

"I..." My shoulders slumped. I looked down at my hands.

"I was afraid of what you might do to her if
knew who he was and where he lived.

Grayson sighed. Carefully, he took my chin and tilted it down.
my head to look at him. His eyes softened.

"Listen to me, Belle, and listen well. I would never do anything to hurt
you. Never. I know you and your mother don't have the best relationship, but
I know I would never do anything to her if I risk losing you.

He leaned down and kissed my forehead. Then he put his forehead to
mine and looked deep into my eyes.

He cupped the side of my face that was whole.

"I need you to trust me, Belle. I care about you too much for you to run
away because you're scared. Talk to me. Communicate. Let's take care of
this together. Ever.

I took a deep breath and closed my eyes.

"Okay," I whispered.

Someone suddenly cleared their throat. Grayson and I both look up to
see Kyle standing in the doorway.

"Sorry to interrupt this touching moment," he said,
smiling at both of us.

"Here's the ice pack you asked for, Alpha. He handed it to Grayson. "Now
I can see why you needed this. You look awful, Luna.

"Gee, thanks, Kyle," I said sarcastically.

He laughed.

"It was nothing," he said. He winked at me before walking away.

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

"You're going to keep this there until all the ice melts. I don't
matter how long it takes. Your face is already swelling up a lot.

I nodded. It hurt like hell.

"I'm going to get some ibuprofen for the pain," Grayson said as he tucked a strand of hair behind my ear. "Stay here, okay?"

I shook my head again.

After he left the room, I sighed and leaned against the mirror behind me. My life has completely turned upside down in just a few weeks.

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

I felt completely out of my mind.

I felt tears forming in my eyes. It was all too much for to hold on. I wanted everything to go back to normal.

I wanted to jump in a time machine. Going back to being with my dad and working at the diner—before I had to worry about money or where to live.

I looked around, trying to control my breathing.

But as a time machine is not available...

I want to go home and regain control of my life!

Even my mother, who always looked so well-groomed and in control, was wearing a mask.

She was obviously living in an environment that prevented her from make any decision.

I didn't want to live like this. I just wanted to go home.

I just want to go home.

I noticed then that Grayson's phone was on the counter next to me. I glanced at the door to see if he was coming, then put the phone in my pocket.

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

When he saw the tears in my eyes, he put the cup and glasses down. pills on the counter and it was in front of me in moments.

- Why are you crying? - he asked.

Because I have to leave you, I thought.

"My face hurts, that's all," I said.

He frowned and ran his knuckles lightly over my bruise.

"I hate that you got hurt. I wish I had appeared there before that happened. That bastard will pay for this, I promise you.

I shook my head.

- No. No, please don't do anything to him. I don't want to hurt my mother.

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

"Drink all the water.

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

"You have no idea how worried I was," he confessed into my neck.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I needed to see my mother.

He murmured as he continued to breathe in my scent.

"Don't ever leave me like that again, okay?" He placed a kiss on my neck.

His kisses continued down my neck before I could respond. He kissed my mark and then returned to my chin, leaving wet kisses in his wake.

Finally, he reached my mouth, moving his lips against mine with such passion it took my breath away.

As I became more and more distracted by current events, I forgot to keep the ice pack against my cheek. Grayson growled and grabbed my hand, pressing it back to my face. I rolled my eyes.

He laid me down on the bed and hovered over me without taking his lips from mine. His hands moved under my shirt, tracing the lines of my ribs.

Wow, this progressed fast.

"Grayson," I said through his kisses. He didn't stop.

"Grayson," I tried again.

He rolled off me a little and nuzzled mine affectionately.

"We need to stop," I said.

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

I swallowed hard. I could feel my cheeks turning red.

- HM thanks?

He laughed and got off of me. He ran a hand through his hair.

"I need to go take a shower, probably a cold one. Would you like to participate?"

My blush intensified.

- No! That was a one-off, buddy.

He chuckled again, leaning down to place one more quick kiss on my lips before getting up.

"Yeah, we'll see, baby," he said.

"Now, are you going to be a good girl and stay here and not run away while I'm in the shower, or am I going to need to handcuff you to the bed?"

I shook my head quickly.

- I'll stay here.

"Fine," Grayson said and then walked into the bathroom.

I sighed and looked up at the ceiling. All I wanted was sleep, but I knew that now might be the only time I would have alone. I took her phone and typed in the password I'd seen earlier.

Do I really want to do this?

Chapter 29

BELLE

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

My plan was to book a flight when Grayson wasn't looking. Then I would escape to the airport sometime during the night. Maybe I could even be home in the morning.

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

I glanced at the bathroom door, a deep part of me hoping Grayson would come out, see what I was doing and stop me.

I was so scared. All of this was too much for me.

I opened the browser on your iPhone, but I couldn't type anything, though he knew he was running out of time.

Even just thinking about leaving Grayson, the pain in my chest increased more and more. My mark was throbbing and tears were already starting to well up in my eyes.

But what about my apartment? My work? It had already been irresponsible of me to spend an extra night in France instead of rushing home.

House.

My rent was already overdue, and the landlord wasn't exactly the forgiving type.

And I knew that if I talked to Grayson, he would just talk me into staying one more day. I was afraid to disagree with him. I had seen what he was capable of.

I would never do anything to hurt you, he said. But was this true? Talk to me. Communicate. Let's take care of this together.

But what would he say if I told him I planned to sneak out tonight and head home? And that I wasn't sure if I still had a job or an apartment and could become homeless?

I was always very proud of being able to support not only myself but also my father after he became unemployed because of his

illness.

Grayson would still want me if he knew all the baggage I had carry? How pathetic was I?

And then there was the problem with my mother and her partner.

Would Grayson treat me like Carl treated my mother?

She looked so worried when she found out my mate

he was an Alpha, and he even helped me come up with a plan to stay away from him.

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

For now, I just wanted to enjoy his company without overthinking it.

Suddenly I heard the shower turn off. My heart skipped a beat. Seconds later, Grayson emerged from the bathroom with a towel draped dangerously low on his hips.

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

"I hadn't realized how much of your mother's mate's blood was still in me. Sorry if that scared you.

Not even knowing what I was doing, I launched myself at him, throwing my arms around his neck. He immediately wrapped his arms around me to steady himself.

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

I started sobbing into his neck, letting all the emotions of the last few weeks flood my body and overwhelm me. I couldn't help it.

Grayson probably thought I was crazy.

His grip on me tightened.

"Belle, baby, what's up?" he asked in a panic. - Why are you crying?

I just shook my head. I couldn't speak through the intense sobs that racked my body.

Grayson rubbed my back calmly, then

He stood up so that my legs were encircling his waist. He guided us to the bed and sat down, with me straddling him.

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

“You're scaring me, beautiful. Whats wrong?”

I took a deep breath.

“I don't want to leave you,” I said through my tears.

Grayson's body stiffened.

“Why would you leave me? he growled.

I sniffled. I slowly reached my arm out and grabbed her phone which was lying on the bed. It was still on. I got up for him to see.

- What? he asked, confusion obvious in his voice. He took the phone from me.

I closed my eyes tightly, bracing myself for what was to come.

“I got it off the bathroom counter when you weren't looking.

I was going to book a flight home and get away from here tonight.

“My mother said if I left something that smelled like me next to you while you slept, you wouldn't notice I was gone until morning.

He gripped my hips tighter and his breathing became ragged.

“Belle, look at me.

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

He grabbed my chin and gently squeezed.

“Look at me, mate.

I opened one eye and looked at him. He didn't look as angry as I imagined. I bit my lip.

“First of all,” Grayson began, “it never would have worked. Maybe a normal wolf wouldn't miss his mate, but not an Alpha.

"I would have noticed right away, or my wolf would have." We're in tune with every part of your body, even when you're asleep—everything about you, not just the way you smell.

I started fiddling with my shirt, my cheeks turning red.

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

"Second, you will never leave me. no matter where however you go or how many times you run, i will always find you.

- Ever. Without fail. You're mine, Belle. I don't know how many times I have to tell you this. You are my companion, my soulmate, my everything.

"Perhaps I wasn't clear enough when I explained all this to you, and for that I'm sorry. But we're going to spend the rest of our lives together. I love you.

I gasped. Did I hear right?

- You love me?

Grayson nodded.

"With all my being.

"But there are so many things you don't know about me. You do not know about all the baggage I have," I said.

"So tell me," Grayson said as he stroked my hair with love. - I want to know everything about you.

- He is sure? I whispered.

He nodded and bent down to kiss my nose.

"Nothing would make me happier."

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

"I'm homeless," I said.

Grayson's expression went from adorable to furious in seconds as he processed what I'd said.

His grip on my hips increased to the point where it almost hurt before

for him to stop and start massaging them.

- For how long?

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

“Well, I'm not officially homeless yet, but I will be when I get home. My landlord is not very understanding when it comes to overdue rent. I'm sure all my stuff is already on the sidewalk.

Grayson

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

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

Grayson didn't say anything for a while, and that forced me to look at him to try to decipher what he was thinking. His face was contorted with disgust and every muscle was tense.

Was he wondering what he'd gotten himself into? Was he wishing he'd been given a different mate?

My shoulders slumped as I asked my next question,

"Do you still want me?"

Grayson's eyes latched onto mine and he snarled fiercely. He pulled my body into his chest.

- You are mine!

His wolf seemed to speak now as the darkness of his eyes took control.

- I'll always want you!

I nodded my head to show I understood.

“I'm sorry,” I whispered into his chest. He walked away so could look at me, his animal eyes boring into mine.

“Why are you apologizing?”

“I'm sorry you're stuck with me. I'm sure it wasn't what you were imagining when you imagined your mate. It's possible I don't have a job either, so who knows when I'll be able to recover.

"Is that why you didn't tell me anything?" Grayson asked. "Did you think I would be ashamed of you?"

I shook my head again.

- It does not have?

Much to my surprise, Grayson just laughed. He ran a hand over his face.

"I've done a terrible job explaining all of this to you," he said grimly.

"I was being honest when I said I'm going to make sure you never pay for anything else in your life. You're moving in with me as soon as we get back to Minnesota. You will never have or need a job again.

"I will provide for you as any good mate does. It's the way of life for all werewolves. It's not in our nature to do it any other way.

I gaped at him.

"Do you want me to move in with you?" After knowing each other for just a few weeks?

He chuckled.

"No, girl, I don't want you to move in with me. You will live with me. You have no choice in the matter.

"I'll tie you to my bed if I have to, just to make sure I get to wake up next to your beautiful face for the rest of my life.

I knew I should be scared, that I should run for the hills. This was exactly what I dreaded when I thought about getting into a relationship with Grayson: not being able to make my own decisions anymore.

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

"As for being ashamed," Grayson added in a disgusted tone, "that's not possible. I wasn't mad at you for your situation.

"I was furious with myself for not being there for you when you needed me most. You were so close and I had no idea. I could have had you in my arms a long time ago.

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

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

He smiled slightly and pressed his mouth to my hair.

"Then you won't," he said.

I sighed as I snuggled closer to him. "It's nice to finally be honest with you. He didn't like all the lies he was telling her. I was so scared. Grayson rubbed my back again, massaging my tight muscles that were slowly starting to loosen.

"What other lies have you told me?"

I bit my lip.

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

Grayson chuckled.

"Do you think I didn't know about that?" The minute I met you, one of my pack members dug up all your data.

I gasped and looked at him.

- You what?

He laughed again.

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

"Yeah, whatever," I said, still a little pissed off at the invasion of privacy.

He leaned over and started playfully nibbling my ear and chin, obviously trying to lighten my mood. I laughed and pushed him away. He chuckled.

"Any other lies you told me?" Grayson asked.

I thought about the last few weeks.

"Um, isn't there a book called Hands of Gold?"

Laughter shook Grayson again.

"Yeah, I knew that one too," he said cheerfully and brought me more within your arms.

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

Chapter 30

BELLE

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

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

"Grayson," I said, trying to wake him up. I rubbed your arms were all around me. "Grayson, wake up.

With each passing second, his grip grew stronger. I knew I had to wake him up or he would literally squeeze me into the death.

I leaned in as far as I could and planted a kiss on his arm, then another. Little snorts came out of Grayson with each kiss I pressed to his skin. His arms loosened a little.

I continued kissing her arms and hands, then started licking and sucking. His grunts turned into moans.

His grip on me loosened to a bearable level, and I let out a sigh of relief.

But then he threw one of his legs over me and buried his face in my neck and hair. I could tell he was still sleeping. I also felt something hard poking my ass. Oops.

I grabbed one of her hands and traced the lines on her palm.

"Grayson," I whispered. He snorted and shifted a little. I brought her hand up and kissed her palm softly. "Grayson, I need you to wake up.

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

Whatever your dream was, it had to be very intense.

Once I was facing him, I noticed how stressed he looked. His face was tense and drawn in, and his whole body was rigid and still, except for his rapid, shuddering breathing.

I didn't like to see him like this. I didn't want him to stay stressed or had a nightmare.

I found myself lifting my hands between us and running them over his face. I stroked the frown lines and traced his jaw, mouth, nose and eyes.

His face was beautiful, and I found myself wanting to touch and memorize every part of him.

He relaxed a little, but his breath was still coming out in quick spurts. I leaned my forehead against his.

“Grayson, okay.

He stirred a little, but didn't open his eyes. I groaned. Man, this guy can sleep.

It could have been lovely, but I really needed to go to the bathroom. And having Grayson squeezing me was definitely not helping.

So I did the only thing I could think of: I gently kissed her neck. And then I continued up to her face—her jaw and around her lips.

I felt guilty for kissing him without his consent, but I didn't stop. I mean, I was molesting the guy while he was sleeping, but I loved the feel of his skin on my lips.

It sent electric shocks through my system and sent my brain all over the place. Besides, I was pretty sure he wouldn't mind if he was awake.

I finally kissed her lips. Fireworks exploded inside me as I moved my lips against his, my breath caught.

And then suddenly I was on my back and Grayson was on top of me, kissing me passionately. I groaned.

Well, I think he's awake now.

I had forgotten that my goal with all of this was to wake him up. I was too caught up in kissing him to pay attention to his reaction.

God, this mate bond thing must be really getting to me.

Grayson grabbed my legs and positioned them around his waist, taking full control of the situation. Then he moved his hands to grab my waist under my pajama shirt.

His thumbs grazed the skin just below my breasts.

I was getting breathless from our intense kiss. Noticing this, Grayson removed his lips from mine and moved them down to my jaw and neck, then to my collarbone and around the collar of my cotton shirt.

He stopped just long enough to grab the hem of my shirt and pull it up.

Unable to stop myself, I raised my arms, allowing him to remove my shirt.

Grayson looked at my exposed upper half for a long moment, his eyes trained on my breasts. His gaze turned dark and stormy as it moved over my body, seemingly memorizing every part of it.

The heat of the moment left me and was replaced by shyness. He was looking at me so intently, and I couldn't help but hope he approved of what he saw.

I had never been so aware of my body before — I had other things to worry about — but now I felt myself shift and squirm in discomfort.

Grayson noticed this immediately and returned his gaze to my face. His expression softened. He reached out and stroked my cheek gently.

“Every day I wonder how I got a mate as beautiful as you, how I got so lucky.

I blushed and squirmed some more, unsure how to react to his compliment. No one had ever spoken to me like that.

He smiled at me and lowered his face to give me a slow but passionate kiss. It wasn't like the kiss before, which had been hot and demanding.

No, this one was sweet and loving and made my toes curl in pleasure.

"By the way," Grayson said, pulling away from me a little, "I hope to be woken up like this from now on.

I laughed.

"I wanted to pee and you weren't waking up. It was the only thing I could think of. I thought you wouldn't mind.

He leaned down and kissed me again.

"I give you full permission to kiss me whenever you want, consciously or not.

I laughed again and got up to kiss her lips. He growled softly. When we broke apart, I asked, "What were you dreaming about?"

Chapter 31

BELLE

He sat back.

- What?

"It looked like you were having a nightmare." You were growling and nearly squeezed me to death," I said.

He sighed.

"I was dreaming about your stepfather. He was hitting you and I couldn't reach you.

"Oh," I said. I loved how protective he was of me. - But I'm good now. You saved me.

He ran his hand over the bruise on my cheek.

"I will always save you.

It was crazy how connected I felt to the man on top of me. It was like I'd known him my whole life. I couldn't believe that just yesterday I was planning to leave him.

Today, I couldn't imagine my life without him. I would probably have a complete meltdown if he wasn't with me. Maybe our mate bond was getting stronger the more we got to know each other.

I felt Grayson caressing my bare side, causing sparks to pleasures flowed through me.

"What are you thinking so much about, beautiful?"

I smiled.

"I..." I hesitated. Would it be weird to say something like that so early in our relationship? I think Grayson already told me he loved me. How much more serious could it get?

"I was thinking about the mate bond, how you used it. flame. I think it's getting to me.

Grayson's eyes sparkled with happiness.

- You think? And why do you think that?

"I just"—I looked away from him—"this whole thing is crazy. I only met you a few weeks ago, but despite that, I still want to give you a chance. Which is crazy and I know it.

- But I do not care. I simply like you. Very. I like being close to you and, um... touching you. I want to be with you, no matter how crazy it is.

Grayson grabbed my chin and I turned my head to look at him. His smile was huge.

"You have no idea how happy this makes me.

I smiled at him hesitantly.

- Same?

He nodded and stroked my face.

"Yes, indeed. And believe me, love, all these feelings are more than mutual. He leaned down and growled against my ear.

"Especially the touching part.

He kissed my mark and I gasped.

But he didn't stop there. He continued down. And went down.

And then his mouth was on my breast.

Half of me was ecstatic, loving every single thing he did, but the other half—probably the saner half—realized at that very moment that I wasn't wearing a shirt. How did I forget about it?

I hadn't even realized I wasn't wearing a bra! I was so comfortable next to him that I didn't even realize my torso was completely exposed. I had an entire conversation with him while I was half naked!

I gasped and pushed him away from me. Thankfully, he let me, and I grabbed the sheet and pulled it up to my neck, covering myself.

successfully.

Grayson growled and pouted when he couldn't see my exposed chest anymore.

"I'm sorry," I said, feeling embarrassed. - I forgot

that he wasn't wearing a shirt.

I was way too comfortable with this guy.

Grayson laughed softly and then sighed. He ran a hand through his hair, looking a little distressed, as if he was holding back.

"It's okay, love. I just hoped you wouldn't notice and let me do whatever I wanted to you.

"I really don't think it's fair for me to be shirtless all the time while you're fully dressed. I think you should go shirtless too.

I raised an eyebrow.

- OK. I will simply never put on a shirt again. I will go out in public topless from now on. I bet all the men around us are really going to like this.

A loud growl left Grayson's mouth, and he quickly grabbed my shirt that lay beside him and draped it over my head.

I laughed. Grayson lay down next to me as soon as I had my shirt on and took me in his arms, laying my head on his chest. He kissed my forehead softly.

"You know, you don't have to be ashamed of yourself. Your body is mine. All of you are mine.

I rolled my eyes at his possessiveness.

"Uh-huh, sure," I said in a teasing tone.

He squeezed my side in warning and I laughed. I nestled my face into his neck, simply breathing in his scent and enjoying the feel of being in his arms. We stayed like that for a few minutes.

Everything felt so peaceful, so right.

But then I took a deep breath.

"There's one more thing you should know," I whispered.

Grayson moved me a little so he could see me.

"Okay," he said.

I could already feel the blush spreading down my neck and across my face. Grayson ran his hand up and down my back in a reassuring way, obviously sensing my anxiety.

"I, um," I hesitated. "I've never done anything like this before.

Grayson raised an eyebrow.

- What?

I shifted and squeezed my eyes shut. I had no idea how he would react to what I was about to say.

"I'm a virgin," I blurted out.

I opened my eyes slowly when I didn't hear Grayson's response. He had an amused smile on his face.

"And you were worried about how I would react to that?"

I shook my head slowly, confused by his reaction.

- Well, yes.

Grayson's smile widened as he ran his hand across my cheek.

"I already knew that, baby.

- What? I asked as I sat down. "How could you know?"

He shrugged.

"I can smell it.

"Can you smell my virginity?" I asked, in shock. Grayson nodded.

"A male wolf can smell his female's virginity, or lack thereof.

My jaw dropped.

"So you knew this whole time?"

"Of course," he said. "And I'm glad to know I'll be the first." He pulled me closer to him and rubbed his nose lovingly against my cheek. "And the last one," he whispered.

I laughed nervously and tried not to reveal how much his words affected me. Hot sparks traveled through my body at what he was implying.

"You're very presumptuous, you know that?"

His lips hovered over my mark as he said his

next words: — You think I won't take your virginity? he said seductively.

The truth is, I was sure he would be the one. But he didn't need to know that. I wasn't ready and I didn't want him to confuse my permission with being ready.

Besides, he didn't need a bigger ego.

"Well... I, I don't..."

He kissed my mark softly and sent flames through my body. I gasped and turned my head to the side to give him better access. He chuckled against my skin.

"I can't wait to be inside you, hearing those sounds you make when I kiss you and making you feel things you've never felt before.

I gasped at his words, and a low moan escaped my mouth. I pushed my body closer to his. I couldn't wait either.

"But now," he said between kisses down my neck and around my mark, "I know you're not ready. I also know you need to pee.

He pulled the blanket away from me.

"Then you'd better go before I decide to keep you in this bed forever.

Stunned, I got up and followed his instructions, walking to the bathroom door and closing it behind me.

Chapter 32

BELLE

I sat in bed in the late afternoon, watching Grayson tidy up our hotel room as we got ready to go home.

We would board our flight tonight around midnight Paris time.

I tried to help but he just growled at me and told me to sit down. Tired from our adventurous day, I didn't bother to argue.

We spent the day seeing everything there was to see in Paris, and it was absolutely amazing. My face hurt from smiling so much.

I was still smiling as I watched Grayson move across the room, looking at me and smiling every now and then.

Everything about him was perfect. I couldn't help but admire the way how his body moved and how his big muscles flexed.

He was breathtaking; it was hard to believe that a guy like him would want a girl like me.

"Grayson?" I asked him hesitantly.

He looked at me with a raised eyebrow.

"Please don't get mad," I said as I wrung my hands together.

He turned fully towards me.

"Okay, now you have my attention.

I took a deep breath.

"We can't go home yet," I said.

His expression was shocked.

- What? You've been begging to go home for weeks. I thought you'd be excited. He walked over to me and sat next to me, holding my hands.

"I know, but that was before I visited my mother. I can't let it

there. She needs our help. Carl is basically a monster.

Grayson sighed.

"Yes, I agree with you on that. I already have everything under control.

- What do you mean? - I asked.

"I've sent one of my men to look after your mother and send me daily updates. I wish I could do more, but I need to get back to my pack.

"Once everything is under control there, I'll review the situation and assess how your mother was handled, and then I'll decide if she needs to be brought to Minnesota and invited to join our pack.

I shook my head.

"But what if something happens?" I can't just leave her here. We have to help her now.

"Someone will take care of her and step in if anything happens," Grayson said. "I can't just separate someone from their mate. Carl's wolf won't allow it. It may not look like it, but he is a powerful werewolf. He is range of the main pack in Paris.

"He has a lot of power. There's no way of knowing what he'd be capable of if his companion left.

He reached out and cupped my cheek gently.

"I know I would never give up if I lost you. I would destroy the world first.

I leaned closer to his touch, loving the feel of the sparks coursing through my body.

"Okay," I whispered.

It made me feel a little better. I had so many questions for my mother. I just couldn't believe she never wanted to see me again.

Not after how happy she was to see me before Carl showed up.

But she had survived this long without me. She could wait another month, right?

Grayson wrapped his arm around my shoulder and pulled me close to him.

"Please don't worry too much, beautiful. I will take care of everything. —
He bent down and kissed my forehead.

I leaned even closer to him. I couldn't help but trust him.

As Grayson and I boarded his private jet to head back to Minnesota, my stomach fluttered with nervousness.

Mostly because I was about to get on a plane and I couldn't help it, and I was still scared of flying, but also because I was about to go back to Grayson's house and find his pack.

How was I supposed to help Grayson lead a pack? I could barely pay my rent. What if they didn't like me or thought I was inadequate?

I knew Grayson could sense my anxiety. He kept a secure arm around me at all times and was always rubbing my back or arm—as if he reminded me of his presence and I didn't have to worry about anything else.

The private jet was bigger than I expected, with several rows of seats and a sofa in the back.

When we got to our seats, Grayson pulled me against his chest before I had a chance to sit down. He placed me on his lap as he sat down in his seat.

At first I didn't care. I simply rolled my eyes and allowed him to hug me. Feeling his arms around mine honestly helped calm my nerves. We stayed like that for a few minutes before the plane moved.

So I quickly tried to get up and sit next to him, but Grayson just tightened his grip on me.

- What are you doing? I hissed.

Grayson acted like he wasn't listening to me and rubbed his nose in the side of my neck.

I pulled her face away from me and tried to get off her lap. He didn't move.

"Seriously, Grayson!" Let me sit in my seat!

He pretended to think about it, then shrugged.

- No.

I was flabbergasted.

"What do you mean by 'no'?"

"I mean, you're going to be sitting right here on the flight. And no one is going to argue with me about it," he said as he held me closer to his chest.

"Oh, you want to bet? I asked stubbornly as I pushed him once more with much more force. His grip on me didn't loosen. The plane was moving faster.

"Grayson, please!" This is not safe! I have to sit down and put on my seat belt!

He pushed his face into my neck and then brought his lips to my ear.

"Calm down, Bella. I won't let anything happen to you.

His calm voice caused some of the tension to leave my body.

"What about seat belts?" I asked shakily. "I hired the best pilot money can buy. I promise you nothing will happen. And if something happens, then my arms will be your seat belt," he said.

Is he stupid or something?

"Um, I don't care how strong you think you are, Mr. Alpha Werewolf Whatever, if this plane crashes into the ocean, your arms won't be able to save me!

He smiled a little.

"Let's put that theory to the test, shall we?" - he asked.

I pushed at him once more, hitting his chest with all my strength.

- No! Let's not do this! Let me go!

Suddenly, Grayson pressed his giant hand to the back of my neck possessively, forcing me to turn and look at him.

He brought my face so close to his that our noses were almost touching, and I watched as his eyes darkened substantially, his wolf's presence making itself felt.

I swallowed hard.

"You're going to be sitting here for the entire flight, period. Am I being clear? Grayson asked, his voice an eighth lower than normal.

At first, I couldn't speak. I was too consumed in his eyes, watching his irises swirl.

His grip on the back of my neck tightened.

— Belle, me traffic.

I quickly agreed, afraid he'd turn into a wolf if I disagreed.

- I will stay here.

Grayson grunted in approval.

- Excellent. Now come here.

He let go of my neck and gently brought me closer to him. so I could lean my head against his chest.

Then his hands found their way under my shirt, where they caressed my back calmly, just like he had on the flight to Paris when we first met.

His touch calmed my body so much, and soon I was completely at peace. Grayson placed a soft kiss on my head.

I was amazed at how quickly he could go from dominant Alpha male, demanding respect, to my sweet, loving mate who I knew would never hurt me.

After a few more minutes, the plane was officially in the air. And, surprisingly, I was fine.

"Hey, Grayson?" I whispered as I tilted my head to look at him.

- Yes beautiful? - he asked.

I took a deep breath.

- I love you.

Grayson looked startled for a moment, but then his face broke into a breathtaking smile. In a split second, his lips crashed onto mine.

As soon as he released my lips, he looked at me and smiled.

widely.

"I love you too, Belle. More than you could ever imagine.

"Aaawww," someone said suddenly beside us. "I feel like my heart is about to burst with cuteness."

Our heads went up. Our eyes locked with Kyle's: he was sitting in the row beside us with his elbow resting on the armrest and his chin resting on his hand. I couldn't believe I hadn't noticed him sitting next to us. Of course, that also meant he was present throughout my declaration of love to Grayson. How embarrassing!

Grayson growled loudly and bared his teeth at him.

"Find somewhere else to sit, Kyle. Go bug the pilot or something.

Kyle held up his hands in surrender.

— I thought we could keep each other company on the flight home. - He raised. "But I can see I'm unwanted.

He saluted Grayson, winked at me, then sat down as far away from us as possible.

I looked back at Grayson.

"Well, that's certainly one way to ruin the perfect moment, I said, playing with the collar of his shirt.

Grayson shook his head.

"Kyle is a good gamma, but I'm thinking of killing him right now.

I ran my fingers through the side of Grayson's hair.

- Let's try again? - I asked.

Grayson raised an eyebrow.

- Try what?

"Grayson," I began, "I love you.

He smiled softly and brought me forward until my forehead met his.

"I don't think I'll ever get tired of hearing you say that," he whispered.
"I love you too, Belle.

Chapter 33

BELLE

When we turned off the path that had taken us through the wilderness of Minnesota and onto a long gravel road that would take us to Grayson's house, it felt like there was a bundle of nerves in the pit of my stomach that felt like a rock.

It was the middle of the night, so I knew I probably wouldn't have to meet many people, but I was still nervous.

I was about to start my new life in my new home with a man I met just a few weeks ago but somehow already loved. If that wasn't enough, I was supposed to help him lead, having no leadership experience whatsoever.

I mean, I barely knew anything about werewolves, and now I was about to become the "Luna" of an entire pack. How did that make any sense?

We were sitting in the back of a car he had left at the airport. Grayson, always knowing when I was feeling restless, wrapped a comforting arm around me and gently pulled me to him.

He rubbed his nose against the side of my head.

"What's bothering you, baby?"

I shrugged and moved closer to him, not wanting to get into the subject right now. I could barely speak above the lump in my throat.

As if he knew what I was thinking, Grayson said,

"Everyone is going to love you." You have nothing to deal with worry. You'll be fine.

Still in his arms, I turned my head to look at him. Your eyes were gentle and soft as he looked at me.

"Will they be okay with a human being their mate?" Being their Luna? And what will everyone expect from me?

I don't know anything about leading a pack. How am I going to be of any help to you?

Grayson pulled me close to him.

"My pack will love you like Luna naturally. They felt the connection between us the moment I met you, so like me.

"They know I've found my mate and her Luna, and they can feel their strength. They trust me as their Alpha and trust the Moon Goddess's choice for my mate.

— You may not know it, but you have all the necessary qualities to be the perfect Luna. We will make your new job easier and in time, you will learn.

"And I have full confidence that you will find being a Luna more nicer than you think. You were born to lead by my side.

I swallowed. Hell, I'm not feeling pressured at all right now.

I agreed.

"Okay," I said. - I can.

Grayson kissed the top of my head.

- Yes, you can. And if it makes you feel any better, the only person you're going to have to meet today is my beta, Adalee.

"And my mate, Elijah! Kyle yelled from the front seat. — He's awake, waiting for me to get home.

Hearing the excitement in her voice, I smiled.

"Do you think you'll be able to handle this?" You will not feel too pressured? Grayson asked me in a worried tone.

I knew he was desperate for me to be happy with his pack. It was almost cute how worried he was. My heart melted a little.

I took a deep breath and turned my body fully so that I was facing him.

- I'll be fine. Just stay with me, okay? I don't think I will I can get through this without you by my side.

Grayson smiled and leaned down, kissing me softly on the lips.

- Ever. I'll never leave you.

I felt the love for the man sitting next to me grow. I pressed my lips to his and wrapped my arms around his neck. Grayson moaned against my mouth.

"Okay, so while you guys make out, I'm going to go see my mate," Kyle said.

Before I could look at him, I heard the car's front door knock and the faint sound of Kyle's running footsteps.

Through the window next to us, I saw a giant multi-story house. It felt more like a hotel than a home, really.

I couldn't help but gasp.

I felt Grayson's hand on my leg, running up and down.

- How are you baby? His voice sounded hesitant as he watched me react to his vast territory.

"I just..." I started. - Wow.

Grayson nodded as he looked toward the house.

"I think that's as good a reaction as any. This is the pack's home and its new home. It houses over five hundred werewolves. Many of the other members also live in houses on pack land, but this is the biggest one.

I swallowed and let out a shaky breath.

"And you live here too?"

"Yes," Grayson said. "We both do.

I agreed.

"Well..." I said slowly. I looked up at him, grabbing his hand and squeezing.

"I think it's time we started our new life together, don't you?"

He squeezed my hand back and smiled widely.

"After you," he said, pointing to the door on my side.

Once inside the house, the first thing I noticed was that the interior

it was as magnificent as the outside.

I walked into the grand foyer with my chin on the floor, barely able to take in how beautiful it was.

I was greeted by a grand spiral staircase, which apparently continued for at least six floors.

Pillars surrounded us in a circle, and my cheap sneakers, no longer so white, found what looked like an expensive hardwood floor that turned to marble as you examined the house further.

All the walls were pure white when they weren't covered by giant windows. The wooden beams in the ceiling gave the whole house a cabin-like feel. It was absolutely breathtaking.

I didn't even realize Grayson was watching me, seeing my reaction, until he tightened the arm that was already wrapped tightly around my waist.

- What do you think?

I couldn't stop looking around me.

"I don't think I've ever been in a place as refined as this one," I said in wonder. I looked at Grayson. "You didn't tell me you were so rich!"

Grayson chuckled.

- It is not me. That's all the money from the pack's work. I'm just in charge.

"But it's up to you how to spend it, right?"

Grayson thought about this for a moment.

- I think so.

"So you're rich," I said. "I don't think I ever had more than a thousand dollars in my bank account, except when I saved enough to go to Paris. I've always lived paycheck to paycheck. Grayson growled beside me and wrapped both arms around me, pulling me to him so that my back was pressed against his chest.

He then leaned down to rest his chin on top of my head.

"That will never happen again. Not while I'm alive. —

He kissed my hair.

The determination in his voice made me shudder.

Suddenly, a woman approached us and cleared her throat. she was tall and fit, with beautiful red hair. Absolutely stunning.

“Alpha, Luna,” she said, greeting us both with a bowed head. Then she knelt down and tilted her neck to the side, showing us the porcelain skin of her throat.

I pressed closer against Grayson, not sure what was going on. happening or how to respond.

Grayson leaned in so his mouth was right next to my ear, his warm, minty breath blowing the side of my cheek.

“She's showing her neck to us, just like you did to me a while ago. It's a sign of respect. Be prepared to be greeted like this for the rest of your life,” he whispered and straightened up again.

“Hello, Adalee. It's great to see you again. I hope my absence hasn't made your life too difficult.

The minute Grayson addressed her, she rose quickly and smiled, losing all her formal posture. She rolled her eyes and laughed a little.

“You know perfectly well that these have probably been the worst weeks of my life. You will never be allowed to leave for that long again. Your job is a lot harder than it looks.

Grayson chuckled. “It's nice to finally get some recognition. Thanks for all your updates. They definitely helped me keep up to date. You did an amazing job while I was gone.

Adalee smiled brightly and then let her eyes wander to me. She approached me slowly, never letting her smile fall.

“It's so nice to meet you, Luna,” she said in a gentle, genuine tone.

“I was incredibly excited when I felt the Alpha's connection with

you.

I shook my head hesitantly, taken aback by his direct kindness. Although, it did make me feel better that my first interaction with someone here seemed to be going well so far.

“Um, thanks,” I said.

Adalee walked over to me and held out her hand to shake.

“My name is Adalee, the beta of this pack. I hope we can be good friends.

I smile back.

“I'm Belle.

Grayson squeezed my side.

"But you won't call her that," he told Adalee.

Adalee rolled her eyes.

“I know you don't. I'm not some idiot who wants to have an angry Alpha hunt me down for disrespecting his mate. Grayson growled softly as I just chuckled.

“I really hope we can be friends too,” I said genuinely. She looked really nice. Maybe I can really fit in here.

Adalee smiled at me.

— Oh, Luna! I have someone here for you to meet! Kyle rushed into the room, pulling someone with him.

He wrapped his arm around the other man's waist and smiled. The man was blond and well built, with striking gray eyes and an easy smile.

He looked at all of us nervously as he entered the room and he immediately flashed his neck to Grayson, Adalee, and me.

“This is my mate, Elijah,” Kyle said as he looked at Elijah lovingly, a huge smile on his face.

“Nice to meet you, Elijah,” I said. “I'm Belle.

Grayson growled. He bent down to talk to me.

“Stop saying your name to people. Only I can call it that.

I just rolled my eyes.

"I can tell people to call me whatever I want," I said.

Grayson ignored me, but I could tell he wasn't happy with my answer. He looked at Elijah.

"This is your Luna. You are lucky to be one of the first to meet her.

Elijah nodded, but didn't look up.

Kyle riu.

"You can look up now. They are less scary than they look.

Elijah slowly lifted his eyes and scanned the room, looking for everyone but Grayson.

"Sorry," he said as he smiled at me.

"I'm not used to being in the same room as the four most powerful members of the family.

- I? Powerful? — I scoffed. - I don't think so.

Elijah laughs.

"You may not feel like it right now, but you have the power to make anyone in the pack do whatever you want. He looked at Grayson nervously.

"Even the Alpha. Some would say you are the most powerful member of this pack.

I looked at Grayson confused to see if that was true. He He met my gaze and didn't deny it.

"Come on," Grayson said as he pulled me away and toward the grand staircase. "We're going to bed.

The others bowed their heads in respect as they watched us.

and

Chapter 34

BELLE

I let out the biggest yawn of my life as Grayson and I walked up the stairs. I leaned my weight against him, letting him lead us to his room. He chuckled and quickly lifted me into his arms.

I sighed happily and snuggled into his chest.

I felt his lips on my head.

"I feel like a human newlywed carrying you away."
our honeymoon," Grayson said.

I laughed.

"Yes, it does.

"Well, this is the start of our new life, so it might as well be our honeymoon.

The only difference was that the newlyweds knew they were going to be together forever. Who knows if Grayson really will always want me?

The thought of Grayson getting tired of me and not wanting me more in his life made me suddenly nauseous.

Who would have guessed... Just a few days ago, I was planning to get away from the man who was holding me, and now I was anxious about whether we would be together forever.

When we reached a set of wooden doors, Grayson stopped and kicked them open. He led us into a huge room that was as elegant as the hotel room we'd stayed in when we were in Paris.

I let out an exclamation of surprise.

"Is this your room?"

Grayson nodded and set me down.

- Our bedroom.

I turned to look at him.

"You mean you want us to be in the same room?" - I

I asked, surprised but secretly relieved.

I didn't even want to think about what it would be like to sleep without him now that I got a taste of what it was like to spend the night in his arms.

"I keep forgetting how little you know about werewolf culture and how it differs from the human world. Yes, you will share a room with me. There is no other way.

"You'll always sleep with me unless I'm away on business and I can't bring you with me. I hope you like this room, because it will be yours for the rest of your life.

I swallowed hard.

- Same? I looked around, taking in the huge California king-size bed, the walk-in closet, the separate living room, and the private bathroom.

I think I could live with this room being mine for the rest of my life. my life. It was three times the size of my old apartment.

"Yes," Grayson said. - Without discussion. His arms were suddenly around me again, pulling me so that my back was flush with his chest.

"Tonight we're going to get some rest, and then tomorrow I'm going to take you on a full tour of pack territory so you can get to know your new home. What do you think?

I smiled.

"That sounds incredible.

Grayson smiled back.

"Someone will bring your bag in tomorrow morning, but the closet is fully stocked with new clothes for you, so I doubt you'll need any of your old clothes.

My stomach dropped at the way he said "old clothes" like he was disgusted with the things I was wearing earlier. Did he not like my old clothes? Did he think I was bad?

I looked down at what I was wearing at that moment. And what am I wearing now? I suddenly felt embarrassed.

Grayson watched me cross my arms over my chest and make my

way to the huge closet. More than half the closet was filled with women's clothing, all in my size.

I ran my hand over some of the pieces and grimaced. It was all so beautiful and expensive—nothing like the clothes I was wearing now.

I turned to look at Grayson, who was leaning casually in the doorway, watching me. He frowned.

- You do not look happy. What is wrong? You don't like the clothes?

I suddenly felt extremely guilty. I'm given a closet full of beautiful, expensive clothes, and instead of feeling grateful, I'm defensive and bitter?

- No! - I said quickly. I went to Grayson and passed my arms around him. "I loved them. Thanks. They're amazing.

He leaned down and placed his lips gently on mine. When he pulled away from me, he said, "I know something's wrong."

I sighed and rested my forehead on his chest.

"You don't like my old clothes?"

Grayson immediately pulled me away gently so he could
I see.

"Is that why you're so upset?" you think i don't like
of your clothes? - he asked.

I looked down at my jeans and ratty sweater, then shrugged.

"Isn't that why you bought me all these new clothes?"

He shook his head and laughed.

"Baby, I love you no matter what you're wearing. You could use a potato sack and I would still think you're beautiful. I bought all of this for you because I want you to have the best things in life. There was nothing wrong with his old clothes.

He placed his hands on either side of my face and smiled at me.

"I will spoil you for the rest of your life. He bent down and kissed my forehead. "Better get used to it."

I smiled at him and placed my lips on his.

"Thanks," I whispered. I turned to look at all the new clothes and sighed when Grayson hugged my waist and placed his chin on top of my head.

"I don't think I've ever owned so many clothes in my life."

Grayson chuckled in response.

"Well, I'm exhausted," I said, letting out a huge yawn. I turned to look at Grayson. "I think I'm going to get ready for bed." Did you buy pajamas?

"Not really," Grayson said.

I raised an eyebrow at him.

"All these clothes and you forgot to buy pajamas?"

"In fact, when I asked someone to buy you clothes, I specifically asked them not to buy you pajamas," Grayson said.

- What? "I took a step back. "I don't care how horny you are, I'm not going to sleep naked.

Grayson riu alto.

"That's not what I meant, beautiful. He grabbed my waist and rubbed my sides. "I didn't buy you any pajamas because I want you to sleep in my clothes for the rest of your life.

He walked over to a dresser and pulled out a pair of his boxers and one of his shirts. It was so big it probably came up to my knees.

I smile at him. I couldn't help but melt a little.

"Why do you like it so much that I wear your clothes?" I think I've spent more time in your clothes than mine since I met you.

Grayson smiled back at me.

"And that's exactly how I want it to be. I want you smelling like me.

My eyebrows draw together.

- Why?

"It's a werewolf thing. Males like their

companions smell like them, so everyone else knows they have an owner.

“I thought that was why you bit me,” I said as I brought my hand up to the mark on my shoulder.

Grayson bent down and placed a soft kiss on the mark, causing delicious sparks to spread through my body. I sighed and brought my body closer to his.

I felt Grayson smile against my skin, enjoying my reaction to his touch.

He pulled away and kissed my forehead.

“Until we are fully joined, my wolf will be madly possessive of you. I'll do whatever it takes to make sure everyone knows you're mine.

I swallowed hard at the intensity in his voice. I knew I should be mad that he was referring to me as his—as if I was some kind of object for him to possess—but I knew he wasn't mean. It was normal for him.

I smiled and caught his lips with mine. He growled against my mouth. His arms slowly encircled my waist and lifted me off the ground.

I wrapped my legs around his waist and he carried us out of the closet and onto his bed, never taking his lips from mine. Our kiss had now gone from sweet and loving to intense and wild.

It was like neither of us got tired of each other.

He laid me down on the bed and positioned himself on top of me; his hands traveled all over my body, including places only I had touched.

After a while, I pulled my lips away from his, needing to catch my breath, but I was surprised I didn't want him to stop.

I trusted him and wanted him to continue.

Grayson sat up quickly and pulled the shirt over his head before leaning down again and trailing kisses along my neck and up to my chest.

His hands went lower, along my waist, holding me tight. I opened my legs a little, and he immediately grabbed them to spread them even further.

He placed his body between them, grunting as the lower halves of our bodies connected.

"Grayson," I groaned, feeling intense sparks travel between us and knowing it was our bond becoming more powerful.

It made me want more, and I couldn't help but press my chest against his, wanting to feel his skin against mine, desperate to feel the sparks everywhere.

I ran my hands down his back, feeling his powerful muscles tense and relax under my fingers as he continued to kiss my mark and throat, leaving hickeys I was sure would still be there in the morning.

I grabbed the hem of my shirt, wanting to get it off, but I couldn't because Grayson was pressuring me.

Grayson must have known I was squirming because, without taking his lips from my skin, he grabbed the hem of my T-shirt.

I expected him to pull it over my head, but instead after that, he leaned back and looked at me.

He was asking my permission.

I shook my head quickly, ready to beg him to take it off.

My shirt was ripped off in seconds and thrown across the room. I gasped.

"Grayson! - I screamed. "You tore it!"

Grayson growled loudly in response. It was then that I noticed how black his eyes were. His wolf was in control. But I wasn't afraid. I felt better that his wolf was here, looking at me.

I felt safe.

His lips crushed mine once more, and he wasted no time in grabbing my bra and ripping it in half before throwing it across the room to join my ruined shirt.

I raised an eyebrow at him.

- Serious? "Although, I thought it no longer mattered, since he had just bought me a whole new wardrobe.

He didn't answer, too busy looking at my breasts. I felt self-conscious but tried my best not to lift my arms and cover myself as his hungry black eyes studied every inch of my exposed skin.

I propped myself up on my elbows.

"Grayson? I whispered.

His eyes locked on mine. He placed his palm on my cheek.

"I'm so lucky. He leaned his forehead against mine and kissed me once more.

"Tell me if you want to stop, Belle," he whispered against my lips.

I smiled and pressed my lips against his then said, "I don't want to stop. "I put my hands on either side of his face.

- I'm ready.

His thumb ran across my bruised cheek, which seemed to be more swollen every day.

- He is sure? - he asked.

I nodded. I've never been so sure in my life. I wanted to be with the man I loved as intimately as possible. I wanted to complete the bond.

- I have.

His face broke into a huge, breathtaking smile. His hands were immediately on my pants, pulling them down my legs. He was moving faster than I'd ever seen him.

Within seconds, I was naked beneath him. OK then. I think this is really happening. He started kissing my stomach, and I moaned, feeling my back arch of its own accord as his

lips touched the inside of my thighs.

I squirmed as he left openmouthed kisses all over my face. area. It still wasn't close enough to where I wanted it most.

He laughed softly and grabbed my hips to stop my movements.

"Patience, baby. I will make you feel so good.

I couldn't wait.

His lips were back on my thighs, getting closer and closer to their final destination. I arched my hips hungrily and let my eyes drift closed.

But then he stopped.

"You've got to be kidding me," I heard him growl.

My eyes flew open. Grayson was leaning back, looking straight ahead of him. His eyes were a gray color I had never seen before. He looked angry—irritated, actually.

"Grayson? - I asked. Had I done something wrong?

He looked at me and his eyes softened a little, turning back to black. He ran a hand through his hair, letting out a sigh that turned into a growl.

"Shit! - he screamed.

He looked into my eyes and then my body, looking like he was about to kill someone.

"This really was the best fucking time.

I sat up and grabbed the sheet beside me, covering myself.

"Grayson, what's wrong?"

He got up, next to the bed and picked up his shirt from the floor.

"Kyle just mind-linked me.

I furrowed my brows, confused as I watched him put his shirt, "Link...with the mind?"

Grayson nodded.

"He spoke to me, inside my mind.

"Can you talk to people mentally?" "I asked, in

shock state.

"Yes, and one day you will too, but I can't explain it now," he said. He sat down on the bed next to me and cupped my face gently in his hands.

"Baby, I'm sorry, but I have to go. It's an emergency. He looked down at my sheet-covered body once more and clenched his fists.

- Cum! he yelled as he got to his feet. I watched him walk to the door, where his shoes were.

"Please know it's killing me to leave you like this," he said as he pulled on his boots and growled in frustration.

"Why don't you take a shower and get ready for bed, and I promise I'll be back before you fall asleep.

"So I didn't do anything wrong?" I asked in a low voice. that he wore the shoes.

His head turned towards me.

"No, no, baby, of course not!" "He went back to where I still was sitting on the bed.

"Fuck, you're fucking perfect," he said, placing his forehead to mine and then softly kissing my lips. "And we'll finish this later."

He licked his lips and kissed me one last time before walking to the door.

"What happened then?" I asked before he left.

He turned and looked at me.

"Vampires invaded our territory.

Chapter 35

BELLE

I woke up the next morning feeling cold and dizzy.

I didn't sleep well. After Grayson left with his news shocking, I took a shower and put on the "pajamas" he had given me.

So I sat in bed for a few hours, waiting for him to come back, too worried to sleep.

I didn't know anything about vampires, and even though Grayson had promised he'd be fine, I couldn't control my anxiety.

I stayed awake as long as I could before tiredness took over. takes care of me, forcing me into a restless sleep.

Once awake, I rolled over to snuggle closer to Grayson, only to find he wasn't in bed.

He didn't have his arms around me - he wasn't stroking my face, my back... playing with my hair.

I made a face and sat up. This was the first time since I'd known him that I hadn't woken up with him beside me. It didn't feel right. My anxiety immediately rose as the events of last night came back to me.

Grayson never returned.

I got out of bed and pulled on some sweatpants before running down the hall, hoping to run into someone else. Eventually I found a kitchen and was relieved to find Kyle and Elijah preparing breakfast.

The two were laughing and couldn't keep their hands off each other. I couldn't help but smile. They looked so happy to be together.

Noticing my presence, they both turned around. "Luna!" Good morning," Kyle said.

"Hey, Kyle," I replied. "You two are adorable. I gestured to their clasped hands.

Elijah smiled and wrapped his arms around Kyle. He kissed her cheek.

"Yeah, well, weeks of separation do that to mates.

"Speaking of mates," I said, "have any of you seen Grayson?"

Kyle frowned a little.

"I thought he'd be with you, this being your first day as Luna and all.

I shook my head.

"He wasn't there when I woke up. He didn't come back after he left last night because of...because of...vampires.

Kyle turned fully to me.

"Didn't you come back?"

I shook my head and wrung my hands.

Kyle's brows drew together.

- This is weird. He glanced at Elijah, who looked just as confused as he did.

"What happened last night?" - I asked.

"There were vampires in our territory, but we took care of them all in less than an hour," Kyle said. "The Alpha was very upset that he had to be there.

"He said he'd get back to you and not to bother you for the rest of the night unless several people were on fire and dying.

This was not helping my anxiety. All the different scenarios of what could have happened to him were going through my head.

What if they didn't kill one of the vampires, and that one did something to Grayson?

"I'm sure there's nothing to worry about." He's probably just in his office. It's where he spends most of his time," Elijah said. "I can take you there.

My heart jumped with excitement at the thought of seeing Grayson. Already had

a blinding pain in my chest from being away from him for so long.

I desperately wanted to be back in his arms.

"That would be great," I said.

Elijah nodded and turned to Kyle to give him a quick kiss.

"I'll be back in a minute. Continue with breakfast.

Kyle frowned, but nodded and kissed Elijah harder.
once.

Once at the grand doors to Grayson's office, Elijah let me in, saying he could smell Grayson in there. I thanked him for guiding me through this huge house.

I knocked a few times on the door, looking forward to seeing Grayson.

"Come in," I heard his soft voice reply.

I opened the door and went inside. I was weak with relief when I saw him and he didn't seem to be hurt.

His office was exactly as I'd expected: all dark wood, down to the bookshelves and windows, with a giant desk in the center at which Grayson sat.

He looked a lot more intimidating than I remembered.

I stopped for a second near the door and shifted my weight from one foot to the other when he didn't look at me.

"Hey," I said, hoping to get his attention.

He looked at me for a second and then looked back at the computer screen in front of you.

"Good morning, Bella."

Well, this is not what I expected.

Normally, he was on top of me, unable to keep his hands off. And he never called me Belle, almost always opting for a cheesy nickname.

- How did you sleep? - he asked.

I hesitated, taken aback by his behavior.

— I slept more or less. You weren't in bed this morning," I said. "It was weird not waking up in your arms. I felt..." I paused. - I missed you.

I blushed a little, slightly embarrassed by my confession. But I also knew he loved hearing me say something like that.

Grayson looked at me, then back at his computer.
again.

"Yes, I decided I had a lot of work to do after staying here. away for so long, and it was better to end it now than wake her up.

I think it makes sense.

- Oh ok. Can I help with anything?

Grayson shook his head, typing instead of looking at me.

"It's nothing that concerns you.

I took a deep breath. He had never spoken to me like that.

- Oh okay. I crossed my arms in front of me. I gave one step closer to him.

- Everything is fine? You are a little strange. everything went well last night? Kyle told me you killed all the vampires.

Grayson looked at me. His eyes were pitch black, which meant his wolf was present. Was he... mad at me?

"I'm fine," he practically growled. "As I said before, I I just have a lot of work to do.

Okay, what the hell? Should I leave? I was starting to feel like hindrance.

"Well, um, didn't you say you had plans for me today? Something about taking a tour? Should I get dressed and wait for you to finish?

He sighed and leaned back in his chair. He ran a hand over his face.

"Look, Belle, I have a lot to do after spending so much time in Paris with you. I just don't have the time. Sorry, but can you get Kyle to show you? The pain in my chest grew at his words, but I tried not to let them get to me too much, knowing he was just busy.

Part of me wanted to be angry, but I remembered that I should have known he wouldn't want to spend every moment of the day with me when we got back to the States.

He had a role here—great importance. Thousands of people counted on him.

"Yes, of course," I said quickly. "I'm going to talk to Kyle.

When he didn't answer, I said, "I didn't mean to interrupt. I'm sorry if I did.

Grayson nodded.

"Yeah, well, maybe we'll make it a rule that you don't come to my office during the day. That way, we won't have to worry about interruptions to any important business. I'll find you if I need you.

He looked back at his computer.

That's when a giant knot formed in my chest and made its way up the my throat. I could feel the tears threatening to come out.

Why is this making me so upset? I'm not a girl sticky... I shouldn't let myself be affected by such simple words.

"O-okay," I whispered.

Again, he didn't say anything, obviously shifting his focus back to work. That should be my cue to leave.

I took a few slow steps back, desperately hoping he would look up and say he was just kidding and then wrap his arms around me. But he didn't. He did nothing but type on his keyboard.

I turned and left.

As soon as I walked out of Grayson's office, I couldn't hold back the tears any longer. I'd been scorned and belittled before, but I felt ten times worse when Grayson did it.

It felt like he had just stuck a knife in my chest and laughed.

A silent sob escaped my lips and I immediately covered my mouth. I was still right next to your door. I couldn't let Grayson hear me cry. He would think I was pathetic.

All he did was ask for space to work, and here I was, sobbing outside your door. God, what is wrong with me?

When I imagined all the things that could go wrong when I first came here, Grayson not having enough time for me wasn't one of them.

I expected even less to be treated like a nuisance.

Couldn't he see how desperate I was for him to help me transition into his pack? I didn't know anything about it.

And he was the only person here that I felt comfortable with.

I shook my head, trying to clear my tears. I will not be that girl. I wouldn't act like the clingy, codependent girl I seemed to be right now.

I would be strong and overcome.

I had probably been affected by his words because of the stupid mate bond.

I squared my shoulders and straightened up, wiping my tears. A new determination swept through me.

I decided to get dressed and show myself to the pack. I thought about asking Kyle to show me around, but I couldn't imagine taking him away from Elijah.

They needed time to talk.

And my newfound independence gave me gas.

I started with the floor I was on and slowly worked my way up each floor of what Grayson called—the pack house.

It was incredibly impressive, with too many rooms to count and tons and tons of people. I tried to smile and strike up a conversation with a few I passed in the hallways, but no one would look at me.

They would give me short answers and treat me like I was that girl in class nobody likes.

It was too weird.

As the day went on, my spirit became more and more broken. This one

it wasn't the first day living with Grayson that I had imagined.

All I wanted to do was seek him out and refuse to leave his side, even if it meant sitting next to him in silence while he worked.

But I held back, remembering our early morning conversation.

I was hoping to see you tonight.

It was late afternoon and I was getting very hungry.

I tried going into each of the house's three kitchens to find some food, but they were full of huge werewolves raiding the pantries to cook.

I felt extremely intimidated.

I was much smaller and weaker than all of them.

Once, when I tried to pick up an apple from a counter, one of the male werewolves grabbed it before me and took a bite while making intense eye contact that said, "Back off."

I left immediately after that.

I decided to talk to Grayson about food when I saw him later tonight. Maybe he would take me into the kitchen and show me where everything was. I had no problem making my own food, but I just needed to know how to get around all those angry werewolves.

I sat in Grayson's room for a few hours, feeling like it was the only place I could really be without being a nuisance. I kept reminding myself that the first few days were always the hardest—that it would always get better. I've learned this from every job I've had over the years.

Maybe I could find something to do to help around here and earn my keep, since Grayson would be busy during the day. People seemed to be always working and moving around.

There must be something around here that I could do. Maybe tomorrow I could try to find some werewolf books and educate myself about this new world I was now a part of.

As the sun went down, my excitement to see Grayson increased.

I had no intention of telling him anything about what had happened to me today, his pack, or how horrible I felt.

I didn't want to put anything else on his plate. Instead, I had made a list of everything I liked about his pack and was going to tell him about it.

After changing into my pajamas and getting ready for bed, I sighed and walked over to his bed, where I flopped down on my face. It was only eight o'clock, but I was exhausted.

This had been the worst day ever.

I tried to stay awake as long as possible, hoping to talk to Grayson, but I couldn't keep my eyes open. I fell into a restless sleep.

Chapter 36

BELLE

Sometime in the middle of the night, I was awakened by the sensation of burning kisses on my neck. My eyes flew open immediately and I gasped, recognizing the familiar sparks.

“Grayson? I asked into the darkness, reaching for him.

“Mm-hmm?” he asked as he continued with his kisses. and grabbed my waist.

I blinked as my eyes adjusted to the light.

My heart skipped a beat when I noticed that he seemed to be in a better mood than the last time I saw him. He seemed to have found his old flame through physical contact with me.

I sighed in relief. I think he was just stressed before.

I wrapped my arms around his neck and pulled his lips to mine. for a deep kiss that pushed all the tension out of my body.

After a few minutes, I pulled away to try and catch my breath and Grayson returned to kissing my neck.

I tried to playfully push him away from me so I could see him and talk to him, but he just growled loudly and snapped his teeth at me. OK...

Suddenly, he ripped my shirt to shreds so that my bare torso was on full display. Grayson wasted no time as he closed his mouth on my breast tightly.

I gasped, and my back arched involuntarily.

My mind was all foggy from his sinful mouth, but somewhere in there, there was logic. This was getting really hot, really fast.

I grabbed Grayson's hair and tried to pull it away from my chest, but again he growled harshly. He didn't look at me, so I couldn't make out the color of his eyes, but I could only assume his wolf had taken over.

"Grayson," I tried again. His lips were moving down my stomach now. I was starting to panic when he approached my center.

"Grayson, stop!" I said firmly.

Acting as if I hadn't said anything, he continued his journey downwards until he finally reached my cotton panties. It was then that I remembered that I had only worn my underwear and one of his shirts to sleep.

That didn't leave many hurdles for him to jump over before I was completely naked.

My heart rate increased as I tried to pull away from him. I wasn't ready anymore. There was something wrong and I didn't want to do anything to him while he was acting like this.

I pushed him harder and tried to get out from under him.

"Grayson, I'm serious. Stop.

A dark laugh left his mouth. His black eyes connected with mine and he smiled at me.

"Oh, come on, Belle. Have some fun. I'm dying of desire to have you. Let's finish what we started last night.

I shook my head.

"Not tonight. I'm not ready now.

- I'm not ready. He imitated me in a high-pitched voice. "That excuse is getting old. All you have to do is lie back while I do all the work.

My jaw dropped at his words. I couldn't believe what he was saying.

What happened to the man who told me he would wait as long as I needed—who took me in his arms when I was embarrassed by my lack of experience?

I tried to pull away again, but he just put his hand on my leg and squeezed painfully. His other hand moved to the edge of my panties and started pulling them down. Panic was looming.

I grabbed his hand to stop him, kicking my legs.

"Grayson, I said no!" Stop!

When one of my feet hit his jaw, he jumped back.

- Are you kidding me?

I immediately sat up and put my back against the headboard, trying to get as far away from him as I could. I took the sheet and wrapped it around myself.

I didn't even realize I was crying until I felt the tears down from my eyes to my neck.

Grayson looked furious. His entire body shook with rage.

"What the fuck kind of mate are you?" First, I'm stuck with a human, and now you're not going to give me the pleasure I'm entitled to?

A sob escaped my throat. I cringed even more.

- What do you mean? What are you talking about? — I paused. — Were you really serious? "I managed to say.

He nodded.

"Why the hell are you crying? If anyone should be upset, it should be me. This is your duty as my mate.

Your only duty. What else are you good for?

- Sorry? — I got pissed. "My only duty?" Having sex with you is not my job! I'm not here to be your personal object of pleasure!

I tried to keep my words firm, but towards the end of my speech, my voice started to shake.

I covered my face with my hands to try to hide the tears. pathetic falling from my eyes.

I heard Grayson sigh. There was a scrape of sheets and then I felt his hands wrap around my wrists to uncover my face. I disengaged myself from the contact and walked away. Another sigh.

- I'm sorry, baby. You know I didn't mean any of that," Grayson said. "I've had a rough day and I was hoping to ease some of my tension tonight.

My body was still shaking with sheer terror and I couldn't respond.

"Linda, please look at me," he said. He placed his hand on my knee and started making gentle circles with his thumb. - Let's go, please?

I slowly removed my hands from my face and sniffed. I probably looked absolutely broken.

Grayson smiled softly.

- That's right.

He leaned forward and rested his forehead against mine. He took a deep breath and we stayed like that for a while, although his hurtful words were still echoing in my head.

I soothed as he continued to whisper soft words and rub circles on my legs. I was starting to feel like maybe Grayson was back to normal.

With each passing second, his lips were getting closer and closer to mine, until finally they connected. At first, I didn't care.

The kiss was loving and passionate as usual—as opposed to the hard, demanding kisses he'd been giving me moments before.

But then I felt him grab the sheet, trying to pull it away from my body. I frowned at the kiss. Was he really trying to start something over again?

I tried to pull the sheet tighter around me, but he just growled and pulled harder until I couldn't hold on anymore. I gasped when my upper half was exposed and his hands moved up.

I immediately pulled away from him and pushed his shoulders with everything I had in me.

"Grayson, no!" Stop! Let's not do that tonight! I seemed to catch him off guard, and he fell back just the tiniest bit—enough for me to jump out of bed and grab the floor sheet to wrap myself back around.

- Cum! Grayson yelled. "You're ridiculous as fuck, Belle!

- I'm ridiculous? Are you kidding me? No means no, Grayson!

What the hell is your problem? - I screamed.

Grayson let out a grim laugh.

"Well, you weren't saying no last night. You were practically begging me.

I sobbed. Tears were running down my face in rivers now.

It took me a few seconds to get my emotions under control enough to whisper, "Who are you?"

Grayson was opening his mouth to respond when a loud growl ripped from his throat. His entire body shuddered, then he gripped her hair, holding it in tight fists.

Suddenly, his head began to rock back and forth as louder grunts escaped his mouth.

"Grayson? - I asked. His entire body started to shake.

I slowly got up and walked over to him, keeping in mind that the last time I'd seen him act like this, he'd transformed and chased me across the entire hotel suite.

His body pulled away from me, and a strange hissing noise came out of him, which was nothing like the growls he normally made.

"If you don't stop, you won't like the consequences," I heard him hiss softly.

I said nothing. I had no idea what to do. I wanted to curl up into a little ball and stay that way forever.

"Whatever," Grayson said. "It's not like I want to get laid." with you while you're like this anyway.

He pointed at my blotchy face and messy hair.

He lay down on the bed, turning away from me, apparently going to sleep.

I stood there for a few moments in complete disbelief of what had just happened.

I wasn't sure what I was supposed to do. I didn't want to go back to bed with him, but I couldn't leave the room dressed like that either.

And I couldn't get new clothes without walking in front of him. This one sheet didn't cover much, and I wasn't about to give him a show.

I started to drag myself towards the bathroom, deciding that would be the best place to collect my thoughts. As I did, I tried to control my sobs so I wouldn't upset Grayson any more.

“Turn the fucking lights off,” he growled suddenly, making me jump.

I quickly ran to the light switch and turned it off before running back into the bathroom and closing the door behind me, making sure to lock it.

Chapter 37

BELLE

I fell asleep on the bathroom floor that night. It was a little degrading to sleep on the cold marble floor, but I couldn't bring myself to leave. I didn't want to face Grayson.

I groaned in pain when I woke up, then rolled over and sat up, bracing my aching back against the lockers. I sighed when I finally stood up and saw my appearance in the mirror.

My hair was crazy, and the tears left streaks on my face and neck.

I spent most of the night silently crying, not wanting Grayson to hear me, but also not being able to stop myself from replaying what had happened between us.

I didn't know what I had done to deserve all her harsh words.

It took me a while, but I finally worked up the courage to leave the bathroom. I felt awful after last night.

What hurt the most, though, was that I knew he was partially right. I was your mate. I should be fine with him touching me. Was not? Take as much time as you need... His earlier words replayed in my head... • He had brought me to his

home and was taking care of me and making sure I never had to work another day. The least I could do was make your nights a little interesting.

However, I just couldn't bring myself to do it—not after the way he'd treated me. Something about Grayson's behavior last night made me feel used and disgusting—not to mention terrified.

I just wanted to talk, but he wouldn't even talk to me. sex was really the only thing he wanted from me?

It made me wonder if all that time we spent together in Paris was just an act: he was kind and sweet while we were there so he could bring me back into his pack and do whatever he wanted to me — show me the real me .

It was the only explanation that made sense.
Was my mother right? All alphas really treated their companions like that?

Or had he had enough of me?

The thought made my heart break into a million pieces. What if I had only encouraged his new dislike for me by rejecting him? What if he really didn't want me anymore?

My stomach lurched. I couldn't lose Grayson. It hadn't taken long, but I already didn't know what I would do without him. I wanted to leave all that behind. I wish things could go back to the way they were were before.

Luckily, when I came out of the bathroom, he wasn't there, and I was able to get dressed and walk down the stairs in peace.

The first thing on my mind was finding some food after not eating anything all day yesterday. And maybe I'd find Grayson and we could talk about what happened.

But, unfortunately, the downstairs kitchen was full, and none of the people were Grayson.

It was full of werewolves cooking, laughing and eating. My Stomach rumbled with all the different smells around me.

I desperately wanted something to eat. I looked at a bowl of apples in the middle of the island. I sighed in relief. I could pick an apple without disturbing anyone.

I approached the island as quietly as possible, watching the large werewolves around me warily, painfully aware of the fact that they could all kill me without lifting a finger.

However, before I could reach out to grab an apple, a large, burly man I had never seen before grabbed my arm and forcefully pushed me back. I gasped as I lost my balance and landed on my ass.

The man didn't say anything or offer to help me up. He just looked at me and shook his head slowly while raising his eyebrows, as if daring me to try again.

"I'm so sorry," I said, struggling to get to my feet before making yet another scene. Everyone was already looking at me, looks of disgust plastered across their faces.

I hung my head in shame. I wasn't even sure where this shame came from. What a Luna I am. Shouldn't I be the leader of this pack? Elijah hadn't told me that I was the most powerful member? He was so, so wrong.

I was a joke.

I left the kitchen quickly, wondering what exactly I had done to deserve this. Why did they get mad at me every time I tried to get some food? It didn't make sense.

I wandered around the house some more, just like I had yesterday, trying to find something to fill my time. My hunger finally passed and was replaced by utter and utter boredom.

There's nothing to do around here.

Well, there were things to do, but every time I walked into a room with anyone else in it, I got looks that made my blood run cold—from a pack of scary werewolves, to boot.

So I just walked. I walked around the entire packhouse so many times I lost count. I thought about going back to Grayson's room, but something kept stopping me.

Maybe I didn't want to be reminded of what happened last night; my heart still ached from the things he said to me. Or maybe I was afraid he'd come back in the room and we'd have a repeat.

I don't think I could handle it.

After a few hours, including a few minutes outside in the freezing cold to try and fill my time, I came across Kyle, who was looking at some papers in his hands and seemed to be in a hurry.

I wanted not to bother him, worried that he too had decided that he now hated me for some reason. But I knew that if anyone was willing to talk to me, it would probably be Kyle.

"Kyle," I said, dragging my feet. - Hey.

He looked up and immediately smiled when he saw me.

— Officer!

I breathed a sigh of relief. It was good to see that at least one person was acting normally.

- How have you been? How was your first day as Luna? - he asked.

"Oh, um..." I smiled nervously. I was afraid that if I told the truth, I would completely fall apart. I needed to talk to Grayson before I told anyone what was going on. - Good. Very good.

- That is great! he said happily. "I knew you'd love it here.

I nodded my head in agreement.

"Yeah, it was great," I lied. "Actually, I wanted to ask you something, if that's okay. If you're not busy, of course. I gestured to the papers in her hands.

"It's more than fine!" I was coming back to get something, but I have a little time. Ask freely! Kyle said.

- OK. Um, it's actually about Grayson. I was wondering if he looked a little weird to you?

Kyle frowned.

- Strange?

I changed.

"Yes, unlike how he usually is.

He thought for a second.

"Well, I've been with him all morning, and he seems completely normal to me.

— He looked happier than usual. probably have something

to do with you being here. He gave me a playful elbow and waggled his eyebrows.

I laughed, but my heart dropped into my stomach.

- Yes maybe.

I was starting to think this was all just in my head. Was I just being too dramatic?

"Are you going back to him now?" - I asked.

Kyle nodded.

"Yes, we're in the middle of a meeting in your office. I just had to go get this. He held up the papers.

"Oh, okay," I said quickly. "Then I won't occupy you for more time. In fact, could you say something to him for me?"

"Can't you tell him yourself?" Kyle asked.

I looked down at my hands and flinched.

- I do not want to bother you. You're already going there anyway.

"I'm sure it wouldn't be a bother, Luna," Kyle said.

"He'd probably love to see you and hear how your day is going. He..."

"No, no, it's fine," I interrupted. The last time I was in Grayson's office crossed my mind—when he asked me to stay away during the day. "Are you going to tell him for me?"

Kyle hesitated for a moment, obviously sensing my discomfort. He looked me up and down like he was assessing if I was okay.

He got a little straighter.

"Okay," he finally said.

I smile lightly.

- Thanks. I paused for a moment, trying to think of the best way to phrase it.

"Uh, can you just tell him I'm sorry? Tell him I'm really sorry about last night and wish I could redo the whole night. I just want things to go back to normal.

His frown intensified. I could see he wanted me to explain, but thankfully he let it go.

Kyle didn't usually ask questions.

"And you're sure you don't want to tell him personally?" - he asked.

I shook my head.

"Yes, I think I'd rather it be you, if that's okay.

He studied my face.

- OK. I will definitely tell him.

"Thanks, Kyle. I didn't want to make you the mediator. I really appreciate it.

Kyle nodded.

- Clear. No problem at all.

"Okay, I think I'll stop wasting your time and let you get back to your meeting. I tried to give him a sincere smile.

"Yeah, okay," Kyle said. He looked like he didn't want to go, but eventually he turned away from me and started walking towards Grayson's office.

Before he went too far, I heard him call.

- Manager?

I turned and gave him a questioning look.

- Are you well? Kyle asked.

I sighed and tried to put a convincing smile on my face.

"Oh, yes, I'm fine.

Kyle shook his head slowly, looking unconvinced.

"Whatever is going on between you two is going to get better. I promise," Kyle said. "You were made for each other and nothing can change that.

I hope so. I shook my head.

"Thanks, Kyle," I said. So I turned and walked away.

Chapter 38

BELLE

I managed to avoid Grayson's room until late at night. I was hoping to be able to sneak in while he was sleeping and use the couch across the street. bed.

I didn't want to sleep in the same bed as Grayson until we talked. But I also didn't know where else I would sleep if not in Grayson's room.

I could feel the anxiety building inside of me as I approached his door, hoping he wouldn't get mad at me anymore.

I opened the door and peeked in to see if he was asleep, and I frowned. when I saw the empty bed. Maybe he was still working?

But as soon as I walked in, I was immediately slammed against the door, my head hitting the wood painfully. I screamed in pain and shock.

"Who the hell do you think you are, huh?" Grayson yelled at me.

I whimpered at the strength he was squeezing my arms.

"W-what do you mean?"

Grayson growled loudly.

"What happens between you and me stays between you and me, understand? You're not going to gossip with the first person that comes along just because your precious feelings have been hurt.

My anger exploded.

- Stay away from me! - I screamed. I pushed at his chest with all my might, furious that he would even think of putting his hands on me like that.

I heard a hard slap and the most intense pain I've ever felt in my life spread across my cheek.

I screamed and grabbed my face as shock coursed through my

system.

He... he just hit me.

I didn't have time to process what had just happened because before I knew it, Grayson had his hands on my shoulders, pushing me against the wall.

"You better listen to me when I'm talking to you," Grayson said, spitting his words in my face. I whimpered in response, completely terrified. "What exactly did you say to him?"

"You mean Kyle?" — I sobbed. "I swear I didn't tell him anything!" I just told him to say I was sorry!

"Yes, you better have said just that." His hand came up and gripped my chin tightly. I shuddered. I knew I'd have a bruise there tomorrow to add to my new black eye.

"Listen here, little buddy. If you tell a single soul about anything that happens in this room, I swear you'll find out just how angry an Alpha male can get. Did you understand?"

His grip tightened on my jaw.

"I said, do you understand?"

I shook my head.

- Yes! Yes I understood!

"Good," he grunted.

He released me and I immediately fell to the ground, clutching my face.

The tears flowed again and I desperately wanted them to stop, remembering how Grayson had reacted the last time he'd seen me cry.

Suddenly, something soft hit my face. I looked down. He had thrown my pajamas in my face.

"I want you sleeping somewhere else tonight. slept better last night without you in bed. ' He stopped for a second.

"That is...unless you want to crawl into this bed and show your mate how sorry you really are.

He raised an eyebrow at me and slowly looked down at my body.

from top to bottom. He licked his lips.

I never thought Grayson's eyes on my body would make me feel so gross and used. I didn't even know how to respond.

So instead of saying anything, I just brought my legs up to my chest and cuddled up, hoping that would leave him less of my body for his eyes to roam.

A hissing noise left Grayson's mouth, followed by a bitter laugh.

- Beauty. Room 101 downstairs is empty. Use this one and get out of my sight.

I let out a silent sob. I knew in that moment that I was losing him. He didn't want me anymore. I met this man just a few weeks ago, and he had already become my whole life. And now I was losing him.

Grayson started to walk away from me, leaving me sobbing on the floor by the door.

- What did I do wrong? I whispered through my tears. - What did I do?

Grayson groaned and ran a hand over his face in frustration. He turned to look at me.

"I don't have time to deal with you right now. Just stay out of my way and don't cause any more trouble. I didn't sign up for this shit," he said, pointing at my hunched form.

My heart sank into my chest and I took a deep breath. I paused for a second, unsure if I should ask that question. But then I knew I really had no other option.

— Grayson — I took a deep breath — you don't want me anymore?

His eyes narrowed and he approached me slowly, moving like a lion about to bring down its prey.

"Look here, mate," he spat.

He held up his index finger and I watched in fascination and horror as a sharp claw emerged from the tip.

He brought it close to my face.

“I'll let you in on a little secret: the only reason alphas want their mates is because of the power they give.

Her sharp nail traced my chin and then ran across my swollen cheek. I sobbed, surprised that such a light touch could cause me so much pain.

I knew the bruise and swelling would be difficult to cover up in the morning. I hadn't realized before that I was bleeding, but when Grayson removed his hand from my face, there was blood on the tip of the claw.

I watched in horror as he brought his claw to his mouth and sucked. He smiled at me.

“You're here to give me pleasure and power, that's all.

It felt like he had ripped open my chest, grabbed my heart and crushed it in the palm of his hand.

I straightened my shoulders and looked into his eyes.

“Then I'm leaving. And you can't stop me.

Chapter 39

BELLE

Without warning, a deafening growl erupted from Grayson's mouth. He grabbed his chest and his whole body shook as he bent down and started to breathe heavily.

He appeared to be in extreme pain. having no idea what do, I just watched.

Grayson shook his head violently and grabbed her hair. He yelled, "No!"

— high and fell to his knees.

This went on for a few minutes, and in the meantime, I tried to come up with a plan to get away from the crazy monster in front of me.

Had I caused this by saying I was leaving? The last time he'd transformed in front of me, it hadn't seemed so painful.

What the hell is happening?

Suddenly, Grayson stopped as he looked down, still holding his head. And then his eyes locked with mine, my wide, scared eyes. They were completely dark.

"Mate," he said.

I backed away as much as I could as I looked at him with teary eyes. I brought my knees up and hugged them close to my chest. Looking determined, he slowly got up and started to approach me. I whimpered when he finally came to stand directly above me.

I wasn't sure what to say when he looked at me. His eyes searched my face and a growl left his mouth. Then he held out his hand, apparently preparing to hit me.

again.

I immediately raised my arm in defense and backed away from the impending blow.

- I'm very sorry! - I screamed. - I'm very sorry! I shouldn't have

said nothing! I'm very sorry! I'm very sorry. I'm so sorry...," I sobbed.

But the blow never came—nothing happened.

I cried for a few moments, not even trying to keep my composure. I felt completely destroyed.

"Mate," I heard Grayson say in a gentle tone that surprised me. I shook my head, not wanting to meet his gaze or for him to see my pathetic state.

"Mate," he said again with more force.

I looked at him slowly and was shocked by what I saw. He, too, had tears in his eyes, running silently down his face.

I never thought I would see Grayson cry. And as much as he scared me now, I still hated seeing him cry.

He ducked again, and this time, I didn't flinch.

I watched in fascination as he placed his hand gently on the my knee, which was still pulled up to my chest.

"Sorry, mate," he said with real sadness in his voice.

I realized then, as I studied his pitch-black eyes, that I wasn't talking to Grayson. No, I was talking to your wolf. His wolf had somehow taken over his body and was communicating with me.

I wasn't sure if the wolf felt any differently towards me, but I found myself hoping that maybe a part of Grayson still wanted me.

- You still love me? ' I asked him quietly.

Sadness flashed in her eyes and her shoulders slumped. Slowly, very slowly—almost as if he was afraid of startling me again—he raised his hand to cup the uninjured side of the my face.

He gently wiped away my tears.

- My partner. Mine," he said. He lowered his head and connected it with mine. "My mate," he repeated.

That told me everything I needed to hear. Grayson didn't want me for nothing but sex and power, but his wolf still wanted me for me.

I threw my arms around his neck and hugged him close to me. I desperately needed to be comforted and have someone tell me that everything was going to be okay.

He returned the hug tightly, wrapping his arms around my waist and then locking my legs around him so he could pick me up.

He sighed deeply, his body vibrating against mine.

Burying his face deep into my neck, he bit down. gently my bite mark and my body shuddered.

He continued to hold me for a few minutes as I sobbed and released all the emotions I had been holding inside for the last few days.

After a while, he started to move, and I gripped him tighter, wanting him not to let go or for his human side not to take over again.

I held him so tight I forgot about my cheek hurt and screamed as it hit the side of his neck.

Grayson growled when he heard my scream—so loud I felt it bone deep. It was enough to startle me and make me loosen my grip on her neck.

He immediately carried us over to his bed and placed me on the mattress gently, moving back a little so he could inspect my bruised face. I wondered if I looked as broken as I felt.

After a moment, he growled softly, then walked silently into the bathroom. When he returned, he was holding a damp towel.

When Grayson brought the cloth up to my face to clean my wound, I grabbed his wrist gently before it made contact and said,

“Be kind, please. I think my cheekbone might be broken.

It made Grayson's entire body shake, and I could tell he was struggling to control his emotions.

He nodded once, then slowly lifted the cloth up to my cheek once more. I winced when the cloth made contact, and Grayson whimpered.

"Sorry mate. Sorry mate. Sorry mate," he repeated as he cleaned my wound. I could see how hard this was for him and that his apologies were both sad and genuine.

Once he seemed satisfied with the treatment, he sat down next to me and pulled me onto his lap, wrapping his arms tightly around me.

Finally, I worked up the courage to ask what was on my mind:

"What did I do wrong?" What did I do to make him hate me so much?

Grayson whimpered softly and tugged on my waist to bring me closer to him.

"I"—he paused—"I, errr..."

He shook his head, and I could tell he was struggling to express himself. After all, he was a wolf. He probably didn't have a lot of speaking experience.

He growled loudly in frustration and tried again,

"I... No." Mate I made a

face. There was no way he would be able to explain anything. He was barely able to utter a few words.

I sighed sadly.

"It's okay," I said, not liking to see him struggle.

"Can you just tell him I'm sorry? Tell him I'm sorry for what I did and I hope he can forgive me. I don't want him to be mad at me anymore. I want things to go back to being

as they were before.

Grayson shook his head violently.

"No, mate. No.

"What do you mean not?" Won't you tell him? "He shook the

head again.

- No. He placed a hand on his chest. "Sorry," he said. He patted his chest again. - Sorry.

"I don't understand," I said. - What do you mean? of what Do you regret it? It's Grayson who should apologize.

But suddenly Grayson's wolf snarled loudly and grabbed his head when her body started to shake again.

He straightened up and I got off his lap and fell to the floor. I groaned in pain.

"Stupid fucking wolf!" Grayson yelled as he grabbed her hair. Then he reached down and roughly pulled me by the arm to get me to my feet.

"Everything he did or said to you had nothing to do with me.

My shoulders slumped and I nodded to show my understanding.

He grabbed my chin and pulled my face close enough that I could feel his breath.

"You're not going anywhere, do you hear me?" You are my mate. I'll tie you to the bed if I have to.

He pushed me.

"Now leave. Sleep elsewhere.

I straightened up, trying to maintain my dignity as I reached for the doorknob behind me.

"And Belle?" Grayson said.

I turned to look at him.

"Sleep there tomorrow too."

I nodded and walked out the door, closing it behind me.

Grayson was right about one thing: I wasn't going anywhere.

As long as your wolf wanted me, I would be here. I knew now that something was wrong.

And I would find out.

Chapter 40

GRAYSON

A NOITE DO ATAQUE DOS VAMPIROS...

Leaving Belle naked and disappointed in my bed was the hardest thing I've ever done in my life.

My wolf was pissed off beyond measure. It kept growling in my head, sending me mental images of Belle's beautiful, sad face as she lay nearly naked, wrapped in a sheet, watching us go.

I growled loudly. She deserves better than that.

I made my way to the edge of my territory, frowning when I saw Kyle and a few of the pack warriors standing idly by.

- What the hell is happening? I barked as I approached them. They all turned around and immediately dropped to their knees and showed their necks to me.

"Kyle," I said. - Come here.

Kyle got up and approached me slowly, obviously feeling my sensitive mood.

"I thought you said it was an emergency," I commented when he was in front of me. - What's going on here? You said there were vampires in the territory.

Kyle opened his mouth to speak, but paused. he slowly he lifted his nose to the air and sniffed.

- Wow! he said as a knowing smile formed on his face. his lips and he covered his nose. "I interrupted something, didn't I?"

I crossed my arms over my chest and growled. I had no time for Kyle's games at the moment—especially when my mate was alone in my bed during her first night here.

“What the hell are you talking about, Kyle?”

Kyle chuckled and shook his head in amusement.

“I hate to say it, Alpha, but you're giving off some serious Alpha male mating pheromones right now. He raised his eyebrows suggestively.

"You and Luna were having fun, huh?"

My wolf lunged forward, instantly bristling with rage. He tried to take control, wanting to remind Kyle of his place and who Belle was to him.

“Kyle,” I growled as I tried to control my wolf. “I suggest you change the subject to why you mentally called me.

“Otherwise, I think you'll find just how angry an Alpha male who is emitting mating pheromones but has been taken from his mate for seemingly no reason can be.

Kyle swallowed hard.

“Yes, Alpha,” he said quickly, nodding. “Uh, Beta Adalee is scanning the territory to see how many vampires are out there. We believe they are not yet aware that we know they are here.

I agreed. I was the fastest of the bunch, but Adalee was quick and silent, which made her the best at exploring tricky situations.

"How long has she been gone?" - I asked.

“I'm right here,” someone shouted from behind us.

Kyle and I both turned to see Adalee walking out of the nearby woods. She approached us with a serious expression on her face.

“There are ten vampires scattered throughout the territory.

I growled. What the hell were vampires doing in my territory?

No creature—not even packless werewolves—is dumb enough to invade my territory in years. My pack had too many members for anyone to slip through unnoticed and unscathed.

These vampires were about to learn that.

- What are they doing? - I asked.

Adalee shrugged.

- I don't know. They are just standing there.

"You mean they're not doing anything?" they are with any weapons? Kyle asked.

Adalee shook her head.

- No. No weapons... nothing. They're really just standing there like a bunch of robots.

"Something's wrong," Kyle said. - I do not like this.

"Neither do I," I said. "Them unarmed will make our lives easier, but I don't want anyone letting their guard down. Something is definitely wrong.

I looked at my warriors—about thirty of them, proud and strong, all waiting for my orders.

"Hopefully, this will go off without a hitch. "I looked at Kyle. - You know what to do.

Kyle nodded and lowered his head slightly.

"Yes, Alpha.

He walked up to the warriors and started issuing orders. I had fought enough battles with Kyle by my side that I didn't even need to tell him what to do.

Kyle was a natural leader. He knew how to give orders, but still be close to my warriors.

There was no one I trusted more in my pack, which is why I made him the leader of the group's warriors.

I watched as my warriors listened intently to Kyle and then morphed into their wolves, preparing to put all of their training into practice.

I was about to change into my wolf to join them and lead the fight when I made eye contact with Adalee. She had an amused expression on her face, with her eyebrows raised and her hand covering her nose.

I rolled my eyes and growled softly.

"I don't want to hear it," I said, knowing she was referring to my scent. "Kyle already told me. Just breathe through your mouth.

Adalee nodded and laughed.

"That's it, Alpha," she said. Then she turned fully to me and her eyes went a shade darker, showing the presence of her wolf.

"You know, I'm really, really glad you got to meet your mate, Alpha. A strange look crossed his face as his lips formed a smirk. "It'll make things a lot easier around here.

I raised an eyebrow at her. She's been acting weird tonight.

"Okay...", I said. "I'm glad too.

She smiled wider and nodded.

"We'd better go. The warriors will need their big strong Alpha to lead them.

She winked at me and then, without warning, she changed into a wolf and ran into the woods.



We were all prepared for an intense battle with the vampires. In fact, my warriors — who had been training for years without being able to use their abilities — seemed primed for a fight.

But we didn't have one.

The vampires allowed us to drive them out of the territory without any resistance. Surprisingly, they treated the event like a game.

We'd chase them for a while, then they'd slow down and let us get real close before speeding up again.

Zigzagging and changing direction, they made us run in

circles as if we were playing tag.

We went on like this for longer than I care to admit, with vampires being naturally faster than werewolves.

We could keep up with them, but we'd need the fastest one out there. pack to capture one.

And usually that wasn't necessary, as vampires liked to get right to the juicy part and attack—battle until there was only one victor.

What was happening now was strange. Vampires weren't known for being cowards. They didn't run away from a fight. What they were doing didn't make any sense. And it was pissing me off.

I wanted to go back to Belle. I told her I would be back before she fell asleep. All I wanted to do was hold her and watch her cute little face relax as her breathing evened out.

She always did this thing where she snuggled deep into my chest and let out a satisfied sigh before falling asleep. I held her tighter and smiled every time.

It was my favorite part of the night. I loved her with everything in me. God, how I wanted to be with her right now.

Thankfully, the vampires eventually seemed to tire of it, fleeing the territory in one fell swoop, as if they'd telepathically decided enough was enough.

Kyle and I stopped next to each other and shifted. We put on the shorts we had tied around our ankles and looked at each other, confused.

- What the hell is that? Kyle asked, saying exactly what was on my mind.

I shook my head.

- I have no idea. Are they all gone?

Kyle paused and his eyes turned gray as he linked his mind to the other warriors who were probably scattered across the rest of the territory. I tuned in, listening to what the other warriors had experienced.

Kyle nodded as his eyes fluttered open after

few seconds.

“The same thing happened to all of them. all vampires were expelled from our territory.

“Let's not let our guard down,” I said. “I want wolves posted in every part of our territory all night. There's something else going on. It couldn't have been that simple.

“I agree,” Kyle replied.

I looked back to the packhouse longingly, desperately wanting to be with Belle. I knew now that I wouldn't be able to spend the night with her. I needed to stay out here and keep my pack safe.

“Why don't you go ahead and go back to the house, Alpha? Kyle said, watching me. “I can take care of that. That's what I was trained for.

I shook my head.

“I don't think it's a good idea.

I sighed as I pictured Belle waiting for me, wondering where I was, worried about myself, alone on your first night here.

She was probably wet from just getting out of the shower, her chocolate brown hair splayed all over my pillow. I pictured her in just my shirt and boxers, with—oh God—her beautiful long legs showing.

I knew the minute I joined her on the bed, one of those beautiful legs would be slung over my waist as usual as she snuggled into my chest.

I would pull her closer so she was basically on top of me, then start running my hand up and down her back and play with her beautiful silky hair.

I could already feel the sparks dancing on my skin. God, I miss her.

“Okay,” Kyle said, clearing his throat noisily.

“I'm about to choke on your mating pheromones.”

Return to your mate, Alpha. I promise you that I am more than capable of dealing with some vampires who are not even in our room anymore.

territory.

I looked at Kyle, then back at the packhouse, then back at Kyle once more.

"Are you sure you can handle this?" - I asked.

"Positive," he confirmed.

I sighed heavily.

"Okay," I ran a hand through my hair and started walking back toward the house.

"Try not to bother me for the rest of the night," I joked. "And I mean, if you do that, you'd better have several people on fire."

Kyle

laughed. "That's it, Alpha. Say hi to Luna for me."

And so he ran into the night.

Chapter 41

GRAYSON

My only thoughts were of Belle and getting back to her as soon as possible.

"Hey, Grayson," someone called from the darkness.

For a second I thought it was Belle saying my name since she was the only person who could call me that. But that voice didn't ignite the sparks it normally did. It couldn't be her.

I turned quickly, only to see Adalee slowly emerging from the darkness, a sly smile on her face.

I raised an eyebrow.

"What did you just call me?" My wolf surfaced, snarling at her lack of respect.

His smile only grew. She crossed her arms over her chest and leaned against a nearby tree.

"Did I ever tell you where I grew up, Grayson?" "So Adalee wants to die?" I crossed my arms and tilted my head.

Okay, I'm going with the wave.

"No, Adalee, I don't think you did," I said gravely.

"You know, it's kind of a coincidence, really," Adalee said, laughing a little as she walked away from the tree and closer to me.

"I grew up in Paris—right around the corner from where you just came from.

I actually didn't know that, which was weird. I thought I knew everything about her when I asked her to be my beta.

"You told me you were from Toronto," I said.

"Tsk-tsk, Alpha. You really need to get to know your pack members better. "She came to a stop right in front of me.

"I moved to Toronto with my mom when I was eighteen. Le reste de ma vie j'ai passé à Paris avec mon père.

The rest of my life I spent in Paris with my father.

So she speaks French. I was starting to think I didn't know my beta as well as I thought I did.

- You are right. I didn't know that," I said, "why didn't you told me. "I approached her. - Why?

She laughed softly.

- Just wait. I'm getting to that part.

She looked me up and down slowly, as if sizing me up.

"Actually, I think you met my father while you were in Paris. He's the beta of the pack there.

My eyebrows draw together.

- That's not possible. I barely left the hotel while I was in Paris. I was too busy taking care of your Luna.

"Carl Aude," said Adalee. "My father's name is Carl Aude. Did you turn on a light?

I took a quick breath. That was Belle's stepfather's name—the werewolf I almost killed for hitting Belle.

"Are you telling me that your father, Carl, is the beta of one of the greatest packs in the world?

"It was," Adalee spat out bitterly. "He was the beta of one of the greatest packs in the world. But he is no more. He had a date with you and your little bitch mate...

A growl ripped from my throat and I launched myself at Adalee without a second thought, intent on reminding her of her place. No one could talk about my mate—his Luna—in that way.

I was about to grab your throat and throw you against a tree when she raised her hand and said:

- It seems.

Suddenly I was pushed back and my feet stopped moving as if they were glued to the ground. Painful flares ran up and down my legs.

- What the hell is that? - I screamed. I looked at Adalee who was just looking at me with a smile on her face. "What the hell did you do?"

with me?

"Quiet," Adalee said, and my mouth immediately snapped shut. as if someone else was controlling her.

How the hell is she doing this?

"Damn, you really do have some anger management issues. You should work on it.

My wolf clawed at my mind, trying to break free, but it was no use. There was something preventing me from changing, keeping me in my human form.

My wolf snarled in frustration.

Adalee cleared her throat.

"As I was saying before I was interrupted so rudely, my father had a tryst with you and...well"--she paused and laughed menacingly--"my dear half-sister..."

Belle...

"So he was magically stripped of his position as a beta and later he was found in an alley, beaten to a pulp.

His expression darkened deeply, all humor leaving his face. voice as she uttered her next words:

"And now he's dead.

I took a deep breath. Carl was dead? That was not possible! I sent some men to teach him a lesson, but I never ordered them to kill him. Belle begged me to spare her life, and I had planned to keep my promise.

Another thought hit me: What happened to Belle's mother?

"Didn't know that, huh?" Adalee said bitterly. "You sent your stupid little men to beat him nearly to death and then didn't bother to check. You just let him die; you didn't even care. And all for what?

"Because he hit his precious little mate?" He died, was killed by a simple mistake.

She shook her head. I could see tears forming in her eyes, but she quickly wiped them away.

"And to think that I really liked you," she continued quietly. "I respected you. I trusted you as my Alpha and wanted to work with you.

"That's why I chose to be your beta. But you no longer deserve my respect. I never thought you were capable of doing such a thing. You will pay for it now.

She circled me slowly. I was still helpless, unable to move or open my mouth to speak. And it was pissing me off.

She stopped in front of me once more and grimaced when looked into my face.

"There's something else you don't know about me, Alpha.

I raised my eyebrows at her questioningly. My wolf growled.

"Do you remember the day you named me your beta? - she asked.

I thought about it. I should have remembered. It was a very important decision — one that I took very seriously. But the more I tried to remember that day, the more it seemed to slip from my memory.

I opened my mouth to respond, but nothing came out. I still couldn't speak.

Adalee sighed.

"You can talk now. Just don't interrupt me and promise to listen quietly.

My jaw dropped painfully.

"I don't know how you're doing this, Adalee, but let me move my feet now before I mentally call every warrior in the pack. You are already on the tightrope.

She rolled her eyes.

"Add terrible listener to the list of things wrong with you—along with murderous and selfish asshole," she snapped.

I growled loudly.

"You can try to link someone, but no one will listen to you. Go ahead and give it a try.

It seemed that I had no other option if I wanted to get out of this situation.

I went into my mind and tried to connect with Kyle, asking him for help. I tried again. And again. And again. I didn't receive even a single response.

I looked at Adalee. She stood there smiling at me.

- It saw? I'm right," she said smugly. "Now, let's get back to my question: do you remember the day you named me your beta?"

I bit back a cruel response, opting instead to say, "No." I don't remember that day. I clenched my teeth. "Care to explain why I can't remember that day, Adalee?"

His smile only widened.

"Oh, you're about to find out how much you really know about your beta.

She started circling me again.

"Look, I come from a very powerful bloodline of"—she paused when she got right behind me, and I could feel her breath in my ear—"vampires.

I almost rolled my eyes. I didn't know what she was doing, but I knew she was lying.

"I know you're not a vampire. I saw your wolf. I can smell your werewolf genes.

She took a step in front of me so that we were facing each other.

"You think you know everything, don't you, Grayson?"

"I'm only a fourth vampire. The rest of me is a werewolf. You know, my father was part vampire. His mother was a werewolf and his father was a vampire.

"And my mother was a werewolf. And they had me. Is it making sense now?"

I stared at her in shock. None of this was making sense.

"So you're telling me you're a fourth vampire?" - I

I asked.

I clenched my jaw and pushed myself as hard as I could, trying to move my legs forward, but nothing moved.

“Try to move as much as you like; it won't work—at least not until I say you can,” she said, watching me budge. She looked pretty pleased with herself.

“Yes, only a quarter of me is a vampire, which means my werewolf genes have almost completely taken over. I don't drink blood. I am not sensitive to light. I don't live with other vampires.

“The only thing I got from my father were these beautiful pearly white fangs.

She pulled her upper lip back and showed her sharp white fangs that I had never noticed before.

“Well, that, and a very special skill that only my family can possess.
he has.

She smiled and looked down at my legs.

“And I think you already know what that ability is.

She moved closer to me until our noses were almost touching. I growled.

“With just the sound of my voice, I can make you do whatever I want.

That's not possible. The only family of vampires who had the ability to control people with their voice were the Mortars.

The royal family of vampires.

Chapter 42

GRAYSON

"You are a Mortar," I said.

Adalee grinned and took a step back.

"Congratulations, Alpha," she said.

Then the smile was suddenly gone from his face.

"You're not as dumb as you look.

That was the last straw. No member of my pack would speak with me like this—vampire or not. I was the Alpha!

I rocked the upper half of my body forward, planning to lock my jaw around her neck and not let go until she begged for mercy.

But as soon as I moved—before I could even touch her—she stopped me with a single word:

- Pain.

My body immediately fell to the forest floor when it was gripped by excruciating pain.

I screamed, clutching my chest and head, trying to find some kind of release. It felt like every bone in my body was breaking as thousands of knives pierced me.

I was sure I was going to die. That should be the feeling.

"Okay," said Adalee's voice.

The pain suddenly stopped. I gasped and groaned as air finally entered my lungs.

Adalee crouched beside me and brushed my hair out of my face. I was too weak to move or stop her.

My wolf was prowling and whimpering in my mind. He now really understood the gravity of the situation. He was worried about our pack and our mate.

"I'm not a bad person, Grayson," Adalee said quietly.

while studying my face. "The only time I used my ability on you was to be named a beta. I wanted to be accepted into a place of power in your pack, but I didn't want to spend months fawning over you.

"I knew you deserved it and would do a good job, so I used my power to talk you out of it. That's why you don't remember the day. She laughed bitterly.

"I never planned on using my power on you again after that. In fact, I never planned on using it again. I didn't like having that control over people. It felt wrong. No one should play God. ' She paused.

"But everything changed when you murdered my father.

I tried to sit up, fighting the extreme exhaustion that replaced the pain.

"I never meant to kill your father, Adalee," I groaned. "He shouldn't" to die.

- Lay down. Don't move," she snapped. My body immediately followed his orders. "I don't care what you wanted to happen. What matters is what happened. she snarled, her wolf coming to the surface. "You should have seen what your men did to him. He didn't even look like himself when he was buried.

"I'm sorry, Adalee," I whispered. "I'm deeply sorry.

- It does not matter now. The damage is done. - She said. - And you go pay.

She whistled as if she was signaling something, then looked at me.

"My father and grandfather had a falling out a few years ago and haven't spoken since. I never had the opportunity to meet my grandfather because of that.

"See, he's not the nicest man. A little power hungry. Some might even call you corrupt. That's why he was removed from the throne. I felt the blood drain from my face at his words. She couldn't be talking about who I thought she was...

"But I digress," she continued. "Especially after

I had the chance to meet him at my father's funeral. We got along really well. We are of one mind on some very important matters. She gripped my chin hard, her nails digging into my skin, and turned my head so I was looking right at her.

“For example, we both agreed that you should no longer lead this pack. And if that means vampires taking over and our species merging, then she shrugged—so be it.

The sound of rustling leaves and snapping branches came from behind us. Adalee lifted her head.

“Oh, just in time. She looked at me. “Grayson, I'd like you to meet my grandfather.

A figure emerged from the trees, tall and dark, dressed all in black.

He had long black hair and blood red eyes. His sharp fangs were visible beneath his upper lip, which curled into a sinister smile.

It was Azazel Mortar, the ancient vampire king.

He approached the two of us slowly, looking at me with a satisfied expression on his face. I growled loudly, baring my teeth at him and desperately trying to move my body.

But it was no use. Adalee had pinned me to the ground.

“Well done, Adalee,” he said. “I have to say, I almost... I thought you didn't have that in you. I'm really glad I was wrong.

Adalee smiled back and took a step back.

“Stand up,” Azazel said to me.

My body moved on its own, pulling me to my feet but remaining completely paralyzed.

Azazel looked me up and down, and I couldn't help but watch as her smile grew.

“My God, you're huge. I can see why you're the Alpha of America's strongest pack.

That was strange coming from him, since he was almost as big as

me — albeit a little thinner.

"It will be extremely interesting to control your body and test your strength," he said.

"What the fuck did you just say?" - I asked.

My wolf was so close to the surface that he might as well have been among us, not needing the shift, letting out loud, dangerous snarls over and over. They were so loud that they echoed through the night.

— Quiet! — Azazel said.

My jaw snapped shut in an instant, the same way Adalee told me to be quiet earlier. The growling in my chest stopped as my wolf was also silenced. My wolf whimpered in my head.

"I don't have time to deal with your delinquent wolf right now," Azazel said. "I'm sure I'll deal with him enough for the foreseeable future.

He continued to stare at me, circling me slowly.

"Adalee, didn't you say he wasn't fully joined yet?"

"Yes," Adalee said. "He hasn't bonded with his Luna yet.

At the mention of Belle, my wolf started pounding inside my head. my mind, trying to break free.

And with each shock, my body shook. azazel watched me attentively, obviously knowing what was going on.

"If that's how strong he is when he's not fully mature, I can only imagine how powerful he'll be when he's fully mated," he said.

My body continued to shake.

"It's going to be fun reaching that full power. Especially if that girl I saw you walk in with earlier is your mate.

Enough is enough. I was going to separate this man's head from his body—after torturing him until he begged for mercy.

He wouldn't touch Belle.

He wouldn't even come close.

Azazel laughed.

“Enough playing around. I have a throne to win back. And your little pack will help me get him.

In the blink of an eye, he was right in front of me, moving faster than I thought possible—even for a vampire.

Then, suddenly, his fangs were sunk deep into my throat and I moaned in pain.

His original commands over my body seemed to wear off, and I sank further to the ground as his venom coursed through my veins.

I felt my awareness start to slip away, only to be replaced by something else. Something dark and evil that was slowly taking over my mind and body.

I couldn't move anymore. I could barely think.

I fought as hard as I could, but eventually my body got tired of fighting and everything went dark.

“This is going to be fun,” Azazel said from inside my mind.

Chapter 43

BELLE

Back to the present...

Room 101—the one Grayson sent me to—was on the downstairs of the packhouse and it was absolutely freezing.

No wonder this room was vacant. The window was broken and wouldn't close all the way, allowing cold Minnesota winter air to rush in and drop the temperature in the room below livable.

There was even some snow accumulated on the floor beside the window.

And to add to that, it seemed like people started using the space as storage. It was filled to the ceiling with boxes and various dusty old objects.

I had to dig up a squeaky little bed in the corner just to lie down.

After about an hour of trying to sleep in the cold, I decided there was no way I could stay in this room and got up to look for another place to spend the night.

The house was much quieter at night, with everyone in their beds.

It was the first time I was able to really get a good look at the place without feeling overwhelmed by the number of people surrounding me. constantly.

After poking around for a few minutes, I finally came across a living room full of sofas and a huge TV. That would have to do for the night. I lay down on a large leather couch.

With no blanket, no pillow, and with tears staining my face, I fell asleep.



I woke up to the feeling of someone violently shaking my shoulder.

- Hey wake up! said a voice. "You can't sleep here!"

My eyes opened; standing above me was a woman older

old woman with a vacuum cleaner in her hand.

"Oh, I'm sorry," I said as I quickly sat up.

"You need to leave so I can clean up," the woman said.

- Yes of course. Sorry. I was up and out of the room in seconds, feeling my face heat up with embarrassment.

I wondered what she would think of me, and if she knew I had been kicked out of my mate's room.

With my shoulders slumped and barely any energy in my body from not eating for two days, I made my way to the kitchen, desperately hoping that I could finally get some food and water.

Once there, I let out a sigh of relief when I saw Kyle and Elijah making breakfast with the rest of the pack.

Elijah was the first to see me and his face lit up.

"Luna!" he exclaimed.

I approached them slowly, looking warily at the others, werewolves, who seemed to ignore me instead of staring at me. Strange.

"Hey," I said quietly.

I looked longingly at the food they made, hoping they would be willing to share it with me.

Kyle turned away from the eggs he was frying and his jaw dropped. when you saw me. He grabbed my shoulder and turned me to look at him.

- What the hell is that? he said, pointing to my bruised face.

My hand immediately flew up to my chin, and I winced when I touched the tender bruise Grayson had caused last night by squeezing me too hard.

The pain on the left side of my face was still astronomical.

I felt panic rise in my chest as I tried to think of

an explanation that didn't involve Grayson so I wouldn't have to face his wrath again.

"Oh, I slipped on the ice last night when I was exploring outside," I said quickly, hoping they'd believe me and not ask any more questions.

Elijah nodded in understanding, obviously believing my story, for which I was grateful, but Kyle's eyes just narrowed on my bruises as he studied my face some more.

I fidgeted nervously.

"Did the Alpha lose his mind when he saw you?" I can only imagine how pissed off he must have been," Elijah said, shaking his head.

I agreed.

- Oh yeah. He was very angry. He made me put ice on my face all night," I lied.

It was easy to make up a story as I remembered how he tended to my bruised face when my mother's partner beat me in Paris.

Elijah laughs.

"Yes, I bet you do. He looked at my bruises.
again.

"If I didn't know better, I'd say they were handmade. But I know that no one would dare hurt an Alpha's mate unless they wanted to die.

Interestingly, it didn't even occur to him that the Alpha himself would have done this to me. I wouldn't have considered it before seeing the real Grayson.

"Huh, yeah, you're so funny. It's definitely not a hand,
I said as I moved.

"So you're telling me you fell on your face when you slipped?"
Kyle asked.

I shook my head quickly.

"Yeah, that was a pretty bad fall," I said.

Kyle didn't look convinced. In fact, he looked at me with such a worried expression that I thought he must not be believing my story.

"I'm surprised the Alpha didn't want to hang out with you all day today with that huge bruise on your face. Her face is puffed up like a balloon.

"You'd think his wolf would go crazy knowing you're here." wounded," Kyle said suspiciously.

I shrugged and looked down at my hands. I hated lying to them, but I knew I had no other choice—unless I wanted Kyle to go talk to Grayson.

"He said he had a very important job to do today and who would come see me later.

Still not looking convinced, Kyle continued to watch me. while Elijah took control of the frying pan.

"Hey, do you think it would be okay if I got some of your eggs?" "I asked Elijah. "I haven't had breakfast yet.

Elijah grinned widely.

- Clear! We have more than enough.

"Look, Luna, can I talk to you for a second? Kyle asked.

I nodded slowly, nervously. Kyle gently placed his hand on my back and steered me to the side where no one could hear me.

"You were right," he said when we were alone.

My brows furrowed.

- About what?

Kyle crossed his arms over his chest and looked around to make sure that no one could hear our conversation.

"The Alpha is acting strange—very strange.

My eyes widened.

- Same? I asked relieved. "Did you notice too?"

Kyle nodded.

"He's been making some really...out of the ordinary decisions.

- Like what? - I asked.

Kyle hesitated, obviously deciding whether or not to tell me.

"He's considering letting some very questionable individuals into our territory. I've never disagreed with any of his decisions before, but some of the commands he's given have been downright unwise.

"What do you mean by 'questionable individuals'?" - I asked.

"He...he..." Kyle hesitated. He sighed.

"Vampires. He wants to let vampires into our territory to 'discuss our relationship with them' or some shit like that.

Kyle shook his head in disgust.

He studied my face, a deep frown twisting his features.

"And then you come here looking like that. No way would he be okay with you hurt like that.

"He's not!" - I said quickly. Our conversation from last night flashed through my mind. If Grayson found out that Kyle and I were talking about him behind his back, who knew what he would do?

"He got really mad when he saw me last night," I continued. Well, at least that's not a lie.

"He... he, um, held me in his arms all night and gave me pain medicine and put ice on my face. He took really good care of me. I looked down at my hands, wishing it was true.

Kyle watched me with an intense expression, which I couldn't read.

I panicked.

"I'm sure Grayson's okay. Same. I hadn't really noticed anything until a few days ago.

Kyle nodded slowly, but I could tell he still believed.

"Okay," he sighed. "Let's go get some food."

He walked back to where Elijah was and I followed eagerly.

At the thought of food, my stomach let out a louder growl, turning my face bright red. Both men looked at me.

"Luna, when was the last time you ate?" Kyle asked.

My eyes widened.

"Last night," I said quickly. "I had dinner with Grayson.

Elijah and Kyle exchanged worried glances and then looked at me.

"I know that's not true, Luna," Kyle said. "We ate with Alpha last night, and you weren't there. He said you were sleeping.

My eyes widened even more when I realized I'd been caught in the lie.

"Oh, um...well..." I didn't know what else to say.

"Luna, I'm going to ask you again, and don't you dare lie to me. When was the last time you ate? Kyle asked.

I looked down at my hands one more time, knowing I couldn't no longer hide the truth.

"The night I got here," I whispered.

- What? Elijah exploded.

"What the fuck do you mean 'the night you got here'?" That was two days ago! Kyle yelled. "You haven't eaten in two days?" "Tears started to form in my eyes. I looked around the kitchen and saw that people were watching us. We were starting to make a scene. "It's just that every time I went

into one of the kitchens, they were always full of people and everyone yelled at me when I tried to get some food. I did not know what to do.

Kyle growled and ran a hand through his hair.

"Territorial and stupid wolves. he sighed. "You don't have to take it personally, Luna. Werewolves are territorial about food and don't like to share. This is how we are like

hunters.

I nodded in understanding. That made sense.

"And the Alpha didn't feed you?" Didn't he know you were starving?
Elijah asked.

I shook my head frantically.

"No, he's been very busy. It's not his fault. I am not
want to trouble you," I said.

"What the fuck do you mean? Kyle snapped. - This makes no sense.
An Alpha takes pride in providing for his mate.
No way would he not want to feed you no matter how busy he is. You
will always be their number one priority.

Panic rose in my chest. I was really messing things up.

Grayson would be so mad if he found out about all this.

"I tell him I'm looking for my own food," I lied.

"I feel like I've been too clingy. I need to be less dependent on him
while I'm here. I can't distract you all day with my stupid problems. Many
people are counting on him.

"That's enough," Kyle snapped. He grabbed my hand and started
pulling me away.

"Elijah, you stay here and make more food. I want there to be enough
in here for her to almost throw up. I'm going to put an end to this
nonsense coming out of Luna's mouth.

Kyle continued to drag me out of the kitchen and towards Grayson's
office, despite my objections.

My mind replayed the conversation with Grayson the last time I was
in his office—when he'd told me to stay away. I could only imagine how
upset he would be if I went back there.

"Kyle, stop!" - I screamed. "Seriously, I'm fine!" We don't need to
bother Grayson! I tried to pull my wrist out of his grip, but he was too
strong.

"Kyle, please!" Please stop!

It occurred to me last night that if I didn't start going back to the thanks to Grayson then i would miss him forever.

He already looked like he didn't want me, and I didn't know what I would do if he never come back to me.

What I did know was that I would have to stay out of his way if I wanted to continue in his life—even if it meant just looking at him every now and then. I decided that would be enough for me.

I loved Grayson. I knew I loved. I would do whatever needed to do to stay in his life.

Seeing him now, after he'd specifically asked me to stay out of his office, would only piss him off. I couldn't allow him to hate me any more than he already did.

“Kyle, please stop! I can't go in there! - I tried to say more firmly, digging your heels into the ground.

It was getting hard to talk with all the sobs coming out of my mouth. Through my tears, I could see people stopping and watching us. They probably thought I was crazy.

Suddenly Kyle picked me up and threw me over his shoulder. I let out a little scream.

“I don't know what the hell is wrong with you, but let's fix it now. You're not going to keep thinking like that,” Kyle said as he continued to march toward Grayson's office.

I smacked him on the back and yelled, demanding he put me down, but he just ignored me. I knew it was no use.

Damn werewolves and their stupid strength.

When we finally reached the door to Grayson's office, Kyle knocked twice and opened it without waiting for an answer.

He placed me on the ground in front of him and put his hands on my shoulders so I couldn't get away.

Grayson was sitting behind his desk with a phone to his ear, obviously in the middle of a conversation. His eyes bugged out when we walked in and immediately narrowed when he looked at me.

"I'm sorry to interrupt, Alpha, but it's an emergency," he stated.

Kyle.

"I'll have to call you back," Grayson said, and quickly hung up the phone.

He was in front of me in seconds, making me wince.

- What the hell is happening? Belle, baby, why are you crying?

He cupped my face in his two big hands and started to wipe away my tears, taking care of the bruises.

I was confused that he was acting so kindly when all I've done is pester him since I got here.

"I'm sorry," I told him. "I tried to tell Kyle not to bother you, but he dragged me here.

"What are you talking about, Belle? Grayson asked. He turned to Kyle. "What the hell is she talking about?"

"Luna hasn't eaten in two days," Kyle said. "She told me she didn't want to bother you with it and instead chose to starve herself because she couldn't get food from the kitchen with the other wolves around. Thought you'd like to know.

- What? Grayson snapped. He looked at me. "Haven't you been eating?"

"I..." I tried to explain, but I wasn't sure what to say. So instead I just shook my head and looked down in embarrassment.

Without any warning, I was thrown over Grayson's shoulder and he marched out of his office. My head spun from the sudden movement and no food in my system.

I tried not to move as he carried me, not wanting to disturb him any more than I already did.

Grayson led me into the kitchen, where he placed me on the floor in front of everyone and pulled me in so that an arm was comfortably wrapped around my waist.

"Listen up, people! Grayson yelled.

Everyone immediately stopped what they were doing and turned around.

to look at it.

"All of you are going to get out of Belle's way when she's here and allow her to take whatever she wants.

"If I learn that someone is preventing you from eating inside any of the kitchens, there will be dire consequences! Am I understood?"

A chorus of:

"Yes, Alpha!" echoed through the room.

"I want everyone out of here!" Now! Grayson said.

Everyone immediately left the room, keeping their heads down.

It surprised me how much power Grayson seemed to have over his pack. They did exactly what he said the second he gave the order.

I didn't expect him to defend me or put on the show of possessiveness he just displayed. I watched in shock as the last person left the room.

Before I could say anything, I was picked up and placed on the nearby kitchen counter.

A moment later, my head snapped back as Grayson's hand connected forcefully to my cheek.

My vision was gone for a few seconds as a sharp pain shot through the upper half of my body and I screamed in shock.

"Can't you do anything right, you shitty bitch? Grayson yelled. "Can't I go a day without you messing things up and bringing more conflict into my life?" You can't even feed yourself!

I cried some more, completely unable to think through the pain. My entire body was shaking and I was having a hard time sitting up straight.

- I'm very sorry! I managed to say, my voice cracking with my hiccups. - I'm very sorry!

"Yeah, whatever," Grayson growled. "What did I do in my past life to get stuck with you as a mate? I didn't even realize how pathetic a human being could be until I met you.

And you never stop fucking crying!

More sobs wracked my chest at his words.

"You're going to stay away from Kyle from now on, am I making myself clear? You'll avoid him and his mate at all costs, as you seem to only cause trouble when you're around them," he said.

I sobered up a bit.

- What? Kyle and Elijah are my only friends here! Everybody hates me!

Grayson grabbed my face with both hands and I whimpered when he made contact with my still sensitive skin.

"I don't give a shit," he said. "You're going to do what I say or face the consequences, understand?"

I shook my head quickly, looking deeply into his eyes that only seemed to get blacker by the second.

It was hard to remember its true color. I didn't see them as anything plus black ones from the morning after we got here.

His grip on me tightened.

"I want words, Belle. Tell me you understand.

"I understand," I said quickly. "I'll stay away from them. "Great,"

Grayson said. "I don't need you messing around."

all. Now, you are going to clean yourself up and cover up those ugly bruises on your face.

"I can't believe you came in here with that on display. He pressed his thumb to the bruise on my cheek.

I whimpered as excruciating pain shot through my system.

"You're not leaving the room until you stop crying. Afterwards, you'll come back here and make sure everyone sees you eating. And I don't want to see your face in my office ever again.

I shook my head again.

"Okay," I said quietly.

Grayson looked me up and down with disgust in his eyes.

"Who knew having a mate could cause me so much trouble?"

problems?

So he left me alone.

Chapter 44

BELLE

The next few weeks were like my own hell.

I spent all of my time in the tiny downstairs room of the house Grayson had told me to sleep in, leaving only to use the bathroom and quickly grab food from one of the kitchens.

I didn't see Grayson. I didn't see anyone.

I couldn't sleep I couldn't eat.

And to make matters worse, there was excruciating pain spreading throughout the entire body. my body that I knew was caused by me being away from Grayson.

Many times I thought of simply leaving, making plans that consisted of running away in the middle of the night and getting as far away from that place as possible.

It's not like Grayson would notice if I left.

He said he wanted me here, getting mad when I threatened to leave but never really spoke to me or came to see me to make sure I was really here.

It would be so easy to escape, take a cab with what little money I had left, and start a new life somewhere else.

But every time I mustered up enough courage to finally put the plan into action, something stopped me. A pressure in my chest told me not to give up hope, not to leave Grayson just yet.

One morning, as I was staggering around after yet another restless night, unable to sleep, I heard footsteps outside my door.

I sat up, confused.

Nobody ever came down here except me.

Especially not so soon.

The sun hadn't even risen yet.

The person hesitated outside the door before the handle turned.

slowly.

When the stranger entered, I realized that my body instantly freed himself from all his tension.

The blinding pain that was in my body seemed to disappear.

I couldn't see who it was, but from my body's reaction to the large figure standing in the doorway, I knew who it was.

"Grayson? I asked in the dark.

He approached me without saying a word, acting like I hadn't spoken.

He bent down when he reached the bed I was sitting on and pulled into his arms, lifting me like I weighed nothing.

He started carrying me out of the room and up the stairs, still silent.

"Grayson? I asked again. I hesitated, not knowing how to act in this situation. On the one hand, I didn't want to bother him. But on the other hand, I was a little scared of where this was leading.

- What is happening? Where are we going?

"Shh," he replied. - Do not speak.

My eyebrows drew together. What the hell was going on?

He took me to his room, where I hadn't been in days, and kicked it open. Once inside, he unceremoniously dropped me onto the bed and walked back to the door to close and lock it.

I glared at him.

"Are you going to tell me what's going on now?" I asked in a low voice.

He turned on the lights and walked over to me. His eyes were pitch black and his hair was messy. I could tell he had just woken up. He must have gotten dressed and picked me up right after.

Once he was in front of me, he crossed his arms over his chest and looked me over slowly. It felt like his eyes were criticizing every inch of my body.

— Have you gained weight? - He asked.

My jaw dropped.

- I'm sorry? "Did he really bring me here just to tell me I looked fat?" If anything, I had lost weight during my time in his pack.

He grimaced as he continued to study my body.

"You look bigger," he said.

I got up.

"You know what, Alpha? - I spat. "If your only reason for waking me up and bringing me to your room so early in the morning is to criticize my appearance, there's no way I'm going to sit here and take it. Screw this. I pushed past him in a huff, trying to keep my composure as I walked to the door.

But before I could leave, a gentle hand wrapped around my arm and pulled me back. I looked back at him. He ran a hand through his hair in frustration.

"That's not why I brought you here. The wolf was getting impatient and wanted to be with you.

My depleted mood lifted a little. Even though the wolf was part of Grayson, I had a soft spot for the wolf that lived inside him. He seemed to want me even when Grayson didn't.

- The wolf? You mean your wolf? - I asked.

He made a face at me.

"Yes, my wolf. What other wolf would I be talking about?

I lowered my gaze, suddenly feeling embarrassed. Why, I wasn't sure.

- I don't know.

We stayed like that for a few seconds in silence.

I shifted uncomfortably.

"Was it just your wolf who wanted to see me?"

I couldn't look at him as I waited for his answer.

I really didn't understand why I cared so much if he wanted see me or not, but it seemed my life depended on his answer.

At first, he didn't say anything, but a slight hiss came from his chest. I looked at him then. I had never heard that noise before.

"I think it's time we came together, Belle," he stated. "I need the power you are able to bring me through the mate bond if we are to face what lies ahead.

I wasn't sure what I looked like, but I was sure that my eyes were about to pop out of their sockets in shock.

- What? - I asked.

He hissed again.

"I don't like to repeat myself.

In the blink of an eye, faster than I'd ever seen Grayson move, he'd lifted me into his arms and thrown me hard onto the bed.

His lips crashed against mine.

I gasped into the kiss, too shocked to enjoy the fact that the man I loved was touching me for the first time in weeks. Dull sparks danced across my skin. I frowned as his lips moved down my neck. The sparks weren't as strong as they usually were. In fact, all of that felt wrong.

I pushed his shoulders lightly.

— Grayson, pare.

He ignored me.

I pushed him again, harder this time.

"No, I won't do that again!" you can't choose when you want to use me! I'm not a toy, Grayson!

I finally grabbed his face and pushed him back with all my strength.

He moved back a little in shock, lifting his body from mine just enough for me to get out of bed.

He hissed loudly and tried to grab me and force me back into bed, but I quickly dodged him.

- What is your problem? - I screamed. I finally pulled away enough that he had to get up if he wanted to get to me.

I could feel tears forming in the corners of my eyes, but I swallowed them back, refusing to cry now. Grayson just looked at me, looking surprised by my outburst.

"You're not going to talk to me like that," Grayson spat. "I'm your Alpha. I demand your respect and cooperation. He got up and approached me slowly. I knew he was trying to intimidate me.

I stood my ground.

"Well, you know what, Alpha? Ever since we returned to your pack, you've treated me like an inconvenience, like I mean nothing to you. The only time you talk to me is when you're forced or when you feel like using my body as a toy! I thought you loved me. I took a deep breath, barely getting over the sob that was rising in my throat. "But now I know I'm only here to give you power. You don't love me and never loved.

Grayson shrugged.

"What if it's true?" The mate bond will force you to stay with me, no matter how I treat you.

I took a deep breath. That was all the confirmation I needed. This wasn't the Grayson I'd known in Paris. This Grayson didn't want me. And you know what? I didn't want it.

I shook my head. Tears were flowing freely down my face at this point as I came to my final decision. Keeping intense eye contact with my so-called "mate," I said, "I'm done letting the mate bond make decisions for me."

I'm leaving. I never want to see you again.

At first he didn't answer.

It looked like he was having an internal battle with his wolf, showing all the telltale signs that he was about to transform.

Thick, dark hair sprouted on his arms, his teeth clenched. stretched and her chest grew to twice its normal size.

His wolf was struggling to get out.

It broke my heart.

But it was ultimately Grayson's silence that sealed the deal.

The Grayson I fell in love with would have fought for me and been heartbroken if I'd said what I just said.

He wouldn't be fighting his wolf, the only part of him that wanted me for the right reasons.

I nodded in understanding. It was over.

"Goodbye, Grayson," I said through my tears. I turned and walked out the door with my head held high. Grayson was too preoccupied with his inner turmoil to notice I was leaving.

I left my heart in that room that day. And I was sure I would never get him back.

Chapter 45

BELLE

I ran down the stairs of the house after leaving Grayson's room, barely able to see where I was going with the tears streaming down my face.
my face.

It didn't matter where I was going.

All I cared about at that moment was getting as far away from Grayson as possible.

My chest constricted, making my breathing difficult.

My mind went hazy and my foot caught on the bottom step of the stairs and I stumbled.

I couldn't help but land squarely on my ass, whimpering as my back made painful contact with the step behind me.

I didn't get up.

I didn't move.

I thought I couldn't even if I wanted to.

My body felt like it was slowly breaking apart, as if it knew what was happening to me.

He knew he had just lost my mate, the man I was supposed to love my whole life.

Not having the strength to get up, I sat down on the last step of the stairs and cried.

I brought my hands to my face and cried harder than ever.

I never thought anything would hurt more than the day my dad died, but I was so wrong.

It felt like my heart had been ripped out of my chest, leaving it to die a slow, painful death filled with sadness and regret.

I was grateful that it was still early in the morning because none of the

pack members would be awake.

They wouldn't witness how I was torn apart, sitting here, crying for someone who didn't want me.

But I guess it wouldn't matter if someone saw me.

Grayson's pack hated me.

Nothing would change that.

"Luna?" someone said suddenly.

My head snapped up and relief filled my chest as I locked eyes with Kyle's. He was standing in front of me in sweatpants and a T-shirt, having just woken up.

As his sleepy eyes roamed over my haggard form, fury and concern invaded his expression.

"What the hell happened to you? - He asked.

I couldn't help the sob that escaped my throat as I looked at him.

I placed my hand over my mouth as I brought my trembling form to its feet.

I tried to open my mouth to tell him everything that happened, but nothing came out.

I felt numb.

So instead I just shook my head and launched myself into his arms.

Kyle, completely shocked, staggered back a little. when I bumped into him.

He hesitated for a second, probably worrying what Grayson would think if he saw us hugging, but then he wrapped me tightly in his arms and squeezed me tight.

"Hey, shh..." He said as he ran his hand up and down my back in a smooth manner. That didn't stop me from crying uncontrollably into her neck.

He didn't try to press me for explanations, for which I was extremely grateful. He just held me while I cried.

I never appreciated Kyle more than I did in that moment.

After a few seconds like that, Kyle said, "Hey, everything's going to be okay. I'll call Alpha's mind and he'll help you. Whoever did this to you will face serious consequences. Everything will be fine, I promise.

My head snapped up in panic and I took a step back so I could see his face.

- No! No, you cannot call Grayson! I can't see you right now. I won't be able to look at him. Kyle please. Please don't call him.

Kyle's brows drew together as his expression darkened. even more worried.

"Okay, I'm not going to tell him, but you need to tell me what the hell is going on right now. His voice went from reassuring to deadly serious in a matter of seconds.

I didn't want to talk.

I didn't want to do anything but crawl into a hole and spend the rest of eternity there.

I was worried that if I tried to explain what happened between me and Grayson, I would just turn into an uncontrollable puddle of sobs on the floor.

But when Kyle looked at me, sincere concern and panic in his eyes, I knew I owed him that.

I couldn't just run away without giving an explanation.

Something was wrong with Grayson and the pack deserved to know.

I opened my mouth to speak, struggling to get the words out through my tears.

"Grayson," I started. "Grayson, he..."

I couldn't finish.

Intense, blinding pain gripped my body with sudden force.

It was nothing I've ever felt before, a million times worse than the pain I felt when I was away from Grayson in Paris.

I doubled over, a scream of agony escaping my mouth.

I was vaguely aware of Kyle yelling my name, pushing the hair out of my eyes so he could see my face better, but I couldn't bring myself to look at him.

I knew in that moment that this must be how it felt.
to die.

I grabbed Grayson's mark on my neck, suddenly feeling like I was on fire, like someone was branding it with a red-hot iron.

I clawed at it, wanting to rip it out of my skin.

The pain was becoming more and more intense with each passing second.

And then, suddenly, an intuition so intense coursed through my body that I wouldn't be able to ignore it, even with all my pain.

There was something wrong with Grayson.

I wasn't sure how I knew this, but something was happening with our bond.

It was breaking.

Panic flooded my chest.

I grabbed Kyle's arm and looked up at him.

"Something's wrong with Grayson," I told him.

Without waiting for his answer, I got to my feet, fighting the pain so I could run upstairs and back to Grayson's room.

At that moment, I didn't care what Grayson had done to me.

I didn't care that he didn't want me.

All I cared about was making sure he was okay.

Even more important, I had to make sure he was still alive.

Kyle yelled after me, hot on my heels as the two of us flew through the house like wild animals. We encountered a few more wolves, but I pushed them out of the way, my mind focused on only one thing.

When we finally reached Grayson's bedroom door, I didn't hesitate to push it open and enter the room.

And enter my worst nightmare.

Chapter 46

BELLE

It felt like my whole life was over at that moment.

Sitting on the edge of the bed was Grayson in only a pair of boxer briefs.

And sitting on top of him was a naked girl, pressing against him and kissing his lips.

Grayson was cupping her bare breast and moaning, rubbing himself erotically against her.

Searing pain shot through my body, begging me to get out of there, to look away, but I couldn't move, frozen inside my worst nightmare.

I couldn't take my eyes off the horrible sight that was my soulmate with someone else.

I could barely comprehend what was happening when Kyle grabbed my waist and yanked me back, blocking my view of Grayson and that wolf.

Kyle was grabbing my face, trying to force me to look at him, yelling my name along with other things I didn't understand.

I couldn't hear him.

I heard nothing over my shock.

Even with the blinding pain I was feeling intensifying tenfold from being in the same room as Grayson, I couldn't move.

I was stunned, trapped in my own hell.

"Luna!" Kyle shouted in my face, still trying to call my attention. "Luna!" Look at me!

Still in a daze, my eyes slowly shifted to his.

"You need to get out of here," Kyle said, determination and concern clear in his tone. He was pushing my shoulders back,

causing me to stumble backward towards the door.

I could feel the tears streaming down my face. I stared Kyle, trying to open my mouth to say something. But nothing came out.

He was wiping one of the tears off my cheek, still trying to push me away, saying, "I know. I know Luna. He nodded frantically. "I know you're feeling awful right now. I know you feel like you can't move, but you need to get as far away from here as possible. You need to get the fuck out now. Go.

Now. He shoved me back, now hurling me with brute force into the hallway.

Again, I couldn't say or do anything.

I felt like I no longer had control over my body.

My mind kept replaying the image of Grayson and that girl on my mind, like a bad movie that had no end.

So this is what it feels like to lose your mate, completely and utterly.

I was sure the only other feeling that could compare was death.

"I'm sorry, Luna," Kyle said. "Elijah will meet you there." down and take it as far away from here as possible. You need to move.

He turned my body and pushed me down the hall hard enough that I nearly fell flat on my face.

I wasn't sure what I was doing, but my feet kept moving.

Kyle was right, I needed to get out of here.

I staggered down the stairs in a hurry, only stopping when someone grabbed my arm and pulled me into his body.

He lifted me easily.

For a second, I panicked, thinking it was Grayson.

But it wasn't.

It couldn't be.

I looked over to whoever was carrying me and found Elijah's worried, sad eyes staring at me.

"I'm here, Luna," he said in a soft voice. "Come on, let's get you out of here."

He didn't wait for my answer to start moving.

Her determined, quick feet moved through the house in a blur, not pausing to notice the confused looks of those we passed by.

It didn't take long for us to reach the front door of the house.

Elijah opened it without hesitation and led us into the forest.

The freezing cold of winter hit me like a ton of bricks, forcing me off my top.

It was then, as Elijah carried me through the woods near the packhouse, running at top speed, that I began to really take in the agony of my situation.

Grayson was mating someone else. He had chosen another girl to be his mate. He didn't want me. He didn't want me.

He didn't want me.

I tried to remind myself that I shouldn't care.

I was already in the process of leaving him when I found him about to sleep with someone else.

But before that, when Kyle was holding me on the stairs, before the pain of my mate leaving me began, I still had hope.

I still believed that everything would work out and Grayson would somehow decide that he really wanted me.

But now I knew. It was over. I had lost him forever.

With that agonizing realization, uncontrollable sobs began to spread through my body. The sound of my pain startled even myself as loud howls left my mouth, echoing through the silence of the forest.

I was grateful Elijah hadn't stopped running.

I was grateful he was carrying me instead of forcing me to run alone.

I didn't know where we were going and I didn't care.

All I knew was that the further away we were from the house, from Grayson, the more my pain dulled.

After a few more minutes like this, my stomach started to churn, like acid was rising up my throat. I grabbed Elijah's shoulder.

“Elijah, put me down. Put me down, please. I'm going to throw up, - I said frantically.

Elijah stopped immediately, dropping to his knees in the snow.

He placed me in front of him and pulled my hair away from my face as stinging liquid immediately spilled out of my mouth onto the forest floor.

It was like that for a while. I alternated between vomiting, hyperventilating, and uncontrollably sobbing nonstop. Elijah stayed with me through it all, never leaving my side.

I finally stopped vomiting after emptying all the contents of the my stomach and only bile came out.

I tried my best to calm my breathing, but it felt like my throat was closing up, like my entire body was breaking down.

I was vaguely aware of Elijah doing his best to calm me down. He rubbed my back with one hand while his other hand squeezed mine tightly.

“I'm sorry,” he continued whispering. — I'm sorry that this is happening to you.

It felt like ages before I was finally able to form a coherent thought that wasn't immediately consumed by pain or indisposition.

I allowed Elijah to pull me into his arms, laying my head on his chest as I sobbed.

There was a very subtle burning sensation from touching Elijah that I knew was caused by him not being my mate.

That's what my body needed right now to calm down.

I needed Grayson.

But I didn't care.

I needed the comfort too much to care about the pain.

After a few minutes, or maybe hours, I wasn't sure,

I whispered, "Why does it hurt so much?"

Elijah's hand stopped its movement on my back. He looked at me. I was shocked to see that he too had tears in his eyes.

"Your bond with the Alpha was the strongest I've ever seen," he said. "I could feel it the moment I met you. Their souls were joined as one, destined to be together forever. But because he"—he hesitated for a moment, whispering the next word—"rejected you, you're losing part of your soul now. The fact that he already marked you is worse. Your body is falling apart.

I took a deep breath.

- I will die?

Elijah's expression grew sadder. He shook his head in defeat.

"I don't know," he whispered.

More tears left my eyes at this revelation.

So that was what it felt like to die.

And yet I could no longer fear my death.

It already felt like I was dead.

Maybe if I really were dead, the pain would stop.

Elijah suddenly grabbed my chin and forced my watery gaze back to his.

"I don't know what the hell you're thinking right now, but whatever it is needs to stop. Is not true. You are strong. You will not let the mate bond defeat and destroy her. You will get over it. And you will do it with your head held high like the mighty Luna that you are.

I glared at him.

I didn't feel strong or powerful.

I felt in pieces.

Defeated.

Used and forgotten.

But I knew he was right.

This couldn't be the end of me.

I couldn't let Grayson win.

Not after everything he'd done to me.

I shook my head.

"Okay," I said.

Elijah waved back.

"Okay," he repeated.

Chapter 47

BELLE

Elijah moved gently, removing me from his arms. I whimpered softly as even the smallest movement caused searing pain through my body.

Elijah got up and took off the sweatshirt he was wearing, leaving him in only pajama bottoms, a shirt, and sodden flip-flops. He handed the sweatshirt to me.

- Here. Wear this.

I moved slowly but with determination and, with Elijah's help, I managed to pull the garment over my shivering form.

"Thanks," I told him. I didn't even realize how cold I was until his sweatshirt, still warm from his body heat, was wrapped around me like a comforting hug.

Elijah nodded. He crouched down next to me.

"Okay, so this is what's going to happen now," he said in a calm voice. "You're going to stay right here and try to control your body and your emotions. It's going to be tough, but you've got to do it to face what comes next. Take a deep breath to calm yourself down and try not to think about 'you-know-who,'" he said, obviously referring to Grayson. Well, at least I knew he wasn't talking about Voldemort.

He reached out and brushed my hair away from my face in a comforting way. I smiled weakly at him and shook my head. I could do this.

Right?

"I'm going to go back to the house and get your things," Elijah continued. "And then we'll put you on a bus and you'll get as far away from here as possible. Where does your family live?"

"I don't have a family," I whispered, lowering my gaze embarrassed. "At least not one that wants me around."

Elijah swore under his breath, running a hand through his hair in frustration.

“You must be kidding me,” he sighed. - OK. Everything is fine. Let's do something else then.

I did not answer.

It was embarrassing how much of a mess my life was.

I thought I had it all figured out when I fell in love with Grayson and I made up my mind to stay with him when we got back from Paris.

Boy, was I wrong.

I had given up everything for him.

My apartment, my job, even the chance to make amends with my mother.

I had received nothing in return.

It just went to show how destructive I really was, destroying and hurting anyone who crossed my path.

Even my own parents.

Even myself.

“Luna, look at me,” Elijah said suddenly.

I lifted my head to look at him, wishing he wouldn't call me that anymore. I wasn't your Luna. I was just Belle. Poor, broken Belle.

“You'll get over it,” Elijah said. His voice didn't falter. “It'll take a while, but the pain will subside. All this will become a horrible memory. What the Alpha did to you will haunt you for the rest of your life. There is nothing we can do about it and for that I apologize. But I can promise that your life won't always revolve around today. You will move on. Things will get better.

I promise.

As I looked into Elijah's eyes, which held so much more confidence than mine, I couldn't help but doubt his words.

The pain I was feeling right now, both physical and emotional, was so overwhelming that it felt like it would never end.

How could I move on?

How could I go on living my life knowing that Grayson, the person I cared about more than anyone else?

someone else in the world, hated me?

But the determination and sincerity in Elijah's words gave me hope. And hope was all I could ask for at that moment.

That hope would give me the strength to go on living one more day.

Elijah got to his feet when I didn't respond to his noble assertions. I was grateful that he seemed to be letting the subject rest for the time being.

"Okay, I have to go get your stuff now. We need to get you out of here. The further away you are from the Alpha, the less pain you will feel. And sooner you will be able to heal.

I wanted to trust that what he was saying was true, but my pain only seemed to increase at the thought of being away from Grayson.

"Shit," Elijah said suddenly. He was looking back at toward the house with a worried expression.

"I'm going to have to go through the Alpha to get your stuff from his room, aren't I?" He let out a silent growl of frustration. - He can to be...

"My stuff isn't in his room," I interrupted. "I haven't been there in a while.

Elijah was confused.

"So where were you sleeping?"

I seriously considered saying screw it and leaving town without any of my stuff.

I didn't want to have to explain what really happened between Grayson and me, explain that I hadn't slept in the same bed as Grayson in weeks. But the things in my suitcase and backpack were all I had in the world. I would only have the clothes on my back if I didn't grab them before I left.

"Room 101," I finally whispered.

- In the basement? Elijah asked. The hardness of his tone told me he knew exactly which room I was talking about.

I agreed.

- Yes.

Elijah growled but didn't ask any more questions, thank God. I am not she was ready to relive things and he seemed to understand that.

- OK. OK everything is fine. So that's where I'm going. His eyes softened when they came back to me. "Are you going to be okay here alone for a while?" No one knows you're here but me, so no one will find you. I will go as fast as I can.

I wanted to say no.

I wanted him to stay with me.

I was scared of what would happen if I got in touch with Grayson again.

The pain would certainly be immeasurable.

But I reminded myself that there was no way he could come looking for me.

He didn't want me.

He was busy sleeping with another woman at that very moment. moment, right as Elijah and I were talking.

The intense pain coursing through my body confirmed the fact.

"I'll be fine," I said.

Elijah didn't hide his grimace, probably disconcerted by the how despondent my voice sounded.

He bent down and placed a soft kiss on my forehead.

I smiled weakly at him as he straightened, my heart warming up with how sweet and caring he was.

"I'll be quick," he said. "This will all be over soon."

He smiled at me once more and turned around, ready to leave. direction we came from.

"Elijah? I asked quickly, stopping him before he could go.

He turned and looked at me. He raised an eyebrow.

"Thanks," I whispered. - Same. Thanks.

He smiled again.

"Of course, my Luna. You have nothing to thank me for.

And with that, he turned and ran into the woods.

I watched him run until I couldn't see him anymore. He was like a blur in the wind, handsome and strong, his werewolf genes making him faster than I could comprehend.

When he was finally out of sight, I allowed myself to lie on my side, waiting for the cold snow to cool my fevered body.

I was relieved because the waves of pain coursing through me finally subsided.

They were still nasty, but not nearly as bad as when they started.

That could only mean one thing.

Grayson was finishing bonding with someone else.

I couldn't decide which was worse, the agonizing torture I'd felt just moments ago or knowing that Grayson had had sex with someone else, officially choosing her as his mate over me.

Probably the last one.

All this made me doubt my decisions.

My decision to stay with Grayson first.

And second, my decision not to allow him to use me to gain power.

If I had, I'd still be in that awful house right now, alone and alone. heartbroken, knowing he only wanted me for selfish reasons.

But what if things would have changed if I had slept with him? What if that was what Grayson needed to come to the realization that he still loved me?

I shook my head violently, trying to clear the thought from my head. But even when I was capable of that thought, I knew it would be a question that would haunt me forever.

I sighed deeply and reached for the mark Grayson had left on my neck, which felt like an eternity ago.

It burned at my touch, stinging and throbbing, shooting an ache agonizing through every part of my body.

I gasped loudly as my body tensed and I dropped my hand in a flash.

Well, I wouldn't do it again, I thought bitterly as I put it on. my face in the snow to seek some comfort for the hot pain.

I wondered if the bite mark would heal now or if I would have to live with the constant reminder of Grayson's betrayal on display around my neck.

Happy thoughts, Belle, I reminded myself, thinking about what Elijah had told me before he left. Think of something else. Anything else.

Did not work.

It was like that was the only thought my mind could conjure up.

And with the image of Grayson kissing a naked woman in his lap, not even stopping when I walked into the room, playing over and over in my head, I allowed myself to cry.

It was good to cry. It felt good to allow myself to feel my emotions for a second before jumping back into the real world. I learned this when my father died and I was left alone.

After Elijah was back, I would wipe my tears and would force me to stand with my head held high.

But now... I just cried.

Elijah was right when he said it would be quick.

It couldn't have been more than ten minutes when he came running back into my field of vision with my backpack on his back and my suitcase cradled in his arms.

He was wearing a different outfit too, jeans, a coat and big boots.

I got up to meet him, quickly wiping the tears from my eyes and pushing my shoulders back the way I promised myself I would.

I wished I'd put on my shoes before leaving the packhouse in such a hurry.

Even covered by the socks, my feet were freezing.

Fortunately, I had shoes in my backpack, which I put on when Elijah finally caught up with me.

And then I also put on the coat he handed me.

When I straightened up and looked at Elijah, he said,

"Are you ready?"

I shook my head stiffly.

- Yes. I'm ready.

He quickly took off my backpack and handed it to me.

"Put this on," he said.

I didn't question him, taking the backpack from his hand and pulling the straps over my shoulders.

Then he turned away from me and crouched down, gesturing for me to climb onto your back.

- Underneath.

I felt a flush rise through my chest. I hoped Elijah didn't see me as weak, like glass he had to be careful not to break. I was pretty much able to walk.

"You don't need to carry me again," I said. - I can walk.

Elijah shook his head, not moving from his position.

- No way. You're swaying standing there and shaking like a leaf. A gentle wind is capable of blowing you away. I carry you.

I still hesitated.

"Won't it be too heavy to carry my luggage and me?" I asked.

Elijah chuckled and directed his gaze at me over his shoulder.

- No. It won't be too heavy. I'm a werewolf with incredible strength and you..." His eyes traveled up and down

my form, a frown forming on her lips.

"Well, you're just skin and bones. That's the first thing I'll do when we leave town. I'll cook you a four-course meal and make sure you eat every mouthful. I stiffened a little at his words.

"Are you coming with me?" I asked in shock. I thought he would just put me on a bus and be done with it. I thought I would never see you again after today.

Elijah finally turned and looked at me, a soft expression covering his features.

"Of course I will. I won't just let my Luna go alone with no protection. Especially after what you've just been through. I probably should have told you this, but with all the commotion, it just slipped my mind. Kyle is coming too. He'll meet us wherever we go and bring my stuff with him. He'll mentally call me the moment I can get away from the Alpha without him noticing. He can't stay with us forever, unfortunately, but he'll move back and forth when he can. We have already discussed this through our link. So I'm sorry, sweetie, but you're stuck with us. He smiled widely.

I don't smile back.

While I appreciated the fact that he wanted to take care of me, I didn't. I could let him do that.

And Kyle too?

No.

No way.

Both had lives to live.

I wasn't going to let them mess up their lives just because they felt sorry for a girl who was rejected by her Alpha.

"No," I shook my head, leaving no room for argument in my tone. "I won't let you come. You need to stay here and be close to your mate. I'm not your Luna anymore," I said bitterly. "Actually, I never was. Not officially, at least. You do not owe me anything. You hardly know me.

Elijah shuddered slightly at the mention of Grayson's betrayal and the hesitation it caused in my voice.

"You are my Luna," he said in a firm tone. "The Alpha may have chosen someone else to help him lead the pack, but my loyalty will always be with you, the true Luna of my pack. Nothing will convince me otherwise.

A little tension left my body. My gratitude for Elijah only grew with his kind words. It was nice to know that at least one person still cared about me.

Maybe even two, I mused as I thought of Kyle's smiling face.

"And I can live without seeing Kyle every day. I don't know if you've noticed, but sometimes he can be a little over the top. Elijah chuckled. I smile a little. "Our bond is strong. We'll be fine.

I searched his expression for hesitation. But I didn't find any. He really wanted to come with me.

And who was I to reject your care? It would be nice not to be alone this time.

"Fine," I finally said. "But I have one condition.

Elijah raised a questioning brow.

"You can't call me Luna anymore. My name is Bella.

Elijah frowned, immediately shaking his head and opening his mouth to argue.

"Please," I said before he could disagree. "It really hurts to be called Luna. The title only brings back bad memories. I just want to be Belle. Only Belle. Not 'Luna'.

Elijah hesitated for a moment. He didn't look happy, but eventually, he nodded.

"My wolf and I don't like it, but... But I'll try my best.

I was satisfied with your answer. It was everything I could ask for.

"Can we go then?" he asked, gesturing for me.
get on your back again.

I shook my head, ready to get as far away from him as possible.

Grayson.

I climbed onto his back, hooking my ankles and squeezing my legs tightly around his waist so he could pick up my bag and hold it instead of trying to keep my legs in place.

Elijah began to move quickly.

I was suddenly very happy that he had insisted on carrying me.

Even just hanging onto his back in my weakened state was proving extremely difficult.

And all that movement made my nausea come back with a sudden force.

But I didn't complain.

Instead, I just tightened my arms around his neck. Elijah and laid my head on his back.

I imagined I was on a boat in the middle of a lake somewhere, fishing with my dad.

That was always one of our favorite things we did together. As we continued our journey deeper and deeper into the forest, I couldn't help but look longingly back in the direction we'd come.

I wished more than anything that things were different.

I wish I could go back to those few weeks in Paris when Grayson still seemed to love me.

I wish I could live in that memory forever.

But since I couldn't, since I knew it was time to move on to the part of my life that didn't involve Grayson anymore, I closed my eyes softly, resting my head on Elijah's back.

And I did my best to let my mind wander to happier thoughts.

Chapter 48

BELLE

Elijah carried me with ease, never showing a sign of fatigue.

The tranquility of the forest that surrounded us, beyond the silence comfortable between Elijah and me, it created a relaxing environment.

All I could hear was the faint chirping of some birds. closer and Elijah's rough footfalls in the snow.

"So where would you like to go?" Elijah asked me about a kilometer into our hike.

I put my chin on his shoulder and sighed deeply. I didn't want to make any decisions. I wanted to sleep. And then never wake up again.

It was like my head was immersed in murky waters, not letting a single clear thought pass.

I was drowning in the water, gasping for air, swimming violently upward.

Swimming, swimming, with no end in sight.

My chest constricted painfully as if I were actually underwater and my breath caught in my throat. I tightened my legs around Elijah's waist, trying to calm my shivering and exhausted body. I shrugged weakly.

"I don't care," I could barely say. - Where you want.

Elijah laughed softly.

"I've only been out of pack territory a handful of times. I I wouldn't even know which direction to go if you asked me to decide.

I paused.

Did I even know which direction to go?

I didn't know much about the world either.

I had been to Paris and that was it.

The rest of my life was spent in hospitals and at home taking care of my father.

“Come on,” he urged in a soft voice. — there must be some where you want to go.

Only one place came to mind.

“I think we can go to Minneapolis,” I said.

Minneapolis was the city I grew up in and it was only a few hours away by car. Although I didn't have many good memories, mainly because of the memories of my father's death, it was the only home I knew.

A thought popped into my head.

I might even stop by my old apartment and get some of my stuff.

That is, if my former landlord, Mr. Hummer, had not sold everything.

He was a mean old man with round eyes, yellow teeth and a breath that only smelled of cigarettes or salami, nothing more.

The number of eviction notices I got from him for forgetting to pay rent not even 24 hours after it was due was ridiculous.

I had no doubt that Mr. Hummer wouldn't react well to seeing me, especially after I disappeared for months, leaving him with no rent money and the responsibility of handling all my stuff.

But it was worth a try, right?

“Minneapolis can work,” Elijah said approvingly. “I'd go wherever you wanted, but Minneapolis is close enough for Kyle to come and go, but far enough from the Alpha for you to get better.

I cringed a little at the mention of Grayson. My heart squeezed in my chest. Elijah shuddered.

“Sorry,” he said quickly. “I'll stop talking about him.

I shook my head.

- It is not alright. I will get over it. I'm..." I hesitated,

but only for a moment. So I lifted my chin in determination. "I can handle that. I'm strong.

Elijah wasted no time in replying, "Of course!

You don't need it. Especially you have the me. I'm great, in case you haven't noticed.

I laughed. And it felt good. It gave me hope.

At that moment, I decided to get back on my feet as soon as possible so that Elijah could get back into his life.

Though I appreciated him immensely and knew I wouldn't have been able to make it through this day without him, he had better things to do than take care of me.

I've been alone basically my whole life.

I was good at it.

I could do it again.

I stretched my neck and gave him a quick kiss on the cheek.

"Thank you, Elijah. I know you're giving up a lot to be with me. It really means a lot.

Elijah smiled.

- The honor is mine. You do not have to thank me.

We walked for a few more minutes before my arms and legs started to get tired.

My body was running out of adrenaline, quickly leaving me exhausted beyond measure.

Not to mention the searing pain that still throbbed through my entire body.

It felt like I had the worst flu ever.

"How much longer until we reach the city?" - I asked. All I wanted to do was get on a bus, curl up in a ball in one of the seats, and sleep until we got to town.

"Another ten minutes," Elijah said. "Do you need to take a break?" We can stop for a few minutes.

I shook my head quickly.

- No. Not alright. I do not want to stop. I just didn't realize the how far the pack house was from the nearest town.

Elijah looked at me over his shoulder with a worried expression.

- He is sure? You don't look too good, Luna.

I narrowed my eyes at him. He promised to call me by my name.

"Sorry," he said quickly. "I'm still getting used to not calling you that." This may take some time. It goes against all my instincts to call her by her name.

I chose not to mention the fact that he hasn't even tried calling me Belle yet. How did he know he couldn't do this if he didn't even try?

I sighed.

- He is well. I tightened my arms around him, trying not to let go of his back and fall on my ass in the snow. My forehead found his shoulder, trying to find some kind of stability.

"I think I should walk a little." I'm starting to feel old.

I didn't have to look at Elijah to know he was frowning. He slowed down, thinking about it. Then, thankfully, it stops.

He placed my suitcase in the snow and gently grabbed my legs so he could help me off his back.

I couldn't help but lean against a nearby tree the second my feet hit the ground.

I closed my eyes tightly, trying to breathe.

When I opened them a few seconds later, Elijah was looking at me with an anguished expression.

"I'm fine," I said before he could ask how I was. I straightened up, pushing myself away from the tree and straightening my shoulders. - Let's continue.

Elijah didn't look convinced by my display of weakness.

He held out his palm.

“Backpack,” he said, gesturing for me to hand my bag over to him.

My brows furrowed in frustration. I wasn't that weak. I could still carry my own backpack, thank you very much.

- I got it. I can do this,” I said stubbornly.

I started walking in the same direction we were heading earlier, hoping he would change the subject.

Unfortunately, I wasn't so lucky. Elijah stopped in front of me, blocking my path.

“I know you can do this,” he said grimly, still holding out his hand. “I just don't care. If you're walking, I'll carry your backpack.

I made a face at him. His unshakable expression told me that I wasn't going to win this battle. I sighed deeply and angrily pulled the backpack straps off my shoulders. I pushed her towards him. - All good. Here.

The corners of Elijah's lips curled up as he held my backpack in my hands.

“Thanks,” he said.

I rolled my eyes, feeling my own lips form a small smile.

Why he looked so happy to be carrying a bag full of books, clothes and other useless objects was beyond me.

But I was still grateful for his help.

He slung the bag over his shoulders and bent down to pick up my suitcase as well. Then he looked at me, patiently waiting for me to give the green light to keep walking.

I used all the willpower left in my body to walk in a straight line without stumbling.

But it was difficult. Difficult. For. Cum.

My legs screamed with every step, the burning in my chest traveling through the rest of me the farther away I got from Grayson.

It was as if my body knew I was leaving the man I loved and because I had such an intense connection with him, it was determined to let my mind know I hated her.

I had never felt my mind and body as two separate entities before, but that was the only way to describe what was happening now.

My mind and body were fighting each other in a bloody battle that neither was going to win.

All for a man who hated me. He hit me, used me, gained my trust, and then destroyed me in the most painful way possible.

I didn't even realize I was crying until my vision blurred with unshed tears.

I groaned in frustration and violently wiped the tears away, mad at myself for crying again.

I looked down at my feet, determined to keep walking and willing them to carry me a little longer.

And then a branch, hidden deep in the snow, seemed to grab my foot like a gnarled hand, pulling my body down with sudden force.

I landed in the snow with a cry of surprise, falling with no grace.

I couldn't help but cry in frustration.

I slammed my fists into the snow angrily again and again.

Something inside me screamed, 'Pull yourself together,

Belle! ' That's why Grayson couldn't love

you! That's why your mother left you!

You're weak, you can't even walk without falling!

I let out a sob, more from anger and frustration than sadness.

I would prove the voice wrong.

I would prove everyone wrong.

I could do this.

I could be strong.

And I would do it myself.

No one would ever hurt me again. Elijah didn't waste a second, quickly crouching beside me the moment I fell.

"That's enough," he said roughly. He put my suitcase aside. "I will carry you. Let's leave your suitcase here and I'll carry it the rest of the way, like it or not. I'll come back for your things later, when we've gotten you somewhere you can rest that isn't in the freezing cold. He tried to wrap his arms around me so he could lift me in the air, but I stopped him.

"No," I said harshly. I pulled his arms away from me, letting my anger and frustration show.

- I can do this. I said I can and I will.

I wiped my hair off my face and sat up.

One of my elbows had been badly scratched by my jacket and dripping blood.

My knees weren't any better.

I tried not to care that my only jacket now had a huge hole in it.

Pushing the pain aside, I got to my feet with great effort. I looked at Elijah, who was still watching me from his crouched position.

He shook his head in amazement, forcing himself to stand as well.

"I know you don't want to hear this right now, and honestly, I'm not sure why I'm saying this right after you got your heart broken," he began, "but you would have been an amazing Luna. Truly. The Alpha made a terrible mistake giving you up.

I wasn't sure how to respond to that.

"Yeah, well..." I said, shifting my weight uncomfortably.

"All that is past now. Let's continue. I am cold.

Elijah nodded, not hiding his sad expression.

— OK.

We continued our walk through the woods, Elijah now walking extremely close to me, surely ready to catch me if I fell again.

We only made it a few more steps before Elijah suddenly stopped. I stopped too, turning to look at him, a few feet behind me.

“Elijah? - I asked.

His brown eyes were glazed and glassy, looking very darker than normal.

He was looking away with a strange expression on his face.

I didn't know much about it, but from Grayson's explanation and the few times I'd seen him do it, I knew Elijah was calling someone's mind, talking to them inside their heads.

But that's not what worried me. Elijah's expression was quickly turning into panic, his breathing accelerating more and more by the second. Whoever spoke to him did not bring good news.

When his eyes finally cleared, his gaze flicked to me. His jaw clenched tightly.

“Elijah? I asked again. - What happened?

Chapter 49

BELLE

“Elijah,” I said again, “what's wrong?”

Elijah's face turned pale as a sheet of paper.

I couldn't tell if it was his wolf or his human side that was upset, based on the rapid change in the color of his eyes.

Either way, whatever had just been told to him through the mindlink—communicated to him through his brain—couldn't be good.

I tried to approach him, but he didn't respond.

The pain I was feeling suddenly didn't matter; it was quickly being replaced by worry.

Elijah growled as I approached and I took a step away, putting a good amount of space between us.

My brows furrowed.

“Kyle,” Elijah sighed heavily.

My heart stopped.

- What? I asked frantically, is there something wrong with Kyle? How do you know?

Elijah shook his head quickly, grabbing his hair in tight strands.

It was obvious now that he was trying to control his wolf.

Was this what it felt like to be fully united and know your mate was injured?

He looked like he was in a lot of pain.

Shouldn't he be running back to Kyle in a panic?

“Mindlink. Mate bond,” he gasped, answering my question in short, painful sentences.

The way he spoke, without a shadow of a doubt, made me

believe he was telling the truth.

There was something wrong with Kyle.

But if Kyle was seriously injured, it wouldn't take long for Elijah to head back to the packhouse.

He wouldn't be here talking to me.

I may never know what it was like to be fully united, but deep down I she knew what it would feel like if her and Grayson's life were in jeopardy.

And nothing would stop me from getting to him.

It was the way Elijah was looking at me now—wide eyes, serious expression—that told me there was something he was hiding from me, something he couldn't tell me.

Something serious.

With cautious movements, I took a step towards him.

"There's more, isn't there?" I asked in a low voice.

Elijah squeezed his eyes shut for a second before he nodded curtly in confirmation.

I took a deep breath.

"Grayson? - I asked. "Grayson did something?"

He didn't give me any kind of confirmation, but his intense, unbroken gaze gave me all the answer I needed.

I was right. Grayson had done something, and based on Elijah's reaction, it wasn't good.

My mouth went dry, my heart rate increased to beat in time with a horse's hooves in the Kentucky Derby.

"Did he hurt anyone?"

Elijah blinked once.

There was no doubt in my mind that he was suffering from everything he learned through the mental link.

He wanted to talk to me, but for some reason he couldn't.

Something or someone was stopping him.

He ignored my last question, instead struggling to say, "Luna. You have to..."

He choked on the words, interrupted by an unseen force.
Her mouth snapped shut and her eyes squeezed shut.
He clutched his chest in immense pain, hunching over.
even until you kneel on the floor.

Panic filled my body.

I didn't waste a second running over to him and grabbing his shoulder.
I tried to help him up, wrapping my arm around his
waist and pulling him to his feet.

- No! he yelled the moment I touched him.

He pushed me hard enough to send me staggering
back. I screamed in shock.

Elijah didn't give me time to process his actions.

"Please..." he continued, desperation and pain in his tone, "you have to
tell me..."

"Tell you what, Elijah?" - I asked.

I tried to keep my distance, knowing now that he didn't want me to touch
him, but it was getting harder and harder to stay away as his pain seemed to
increase.

- Tell you what?!

And then, without warning, her back straightened.

He jumped up and looked at me with a bright, pleased expression.

He smiled widely, showing all his teeth.

It sent shivers down my spine.

"I must report back to the packhouse now. Goodbye," he said with that
clenched-toothed smile.

And without giving any further explanation, he turned on his heel and
started walking in the direction we came from.

But. What. Cum?

I allowed myself to stand there for a second, looking at his back, before
going after him.

His confused words ran through my mind.

Did he need to go back to the pack house? Why? It didn't make sense.

What happened? What can he not tell me?

It didn't bother me that he didn't seem to come with me anymore.

I wasn't selfish enough to worry about my own comfort when the well-being of others was at stake.

No, what bothered me was the fact that something was clearly very, very wrong.

And Elijah was walking into danger, acting as if was completely insane and unconscious.

- Hey! I yelled, running a little way to catch up. - Where are you going? What the hell is happening?

He didn't say anything back. As if I wasn't there, he He kept walking, still wearing that weird smile.

I grabbed his arm, not wanting to give up.

"Hey, you better tell me what's going on now, Elijah!

He continued to ignore me.

— Hey, stop! Please! Did something bad happen to Kyle?

Still, Elijah didn't stop. He continued to let me scream in your ear for a good minute without responding.

"I won't let you go until you tell me what's going on!" - I screamed.

Suddenly, he grabbed my arm and yanked me back.

I yelled, surprised by his sudden strength.

I was now walking directly against his back, my movement incapacitated by its death grip.

He walked the same way as before.

His hand moved down my arm, maintaining just enough pressure to hold me in place, and then he grabbed my hand tightly.

I noticed how her body was shaking against mine.

He squeezed my hand twice, then placed his index finger against my palm, moving it frantically.

over my skin.

It took me a second, but I realized with a shock that he was tracing letters in the palm of my hand.

DO NOT FOLLOW ME.

DANGER.

My breath caught in my throat as I interpreted his writing.

The fact that he needed to write the words on my palm instead of saying them only distressed me more.

Why hadn't he told me openly what was wrong?
Was anyone listening? Was he in trouble?

Whatever it was, Elijah was trying to tell me to stay back while he took care of everything.

Although, I might add, he continued to smile in a way that I could only describe as chilling.

I decided then that, while the last thing I wanted was to see Grayson again, the thought of Kyle or anyone else getting hurt as a result of my actions earlier today was reason enough to go back to the packhouse and help however I could.

I squeezed his hand once and started writing my own message on his palm, hoping he understood how I felt instead of trying to argue.

GO TOGETHER.

Elijah's steps faltered for just a second as he interpreted the information I conveyed to him.

Then he squeezed my hand so hard it almost hurt.

NO, he wrote back, his lyrics accompanied by another strong grip, emphasizing your point.

I squeezed his hand back just as hard.

Sim.

With that, Elijah stopped walking so abruptly that I gave a bump into your back.

His body was still shaking when he wrapped his other hand around it.

trembled around mine so that they were both squeezing my fingers.

He waited a second, his shoulders rising and falling with a deep, focused breath before squeezing my hand once more, softer than before.

PLEASE. DO NOT FOLLOW ME. PLEASE.

I the cows.

He was serious. He really didn't want me to go, he wanted to go back alone while I stayed behind.

I could feel the guilt consuming me.

I couldn't take it if Elijah or anyone else got hurt fighting my battles.

My stubbornness was advancing full force.

But did I really have a choice?

Noticing my resolve, Elijah squeezed my hands gently again, writing, IT WILL BE HAPPY.

I didn't expect the tears that started running down my face.

Even if they were just letters on my palm, your words they meant the world to me.

There was sincerity and hope emanating from his firm grip, causing warmth to spread through me.

Elijah wanted the best for me. I knew.

What if this was happening on my own and letting him fight my battles... so be it.

I trusted him.

I couldn't help but launch myself at him, wrapping my arms around his waist from behind in a hug that I hoped conveyed everything I was feeling.

My gratitude for your help and friendship.

My hope to see you again one day under better circumstances.

"Thank you," I whispered into her back, holding back the tears, "

thanks.

Elijah didn't answer.

It didn't surprise me, given the circumstances. But I knew he felt the same way.

I knew that if he had the chance, he would be telling me I was badass and that I was going to rock in the real world.

He placed his hands over mine in front of him and sighed, squeezing me lightly.

As sad as I was, the whole experience felt strangely cathartic.

I wasn't just saying goodbye to Elijah and the amazing friendship that had proven so valuable over the last month, I was saying goodbye to Grayson, life and the people that came with loving him.

I felt stronger. I felt happier.

I felt ready.

We stayed like that for a minute, silently communicating our goodbyes through our tight embrace.

Elijah let me hold him for as long as I wanted, looking like he needed to release his emotions as much as I did.

"Stay safe," I whispered to him.

And then, as if we both knew it was time, he shook my hand, wrote, GOODBYE, LUNA, and released me.

Leaving me, once again, completely alone.



Elijah was right.

The nearest town was a good ten minutes' walk away from where we were.

After grabbing my suitcase and backpack, it didn't take me long to get to the small town.

Once there, I got a bus ticket with the little money

I had stuffed in my backpack and took a bus to Minneapolis.
During the trip, I allowed myself to process what had happened to me over the last few months.

I remembered Elijah had told me not to think about Grayson,
that this would only make the pain worse.

He was right about that too.

Everything hurt just imagining Grayson's smile, his laugh, his affectionate nicknames for me, that night we spent hours talking under the twinkling lights of the Eiffel Tower.

For now, I told myself, you'll allow yourself to think about him.

You will be consumed by thoughts of what could have happened.

But the moment you step off this bus, the second you go back to your old life, you'll erase him from your mind.

You won't let yourself drown in victimhood.

You won't wonder what you did wrong.

You will be strong. You will walk with your head held high and not let what he made you let down.

And that's exactly what I did.

At the Minneapolis bus station, he had found a new vision of things.

I wiped away my tears and pushed my shoulders back, no
wasting time before walking to my old, familiar building.

I intended to retrieve my things.

I had left most of my belongings in my small
apartment before going to Paris.

Although I had been gone for a few months and hadn't paid rent since then,
I was hoping my landlord would have kept at least some of my stuff instead of
selling or leaving it all.

in the street.

I was wrong.

My old landlord didn't even open the door for me when I knocked.

He yelled at me for a few minutes before telling me to go away.

When I continued to plead, he threatened to call the police.

Then I found myself back on the street, with only the items in my backpack and suitcase and the clothes on my back.

As I looked around, I was flooded with memories of my childhood with my father.

As I walked, I came across the playground where he used to take me on weekends.

So I passed the hospital where he died, just a few blocks from my old apartment.

The good memories turned bad, suddenly and completely.

I realized that this place, this city, only held memories of sadness or heartbreak, even if the memories were happy at the time they were made.

My father would have wanted so much more for me than what I was doing now.

I almost passed out right there, not knowing what to do next, but I held back.

Instead, I took another bus and let it take me away.

And then, when I felt like it, I took another, letting instinct and they might decide where I would go.

I rode that bus through the night and didn't stop until the driver told me I needed to get off.

I found myself in a new city with the hope of a new I start burning in my chest.

I was ready to move on and find the strongest, most independent, most capable version of myself.

I wasn't going to let anyone bring me down.

Come on, world.

Chapter 50

KYLE

VÁRIAS HORAS ANTES, NA MANHÃ DA PARTIDA DE BELLE

I could not sleep.

No matter how much I tossed and turned during the night, the tension coursing through my body kept me awake.

I'd uncovered some information last night that I shouldn't have known —information about my Alpha.

It all started when I couldn't stop worrying about Luna, her strange behavior constantly on my mind.

I never saw her again. In fact, I hadn't seen her in weeks.

Even when I looked for her, she was nowhere to be seen.

At first I just missed you; she was fun to be around and made the Alpha's ever-changing moods more bearable.

But then it turned into something else.

Something was going on between Alpha and Luna that I didn't know about.

My first clue was when Luna asked me to mediate between her and the Alpha due to some fight they had during their second night with the pack.

But that wasn't the strangest thing in and of itself. Mates fought, that was the way it was—goddess knew Elijah and I fought regularly.

But Alpha and Luna just didn't seem like that type.

The next clue was when she showed up in the kitchen sporting a black eye and bruised chin.

She said she hadn't eaten. She looked worried and tired, maybe even depressed.

Thinking that might do the trick and looking to take care of my Luna, I threw her over my shoulder and carried her straight to the Alfa.

I ignored the fact that she was screaming and crying like she was afraid to see him.

I ignored the look of terror in her eyes.

Now, in hindsight, I regretted my actions.

I should have spoken to her first. I should have listened to her before decide what was best for her.

I hadn't seen her since that morning several weeks ago.

My concern grew more each day that I didn't see her.

She wasn't even at the weekly dinners, the seat next to the Alfa always empty.

The Alfa never gave an explanation for her absence: he was quiet and focused on his work, more so than I'd ever seen him.

Time passed until it seemed like Luna didn't exist.

Yesterday, my worry had finally become too much and had taken over my common sense.

The Alfa might attack me for thinking I knew what was best for his mate over him. But I convinced myself that I had no choice. I cared too much about Luna to let this go.

After a long meeting that morning, I decided to ask Alpha about Luna, hoping for a logical explanation.

I was shocked when he just seemed bothered that I had touched on the subject, not angry.

He acted like it was an inconvenience to talk about his mate.

He nonchalantly told me that she was having a hard time adjusting and needed space, and insisted that I not worry about her anymore.

Of course, those words that were meant to reassure me did the complete opposite.

Something wasn't right.

Alphas didn't leave their mates alone, especially at a time like this, important not just for the pack, but for Luna as she adjusted to life as a leader.

If Luna was having a hard time, the Alpha wouldn't even consider leaving her side—and if, for some odd reason, he did, his wolf wouldn't let him put the action through.

Baffled by his response and not quite ready to let the matter drop, I joked about my surprise at the fact that he still hadn't consummated the union.

I hoped this got a response from him: Alphas were known to get angry and overprotective when asked about their own bonding processes.

To its credit, the Alpha fought back. Just not in the way I expected.

He perked up and looked at me for the first time since the beginning of the class conversation.

He didn't speak for a moment, thinking. Then his lips curved into a strange, almost evil smile.

“Ah, yes... union,” he said, leaning back in his chair.

He looked up at the ceiling and licked his lips.

Then he looked at me with a new twinkle in his eyes and gave me a pat on the back.

- Don't worry. The union will happen soon. Very soon.

Without another word, the Alpha walked out of the conference room, his determination evident at every step.

I watched him go to his office with a sour taste in my mouth.

The way he spoke made it sound like he had forgotten what togetherness was.

So by this time I was in a panic. His odd behavior mixed with Luna's absence equaled a need for answers.

I had to find Luna and find out exactly what was going on.

My first stop was the room she shared with Alpha.

I knocked several times, and when no one answered, I went in anyway.

I didn't care that anyone but her and the Alpha were allowed here. I was very focused on my mission.

To my surprise, the room was empty. Luna was nowhere to be found.

I thought this was where she was hiding but obviously I was wrong.

As I looked around the room, my eyes landed on the Alpha's desk.

It was extremely messy—odd, since the Alpha was such a mess. one of the most organized people I knew.

He got upset when even with a paperclip out of place.

There were papers strewn across the surface of the table, covered in red ink.

I approached her, curiosity and concern getting the better of me. my usual dedication to the rules.

What I found made my heart stop.

All papers were letters written to Alpha.

Sent by vampires.

No, that can't be right. Alpha would not be in communication secret with our mortal enemies.

I reread the letter I was holding before moving on to the next one in the hope to find some other explanation.

But there were none.

All the letters were written by a vampire clan to the Alpha.

And that wasn't even the scariest part.

This wasn't just any clan—it was the most famous clan in the world. world except the royal family.

It was also the most evil.

This was the Clan of Azazel, given the title after supporting the rule of Azazel Mortar, the former king of vampires.

They helped him in the Vampire War years ago, becoming a army of the most evil beings ever known.

Unlike other vampires who seemed to have at least some morals, this clan was infamous for murdering without a cause and performing despicable acts.

His vile conduct was the reason werewolves and vampires were in war for so long.

As king, Azazel Mortar switched to allowing rogue vampires into the royal clan, ignoring how dangerous this could be, thinking only of gaining more power.

They couldn't control their thirst for human blood... and it was for That's why Azazel lost the throne.

The letters spoke of an ambush on our pack that would occur within three days.

The Alpha had shared with them all the weaknesses in our borders, giving them information on the best attack strategies.

Together, they formed a plan to take down our pack.

And after defeat, they would give us the choice to join them in conquest of the next. It is the next.

Or die.

My hands shook as I read each letter, absorbing the details and committing them to memory.

His ultimate goal was to attract enough wolves to defeat the Mortar, the real vampires.

And they would. If our pack were defeated and fought against other packs with the help of vampires, we would win.

There was no doubt.

The army of vampires and werewolves would grow to become the most powerful in the world.

Azazel Mortar would once again have the throne.

I dropped the letters back on the table after I finished reading.

I wasn't supposed to know any of this. The Alpha was hiding the

evidence, and for good reason.

My mind wandered back to when the Alpha proposed we let a much less dangerous group of vampires into our land.

He thought it would be good to have them by our side during battles, in case we were attacked.

His idea was immediately rejected by the elders and me.

Vampires and werewolves never got along. both of ours species were too proud to work in harmony.

If the Alpha had proposed that we join Azazel's Clan during a meeting with the Elders, he would have been considered insane, possibly unfit for his office.

He could lose all his authority and credibility.

Then he felt the need to go behind our backs and communicate with the clan in secret.

Alpha Grayson took great pride in having the most powerful pack in the world, and he worked hard to earn that title.

But I never thought he was power hungry enough to put the whole pack in danger on purpose.

Didn't he know that most, if not all, of our members would die before agreeing to take orders from vampires and help them kill other werewolves?

If he imagines that this will somehow help us get to the top or make history, then he has misjudged the situation.

This will spell the end of our pack as we know it.

I had very little time to act.

I thought about going to Beta Adalee, but her name had been mentioned in the letters several times.

In fact, now that I think about it, she and the Alfa have been awfully friendly ever since we got back from France.

Was it possible they were in this together?

There was no one else he could trust with information he wasn't in danger of knowing.

I had to do it myself.

In less than a second, I was out of Alpha's room and down the hall.

Although I was still worried about Luna, she was now the last thing on my mind.

It was better for her to stay away anyway. She would be safer if she didn't have contact with the Alpha.

And the Alpha would be weaker without his mate.

Once I was in my office, I quickly wrote a letter explaining the risks and handed it to the strongest warrior in our pack, Ben.

I sent him out with orders to deliver the letter to the nearest pack, about a day away.

Ben was incredibly resilient and would have been able to run the entire way almost without breaking a sweat. He must not stop for any reason or let anyone but the other pack's Alpha see the letter.

As soon as he received his instructions, Ben ran off without doing anything. questions, sensing the urgency.

It was clear to me that a war was coming in three days, a war we would not survive without help.

With luck, the pack next door would be willing to help us.

We had a good relationship and a history of fighting together.

Although this battle was more dangerous than any other, I had no doubts that they would help us, especially since it also concerned their well-being.

But that wasn't enough. I would need more than that.

After ensuring that the Alpha was still in his office, I organized a pack meeting in the forest.

I ordered everyone to start training and prepare for an intense battle, emphasizing that these were the Alpha's orders, not mine.

At first they were confused and worried and wanted to know what was happening, which was only fair.

I assured them that I knew as much as they did, that I was just the messenger.

They started work soon after that.

I considered contacting other packs, but refrained.

It would take a long time to send letters to them, and I couldn't call them without arousing the Alpha's suspicion.

If all went well with the pack at my side, I would have an army of about six thousand men on my hands.

However, Azazel's Clan had over ten thousand rebels and counting, constantly biting humans and mutating them, increasing their numbers.

I needed more help if I was to save my pack.

And there was only one way to do that, only one person who would have a lot to lose if Azazel's Clan gained power.

I would have to negotiate and ally with the vampire king, Azazel's brother.

Zagan Mortar.

Chapter 51

KYLE

I looked down at Elijah sleeping silently on my chest.

I had joined him in bed an hour ago, but I couldn't close my eyes once.

I'd been up all night trying to think of a plan to get in touch with Zagan Mortar, the vampire king, in order to tell him about the war that was going to kill us all.

Contacting the Mortar would not be easy.

His realm was concealed by means of black magic, accessible only to a pure-blooded vampire, a vampire born rather than made.

No werewolf had ever set foot in royal domain—it was very well hidden.

The only way to get in touch with the royal family was to make another vampire to deliver the message.

That meant I had to do two things: First, find a vampire willing to listen to a werewolf long enough to deliver a message—a very difficult task.

Second, convincing that vampire to set up an audience with the Zagan Mortar — an even more difficult task.

Only then would my message be delivered. It would be nearly impossible.

Except, in a stroke of sheer luck, we just had a vampire in our dungeons.

One of our prisoners from the attack a few months ago, a girl named Elina, still hadn't managed to escape.

We had planned to keep it locked in case any information needs arise...but plans change.

I had spoken to her yesterday, tried to convince her to deliver a letter I had written to the royal family.

At first, as expected, she hissed and even tried to throw a few jabs at her.

on the cell bars with its long claws.

If werewolves were the dogs of the supernatural world, vampires were definitely the cats.

She continued to hiss and curse at me until I offered her something that would make her listen: her freedom.

I told her that I would let her go if she agreed to deliver my letter to Zagan Mortar.

It was an offer I knew she couldn't refuse.

She was already weakened from not drinking blood since before she got here.

Vampires could go without blood for up to a year, but they begin to grow weak and ill-tempered after just one day.

It didn't help that Elina was also a newborn vampire, meaning that she had been turned not too long ago.

Her inability to contain her hunger due to her new passion for blood would convince her to do almost anything.

"They won't let me in," she said after I finished explaining my plan. "I'm not purebred, I was bitten a year ago.

Therefore, a very young newborn.

And even after she wasn't young anymore, she would be a half-breed, someone who wasn't born a vampire but became one.

Half-bloods were not allowed in royal territory.

But in this case, it only worked in my favor.

"Yes," I nodded, "but the king won't be able to ignore a young half-blood trying to enter his realm. Especially if she has it.

Through the bars, I handed him the letter.

It was written on old, wax-sealed parchment and the pack emblem in gold—The emblem belongs to one of the most powerful werewolf packs in the world. It smells like a wolf and was written by Alpha Grayson's gamma. If a newborn half-blood waltzes into the realm with that letter, there's no doubt the vampire king will find him. He won't have a choice.

I expected her to bring up another argument and expose more flaws in my plan, but she didn't.

She took the letter and stuffed it in her pocket, promising to do what she could.

She was desperate for her freedom and blood, probably.

It occurred to me now that she might have been lying when she promised to deliver the letter.

She could take the letter and her freedom and never think of me again or in my pack again.

But somehow I felt that she wasn't the type of person to make a promise only to break it, especially one that concerned so many people's lives.

I could only hope for the best.

Suddenly, Elijah moved against me and kissed my chest, snapping me out of my worried thoughts.

I had almost forgotten where I was, too caught up in my own world.

He rested his chin on my chest and looked at me sleepily.

"You're disturbing my beauty sleep," he whispered. - I can feel your concern through the bond.

I sighed. Shit. I didn't want to wake him up.

- Sorry.

I leaned over and kissed him once on the lips.

The action calmed my wolf, but it only seemed to agitate Elijah even more.

When I pulled away, he sat up, frowning.

"This has something to do with the battle the Alpha wants us to train for, doesn't it? Do you know anything? Is there something you're not telling us?"

It didn't surprise me that Elijah knew right away that I was hiding something.

Over our years together, our bond had grown incredibly strong.

We knew everything about each other. We could practically read the each other's mind without batting an eye.

I sighed and sat up too, starting to feel her panic through the bond.

My wolf didn't like it, urging me to make him feel better.

I took her hands in mine.

“If I could tell you, I would.

I kissed her fingers carefully, looking into her eyes.

“Please believe me.

I felt his concern only grow at my terrible attempt to reassure him.

“I know,” he whispered, the honesty coming through in his tone. He paused, studying me. “But you would also tell me if you were in trouble, right?”

My wolf whimpered, starting to circle in my direction.
mind.

Shit.

I would have to lie to him. And I would hate myself for it.

I simply refused to put him in danger.

If I told him what was really going on, there was no doubt he'd do anything he could to help me—even go toe-to-toe with a Mortar if need be.

I couldn't let that happen.

I was already thinking of locking him up when the battle started so I would know he wouldn't get hurt.

With my most reassuring smile, I said,

“Yes, of course. I'm fine, I promise.

He didn't look convinced. In fact, I was pretty sure he knew I was lying.

I kissed his lips before he could say anything else and continued.

“I'm going to get some coffee. Do you want some?”

Elijah watched me get out of bed, his handsome face still creased.

My heart squeezed painfully at the sight. I was grateful he'd changed the subject for now.

"Yes, of course," he replied.

I nodded once and slipped on my flip-flops, then turned back to him and dropped a lingering kiss on his forehead.

"I love you," I said.

The corners of her lips curled up a little in a sad smile. He nodded.

- I love you too.



Guilt consumed me during the long walk to the kitchen.

My wolf was angry at the decision to lie to Elijah.

But he didn't understand that if I told the truth it would only put him in danger.

Stupid wolf. Making me feel guilty for doing the right thing.

A sudden sound brought my inner battle to a halt and my feet wobbled.

Someone was crying—sobbing, actually.

And I recognized the voice.

My legs started running before I had time to process what you were doing.

Turning corners and running up a flight of stairs, I found myself in the main hall of the house.

My gaze fell on the shivering form of a woman bent over on the stairs.

It was the Moon.

She looked, beyond disturbed, sitting on the steps in her slacks, pajamas and a white T-shirt.

Her body shook with sobs and her hands covered her face.

"Luna?" I asked gently, trying not to startle her, but she jumped the moment I spoke.

Her head snapped up and her teary eyes connected to hers.
my.

She looked a mess, dark circles under her eyes, hair disheveled.

She'd lost weight too, a lot of it, leaving her cheekbones—one still swollen from the violent bruise a few weeks ago—sunken and bony.

Fury and protection hit me like a ton of bricks.

My wolf lunged forward and howled in my head, wanting to help his Luna at any cost.

"What the hell happened to you?"

I approached her as I would a wounded animal about to flee.
at the slightest movement.

Her mouth opened and closed several times, but no sound came out other than stifled gasps and sobs.

I realized how right I was to be concerned about Luna.

I had the feeling that something was wrong...but I never expected it.

All of a sudden, Luna was unexpectedly lunging at me, his arms around me in an instant, his face in my neck.

I could feel the tears on my skin as her sobs intensified.

His momentum caused me to stumble back in shock, but I was able to get to my feet.

Hesitating for just a second, I wrapped my arms around her.
and pulled her closer.

She obviously needed comfort right now, and I was glad I was the one to offer it.

"Hey, shh," I said, running my hand up and down her cheeks.
back.

I wasn't sure what to do. It felt wrong to hold someone who

it wasn't my companion like that, but also right, because it was what my Luna needed.

I allowed it to stay like that for a long moment before deciding I couldn't wait any longer for an explanation.

Someone hurt her. And I was going to make him pay.

First, she needed her mate, even if he was a vampire-loving lunatic.

"Hey, it's okay, everything's going to be okay.

I leaned back to try and look at her, but she kept her head on the back of my neck.

"I'll link the Alpha and he'll help you. Whoever did this to you will suffer serious consequences. Everything will be fine, I promise.

His head snapped up and his eyes locked with mine.
in which I mentioned the Alpha.

- No! she screamed in fear. "No, you can't mentally call Grayson!" I can't see you right now, I can't, please Kyle. Please don't tell him.

Not wanting to upset her further, I nodded in agreement.

If she was going so far as to beg me, that's just would confirm my fear: that the Alpha had done this to her.

My respect for Grayson had officially hit zero when I looked into his companion's exhausted eyes.

"Okay, I'm not going to tell him," I said, "but you need to tell me what the hell is going on. Now.

I needed answers and I wasn't going to let her leave until I got them.

She shook her head, tears streaming down her face.

"Grayson," she gasped, "Grayson, he...

She didn't finish. Her eyes widened and her face contorted in pain. She let out a deafening scream and doubled over.

"Luna!" - I screamed.

I tried to help her up and ask what was wrong, but

she continued to squirm.

She was scratching her neck and arms, sobbing as if something unknown was crawling into her body and trying to break her skin with claws.

It was horrible to see.

Then, suddenly, her screams stopped and her hand grabbed my arm.

"Something is wrong with Grayson," she said.

Yes, no kidding. He's an idiot.

Without another word, she turned and ran up the stairs faster than I'd ever seen a human run.

I should have stopped her. I should never have let her into that room.

But my own concern for the Alpha, treacherous as he is it was, it blocked my judgment.

So instead, I followed Luna until we reached Alpha's room.

And I saw when your heart broke.

Grayson was sitting on the edge of the bed with a naked woman in his lap.

None of them looked up when we walked in, too consumed with their bodies brushing and kissing nonstop.

They hadn't started the union yet, but it was obvious they were about to.

I looked at Luna in shock, but she didn't say anything, just looked at her mate—my Alpha—getting ready to have sex with another woman.

Her face was expressionless, but she was pale and her body rocked back and forth.

She looked like she was going to fall over or pass out at any second.

Though she and Grayson never completed the joining process, she undoubtedly felt her soul being ripped in two in what was probably the worst feeling in the world.

I wouldn't let her stand there and watch while her mate, one man I no longer recognized, mated with someone else.

I had to get her out of here.

I thought about taking her in my arms and running away, but I couldn't.

I was too blinded by the rage telling me to beat Grayson up
turn bran, Alpha or not.

Luna's confused behavior over the last few weeks was becoming clear.

Grayson had hit her. Probably several times. He was neglecting her.

No wonder she looked like she hadn't slept in weeks and had practically
been reduced to a skeleton.

I couldn't let Grayson have sex with someone else knowing
that would probably kill her.

She had been through enough. She deserved better.

I had to stop him, even if it meant risking my life and fighting him.

But first, I had to get Luna out of here.

I quickly got in front of her, blocking her view.

Thankfully, she didn't try to walk past me, looking too out of breath to
even notice.

I grabbed her face and tilted her head towards me.

— Manager.

She just stared straight ahead with a blank, dead stare.

I wasn't surprised; I would have acted the same if that had
happened to me. But I had to go on.

"Luna!" Look at me!

Slowly, his bright eyes met mine.

"You need to get out of here," I told her in the most urgent tone I could
muster.

I looked back. Grayson was now going further with the other girl, back
on the bed, kissing each other fiercely...

What the hell is wrong with him?

He doesn't mind that his mate is in the room while he

about to fuck some other girl?

Luna still wasn't responding, continuing to look at me without really seeing me.

Was she really processing my words?

To emphasize my point, I pushed her back just enough to get her moving.

She stumbled towards the door.

When she regained her balance, the trance seemed to disappear and the fog dissipated from her expression.

Instead of words, a hard, shattered sob left her mouth.

My heart broke. I knew she was finally starting to understand what was going on.

That she was losing her mate.

The tears started again. I approached quickly.

I wanted more than anything to pull her into my arms and hold her until she stopped crying, but now was not the time.

- I know. I know, Luna"—I wiped her cheeks—"I know you're feeling awful, like you can't move, but you need to get as far away from here as possible. Please, leave. Right now.

Go. Now.

I pushed her again, harder this time.

She took a few steps back but didn't continue; it was like their feet were glued to the ground.

Your body was probably seeking the comfort of your companion, not knowing that it was he who was causing her pain.

She wouldn't be able to do this on her own then. She would need help.

Elijah! I yelled to my mate through the mind link. Elijah, wake up!

His sleepy voice answered.

What? Did the kitchen run out of coffee again? There's no need to get so grumpy.

Elijah, I need you to meet Luna at the bottom of the stairs in the hall.
front. She's coming down soon and she's going to need help.

I swallowed hard, preparing to tell him the gory details.

There's not much time to explain, but Alpha is bonding with someone else and Luna is in a lot of pain. I need you to take her as far as you can. Wherever she wants to go after that—I'll meet you there with our stuff as soon as I can.

Elijah's concern in the bond was nearly drowning me.

But I also felt determination. He didn't ask questions. He knew immediately how serious this was.

I'll do what I can, he said.

So I turned my attention to the fragile Luna.

"I'm sorry, Luna. Elijah will meet you downstairs and get you out of here. You must move.

I turned her body and poked her with the strongest force yet.

Finally, with the boost he needed, he staggered out of the room. room, down the hall, towards the stairs, without looking back.

I listened until I heard Elijah's reassuring voice, ready to take care of her, and let out a sigh of relief.

Then I turned to Grayson, ready to do whatever was necessary to avenge Luna.

Chapter 52

KYLE

The second I knew Luna was safe in Elijah's care, I let my wolf take over half of my mind.

Doing so did not transform me, but it did allow the power of my wolf possessed my body, making me bigger and stronger.

My anger blinded me to reason as my gaze locked on Grayson and the girl on his lap.

There's no turning back now.

As soon as I was in front of the bed, I grabbed the girl and threw her to the floor.

She fell, letting out a scream as her bare legs scraped against the wooden floor.

I couldn't bring myself to feel guilty about using my strength against a helpless wolf.

She knew she was betraying her Luna and therefore her pack.

"Get out of here," I said, grabbing her clothes from the pile on the floor and tossing them to her. - Outside!

I was about to turn back to Grayson, ready to fight, when I noticed his eyes.

His irises were a dark, unnatural blood red.

Then I watched, dumbfounded, as his eyes changed to a normal hazel color.

She frowned as her eyes cleared and scanned the room.

She looked at the clothes I had thrown at her, as if she had just realized that I was naked.

Her face went pale and she hugged her clothes to her body, trying to cover up as much as possible.

She looked over at Grayson, who was still in bed, with only his

boxer.

- What...?

She didn't finish.

With tangible confusion and embarrassment in the air, she hurried out of the room.

His terrible red eyes flashed through my mind when I turned to Grayson.

I didn't have time to consider what the red irises meant.

Maybe she was bewitched? Maybe he had some genetic mutation?

All I knew was that I had never seen anything like it—not in werewolves, at least.

Lying on the bed, Grayson growled loudly at me.

“You ruined my fun,” he said grimly. “I thought gammas were supposed to help your alphas. You ended up wasting an opportunity to gain more power.

He had been my Alpha for several years.

I was fortunate to watch him grow as a leader, developing the skills to make tough decisions and the compassion to guide his people no matter what the circumstances.

In that moment, looking at a man I no longer recognized, who couldn't possibly be my Alpha, I realized that these things I idolized him for were all an act.

All run to get and keep power.

My wolf stepped forward and took control of my mind and actions. We could only focus on one thing.

Avenge our Luna and get revenge.

My fist flew before I could fully comprehend my actions.

Fueled by violent rage, it connected with Grayson's face with more force than I knew it had in me, resulting in a satisfying squeak.

Grayson let out a sound of surprise as his head flew to the side.

A hissing noise I'd never heard him make before came from his throat.

I didn't give him time to react as I repositioned my arm for another punch, hoping to break his nose with this one.

But then Grayson grabbed my wrist, stopping my movements.

"Stop," he said quietly.

Its high-pitched tone reached my ears and, like magic, immediately made my body freeze.

I groaned in discomfort and shock—it was like I was made of ice, solid and cold, shivers running down my spine.

I couldn't move no matter how hard I tried.

My wolf howled in my head, wanting to lunge and crash against the my skull so it could come out.

But he was also completely paralyzed.

Panic enveloped me. How did Grayson do it? How was that possible?

He wasn't looking at me.

He still had his head turned to the side, wiping blood from the corner of his mouth, and he let go of my fist.

"What the hell did you do to me? — I boiled.

I tried once more to move my body, but I was stuck in the same position, my fist raised.

Grayson rubbed his chin.

"You pack a punch, little wolf.

My wolf bristled at the insult.

"I can see why he wanted you to be his beta.

I was barely listening, too focused on trying to move my body.

"Let me move!"

He shook his head, his eyes finally meeting mine. They were blood red like the girl's.

I took a deep breath.

“Your eyes,” I whispered, “was how you got that girl to sleep with you. You were controlling her.

He chuckled softly, but didn't answer.

I didn't need confirmation. I knew I was right.

Grayson got up from the bed and walked past me until I couldn't see him anymore.

“Your little outburst has to do with that little brunette girl, it is not? he said behind me.

Brunette girl.

I knew he hadn't forgotten her name. He was playing with me, trying to piss me off. I clenched my teeth.

“Belle,” I said, “the girl you were about to kill for hooking up with someone else. Your Luna.

“Ah, so that's where you're wrong, my boy,” Grayson said.

I could hear noise behind me as well as drawers opening and closing.

He was getting dressed.

“That girl would never have been my Luna. My plan was to bond with her and feed on the power of the mate bond. But she was never worthy of being my mate. Small and weak. A human.

Disgust permeated his tone.

“We weren't made for each other. Even she knew that. That's why she ran away. That's why I chose another for the union.

“She didn't run away, you son of a bitch,” I snarled. “You chased her away.

Grayson was in front of me in a second, faster than I'd ever seen anyone move in my life, now fully dressed in jeans and a shirt.

I blinked, surprised.

“How—” I started to ask, but was silenced by a sharp slap across the face. Pain spread across my cheek.

"Remember who you're talking to, wolf," Grayson said, dangerously calm. "You're lucky you're still alive.

I showed my teeth.

His stern expression faded as he looked at me with interest, looking from my fangs to my fist.

I would still be ready to pounce the moment I was freed from this fucking mind control.

He sighed.

"Stop it." He waved his hand dismissively and walked away.
— you're making me nervous.

The tension in my body was released in an instant.

My arms moved to the sides and my legs came together.

I was standing straight and facing Grayson like I was part of the army.

Grayson also glared at me. I couldn't move but my muscles weren't tense in preparation for a fight.

Grayson sighed in frustration and crossed his arms over his chest, watching me closely.

"Your loyalty to Luna is impressive. It shows your bravery.

He made a face.

"Your loyalty to me is not. You willingly defied me and doubted my decision to take another mate. I believed that werewolves had a blind devotion to their alphas. This little feat of yours proved me wrong.

He rubbed the bruise forming on his chin, looking me up and down, assessing my body.

"Be grateful that I'm willing to let this go. You are one of the strongest members of the pack and a good gam. You would be of no use to me dead. But be aware that I let you live in the belief that you will not defy me again, wolf.

I opened my mouth to curse him out, to tell him he wasn't my Alpha anymore.

But an understanding stopped me.

He kept calling me a wolf. Young wolf. Little Wolf.

The names were meant to be derogatory—but I was a wolf, young and smaller than he was.

I studied Grayson: red eyes, hissing mouth, the way he could somehow control me with just his words.

I had never seen him do any of those things before this one. time. I didn't know he was capable of that.

No werewolf had powers like that.

In fact, there was only one species that did.

“Vampire,” I choked out.

The red eyes widened slightly. The jaw dropped. A small smile formed on her lips.

“Well,” he said casually, tilting his head to either side and cracking his neck, “good for you. I was starting to wonder if anyone would find out.

He chuckled and rolled his shoulders.

“A pity, really. I was having so much fun.

I watched, still incapacitated, as Grayson shifted and changed as if he was turning into his wolf.

Only instead of growing and sprouting fur, his body shrank and changed until there was a completely different man in front of me.

And not just any man.

Azazel Mortar.

Chapter 53

KYLE

Azazel Mortar was one of the biggest vampires I had seen in my life.

He had long black hair and a neatly shaved beard.

His red eyes were darker than Grayson's or the girl's, piercing my soul, telling me he was a powerful pureblood.

I felt stupid.

How could I not? All the warning signs were there, just waiting for me to notice them.

They couldn't have been clearer if they were biting me in the ass.

Grayson wasn't Grayson after all — well, it was his body, but it was not he who controlled it.

It was Azazel this whole time.

Azazel chuckled as he stretched his arms and legs.

“You have no idea how good it feels to be back on my own. body after being trapped in that filthy dog for so many months.

He shook his head in disgust.

“As much as I enjoyed the power Grayson's body provided me, it gains nothing from your own skin.

I bristled, clenching my teeth.

- What you do with him?

I was desperately fighting the mind control that kept me from moving.

"Where's Alpha Grayson?"

"Shh, shh, shh, little wolf," Azazel teased, stepping forward and patting my cheek.

If I could have moved anything other than my mouth, I would have bitten him.

"Don't worry about your poor Alpha. He's still here.

He tapped his temple.

"I wouldn't be able to use his body if he wasn't alive.

"Can he talk?" - I asked. "Can he see me?"

Suddenly, Azazel hissed, baring his vampire fangs, obviously angry.

He looked away from me, his gaze settling somewhere in the room. He was silent for a moment.

"He can see you. And he can talk, only to me. In fact, he doesn't shut up.

I could tell he wasn't talking to me alone anymore.

If everything he was saying was true, Grayson was in his mind and communicating with it.

I almost smiled at the thought.

If Grayson were actually present and able to talk with his busy body, I could only imagine how awful the conversation was. constant.

I wouldn't have been surprised if Azazel hadn't had a moment of peace since it took over.

Azazel shook his head and smiled calmly at me.

- Forgive me. He thinks he can talk as much as he wants now that his mate is gone. He seems to have forgotten that I can kill the rest of his pack just as easily. You included.

He paused, waiting for something.

My best guess was that he was waiting to see if Grayson would continue to speak after the threat he had just made.

After a second, the calm, menacing smile widened.

"That's better," he said.

Grayson had finally stopped talking. Azazel laughed in amusement.

"Your Alpha cares a lot about his pack and especially about you.

your mate. Maybe a little too much. This has made him weak, and because of this, I can control his body with ease. The price you pay for love, I suppose. What an expensive price.

I growled.

- Let him go. You already have your clan coming to war. You already have all the information you need to succeed. Release your grip on Alpha Grayson and fight the battle you've planned. Only a coward would hide in the body of someone stronger.

Azazel looked only a little shocked by the revelation that I knew of his plans.

"So you were the one who went through my things yesterday."

He chuckled darkly.

"You're smarter than you look, young gamma. I underestimated you.

"I know my Alpha," I replied vehemently, "and you're not him.

His expression turned into a mocking frown.

"Oh, gee. Here I was, thinking I was doing such a good job acting as the mighty Alpha Grayson.

He mocked his name.

"After all, I have access to every thought in your mind.

He dropped his shoulders in mock sadness.

- Oh well. I can live with the fact that I can't act like a dog.

My wolf pressed. I could feel my eyes turning black with his presence. He wanted out.

"Calm your wolf," Azazel said dismissively, "there's no need for that. All this will be over soon. I need your Alfa for a few more days, and then I promise I'll be gone. I will ensure that Alpha Grayson dies as honorably as possible, but only after he has told his pack to give their lives to Azazel's clan and fight alongside them for the throne.

"They would never do that," I snarled, "fight alongside vampires."

disgusting.

“It's really sad.

Azazel circled me, completely ignoring my last statement.

“You would have been a fantastic right hand man for me. You've impressed me these last few months. But I can't let you spill my little secret now, can I?

He moved in a blur, throwing me to the ground in one graceful motion.

I was helpless as my body fell backwards.

Then Azazel was beside me on the floor with that evil smile.

"Let me move!" - I screamed. “Stop being a coward and fight me without limitations!

He laughed.

“Oh, my boy. I'm anything but a coward.

And his fangs plunged into my throat.

I knew in that moment that I was going to die.

I had no way of stopping him from sucking every last drop of my blood.

There was no hope.

I could only try to convince myself that I had done enough to keep my pack safe from the battle that was to come tomorrow, that the vampire king had received my message and was on his way to help.

Gradually, I could feel my energy leave me with every drop of blood Azazel sucked.

My wolf struggled against the barrier that kept us from moving, but it was no use—he, too, was rapidly losing strength.

I thought about reaching out to Elijah. I wanted to tell him how much I loved him.

Until now, I'd been blocking my mind, making sure he didn't feel what I felt during the night.

But I couldn't die without giving you an explanation.

He deserved to hear my voice one more time and know how much I loved him.
experience.

Maybe he could even be the one who could save the pack.

Black clouds began to close in on my vision, and I was
about to open my mind to speak Elijah one last time.

Then Azazel was lifted off me.

Chapter 54

KYLE

Azazel's teeth ripped from my throat, tearing my skin.

I screamed in pain, blood seeping from the now much larger wound.

"Help him," said a deep voice from across the room.

The face of a very small girl suddenly appeared in front of me.

She obviously wasn't the owner of the deep voice.

She knelt on top of me. She had short brown hair and blood-red eyes.

Another vampire. Excellent.

"Hello," said her high-pitched voice, "you can move now.

My body relaxed as my mind was released from Azazel's power.

I groaned loudly in relief, but immediately regretted it as pain shot through my body.

It felt like I'd been working out for three days straight, sore and weak from my own commands.

Even though I was relieved to be able to move again, the small red-eyed vampire kneeling above me became my main focus.

Her ability to bend me to her will with just her voice told me she was a Mortar too.

Fucking fantastic.

My hand immediately went to the wound on my neck and came out covered in blood.

I shuddered, my world spinning at the sight—or maybe the loss of blood.

Either way, that couldn't be good.

I put my hand back over the wound to try to stop the bleeding.

The vampire girl flinched as she watched me.

"Oh, that doesn't sound very good.

She touched the hand covering the wound.

"Here, let me help.

"Touch me not, Mortar," I spat, leaning away from her.

"Are you here to help Azazel?"

"By God, no. She grinned. "I'm one of the good guys.

I didn't have time to fully process what that meant.

Grunts and screams could be heard outside the room in the hallway.

Shit, what happened to Azazel? He escaped? he is hurting pack members?

I tried to sit up.

"Where is Azazel?" I asked hoarsely.

The girl gasped as I grunted in pain and tried to get up.

- Oh no! You shouldn't do this!

She placed her hands on my chest and pushed me back one more time.
turn.

I snapped my teeth at her, trying to bite her filthy vampire hands.

"Don't fucking touch me.

"Oh, wow, you're strong," she said as I struggled against her, "but you have to stop moving.

And, just like that, I was frozen again.

My gaze met hers.

"Stop using your Mortar powers on me," I growled. "Fight and hurt me if you want to incapacitate me.

"Look," she said, and I could detect worry in her voice, "I needed you to stop moving so I could heal you.

Believe me, I wouldn't use my powers if I didn't have to.

My vision was starting to blur. I closed my eyes with strength. My neck hurt like hell.

"I can see you've been through a lot," she said, "but you don't need to worry anymore.

I didn't care what she thought.

I needed real vampires to stop taking over my body so I could kick some ass.

I watched as she brought her index finger to her mouth and pressed it against one of her fangs, breaking the skin.

She squeezed the tip until a drop of blood came out.

Then she stuck her finger in my mouth.

I gasped and struggled as she shoved it deep in my mouth.

I tasted vampire blood, the metallic taste of copper overpowering my senses, and I gasped.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry," she repeated, low and soothing, as she continued to move her finger.

I bit your finger.

- There! Hey, don't bite me!

To my disdain, my jaw dropped open at his command.

A few more seconds and she finally took her hand away. I coughed.

A tingling sensation began to run through my body: it didn't hurt, but it was uncomfortable and invasive.

I did not like that.

I panicked as I looked at the girl.

"What the hell did you do to me?"

She winced at my rough tone.

"Sorry," she said once more.

I decided that if she didn't stop apologizing, I would stick my finger in her mouth.

- Wait a second.

Suddenly the pain stopped.

My muscles relaxed and the pain from the bruise on my cheek disappeared.

I could feel the skin under my hand mending.

I gasped as the skin moved under my palm, stretching to cover the wound.

My vision cleared. Energy flowed through me.

I felt amazing.

The girl smiled widely at my shocked expression, her red eyes gleaming.

"I love seeing people healed for the first time.

It could be? Did she heal me?

I'd heard stories of vampires and their insane abilities, but never anything about finger magic blood.

I tried to sit up and move to confirm, but I still couldn't move.

I sighed in frustration.

The girl noticed my dilemma.

"How about: I'll let you move if you promise not to bite me again."

She waved her finger, the one with the imprint of my teeth.

I rolled my eyes.

"Yes, of course, I promise.

Her eyes narrowed, wary, but she relented.

- OK. You can move.

The tension was released once more. I sighed in relief, sitting up and turning my neck and shoulders.

- How did you do it? - I asked.

The girl held out her hand for me to shake.

—Amelia Mortar. Everyone calls me Minnie. fourth daughter of King Zagan and healer of the royal clan.

When I didn't shake her hand, she took mine.

"You must be Kyle King, the beta of the most powerful werewolf pack in the world. I'm so happy to meet you.

I was shocked, to say the least.

She knew who I was. Was it bad that I had never heard of her?

"Uh, yes, likewise. You got one thing wrong, though. I'm gamma, not beta. Adalee Johnson is the beta.

Minnie shook her head.

"I'm not wrong. You are the true beta of this pack.

Adalee Hear...

She emphasized the last name, which I had never heard with Adalee before.

— He used his powers to become a beta, but he doesn't really deserve it. the title. I should know. She is my second cousin.

What?

"Wait... Is Adalee a Mortar?"

Minnie frowned.

"Well, not really. She's mostly werewolf because her father is — well, was — Beta Carl Aude, who was half vampire. So she got the vampire gene from the Mortar family bloodline.

I was trying to get my head around all this.

— Whoa, whoa, whoa, wait. rewind Adalee's father is Carl Aude? Like Carl Aude?

She didn't have a chance to respond.

There was the sound of breaking glass somewhere in the house.

Minnie looked over her shoulder and I got to my feet.

Now the sound of hissing and screaming. That could only mean one thing.

"More vampires," I said.

I could feel your presence. And my wolf and I hated it.

'You're probably right,' said Minnie, following me towards the noise, 'this might not be the best time to talk about the good old family tree.

My heart was pounding when we came across a broken window on the third floor of the packhouse. The pack members crowded around in their pajamas, probably woken by the noise.

I growled to get their attention.

"Everyone back to your rooms!" — I ordered.

They had no choice but to obey me, especially when I used my special Gamma tone—well, Beta.

It was to be used only in emergencies, and I officially considered this moment an emergency.

I mentally linked the rest of the pack, telling them to stay indoors until further notice.

I could hear everyone running to their rooms for cover.

I had probably scared them and even woken up a few of them, but I didn't care as long as they were safe.

"Wow," murmured Minnie, "this is really cool." I can never make sure no one listens to me.

Ignoring the constant commentary, I ran to the window and looked down at the forest floor.

Someone had obviously fallen out of the window, breaking it on the process.

In the snow lay Grayson's body—with Azazel inside.

He was fighting another man with the same dark hair, wearing the real costume of vampires.

"Oh my God," I whispered.

Zagan Mortar, king of the vampires, was in my pack's territory.

I could be one of two things right now:

Ecstatic that he obviously got my letter and came to help.

Or scared that the two most powerful vampires in the world were fighting on my lawn.

Chapter 55

KYLE

I ran down the hall towards the front door.

Outside, Azazel and Zagan were locked in a fight to the death.

"Hey, I wouldn't do that if I were you!"

Minnie was a few steps behind me.

"They haven't seen each other in years, and you don't want to come between them.

"I don't give a shit," I said, "that's my Alpha. If Zagan kills Azazel in Grayson's body, Grayson will die as well. This can not happen.

I went to the front door and ran into the snow, instantly wishing I were wearing any other shoes but slippers.

I couldn't believe I was having the battle of my life in my pajamas.

Azazel and Zagan were a blur of movement and body parts as I approached, using my newfound energy from Minnie's healing to propel me forward.

I was about to help Grayson when...

- Stop! Minnie screamed.

"You've got to be kidding me," I growled as my legs crashed.

I was really getting pissed off with these vampires.

"Let go of me, you stupid Mortar!"

Minnie was in front of me in the blink of an eye, holding her face in her hands.

"Sorry, sorry, but you saving your Alpha wasn't part of the plan. And you don't want to get in the way of one of my dad's plans. He is not a very forgiving man.

My jaw clenched in anger.

I didn't care about the stupid plan. Grayson couldn't to die.

"Let me go now, or I swear to God your throat will be the first one I'll rip off when I take control of my body.

Minnie's jaw dropped.

- How rude.

She crossed her arms and scowled.

"You just made sure you weren't released for a while.

BOOM.

My gaze flew over Minnie's shoulder.

Zagan smashed Azazel into a large oak tree, splintering and breaking it.

They fell. Azazel, in Grayson's body, fell to the ground, spitting blood.

But it did not stop there. The fight continued, with them moving in a blur I could barely follow.

Her graceful movements were powerful and well thought out.

It was obvious that they were both extremely well trained in combat.

Zagan wasn't taking it easy on Azazel and soon dominated the battle, tossing Azazel around like a rag doll.

With each move, Azazel grew weaker and less able to counter. attack.

I was watching my Alpha, whom I was unable to help, be beaten to death.

Azazel had chosen to fight in Grayson's body in case Zagan won.

Because if Zagan defeated him now, Azazel would be able to leave the Grayson's body with his intact.

It was becoming clear very quickly that this would be the case.

Azazel would lose and Grayson would die.

Finally Zagan lifted Azazel off the ground, holding him by the neck.

He leapt high into the air and forced Azazel back with a mighty force, slamming a large tree branch into Grayson's back and slicing through his chest.

Azazel gasped as the branch pierced his chest.

He was stuck in the tree, six meters high.

The battle is over. Zagan had won.

- No! - I screamed.

I fought harder than ever to break free of Minnie's vampiric grip.

I had to break free. I needed.

Grayson would have his life taken from him.

I almost didn't notice Minnie's little hand on my shoulder.

- Everything will be fine. Don't worry.

So I looked at her. There was genuine confidence in his expression. She believed her words.

I wish I had the same confidence.

"I won't let you die," she said.

Another loud noise.

Zagan jumped out of the tree and landed on the ground.

He looked at Azazel, who hissed at the large branch in his chest.

"You've grown strong, brother," he told Zagan, spitting blood. "No one would know you were a weak little boy who could only dream of being king.

Zagan held his brother's stern gaze with an even deeper severe.

"Leave this body now or die with it, Azazel. Stop hiding in someone else's body like a coward. Come out and fight me the way you tried to avoid all those years ago. As you owe me.

Azazel smiled weakly. Grayson's body was running out of time.

"You will have your fight, King Zagan," he said, spitting out the title as

if it was an insult, — but not today.

Black dust billowed, scattering into the air, swirling and swirling until finally flew into the forest.

Grayson fell against the tree, supported by the branch lodged in his chest.

Azazel had left Grayson's body.

Chapter 56

KYLE

"Alpha! I screamed in horror.

Grayson's lifeless body toppled onto the tree branch twenty feet up.

He wasn't dead yet - I would have felt it if he was - but he was close. Very, very close.

I could feel the life leaving her body as if it were my own.

Minnie, who was holding my shoulder, nodded.

- Or.

My body was released from restraints and I wasted no time running to Grayson.

"We need to bring him down!" - I screamed.

He was too high for me to reach. A vampire could easily jump in and grab it, but werewolves couldn't climb trees.

I looked at the vampire king.

"Help him!"

I didn't care that I was trying to order a man around. much more powerful than me.

If he killed my Alpha over some family feud, I wouldn't I would hesitate to release my wolf.

Zagan nodded once.

— Casimir.

Another vampire, one I hadn't noticed until that moment, stepped forward.

He looked like Minnie and Zagan — the same black hair, dark features and red eyes.

It must be another son of Zagan. A vampire prince.

Casimir nodded, then, in one swift movement, leapt gracefully onto the tree branch.

He looked at me.

"Be ready to catch him."

I shook my head quickly.

Casimir jumped onto the branch hard enough to snap it in half.

Grayson fell with it still lodged in his chest.

I picked him up and laid him down as gently as possible.

Zagan approached Grayson slowly, his eyes on me.

- Can I? he asked, pointing at Grayson.

My wolf snarled in my mind.

None of us wanted this filthy vampire anywhere near our weakened Alpha —vampires were the reason we were in this mess in the first place.

But Zagan Mortar still hadn't done anything that wasn't trustworthy.

In fact, he might be the reason my pack is alive and well tomorrow.

I nodded slowly, giving Zagan permission to approach.

He grabbed the branch and gestured for me to do the same.

Together, we managed to pull the branch from Grayson's chest and toss it to the side.

Even in his unconscious state, Grayson groaned in pain, his face contorting.

I winced at the baseball-sized hole in his chest, his blood running through the white snow.

My wolf whimpered, forcing itself against the front of my skull. to see through my eyes.

It would be a miracle if the Alpha survived.

Zagan didn't waste a second.

— Minnie.

She nodded and, just as she had with me, placed the tip of her index finger on the fang and drew blood.

But Grayson didn't fight back when she placed her finger in his mouth. Instead, he closed his mouth around it, drinking greedily.

I've never been more grateful for magical finger blood in my entire life.

It took Minnie a minute to remove her finger and step back.

Grayson still wasn't moving. He was unconscious, the big hole in his chest not mending like my wounds had from Minnie's blood in my system.

He wasn't healing. Nothing was happening.

I started to panic. Was he already gone?

My heart was beating so fast I could hear it in my ears. I turned to Minnie anxiously.

"Why isn't anything happening?"

"It'll take a while.

She gave her most reassuring smile.

"Your wounds run deep, both physical and psychological. In a while before jumping to conclusions.

I growled softly. I didn't want to take a break. I wanted to know if we would have to live without our Alpha.

"Do it again," I said. "He needs to live.

She didn't answer, just looked down sadly.

Zagan crouched on Grayson's other side, inspecting him.

I nearly yelled at him, my protective instincts kicking in.

"Your Alpha is strong," he commented.

I almost scoffed at the obviousness of the remark.

"Stronger than anyone I've ever known, vampire or wolf. There aren't many out there who would be able to hold on to body control for that long. You yourself felt it when Azazel commanded you—you became weak and fragmented.

He shook his head, a somber expression coming over him.

"Most wouldn't last more than a week or two being controlled like this. His Alfa lasted two months. It is surprising that he is not dead.

Genuine respect and admiration shone across his face as he watched Grayson closely.

Then he looked at me and nodded once.

"Don't worry, beta. I would be shocked if that's what will kill him.

I remained silent, too preoccupied to speak. I could only hope he was right.

Zagan got up.

— Casimir.

His son took a step forward.

"Where's Adalee?"

My gaze jumped up to look at them.

Are they looking for Adalee?

Casimir shook his head.

"I looked for her everywhere. She's not on pack lands. She smells fresh though, and she couldn't have been gone for more than an hour before we arrived.

Zagan sighed.

"A coward like her grandfather, I see.

I spoke.

"Is it possible she just crossed the border in the woods? My partner is outside with Luna. I can ask him to look for her on the way back.

"Is Alpha Grayson's mate still around?" Zagan asked.

"We...were trying to get you out of here before Azazel hurt you.

I cringed at the memory of the tears on her bruised cheeks.

"They won't be back long after I explain the
What's happening. Luna will be quite relieved.

Zagan shook his head.

- No. The Alpha's mate can't come back. This will only distract you
from the battle.

I got up, not liking what he was saying.

No way was I going to let Luna go on thinking the way she was,
thinking that Grayson hated her.

She needed to be with him as himself, not Azazel's version of him.

And the Alpha needed her by his side.

'With all due respect, sir, you don't know the situation. Companions are
stronger when they're around. The Alpha needs her to succeed in battle.

If he survives the night, of course.

"Not in this case," Minnie squeaked from behind me.

I looked at her.

"They've been apart for a long time," she insisted. "If the Alpha—or, I
think, Azazel—harms Luna badly, Alpha Grayson's wolf will go berserk the
moment he wakes up. He won't leave her side. Even with a war going on
around you. It's safer for both of them if she stays away.

"Minnie is right, young beta," Zagan interrupted. "We need Alpha
Grayson present during the battle. Your pack needs its leader.

"But the Alpha will never allow that," I snapped. "You haven't seen him
with Luna—he's crazy about her. He won't even talk to you until he has
you by his side. Even if it means leaving now, at the worst possible time to
find her. We must bring her back now.

Zagan apparently wasn't going to back down.

"Alpha Grayson will allow it because he knows this war will only put his
human mate in danger. He knows she's better off somewhere far away
where Azazel can't use her as bait.

If Azazel gets his hands on her tomorrow, it will all be over. She will die and we will lose.

He sighed.

"I know you want to protect your Luna. The best way to do this is to keep her at bay. And if you don't believe me, wait until the Alpha wakes up. Let him decide. I guarantee he will say the same as me. He is smart and knows that good leadership involves sacrifices.

As much as I hated to admit it, Zagan was right.

Grayson would probably make that decision if he was conscious, even if it breaks your heart.

Putting Luna in danger was the last thing he would want.

I nodded solemnly.

- He is well. Let's wait. I'll update my companion without telling him to bring Luna back. We'll let Alpha decide when to wake up.

"No," said Zagan again.

I raised an eyebrow.

This vampire really thinks he knows everything, doesn't he?

"Are you going to tell your mate to go back to the pack and leave Luna.

I was flabbergasted.

Was he crazy? I wasn't going to tell Elijah to leave Belle alone in your most vulnerable moment.

"I'm sorry, not at all. Luna needs someone right now. He will stay with her.

Zagan shook his head.

"The Alpha won't be able to resist the temptation to go to his mate if he can easily ask a pack member where she is via mind link. And Luna won't be able to resist the temptation to go back to Alpha if she realizes her mate knows something. You will tell your mate to go back to the packhouse. You will use your rank if necessary. And he will leave Luna behind where she will be safe.

The familiar weight of a Mortar's command enveloped my body.
He wasn't suggesting I do this—he was ordering it.
“Are you commanding me to manipulate my own mate with my status?
To leave Luna alone when she needs someone the most?”

Zagan's eyes narrowed as he recognized the threat in my voice.

"Looks like you're not giving me a choice."

My wolf growled, the sound reverberating through my mouth.
None of us liked the fact that a bunch of vampires
it kept telling us what to do and exerting its power over us.

"Do it now," said Zagan, "before the Alpha wakes up."

I growled again, trying to fight the command and failing. I
I had to do what he told me.

Glaring once more, I opened my mind to my mate.

Elijah.

Kyle!

My mate's immediate response flashed through my mind.
Just the sound of his voice calmed my nerves.

Are you well? What happened?

I am fine. It's okay, I replied quickly. I do not have much time. Just
know that what I'm about to say doesn't come from me. I have three very
powerful vampires in front of me telling me what to say.
I have no option but to listen.

To his credit, Elijah only stopped for half a second to process what I
said.

What? What the hell do you mean? Did they hurt you? Are you well?

“Out loud,” Zagan demanded, “I want to hear what you're saying to him.

I growled, wanting nothing more than to give him my own set of
commands to jump off a cliff.

“You have to go back to the packhouse,” I said through the link, speaking loudly so everyone around me could hear.

“And you have to leave Luna behind.

I felt Elijah's anger and confusion through the bond.

I will not do it. She needs me. She is falling apart.

- What is he saying? Zagan asked.

“He doesn't want to leave her. Luna is not well.

Zagan nodded.

“Use your beta tone on him.

I shook my head, fighting his command.

“Don't make me do this. Please. Luna needs Elijah now...

Zagan's eyes narrowed.

“Do as I say.

Elijah wouldn't like that.

Taking a deep breath, I

said, “As your beta, I order you to leave Luna and return to the packhouse.

Excuse me?

I shuddered. Yes, he was upset.

You're not even a beta! And you won't use your status on me.

Especially with a request as ridiculous as that. Take back what you said.

I can't go back, I told him between the two of us. You have to do this. Trust me, I hate it as much as you do. But it's a command from a Mortar. Zagan Mortar, the vampire king.

Are you with Zagan Mortar?

Elijah was stunned.

Is this what you were hiding from me? you are communicating with vampires? Did the Alpha decide this?

Well... sort of, I guess.

Elijah's anger surged through the bond.

That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard. How could you let the vampire king into pack territory? Perhaps you should invite Azazel Mortar as well. Have a party!

I almost laughed. If he knows.

- Out loud! Zagan said. — Have the rest of the conversation in voice high. Tell him to come back now in your Beta tone.

I clenched my teeth.

"I'm sorry, Elijah," I began, "but as your beta I order you to come to the packhouse and leave Luna.

I'm not going to leave her without giving her some kind of explanation.

I looked at Zagan.

"He wants to explain to her.

"Tell him he can't. He can't risk worrying Luna and have her follow him.

I could feel Elijah starting to talk to Luna. My mouth opened in accordance with Zagan's orders.

- Stop! I exclaimed through the mind link.

He was trying to explain about vampires.

"As your beta, I order you not to tell her anything else.

Elijah struggled against the command, which was painful.

Defying the command of a high-ranking wolf went against everything in our nature.

Kyle, why are you doing this? Stop. Please.

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

"Stop fighting it, Elijah, you're only hurting yourself.

He wasn't listening — he was still trying to communicate with Luna and go against orders.

"Elijah, as your beta, I command you to follow my orders....

I won't let her! He countered with a strained growl.

"Tell him she'll die if she comes with him," said Minnie. - Say tells him that she will die unless he gets as far away as possible.

I nodded in agreement.

"Listen to me, Elijah. Luna is in danger. There's a war coming, and she can't be here. Please trust me. This is the best. Times.

What a war?

"Tell him to stop worrying you," said Casimir.

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

"Tell him to say he has to go back to the packhouse, put on his best smile and leave. Tell him not to say anything else about what's going on.

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

"As your beta..."

I clenched my teeth.

"I order you not to worry Luna. Tell her you have to go back to the packhouse. So put on your best smile and go. Make sure she isn't following you, or she risks dying. Please Elijah. It's the only way to keep her safe.

Finally, I felt her resolve through the bond.

My words hit him. We wanted the same thing.

"Is he doing this?" Minnie asked.

I agreed.

"He's leaving her now.

I concentrated on the mate bond.

"She's trying to come, but he's stopping her.

Zagan nodded in approval.

- Good.

I looked at the unconscious Grayson.

Nothing had changed, but he was still breathing, thank God.

I sighed.

Alpha, Elijah and Luna were all safe. Things were going to be fine.

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

What...?

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

I looked at the blood on my finger in confusion. How did this happen?

Then my teeth started to move. Pain streaked across my face.

I screamed.

Touching my canines, I noticed they were getting bigger. And sharper.

In fact, they weren't canines anymore.

They were prey.

"Oh, yes," Minnie mentioned casually, "we should probably take you inside and get you to bed." Your transition is starting.

Chapter 57

GRAYSON

My wolf was practically screaming, waking me from a nightmarish sleep.

My head throbbed as he yelled in displeasure at me.
encouraging to wake up.

I groaned, shifting my weight on the mattress.

What the hell is happening? Where am I?

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

I groaned again, wanting to keep the loud voice away until I figured out what
what was going on.

Why is he screaming anyway?

Something was wrong. Everything around me felt softer, harder, crisper, more
textured than ever before.

I gripped the sheets beneath me, fisting my hands around them.

It was as if I could feel every thread, woven into the intricate design that
formed the sheet.

There were strange odors in the air too; new people I'd never met before
were in the room, leaving traces of blood and woody cologne.

Its potency overwhelmed me, actually made me want to cover my nose.

A small hand touched my shoulder.

"Alpha Grayson, can you hear me?" a high-pitched female voice said.

I ignored it. I didn't like the voice. I didn't like the touch.

My wolf wouldn't shut up: he kept repeating a name over and over again.

I liked the name. I liked the way he sounded. I wanted to keep listening.

Beautiful. Beautiful. Beautiful. Beautiful. Beautiful! BEAUTIFUL!

My eyes flew open.

— Beautiful, — eu rosnei.

Everything came back in an instant.

Azazel. A guerra. Kyle. Belle.

Belle was hurt. I needed to get to Belle.

“Alpha,” a familiar voice said from beside me, “thank God. I thought you had an aneurysm or something.

I pushed my body off the bed, moving faster than I expected, practically flying in the air.

So I pulled myself together. I hadn't been in my body for a while. time; maybe I forgot how to use it.

My eyes found the speaker—Kyle—and scanned the room. Several people here, none of them the one I wanted.

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

"Where the hell is Belle?" I growled. I barely recognized my own voice—it sounded lower, frightening even.

My wolf added gravity to my tone, but he wasn't the only presence speaking.

There was something I didn't recognize right in my chest, hissing, making my breathing ragged and strained.

His soul was darker than my wolf's, and just as powerful.

“She's safe,” Kyle responded immediately, “she's fine.

That wasn't good enough for me.

- Where? I asked again, lifting him off the ground. "Where is my mate?"

Kyle swallowed hard. I could hear his saliva go down his throat and reach the stomach. Strange.

“I don't know,” he said in genuine regret, “I don't know. I'm very sorry.

The loudest growl I'd ever heard came from my wolf, reverberating through my chest and out of my mouth.

The floor and walls shook. I was close to turning.

Hair began to sprout from my arms. My muscles began to lengthen. Something sharp pierced the inside of my bottom lip.

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

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

It was a Mortar's command.

My muscles clenched as I waited for the order to take effect.
take care of me and force me to follow your directions.

To my surprise, this never happened.

I paused. The vampire's command didn't work.

And I could tell that no command coming from him or any Mortar would succeed.

How I could say this, I wasn't sure, but I felt complete mastery over my mind and body—as if a permanent mental block had been put in place.

Fury coursed through me like fire.

I moved to meet Mortar's eyes. I was surprised by not see Azazel's face.

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

I had no idea what he was doing standing in my room, but it didn't matter—at least not at the moment.

What mattered was that he ordered me to control my wolf as if I hadn't spent months under his brother's control.

I moved so fast I barely understood.

Soon I was in front of him, towering over him, though he didn't even even retreat.

"Give me an order again," I hissed, "and I won't hesitate to tear it limb from limb. King or not."

Zagan looked surprised but unfazed.

Under other circumstances, I would have smiled.

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

The only clan that could pose a threat to us was royalty, and that was only because the Mortar had the power to control others with their words.

Without that power, they were helpless.

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

Which meant—and we both knew it—that I could snap him in half like a stick right there if I wanted to.

Zagan nodded once, never taking his gaze off the
my.

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

I looked back at Kyle.

"Belle," I said again, trying to control my seething anger.

My wolf urged me to shift, howling in my head. I would give him what he wanted, but not now.

- Where she went?

I remembered everything from the past two months.

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

Azazel made her think I wanted her for sex and power; he had used her; he chuckled when she collapsed.

And I was trapped, trapped inside my own body, my heart breaking along with hers.

While I was here wasting time, she was thinking that I had rejected her for someone else.

But I would find her, and once I did, I would make sure she understood the truth, even if it meant crawling on her knees for the rest of eternity.

She had to know how much she meant to me, how I would die without her.

Azazel would pay for what he did. He would die a torturous death for the my hands, of that I was sure.

He had beaten Belle, scarred her skin, touched her in ways only I was allowed to do, hurting her because he knew it would weaken me.

But now I was being fueled by the rage he put in me.

I felt better, more balanced and centered than ever before. It was almost strange how powerful I felt.

If I wasn't planning to protect my mate with this newfound power, I would have reason to be concerned, but I was ready to kill.

Kyle hesitated as he formulated a response.

It was then that I realized how big he had gotten. he looked more strong, more muscular, huge next to the door.

Even though I had seen him through a small window while Azazel had control of my body, I knew he looked different than the last time.

What happened to him?

I clenched my teeth.

"Kyle, you better tell me what happened after she left this room yesterday, or God help me..."

"She was with me," he interrupted in a new voice, "it's my fault.

Our heads swiveled toward the door, where Elijah was.

I fixed my eyes on him.

"What's your fault?"

Chapter 58

GRAYSON

I was about a second away from setting the entire world on fire.

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

In the back of my mind, common sense was telling me that none of these people here deserved my anger—especially Kyle and Elijah, who took care of my mate when I couldn't.

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

"It's my fault, Alpha," he repeated, intervening. "I let her go.

"Elijah," Kyle growled, blocking him from my view.

He said something through the mindlink before turning back to me.

"I ordered Elijah to leave. You can't fault it.

"I don't give a damn about the guilt!" Tell me where she is.

They exchanged worried glances before Kyle opened his mouth.

"When we found you and that girl yesterday, I knew that we needed to get her out of here. She... she wasn't well, Alpha.

My wolf snapped its teeth in rage inside me.

I remembered her face when she walked in and witnessed what she I thought it was me hooking up with someone else.

She was beyond sad—she was devastated.

Kyle swallowed hard before continuing.

"I told her to go with Elijah so I could stay here and find out what the hell was going on with you. I knew something was wrong. Elijah would take her where she wanted, somewhere you couldn't find her.

"But then something happened," Elijah interrupted. - It was not you

who was in control of his body but Azazel. Kyle... he almost died fighting him.

"I remember," he said dryly, "I was there.

"What you don't remember is what happened after Azazel left your body.

Kyle stood in front of Elijah protectively.

"You were unconscious for hours. We didn't know if you would live, so we had to make some tough decisions for you. Belle, well...

He paused, nervously looking at the vampires and then back at me.

"We ordered him to leave you," King Zagan finished.

My head swiveled toward him.

What did they do?

"We thought it would be best for her and her pack if she weren't here for the battle.

My anger rose.

I tilted my head to the side, approaching him slowly, as if he were a deer in the woods that I was about to attack.

"And you thought this was your decision, Mortar?"

Zagan met my gaze directly.

"She wouldn't be safe here. Azazel knows she is his weakness. We already know he's willing to hurt you to get to you. He wouldn't hesitate to do it again if the opportunity presented itself during battle.

I considered his words as I stopped in front of him, breathing heavily.

Somewhere deep down, the logical part of me knew he was right.

While he had control over my body, Azazel was in my head as much as I was in his.

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

Likewise, I saw his determination to regain the throne.

He was willing to kill anyone who stood in his way, and there was no doubt he was going to seek out Belle and use her to lure me in and kill me.

But even knowing that, the compulsion to find her and never let her leave my side again was unbelievable, nearly blinding me.

His feelings were tangible, sitting in my chest, squeezing my lungs.

She felt torn apart, alone, confused—most of all, she felt unwanted, as if she had been responsible for all the people who had abandoned her.

I could feel her thoughts as they ran their course.

Everyone she cared about who she thought cared about ended up leaving one way or another: Her father, who died and left her alone...

His mother, who had gone to build a new family...

Elijah and Kyle, who promised to stay until they reneged at the last minute...

And me. She thought especially of me.

She was going over our months together, all the things she thought what he had done wrong.

She came to the conclusion that she pushed me away.

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

She was building a wall in her mind, brick by brick, to make sure no one had access to her heart and would never be able to hurt her again.

She was also inadvertently cutting off my access to her, making it impossible for me to know what she was feeling or how to find her.

She thought our bond was broken, but it wasn't.

She thought she was protecting herself by blocking herself, but she was only weakening our already struggling bond. She needed me by her side, and soon, or she would weaken and fall ill.

It might even kill her—not for a while, probably a few months, but eventually.

But not if Azazel killed her first.

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

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

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

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

It would be difficult, but I would put someone in charge of looking after her until the war was over.

I studied Zagan. He looked way too small to be the king of vampires. My anger was dissolving.

"You will never make up your mind about my mate again, do you hear me?" Or I will hunt you down.

Zagan scowled, probably irritated by my manner. disrespectful, and did not respond.

I sighed. I didn't want to admit what I was about to do.

"But the decision you made was the right one. While I would have liked to see my mate and explain this to her beforehand, I agree with the choice. The fact that you did this now saved me the pain of letting you go.

Zagan waited a moment before speaking.

"You are a good leader, Alpha Grayson. I'm sure you would have chosen to do the same if given the chance.

I could only hope so.

I turned to Elijah, who straightened the moment our eyes met.

- Do you know where she is? - I asked.

- I think so. We made a plan before parting ways.

- Good. Then you will go to her.

I adopted my Alpha tone.

“You will find my mate and keep her safe by creating a link to my mind the moment I have it in view.

My wolf bristled, not liking to put our mate's safety in the hands of a wolf we barely knew, but knowing we had no choice.

I needed Kyle here to command the warriors, and no one but he knew Belle well enough to know where she would be.

Kyle looked nervous. I paused.

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

- Everything is fine? — I asked him.

Kyle sighed and shook his head grimly.

“He'll be safer there than here,” he muttered.

He took Elijah's hand and squeezed it. Elijah smiled sadly.

They both knew this could be the last time they saw each other.

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

Elijah didn't let go of Kyle's hand.

“Yes, Alpha.

I looked away as they hugged and whispered their goodbyes.

It wasn't long before Elijah was out the door and Kyle was looking at me with determination.

But something made me stop and do a double take.

My heart rate increased, my wolf came forward to see

better.

“Kyle...why are your eyes red?”

Chapter 59

GRAYSON

In less than a second, I had Kyle back against the wall with my arm around his throat.

He yelled in surprise, looking at me with blood red eyes.

I took a deep breath as I looked into those eyes, immediately taken aback by their unnatural color.

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

We didn't want to hurt him, but we knew we wouldn't have a choice if that was the case.

Red eyes could only mean two things.

Either you were a vampire or a Mortar was taking over your body.

None of the explanations were good.

"Speak up," I growled, pressing him further against the wall.

Kyle whimpered slightly; his wolf was probably upset over the fact that his Alpha was showing his distrust.

It hurt me too, but he should have known I had no other option.

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

And if he was now, somehow, a vampire, no longer a werewolf, so he would still have to be treated accordingly.

Kyle swallowed hard.

"I... I... um..."

He stumbled over his panicked words.

I pushed him further against the wall, emphasizing that I had no

patience for hesitations.

“Alpha Grayson,” King Zagan interrupted behind us, “you might want to look in the mirror before you do something you regret.

“What the hell are you talking about? I replied, looking at Kyle.

“You can't hurt him,” said the girl, “he was turned when Azazel bit his neck. You wouldn't remember why Azazel changed into his own body to do that. He transitioned while you were unconscious a few hours ago. He's a hybrid now—one-third human, one-third werewolf, one-third vampire. But he is still your beta. Your wolf is still in there.

I searched Kyle's eyes for confirmation.

To my utter shock, they went from his normal brown, showing his human, to black, showing his wolf, and finally to red, showing the part of him that was now a vampire.

“It's true,” he whispered sadly, “I'm a third vampire now.

But that means...

I released Kyle immediately and took a step back when a understanding hit me.

Azazel also bit me before taking control of my body.

As fast as I could, I ran to the mirror hanging in my room, my heart stopping as I registered what I saw.

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

So I was a vampire too. A hybrid.

And not only that, I was bigger—much bigger.

I had grown over a foot tall, almost too tall to be able to see myself in the mirror.

My muscles felt like they had exploded in size all over my body.

I had been a big wolf all my life,

living up to the expectations of an Alfa and then some after rigorous training.

Now I was practically a tank. Iron. Unbreakable. Mortal.

I felt then, the other species within me, lodged within my chest and recognizing me from the front.

It was the vampire, the one I acquired after transitioning.

It was different from my wolf, less innocent, containing a more powerful soul. dark.

I expected it to feel like something immoral and corrupt was trying to take control of my being. But it didn't seem like that at all.

This new soul...she cared about me and my wolf. I wanted the best for us.

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

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

Both creatures were sitting inside, looking through my eyes, waiting until I needed them, like two pieces of a puzzle that completed me.

But what interested me most was that the vampire wanted Belle.

He called her his mate and wished she was by our side as much as my wolf and I were.

Vampires didn't have mates, so I thought it odd that this one seemed to have accepted it the moment it entered me.

Now there were three possessive beings inside one body, all wanting the union with Belle.

Oh, Belle is going to love this.

She'd already called me a Neanderthal barbarian with just my wolf and me around.

Who knows what she would think now.

The moment I retrieved it, neither my wolf nor my vampire nor I would ever let her out of our sight.

It can wait, baby, I thought, imagining her smiling face next to mine.

side in the mirror.

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

Being part vampire explained the strange feelings I'd experienced since waking up. My new strength, speed, size, and heightened senses were all a result of the vampire taking up residence in my body.

Curious about my new skills, I opened my mouth in the mirror and watched my already large fangs grow into sharp fangs.

I ran my tongue over them gently.

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

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

The girl suddenly appeared behind me, having moved in a blur across the room with his vampiric speed. She spoke quietly.

"You were bitten by Azazel too. We're not sure when, but we suspect you transitioned while unconscious. You and Beta Kyle are hybrids.

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

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

He had grown substantially since the transition as well.

"I've had a few hours to get used to it, but I'm still as shocked as you are," he muttered, looking down at his own hands and seeing his fingernails turn into claws.

He looked at me.

"Crazy, huh?"

That was the understatement of the century.

"But you're still a wolf, right? - I asked. "I won't have to" find a new beta, is not it?"

Still a wolf, boss, he said through the mind link before continue out loud.

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

I smile lightly.

- I would not do that. Just don't get bitten by any other creature. I don't know how I'm going to deal with three souls inside you, let alone four.

Kyle nodded.

“I don't think Elijah would handle that well either.

I chuckled when I realized how much I'd missed talking to Kyle over the last few months.

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

That's what made him such a good gamma—well, beta now.

I suddenly remembered something else, something painful.

“Oh, I suppose you heard about Adalee. I assume it's okay for you to take on the beta role, considering it was meant to be yours in the first place.

Kyle's eyes gleamed.

“More than okay with that, Alpha.

I shook my head, resuming his smile. -
Excellent.

I turned back to the three vampires, my mind still full of questions that needed answers. "That's why it didn't

work when you tried to use your powers on me earlier? Why am I part vampire now?

Zagan sighed, his brows drawing together.

“I've been wondering about that myself. I do not know why. No vampire who has been turned, even by a member of the royal family, is able to resist a Mortar's command. The only creatures that can do this are other Mortar.

I noticed Kyle beside me and his tone was bitter.

- He's right. They've been treating me like their personal butler all day. Their orders still work on me and I was bitten by the same vampire as you.

"Then what does that mean?" - I asked. "It's not like I could have magically evolved the DNA to become a Mortar.

Zagan nodded, exchanging glances with the vampire boy beside him.

"I have a theory, but...

He looked at me, dragging his gaze up and down, sizing me up.

"If I'm correct, you could very well be the most powerful being in centuries.

"Oh," said the boy. He also studied me. your eyes if swelled with realization. — Oh.

The girl gasped.

- Do not you think...?

"There's only one way to know for sure," Zagan said.

"Know what for sure?" - I said exasperated.

Someone better explain what kind of vampire nonsense this is before I freak out.

Zagan hesitated only a second before answering.

"There's a possibility that you have your own powers now. Same as the Mortar family, controlling people with their words. And... may you be immortal.

Chapter 60

GRAYSON

I was pretty sure I hadn't processed Zagan's words exactly.

"What the hell do you mean?"

"Perhaps it's best if you sit down, Alpha Grayson," the vampire girl said. "Your intensity will scare off your pack members. You need to calm down."

I snapped my teeth.

- Do not tell me what to do.

"Calm down, everyone," Zagan scolded. "Minnie, come here."

The girl joined Zagan and the boy.

Seeing them all together, it occurred to me that they were all part of the royal family. All Mortar.

I was standing in front of Zagan Mortar, king of vampires; Casimir Mortar, secondborn and chief warrior of the clan; and Amelia Mortar, the fourthborn and royal healer.

I remembered what Azazel had said about Kyle snooping through his stuff before attacking him.

Kyle knew Azazel was planning to wage war against the pack, but he thought I was the one in cahoots with Azazel's clan.

Even so, he was brave enough to get in touch with King Zagan and ask for his help.

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

I looked at Kyle and made a mental link with him.

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

Yes. Kyle started, already defensive and cautious, but only because...

You did the right thing, I interrupted, stopping him before he entered.

on tangent. Remind me to thank you properly later.

He smiled slightly.

Oh ok. You understood. I'll be expecting a whole party in my homage, with ribbons and everything.

I rolled my eyes and laughed.

Though, after all he'd done to keep the pack safe these last few months, maybe he really did deserve a party.

I turned to the three royal vampires, who obviously knew Kyle and I had just mentally linked and were watching us with wary expressions.

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

Zagan looked at Casimir, who took a deep breath.

"There was a king a long time ago who was a hybrid like you. Elijah Viotto.

"My mate was named after him," Kyle interrupted. "He was the most powerful king ever known to mankind.

Casimir nodded, continuing.

"He ruled over all species, vampires and werewolves, before the shattering. He was extremely powerful, but his subjects loved him because he was a just and decent ruler.

Casimir hesitated, but his father nodded to him encouragingly.

"King Elijah has bonded with a faerie. She must have been one of the last, because they went extinct. As I'm sure you know, fairies lived forever unless they were killed by an unnatural cause.

"According to legend, once the faerie and the king were united, King Elijah gained what we now know as the power of the Mortar—control with his mind. And he gained his mate's immortality.

Hmm.

"People say the king was able to give that control to those

that he considered worthy. But it was too much for some, which resulted in a great war between vampires and werewolves and the death of many. It was in this war that King Elijah was killed by the man he called his closest friend, Damian Mortar.

"He took the throne," I said. I had heard of Damian Mortar, the first vampire king.

Casimir nodded.

- Yes. King Damian took the throne, created the royal clan, and continued the Mortar bloodline, gifting his descendants with the same power. We are all descended from him. But he cannot mend the divide between werewolves and vampires, resulting in the current rivalry between the species.

Surprise that I had never heard this story washed over me. It seemed to be an important part of my species' history.

"So the king gained immortality by mating with a faerie," I said, "but my mate is not a faerie. She is human. We haven't even completed the bonding ritual. Doesn't explain why I'm like this.

"We don't think this is all about your mate, but something else," Zagan said. "Although if that's true and you're the man we think you are, your mate will be impacted as well. See, King Elijah left a prophecy.

Now I was even more worried. Belle was mentioned.

My wolf and newfound vampire were pressed against my conscience, listening intently.

"And what is this prophecy, exactly?"

'Tell him, Casimir,' said Minnie. "You were the one who found it and studied it.

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

"Well...years ago, I found a scroll in the royal palace. In it, King Elijah himself prophesied that there would be a powerful hybrid who would become immortal and possess the powers of the Mortar.

"He would ascend to the throne as the most powerful man alive, restoring peace to all species—even vampires and

werewolves.

I almost started laughing at the ridiculousness of this theory.

They can't think I'm the man in the prophecy.

Me, taking over a throne that currently belongs to vampires?

No. No thanks.

After a few seconds of silence, Kyle asked, "You don't
Do you think Alpha Grayson is..."

"What does that say about this man's mate?" — I interrupted.

Casimir thought for a moment.

"It said that... that the new king's mate, who knew hardship and loss, would go through her own transition after the joining ritual." She would become...

He hesitated.

"She would become a fairy, the only fairy in the world, and an extremely powerful one. As well as King Elijah's mate, Queen Evangeline. Together, these companions would rule over all mythical creatures, taking on the roles of King Elijah and Queen Evangeline.

I stared at Casimir for a second.

He thought there was a possibility that I was destined to become the ruler of all mythical creatures.

And that Belle, my sweet human companion, would become... the queen of the fairies?

Fairies were among the most powerful creatures known, born with the ability to acquire virtually any skill—precisely why they were hunted to extinction.

I struggled to find something to say.

"So...you think...I'm the man in the prophecy.

Casimir shrugged a little.

"The prophecy said it would happen sometime in the decade after the discovery of the parchment. It's been nine years.

"But that's not the only reason," Zagan interjected.

"You meet all the expectations set for the new king, although some developments are more recent. You are a hybrid, you have a mate who knows the ropes, you were able to resist my command, and you are basically unkillable. By all accounts, you should have died after Azazel's invasion period.

"The only thing in question," Casimir interrupted, "is whether you will have the power of the Mortar.

I took a deep breath.

The power of the Mortar? I'm not sure I want that kind of power.

My Alpha tone only affected pack members, but the power of the Mortar could affect any creature, including humans.

It felt dark and unnecessary, like someone was playing God.

"So the way to find out," concluded Casimir, "is for you to try to issue a command.

"Wait," I said quickly, "if I'm this powerful man of ancient prophecy, then why haven't I had the power of the Mortar all my life? Or immortality?"

Kyle spoke from beside me.

"You've just been turned into a hybrid. maybe the power was latent and activated once Azazel bit you.

Zagan nodded.

"That would make sense. Perhaps the same for immortality.

"Then again," Minnie piped up, "who's to say you weren't always immortal?" You're not dead yet, are you?

I growled to myself and ran a hand through my hair.

"That's a lot of information to process.

"Try a command," she insisted.

I sighed deeply.

"On who?"

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

"Oh, come on, no way. Because I? Why not one of you?"

He nodded to the vampires.

"It won't work on Mortars," said

Minnie.

- You are the only one.

Kyle groaned and kicked the ground like a child.

"But it hurts!" I don't want to be controlled again.

I laughed.

"Just pretend I'm using my Alpha tone. I've used this with you several times.

He sighed, turning to face me.

"Yes, just like your Alpha tone, except you feel as if
had been hit by a truck afterwards. Funny.

I looked at Zagan.

"And how exactly do I do that?"

Zagan crossed his arms, watching us closely.

"If you really are the one in the prophecy, it will become clear. You don't
will need to be told how.

I agreed.

"Okay," I said nervously, "this isn't going to go anywhere.

Kyle shivered slightly, straightening his shoulders.

The vampires took a deep breath in anticipation.

I opened my mouth.

Chapter 61

GRAYSON

I racked my brain, trying to come up with an order to give Kyle.

I needed to test it, to see if I had the power of the Mortar.

But how exactly would I do that?

I couldn't help but wonder what the hell I was doing. No way could I be the person in this prophecy.

They thought I was supposed to become the next king of all mythical creatures, the most powerful ruler in existence.

They thought I could restore peace between werewolves and vampires and stop a war that had lasted for centuries.

Was that possible?

My wolf loved the idea; in my mind, he puffed out his chest with pride, communicating to me that he thought we were more than capable of ruling.

He also thought that Belle would make an amazing queen.

He liked the idea of her ruling alongside us for the rest of eternity, having power, never dying.

I couldn't help but agree that not only was Belle going to be an amazing queen, but that we had the ability to become kings. I knew from a young age that I had to lead, not because of ego, but because I knew it was what I had to do.

I knew I would make a good Alfa and I've proven that over the years.

But even after I fought my old Alpha to the death and defeated, taking on the role alone, I wasn't satisfied.

I wanted more.

My wolf kept telling me that we should lead thousands.

Something was missing, he insisted.

Could this be what he meant?

I sighed. Now was the time.

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

Deep down, I hoped nothing would happen. If nothing happened, life it would be much less complicated.

It would mean things would go back to normal and I could forget about these last horrible months. But I already knew that hope was false. Because even deeper, I knew that Casimir was right.

The moment I opened my mouth, I felt my newly awakened vampire inching to the forefront of my consciousness, pushing against the inside of my skull.

A tingling sensation traveled through me, forcing me to take a quick breath.

Then, like a wave of energy, I felt the command travel from me and wrap Kyle around like a blanket.

Its eyes turned red and then, like a duck, it began to quack.

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

I stared at him in shock.

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

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

The humor of the situation hit me as Kyle continued to croak with a grim frown on his face.

"Can I, quack, please, quack, stop now, quack?"

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

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

"Okay, okay, you can stop.

Just like before, the command that came from me brought Kyle to an immediate halt.

"Seriously," he complained, "a duck? You couldn't have made me

do something cool, like jump fifty feet in the air or something?

I shrugged.

“It was the only thing I could think of.

Kyle huffed and rolled his eyes.

“Okay, because that's the first thing everyone thinks. Don't turn around, or say hi, or anything normal. No, you had to choose to quack like a duck.

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

After a moment, the light-heartedness disappeared and the living room it suddenly got much more serious.

I gave a command using the power of the Mortar.

Which can only mean...

"So it's true," I said, looking at Casimir. “The prophecy is about me.

Casimir looked at his father with a worried expression before look at me and nod slowly.

“Yes,” he whispered, anguish evident in his tone, “you are the new king of all creatures. The throne is yours.

My gaze turned to Zagan.

- Like this? Are you giving up your title and throne without a fight?

Zagan's glowing red eyes searched mine for a moment, his bushy black brows drawing together in thought.

He didn't look upset or threatened as I'd expected. He just looked thoughtful.

After a moment, he spoke.

“Ever since Casimir found that scroll years ago, I've been waiting for this moment. Preparing for when another would come and take the throne from me.

His eyes appraised me darkly.

"If it had to be anyone, I can honestly say I'm glad it's you. You will be a worthy and just ruler. I have no doubt that your reign will be one of dignity and strength.

Everything seemed so sudden.

And her trust in me didn't make it any less scary.

"Wait a second," Kyle interrupted, "you're telling me that Alpha Grayson is king now? Like, with a palace and everything?"

We all had the same questions.

"What about the pack?" What about Luna?

Belle's beautiful face flashed through my mind, making all my body stiffen painfully.

My wolf snarled, urging me to shift, to go find our mate.

He kept repeating that she needed us, over and over, as if I wasn't quite aware of the fact.

I clenched my teeth, forcing him back into my consciousness so that I could concentrate.

"None of this needs to be decided right now," Zagan said. - You will have time. All the time in the world, really... King Grayson.

I took a deep breath as realization hit me.

My brain was going a mile a minute, words going through it like a broken record.

King. Immortality. Prophecy. Hybrid. Fairy. Powers.

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

How would Belle feel?

Fortunately, I didn't have to think about it for a long time.

Sudden pressure filled my head, causing me to fall backwards.

I clutched my head as the pressure built to the point of throbbing.

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

I groaned, closing my eyes. What the hell was going on?

"Alpha," came Kyle's voice, "are you all right?"

— Eu...

I stopped—talking only made it worse.

The pressure was becoming more unbearable with each passing second.

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

"Alpha Grayson," I heard Minnie say.

I opened my eyes to see his worried face right in front of me.

She reached out, placing her small hand on my arm.

- What is wrong?

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

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

My head turned towards him.

"What the hell are you talking about? "I barely managed to say it.

"It's Azazel."

Zagan shook his head.

"I was afraid of that. Something happened to Azazel. You have to let him in.

I wasn't sure what he was talking about, but the thought of Azazel trying to get into my mind pissed me off.

Screw this.

Anger welled up in my gut at the fact that he'd even suggested I let Azazel in after everything he'd done.

I braced myself against the wall, starting to lose my balance.

That motherfucker won't get anywhere near my mind. He will never control me again.

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

"Azazel couldn't take control of you again, even

if you tried. That's not what's happening. He's not trying to take over your body.

My chest rose and fell with each ragged breath.

"Then what the hell is going on?" - I groaned.

"No time to explain.

There was obvious concern in Zagan's tone.

"I promise you, nothing bad will happen if you let him into your mind. In fact, it will likely help in the war to come. Probably Azazel isn't even aware that he's projecting onto you right now.

Nothing he was saying made any sense. I let out a grunt.

The pain in my mind made my head feel like it was going to explode.

- Just do it! ' exclaimed Minnie. "Whatever it is, you can handle it.

I looked at her. She was right.

As much as I wanted to deny Azazel all access to my thoughts, I could break him like a toothpick now that his commands didn't work on me.

I shook my head, my wolf and vampire both present in my conscience, ready to attack if needed.

Slowly, I stopped resisting the pressure in my head and let him do what he wanted.

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

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

Azazel.

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

I took a deep breath.

My heart rate increased as I realized this was the army I would be fighting tomorrow.

They were a boisterous, hissing bunch and they moved as if none of them were able to stand still for more than a few seconds.

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

I turned to look, already knowing what to expect.

Azazel.

- The time has come.

Azazel spoke loudly, addressing the newborn vampires.

"I know you all will make me proud.

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

He was passionate, with strong, well-thought-out words—but he didn't mean any of that.

His aim was to make newborns think that he cared for them as a father cares for a child, so that they would fight for him and risk their lives.

In reality, he barely cared if they lived or died.

I could feel the way he was manipulating them as if I was in his mind, feeling everything he felt.

He was determined to seize the throne, at the expense of every vampire before him.

"Go," he finished suddenly. The order hit the newborns, leaving their eyes red.

In an instant, they scattered through the forest, hissing and moving in a big blur.

Azazel watched with a kind of evil pride, a smile dark forming on her lips.

I clenched my teeth as I watched him.

I wasn't sure what was going on or how exactly I'd gotten here, but it hardly mattered.

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

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

I had one focus: your blood on my hands.

I wanted him dead on the forest floor, wanted to see the life leave his eyes.

I reached out, intending to grab his throat and throw him to the ground.

But my hands closed around nothing but air, passing right by his neck as if he were a hologram.

I looked down at my hands in complete shock.

"Hello, Alpha Grayson.

I got up to look at him.

His red eyes met mine, and he scowled.
deep as he studied me.

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

All I could do was snarl and land another swing at him, hoping to break his jaw with my fist.

But where I should have connected with your face, I felt nothing plus air again.

"Azazel, what the hell did you do?"

He huffed irritably, looking away from me and into the forest.

"How little do you know, young Alpha," he muttered. "This is not my doing, and you shouldn't be here.

"Then why am I here?"

Azazel didn't answer for a moment; his gaze remained on place, almost as if he was lost in thought.

At last he said,

"Tell my brother to get ready." Your time as king is over.

His piercing red eyes returned to me, darkening to a hue I'd never seen before.

"We're coming.

Continued in Book 2...

lost queen

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