

Pregnant and Rejected by My Alpha Mate Chapter 31

Pregnant and Rejected by My Alpha Mate

Chapter 31

Chapter 31 Interrogation

Selene's POV

Being in lock down with morning sickness is even less fun than being in lock down with nothing to do – especially when one is confined with a host of people who can't know you're pregnant.

I've been popping my anti-nausea medication like it's breath mints for the better part of three hours, intermittently wondering if it's possible to overdose on the drug. My stomach is finally starting to settle, but the boredom isn't getting any better.

Bastien didn't explain anything when he tossed me in here with Odette and the guards, simply announcing that there's an emergency and we needed to "stay put" until he returned. It might be easier to accept the situation if we understood what's going on, and my mother-in-law isn't faring much better than I am.

"Try not to worry, Odette. "I soothe for the dozenth time. "I'm sure Bastien's safe."

"I'm afraid none of us are safe "She replies grimly. "Bastien won't say so, but I know more is going on here than he's letting on Too much has gone wrong lately."

"I know, I agree soberly, "But feeling anxious about things we can't control or predict will only make it worse."

Odette looks like she's about to respond, but before she can get any words out, her expression changes and she jolts to her feet. "He's back

I scent the air, realizing she's right before I can question why or how I'm doing this

"He's not alone. She announces.

Aiden? I suggest.

"No – enforcers."

I can hear their footsteps now, so many they muddle together into an odd, clomping cacophony. They pound down the hallway until the bolts locking the door gradually turn over, and the wooden panel swings open so sharply it rebounds against the wall.

Bastien towers in the center of the frame, flanked on either side by rugged and gnarled enforcers. I sit frozen while Odette runs to him. Sweetheart, what's happened?"

"Arabella has been kidnapped." He declares gruffly.

My mother-in-law's eyes go wide and her hands clamp over her mouth, "Oh Goddess."

I'm not sure what to think. At first all I can process is the rage in Bastien's expression. He must be out of his mind with worry, not to mention infuriated someone would do such a thing. Then I wonder who would possibly be dumb enough to kidnap the Alpha's future wife, thinking of the Gemini wolves and their provocation at the memorial, as well as Gabriel's still unknown murderer.

Yet underneath it all, doubt niggles at my mind. I know what Arabella is capable of, and I know how upset she must be to have her wedding postponed this way, Is it possible her cruelty doesn't only extend to me? Would she put the man she loves through such pain in order to get what she wants?

Just as quickly as the thought enters my mind, shame swells in my chest. What a horrible, cynical thing to think. A woman's life is in danger and I'm questioning whether she's faking the threat. Only a complete sociopath would engineer such a plot.

"We need to speak with Selene." Bastien's command clears the room before I can catch up to his hushed conversation with his mother

When we're alone with the enforcers, I approach my husband, "I'm so sorry." I express honestly. "This is terrible."

But it isn't Bastien who answers me. Please have a seat Mrs. Durand."

I swing my gaze to the investigator who spoke, noting the way the other men seem to defer to him. He must be in charge.

Though I want to ask about a hundred questions, I obey, returning to the chaise I had been sharing with Odette,

Bastien crosses the room with an unreadable countenance, Selene, when did you last see Arabella?"

The image of Arabella kissing Bastien as she left his office after midnight appears in my mind's eye, every bit as damning as it was in reality. "The other night." I'm speaking to

the ground, unable to bring myself to look at them. "It was late and I was worried you were still working. So I came to get you, but then I saw Arabella leaving your office."

"And you haven't seen or spoken to her since?" Bastien prompts.

"No." I murmur.

When I finally raise my eyes, I see the enforcers exchanging knowing glances. "Mrs. Durand," The lead investigator interjects, "How would you describe your relationship with Ms. Winters?"

My brain flips through our past dealings; from our coffee house meeting, to her attack on the stairs, and our confrontation outside the jewelry store. "We're not friends, if that's what you mean."

Understatement of the year,

"I see." The man nods, "have you ever fought?"

For the first time, it occurs to me that I might be a suspect. Why else would they be questioning me this way? "We've argued." I hedge. The last thing I need is to tell them how many times Arabella threatened me. My husband leaving me for her already gives me plenty of motive to want her out of the way.

"Like the argument you had when you pushed her down the stairs?" One of the enforcers chimes in.

"I never did that!" I exclaim, looking to Bastien for help.

He shakes his head, "I've already told them what happened."

Confusion pulses at my temples. How can this be happening. He said he believed me! I scan their faces, searching for anyone who looks sympathetic and finding none. "I swear I didn't have anything to do with this. You have to believe me!"

"No one suggested you did, Mrs. Durand." The lead investigator replies smugly.

.

"Wha- but..." | grapple for calm but only feel myself grow more flustered, "You obviously think I did. Otherwise you wouldn't be here questioning me this way."

"Please calm down, ma'am." The man condescends, "We're merely here to ascertain facts about Ms. Winter's life and relationships."

“Selene.” Bastien interrupts firmly, his silver eyes piercing through me. “Have you ever threatened Arabella, in any way?”

“No.” I answer instantly. “Of course not. I don’t threaten people, no matter what they’ve done to me.”

I can see they think I answered too quickly. The same enforcer who brought up the stairs tilts his head curiously. “What do you mean, no matter what they’ve done to you? Are you saying Ms. Winters wronged you?”

“That isn’t what I meant.” The words are scarcely more than a squeak.

“What did you mean?” Bastien asks.

“Simply that making threats isn’t in my nature.” I state slowly, trying desperately to regain my bearings.

The lead investigator pulls out his phone, scrolling over the screen before offering it to me, “Then how do you explain this?”

A photo fills the small rectangular screen, clearly displaying a cream colored parchment bearing a few lines of flowing script. I read the message quickly, bafflement and incredulity rising to the forefront of my ‘swirling emotions. The handwriting looks like mine, but the signature is slightly off.

Arabella must have found something I wrote and studied it in order to copy the script. “I didn’t write this.” I maintain, “That isn’t my signature.”

“Forgive me, Mrs. Durand.” The enforcer gestures to Bastien, who produces another paper from his jacket pocket. I recognize the note paper immediately – it’s a narrow sheaf from the kitchen notepad where I write out to-do items and shopping lists. “but the handwriting is almost identical.”

Side by side, the similarities are damning, but they must see how ridiculous this is. “I make half a dozen lists like that every week anyone could pull one from the trash to copy my writing:”

“So your defense is that you’re being framed?” An enforcer inquires, “why would anyone want to frame you?”

“Why would anyone sign their name to such a threatening note.” I defend, pointing to the phone in exasperation. “Especially if they planned on kidnapping the recipient.”

“Maybe it wasn’t planned.” The lead investigator jumps back in. “Maybe you lost your temper and didn’t have time to go back and clean up the evidence.”

I attempt a steadying breath. “Even if I wanted to kidnap her, how could I? I’m not strong enough to overpower anyone!”

“The element of surprise goes a long way.” One of the enforcers declares, a few others nodding in agreement. “Especially in the confines of a vehicle.”

“You can’t honestly believe this.” I beseech Bastien.

Bastien’s hard jaw twitches ominously. “It isn’t just the note Selene. The blood in the car came from two different people. One sample was hers, and one was yours.

Bastien’s POV

This is torture.

Selene looks like she’s been hit by a truck, and I can’t blame her. The enforcers have taken this too far. I told them over and over again that my mate has nothing to do with this, that the kidnapping is more sabotage, but they believe the evidence is too strong.

The lead inspector, Danvers, didn’t seem to be capable of grasping why someone would both kidnap Arabella and frame Selene. What was the point when they could kidnap them both? Why resort to kidnapping at all? If someone has a vendetta against the family, why bother with sabotage? Why not kill us?

He doesn’t seem to understand that killing me isn’t enough for our tormentor. It would adopt the narrative of a tragic leader taken too soon, further perpetuating our reputation and legacy. It wouldn’t break my will or tarnish my good name, and that’s what they want: to make sure I have nothing left when they finally go in for the kill.

I can hear Selene’s heart hammering from across the room, which means the others can as well. “I’ve never been anywhere near Arabella’s car – and I don’t heal like you do.” She pleads. “You’d know if I was injured.”

“Forgive me, Mrs. Durand but you are injured.” Danvers points to a handful of long red marks on Selene’s forearm.

“They’re just scratches!” She cries. “I’ve been taking care of Odette’s roses until she feels up to it again.”

“That might explain one cut, maybe two. Those,” He nods toward the parallel gashes, four stretching side by side, only an inch or two apart. “Look like claw marks.”

Pregnant and Rejected by My Alpha Mate Chapter 32

Pregnant and Rejected by My Alpha Mate

Chapter 32

#Chapter 32 House Arrest

Bastien's POV

"Enough" I cut through the rising voices: Selene swearing her innocence, the enforcers combatively contending that the evidence is against her, Aiden calling for calm. "This isn't getting us anywhere. Our priority is finding Arabella."

No one quells more than Selene under the force of my tone, and I wish I could comfort her. My anger is for the enforcers, not her.

"Our best trackers are on the trail, Alpha." A resigned Danvers promises, "I've already received word that the men you sent rendezvoused with the team."

"They've followed Bella's scent to New Town." Aiden confirms. Then, using our mental link he adds, "If it were me, and I wanted to frame Selene, I would take Arabella to Garrick's house."

He's right. It's the only property Selene owns independently, and the last place either of us would ever go. Let's go.

Aiden marches out on my order, no doubt pulling the car around while I wrangle the enforcers back out of the room. "We have a lead." I announce. "I want everyone ready to move out in five minutes."

Danvers brow furrows, "What lead?"

"I'll explain on the way." I deflect, calling mother and the sentries back into the secure room.

"You're leaving?" Selene's small voice surprises me. "Now?"

"Yes." I answer simply.

"What if it's a trap?" Selene halts me for the second time. "You should let the enforcers go and make sure it's safe first."

I don't even consider the suggestion. I've never run from a fight before, I don't intend to start now, I need to be there for Arabella."

*Please don't go, Bastien." Selene whispers, her cerulean and violet eyes shining.

"I have to." Once the guards are positioned at the door once more, I command, "Don't let anyone in until I'm back."

"Wait." Tiny feet charge after me, near silent on the persian rug. "You're locking us in here again?"

I turn back, facing the distress written clearly across my wife's face. "I promise you'll be safe."

Selene blinks, her confusion and fear gradually eclipsed by outrage. "From what?" She hisses, sounding entirely unlike my mate." thought I was the kidnapper. Why do I have to stay in lock down if I'm the one causing all this?"

Her anger is completely justified, but I don't have time to put out this fire, not when another blazes out of control. I need to ensure my mate is safe, and the enforcers want to keep her under lock and key until she's eliminated as a suspect.

Heaving a weary sigh, I close the distance to my wife and drop my lips to her ear. "Don't make this harder than it has to be. Selene."

"I'm not making this anything!" She croaks.

"It's this or enforcer custody, sweetheart." The endearment rings false in my clipped tone, "which would you prefer?"

It's a lie, but we still have an audience. I have no intention of allowing the enforcers anywhere near Selene, no matter what other false evidence they find, but I can't reveal this – not yet. It will be seen as corruption, and I need the investigators on my side until Arabella is safe and the immediate threat neutralized. I cannot risk alienating them by going against the law.

*Oh." The threat hits home with devastating impact, and I wish I could take back the words. "So it isn't lock down." She summarizes. "It's house arrest."

"I don't mind what you call it," I said. "As long as you stay put."

Selene's POV

"This is ridiculous." | vent. "Where the hell do they think I'm hiding her? My hands gesticulate wildly as I pace in front of Odette "Do they imagine I'm such a villain that I have a secret lair somewhere under the mountain?"

"I don't think logic has anything to do with it, Darling." Odette soothes, more alert than I've seen her in a long time. Providing comfort seems to have sidelined her sorrow, if only for a while. "Enforcers aren't trained to question evidence, only collect it."

"I know." I grumble, "But I can't believe Bastien is going along with it. Doesn't he know me better than that?"

"I think he's just afraid for Bella." She asserts. "He's always had a blind spot when it comes to her."

"Truly though," I harp on, unable to let the issue go. "Let's assume I wanted to kidnap Arabella and actually found a way to accomplish it. Where could I possibly put her? What am I supposed to be doing with her? There's no ransom and no body- and I've been here basically 24/7 since before she was taken, so it's not like I can be off torturing her!" The words pour out of me in a frenzy. "And they'd know if I hired someone to do it for me, because all of my money is Bastien's!"

"You're right." She agrees, sitting up with a look of dawning light on her face. "The only things you have are Bastien's."

"Well thanks for putting it so gently." I mutter.

Odette ignores my sarcasm, pulling me into the bathroom and out of the guard's hearing. "The cabin." She murmurs, "The pack house isn't technically your property because it transfers to any Alpha, but the cabin is in Bastien's and your name. It's the only place they could tie directly to you, and no one has been up in ages."

I fight the urge to jump up and down in excitement. "Odette, you're a genius!"

"I have my moments." A sly smile stretches across her face. "What do you say, we make a break for it?"

I've wanted nothing more than to get out of this room since the first moment Bastien threw me into it. "How?" I agree immediately.

Odette begins combing her hands along the wall, her slender fingers searching for some unseen pressure point in the plaster. "One benefit of being Alphas," she shares smugly, "we get to know the escape routes even the guards don't."

As her lips close around the final word, the wall clicks loudly, and a hidden doorway slides open before us. Sweet relief fills me, accompanied by only a fraction of frustration. "Why didn't you show me this five hours ago?"

Odette shrugs. "That was before. Now we know you aren't in any danger – they can't blame you for the kidnapping and attack you at the same time."

I catch her arm as she lifts her foot over the threshold. "What about you?"

:

“Don’t worry about me sweetling.” She pats my cheek and flashes her fangs, “Gabriel wasn’t the only one who ruled this pack with an iron fist.”

“The lights are off.” I frown, peeking over a mossy boulder beyond the treeline of the cabin’s clearing.

“And I don’t hear anything inside – or smell Arabella.” Odette is hunkered down beside me, her wolf glowing through her eyes. All wolves seem to rise to the surface in the forest, and being near them when it happens makes me ache for Luna, no matter how long I’ve been without her.

I can almost imagine I feel a stirring in my own blood, a spark of fire in my empty heart. I don’t even feel nauseous here. For the first time since I found out about the baby, not even a sliver of discomfort assails my belly.

It’s odd to feel so suddenly light when we’ve found naught but disappointment.

“Damn.” | huff, “I was really hoping she’d be here. It seemed like the only explanation.”

“I know.” Odette frowns. “But at least it got us out of that room.”

Right. Our escape. I’d hoped finding Arabella would give us immunity for that little stunt, but that’s seeming less and less likely. “How mad do you think Bastien will be?”

Odette’s lip quirks. “He has to find us first.”

“Did you disable the tracking in the car?” I ask worriedly:

My mother in law rolls her eyes. “This isn’t my first rodeo, Darling.”

giggle, leaning back on the soft ground. “Should we go inside?”

“Let’s!” She chirps, bounding to her feet. Inside we find blanketed furniture, stripped beds and an empty pantry – but no kidnapped she-wolves.

Together we prepared the rooms, opening all the windows to air out the space and cleaning swiftly if not thoroughly. By the time the sun sets my stomach is growling like a wild beast, and Odette raises an eyebrow, “I don’t think ordering in is a good idea. So why don’t I run out to get some groceries?”

I nod, watching her retreating back in the mirror above the side table I’m dusting. “Odette.” I say, just as she reaches the door.

She turns back. “Yes, my love?”

“Arabella,” i begin, picking at my cuticles anxiously. “When I said we don’t really get along...She really hates me. Enough to...”

Odette freezes with her hand on the door knob. “Are you saying she might be behind all this? That she might not have truly been kidnapped?”

“I don’t know what I’m saying.” i concede, “I just know nothing about this feels right.” I take a deep breath, “And she’s attempted worse.”

She’s in front of me now, taking my face between her soft hands and drawing my eyes up. “First, let’s get you fed. Then we’ll sit down, and you can tell me everything.”

I hiccup and nod, accepting a hug before watching her retreat to the door again, disappearing beyond and driving away with a flash of headlights. I’m only just realizing she’s left her phone on the kitchen counter, when I hear a knock at the door.

I don’t need to see the flash of blonde hair, or smell the cloying perfume to know who stands on the other side.

Arabella.

Pregnant and Rejected by My Alpha Mate Chapter 33

Pregnant and Rejected by My Alpha Mate

Chapter 33

CHAPTER 33

Selene’s POV

Call it intuition or instinct, call it prophecy or clairvoyance, but the moment I see Arabella on the other side of the door, I know this night will be my last.

I’ve felt this way once before, the day I tried to provoke Garrick into killing me. However then I had nothing to live for, and nothing to lose. Now things are very different. I may not have much, and my life might not be worth fighting for, but my baby’s certainly is.

I pull the door open, surveying the she-wolf waiting on the other side. Arabella looks as perfect as always: her voluptuous curves swathed in expensive fabrics tailored to highlight her considerable assets. Her makeup is flawless, but her lovely features are twisted into a sneer.

"Can't you ever do what you're supposed to?" She says by way of greeting.

"Excuse me?" I retort, blocking the entrance.

Arabella pushes past me into the cabin. "I had everything planned out so perfectly!" She exclaims, "The crime scene, the threat, your blood." She throws her hands up in exasperation, "But you're like a cat with nine lives. No matter how many times I knock you down, you keep getting back up."

Alarm bells blare in my mind. She wouldn't admit all this if she planned on letting me walk away. "I don't think I'm as resilient as you believe." I grumble. "They want to arrest me."

"And yet here you are." She snipes, "Safe in the family cabin. My family, not yours."

"I have every right to be here." I whisper, "Until the rejection at least."

"The rejection." Arabella mocks, "And when will that be?"

*It might have already happened if you hadn't been so impatient." I skirt around her, painfully aware of how vulnerable I am. If she shifts, it's all over for me. "He Doesn't. Want. Me." I remind her thickly. "So why do you feel so threatened?"

"He married you, despite not wanting you. He put his true love aside, in the name of obligation. That's who he is." Arabella hisses, "Surely I don't need to tell you why I feel threatened now, when the mother of all obligations grows in your belly."

Scrambling for distractions and praying I can stall long enough for Odette to return, I ask, "how did you get my blood anyway?"

"You can thank the hospital for that." Arabella-snorts, "The hematology lab's security isn't exactly state of the art."

The hospital? "Just how long have you been planning this?" I blurt incredulously.

Arabella shoots me a pitying look. "Oh you poor, simple girl." She scoffs. "I've been planning this since the day you stole him." She bares her pearly white teeth, which means I have three years more preparation than you do. So why don't you do us both a favor, and give up now."

Bastien's POV

Another dead end.

Bricks shatter as I throw my fist, full force, into the wall; sending stone and dust flying.

"Take it easy, brother." Aiden encourages, warily patting my shoulder. "The more possibilities we cross off, the closer we get."

*Narrowing options only works when there's a finite number." I snarl, flexing my bruised and bleeding knuckles. "We're looking at an endless list of permutations, and we don't have time to work through them! Arabella is missing, Selene is being set up to take the fall, my mother is barely hanging on by a thread, the pack is on the verge of overthrowing me, and my father's killer is out there, freely roaming my city." Axel is writhing and snarling in my chest, fighting to be free of my human form,

Aiden appraises me for one long moment, no doubt reading my every thought. After a moment he makes a single, decisive nod. "Let's go for a run."

I don't need to be asked *twice*. Within seconds our clothes are in a pile on the ground, and our bodies are *no more* than streaks of fur darting through the dense woods. *My* heart pounds, racing faster and faster as my legs stretch out beneath me, pumping adrenaline through my veins with intoxicating fervor.

I run until my legs feel disconnected *from my* body, until all my limbs feel like jelly and my lungs are gasping for air. I run until *every* horrible stressor weighing on my shoulder is forgotten, and the only things that remain are Axel and the night sky.

Aiden fell behind after the first few miles, but when I finally collapse at the edge of a cliff overlooking the lake, he eventually catches up. Slumping down next to *me*, we lay in breathless silence until the moon is high overhead.

I know it's a lot. Aiden finally acknowledges, ignoring my derisive grunt. But anything would seem *overwhelming* taken all together. You have to tackle your problems one at a time. Start by finding Arabella, then *focus* on Selene, and so on. If *you try to* do it all, you will fail. It's about baby steps.

Alphas and baby steps don't go together. I bite, I don't have time to tackle our problems in stages. The world is falling apart around us, and it's happening now. If we wait, it will be too late.

Then stop trying to do it all alone. Aiden snaps, You have *friends* for a reason, stop being so damn prideful and use us.

Flynn's face appears in my mind. The last time I leaned on a friend it didn't turn out so well.

Don't even start about Flynn. Aiden objects immediately. That was his choice, and acting like it wasn't only dishonors his memory

Goddess, when did you get so bossy? I joke.

About the same time you decided to lose your mind over a woman. He jibes back.

I did, I admit. But you can't deny she was worth it.

Selene's POV

"Why are you doing this?"

Arabella is stalking me into a corner, a lethal glint behind her wolfish expression. "You know why, Selene." She attests icily. "I warned you what would happen if you didn't leave."

"I was going to leave!" I insist. "It's not like I planned this – Gabriel was murdered." As if she could forget. "Bastien needed support. It was his choice to cancel the ceremony, not mine."

Arabella rolls her eyes, the rich brown irises hard as stone. "Men don't know what they want. You have to tell them." She declares, "And you took advantage of his vulnerability."

"I didn't." I growl, taken aback by my own strength. "I love him, I only want what's best for him."

"Goddess above," the blonde jeers, "What do you know about love? You're not even a whole person." Her claws extend, and she studies them ominously. Honestly you should thank me for putting you out of your misery now. It would be a tragedy if you actually had that baby." She smirks, "After all, what could a halfling possibly offer a child? It's better off dead than it would be having you for a mother."

"You're wrong." I retaliate. "I may not have a wolf, but at least I still have a heart – which is more than you can say"

"I don't need a heart, Selene." Arabella taunts, "I have beauty and brains, assets that are going to be in your husband's bed every night as soon as you and your brat are in the ground."

overpower her.

"You should hear the way Bastien talks about the future, how excited he is to be rid of you." Arabella presses on, "granted he may not know how he's going to be rid of you, but the end result is the same."

"If he finds out you killed me, he'll never forgive you." I argue, "he considers protecting me his responsibility."

“That was before you kidnapped and tried to murder the love of his life.” Arabella cackles cruelly.

“You see, I could just slit your worthless throat. But I have to make this look like an accident. As justified as I would be to kill my kidnapper, I don’t want Bastien to think me capable of the same sort of heartless violence you inflicted on me.” She feigns an exaggerated pout. “I suppose you learned it all from your stepfather. It just goes to show that no one ever really survives that sort of thing with their sanity intact.”

Her nasal voice goes hoarse as she slides Odette’s phone off the counter, slipping it into her pocket. “I’ll try not to judge you. After all, it wasn’t really your fault – you were a victim too. But I’m afraid the wounds just run too deep.”

I keep my back steadfastly against the wall, realizing Arabella must think Odette’s cell is mine; she cannot see my own phone tucked snugly in my back pocket. “What are you going to do?” I question shakily,

A savage leer transforms her beautiful features into something truly horrible as she stalks me into the linen closet. My shoulder blades collide with shelves of sheets and towels, and Arabella draws a box of matches from her purse. “I’m going to give the Durands a chance to renovate this disgusting cabin.”

Before I can say another word, the door slams in my face, followed by a loud click as the lock turns. I smell sulfur as Arabella lights the first match. As orange and red light begins to dance through the crack in the door, and smoke fills the air, Arabella’s parting words float back to me. “Say hello to Gabriel for me.”

Pregnant and Rejected by My Alpha Mate Chapter 34

Pregnant and Rejected by My Alpha Mate

Chapter 34

#Chapter 34 | reject you, Bastien!

Selene’s POV

My body crashes into the door with a dull thump, and I bounce away from the wood for the dozenth time. If I ever get out of this tinderbox, I’m sure I will have bruises all down my sides- but getting out is seeming less and less likely.

I did not waste a single moment after Arabella locked me in the closet, immediately beginning to scream and yank at the immovable door knob. When that didn't work I tried climbing the shelves to reach the vent in the ceiling, but they collapsed beneath my weight and built a veritable pyre of linen on the closet floor,

At least when the fire reaches me I'll go fast.

A sob wrenches from my throat, true terror enveloping me as the reality of my circumstances set in. When Arabella first struck the match, I thought only of what I must do to escape. I did not let myself dwell on what would happen if I failed. I did not contemplate the agony awaiting me.

I throw myself into the door again and again, the prospect of burning to death riddling my body with panic and adrenaline. As smoke slips beneath the crack in the door and clogs the air around me, I remember my phone, yanking it from my pocket with shaking fingers.

I fumble for the touch keys, my lungs already burning with acrid smog. Bastien's number flies from my fingers on auto-pilot, and I strain to hear the tinny ringing over the rising whirr of flames. The temperature is rising every second, and blazing orange light now shines through every crack in the door.

"Pick up, pick up, pick up!" I beg as prayers race through my mind. Please, I implore the Goddess internally, Do whatever you want with me, but please don't do this to my baby. Please don't take it too.

The line rings and rings, chiming in my ear like a relentless death knell. Please Bastien!" I shout into the roaring inferno. "I need

you!"

Bastien's POV

The moon and stars have disappeared behind black clouds, as if the Goddess can hear my grim thoughts and is reordering creation to match them. Aiden still sits beside me, a hulking gray wolf gazing longingly into the trees, hoping for signs of prey.

Ambient light from the city radiates a golden halo over the ridge at our backs, but the wild mountains before us lie in full shadow. I howl into the darkness, channeling every ounce of my rage and frustration into the call.

My dread only increases as the minutes tick by. I agreed to rest before setting back to Elysium, caving to Aiden's nagging if only to make the lecture stop. However being away from the pack when so much chaos reigns makes my skin crawl.

A knot has been lodged in the pit of my stomach since I first heard Arabella was missing, but since we've been out here, the knot has expanded to a wrecking ball. I try to tell myself it's only my anxiety spinning out of control. If anything new had developed, my men would have notified me – our mental link can travel any distance.

Mom and Selene are safe with my sentries and Donovan is overseeing the enforcers searching for Arabella; everyone is accounted for. I would know if something was wrong.

So why do I feel such a horrible sense of foreboding? I roll my neck, stretching my restless muscles and shaking out my fur. Perhaps my instincts are trying to alert me to something already happening, but a crisis yet to come.

I want to go back. I relay to Aiden.

We should try to find some food first. He answers. You've got to keep up your strength.

A fresh wave of alarm slams into me as his thoughts travel to mine, and my claws dig compulsively into the soft earth. No. I can't stand to be away any longer.

Fine. Aiden relents, but if you collapse before we get back to the city, you'll have only yourself to blame.

I'm already running, my powerful haunches launching me through the trees like a speeding bullet. Aiden struggles to keep up, yelling after me to slow down more than once.

But I can't. With every inch I draw closer to home, the more certain I am that something is *very, very* wrong.

Selene's POV

My tears streak through the soot on my cheeks, leaving pale tracks in thick gray powder. Ash fills my lungs, melding with my bodily fluids to form a foul tasting slime the strained organs continuously expel in their efforts to keep me breathing. The coughing is as painful as it is disgusting, but nothing hurts worse than knowing no one is coming to save us.

I barely spoke two words to Bastien's voicemail before my phone died. Being locked in the safe room all day without entertainment or a charger had drained its battery, and my lovesick instincts to call my husband for help rather than the pack emergency line stole my last chance of salvation.

We're going to die.

I wrap my arms around my belly, futilely shielding the precious life within. "I'm sorry." I weep, clutching the spot where my baby rests. "I'm so sorry. You deserved so much more than this, so much better."

I should have killed Arabella. I never should have allowed her into the cabin. I knew she was up to no good, but some idiotic part of me thought I could talk her down. After all, what else was supposed to do? I didn't have any way to escape.

The only safety I've ever known has come from Bastien. Without his protection I'm helpless, and I stopped being able to count on him the moment Arabella returned.

Odette had known Gabriel was in trouble simply by instinct. If Arabella was right and Bastien and I really were supposed to be mates, wouldn't he sense something was wrong? Enough to at least answer the phone?

I know he has the device glued to his side because of the "kidnapping," and every time I've called him recently it's been because something was wrong. Shouldn't he know by now that I don't pick up the phone without good reason?

The truth is he doesn't care. Not when Arabella is missing and in danger – and especially not when he believes I'm responsible. He's already put me under house arrest, for all I know he's currently making arrangements for my trial and exile, if not my execution.

Whatever affection Bastien once held for me is gone. If I'm being honest, it wasn't ever true affection: it was pity and obligation cemented by lust. Over time the combination grew to fondness, but the sort of fondness one has for their pets: patronizing if benevolent.

It was a mistake to let myself become so dependent on him. At first I didn't have a choice. When we met I was frail and traumatized, without a friend in the world or a penny to my name – and bearing no skills to earn any. I needed him to survive. But I should have put a stop to it after I found my feet, I was just too in love with him to think of my own best interest.

This is the result. I never learned how to stand on my own, and fondness is not love. It doesn't last. It doesn't conquer all.

Sweat pours off my body in heavy torrents, and I'm actually beginning to hope dehydration might take me out before the flames can breach the door. The room grows hotter and hotter every second, and my stomach leaps into my throat. I vomit black bile onto the pile of towels and sheets under my feet, still gagging and retching once my stomach is empty.

My shoulders collide with the wall as my knees give out, and I howl the way Luna used to before Garrick stole her from me. "Goddess damn you, Bastien!" I cry, "All I ever did was love you!"

He never wanted me. He made me believe in a future he never intended on giving to me, playing with my heart and throwing it away the moment his duty was fulfilled. Three years of marriage, and he turned his back on me despite all logic and common sense.

Now my baby is going to die because he'd rather be with a psychopathic barbie doll than a halfling.

My head whips manically back and forth, "No." I gasp deliriously. "You don't get to reject me." I slur, "I reject you, Bastien! Do you hear me?" I shout the words into the conflagration, "1. Reject. You!"

I slide down the wall until my bottom connects with the floor, hugging my legs to my chest. Black spots smatter my vision, the air around me feeling completely solid. This is it. Woozy heat dulls my thoughts, whirling them through my scattered mind in a lightheaded maelstrom. I'm dying.

It's not the first time I've thought this, but I know this time it's real.

My sorrow is for my child. My fear is for the pain. However I also feel relief; relief that all this torment will finally be over

No one knows exactly what the afterlife is like, but everyone has seen glimpses. When the Goddess ushers in the dark half of the year on All Souls Night, the veil between worlds becomes so thin that you can almost see across. On those nights you can feel your loved ones watching over you so keenly that there is comfort even in the unknown.

Wherever I'm going, I'll be with my mother again. With Luna.

I'll finally be safe.

As my eyes close for the last time, I whisper my final thought. "I won't have to hurt anymore."

Chaite

5 Shets Dead

When Alden and I get back to our clothes, my phone is ringing in my jacket pocket. I untangle the device from the garment, noticing a missed call from Selene and 16 from my mother in addition to the incoming line from an unknown number

The dread I'd begun to feel on the cliffside had transformed suddenly and horrifically into a riot of agony as an impassable rift rent my heart in two. Something deep in my bones told me that Selene was rejecting me, and now,

I hadn't known how profoundly it would affect me, at least, not in terms of the rebuff itself. I knew losing my mate would test the very limits of my being, just didn't understand how immediate the impact would be, even from such a distance. And I don't know what happened to cause it

I certainly left things on bad terms, but why now? Could she be rejecting me simply for my misleading comments about house arrest? Was that the last straw after one too many wrongs?

I'm gasping for air as I fumble to accept the call, my anxiety snowballing into a blinding, deafening avalanche of worry as I whip my phone up to my ear, "Hello?"

*Alpha

It's Danvers, his familiar voice low and subdued.

Did you find her?" I ask immediately.

"No, sir. It's not Ms. Winters." He hedges, clearly unfinished but struggling to find the right words.

*Then what is it?" I prompt harshly, yanking on my trousers.

I'm afraid it's Mrs. Durand." Danvers replies resignedly.

I freeze, renewed panic zinging through my body. Though Axel was just in control mere moments ago, he's already clawing to get out again. "Which Mrs. Durand?"

Aiden stops halfway through buttoning his shirt, watching me with apprehension.

Danvers clears his throat. "Actually it's both of them." He says. "They snuck out of the pack house and went to your family cabin."

*They what?!" I thunder,

"That's not all, sir." He continues grimly. "There's been a fire."

Flashing red and blue lights blot out the cinders of the cabin, framed by billows of black smoke spiraling up from the ashes as firefighters douse the embers with industrial water hoses. There are too many emergency vehicles to count: firetrucks, ambulances and patrol cruisers lined up through the clearing like a wall

The scent permeates through the sheet metal and fiberglass of Aiden's car, but rather than the cozy aroma of a bonfire, it's a foul blend of burnt plastic, metal and – most sickeningly-flesh. Bright orange sparks float in the air, carried on the wind and blazing bright until winking out in the damp autumn air.

Through the haze of smog and glaring lights I see my mother standing next to Danvers wrapped in a heavy woolen shawl. I can hear her weeping even from this distance, then meet her bloodshot eyes when her head turns in my direction.

I charge toward them through the raining ash, taken aback when my mother begins retreating rather than moving to meet me. *1 was only gone for half an hour," She sobs, "I don't know what happened. Everything was fine when I left."

*Where's Selene?" i demand, aching to comfort her but unable to focus on anything until I know where my mate is.

*Bastien," Mom chokes, shaking her head as fresh tears spill from her lashes

My stomach lurches, "Where is she?" I repeat gutturally.

She wrings her hands, gazing at me with such sympathy my heart begins to splinter. I know, before she opens her mouth, what she's about to tell me. "No." I jerk away from her, backing out of reach when she extends her hands toward me

Pregnant and Rejected by My Alpha Mate Chapter 35

Pregnant and Rejected by My Alpha Mate

Chapter 35

#Chapter 35 She Is Dead

"Bastien," Mom follows me, dogged even amidst her grief. She catches my shoulders, wrapping her arms around me before I can stop her. "I'm so sorry." She keens. "She was inside."

"No!" I say again, my voice a dull roar in my own ears, "You're wrong. She can't – she can't be. I would know if she was dead, 1 would feel it!" i insist.

My mother buries her face in my neck, her tears hot and wet against my skin. "I know." She laments, "I know sweetheart." Her small hands rub circles over the rigid muscles of my back. "But she's gone."

“How do you know?” I struggle to push her off me without hurting her, “Is there a body? Show me her body?”

Mom’s arms clamp down around me more tightly, squeezing me with her supernatural strength. “They already took it.” She whimpers. “It’s at the morgue,”

The phone line opens with a fuzzy click, dissolving into a strange, droning roar punctuated by splintering wood and hollow crackling. “Bas-en.” Selene’s terrified voice cuts out as she attempts to cry my name, “I – eed. Th-re’s... el... Pl-elp!”

I listen to the voicemail over and over again on the way to the coroner’s office, trying to decipher any clear words or message from the jumbled sounds. Unfortunately no matter how many times I play the recording, I can’t make anything out.

I don’t want to believe it. I can hear the fire in the background, and I’ve seen what’s left of the cabin, but I cannot fathom that Selene might be dead. She was clearly in trouble, but that doesn’t mean she’s gone. After all, her phone cut out – if it ran out of battery she could be trying to find help this very moment and simply unable to call me again.

She isn’t dead. Axel says for the thousandth time. I would know.

How did this even happen? How did the fire start? And if Selene really was in the cabin when it began, why couldn’t she get out?

The obvious answer is too horrible to contemplate. My hands curl into fists, clenching and unclenching compulsively as the city flies by out the window. She isn’t dead. I think again. She can’t be.

Then whose body did they find? A small, cruel voice in the back of my mind wonders. And why did she reject me, if not for failing her when she needed me most.

My mother’s hand closes over mine, squeezing gently. I return her affection, but I refuse to look at her. I can’t bear to see her guilt and pain. I can’t bear to hear her apologize again, or say my mate is gone.

“Why did you leave the house?” I ask abruptly.

Mom hiccups, “We thought the kidnappers might be holding Arabella at the cabin.” She explains hoarsely, “It seemed like the only place they could pin to Selene. Garrick’s house never occurred to us – I didn’t even realize she owned it.”

“Owns.” I hiss, shaking off her hand. “Why didn’t you go back when you realized you were wrong?”

"Because the cabin was a right side nicer than being locked up with a bunch of enforcers." Despite her words, there is no venom in her tone. "I didn't think I never imagined..." She trails off.

"The enforcers were there to keep you safe." I groan, "To prevent something like this from happening!"

"You told us they were there to keep her in custody!" Mom exclaims. "That was a cover!" I explode, "Somebody is trying to destroy this family any way they can. I lied to the enforcers to appease them, and to avoid frightening you!"

"How were we supposed to know that?" She cries. "You accused Selene of kidnapping Arabella!"

"That isn't true!" I refute hotly, "I let them question her, that's all! I know she didn't have anything to do with it. She can't possibly believe I thought otherwise."

"Well she did." Mom informs me thickly. She believed you were against her, that's why we followed the lead ourselves instead of going to you."

So this is my fault?" I demand, "It's my fault she's missing?"

"Of course not!" She objects immediately. "I didn't mean that, Bastien. If anything it's my fault... I'm the one who broke her out."

She is and

"Stop it Alden barks from the front seat. "None of this is either of your faults. The only person responsible is whoever lit the fire in the first place Selene knew you loved her, both of you."

"Stop talking about her in the past tense!" I order harshly

Tense silence fills the car for a long moment, until my mother returns her comforting touch to my arm. "Bastien." She broaches gently, the salty scent of her tears filling the small space. "I don't want it to be true either, but the longer you deny it, the more painful it will be to deal with" She cautions. "You need to accept it. Selene is dead."

"No she isn't I argue "Until the doctor says otherwise, we have to assume this is another trick." The car rounds the corner and the hospital comes into view, its glaring lights stinging my eyes. "She's not dead."

"I'm very sorry, Alpha. "De Kane proclaims softly, "The DNA was a match."

"No," I stand firmly. It can't be"

The man offers me an infuriatingly sympathetic look. "I'm afraid the tests don't lie, sir,"

Reason wars with my denial, and I conjure a last resort to maintain my stubborn refusal. "I want to see the body." I command.

Mom's eyes widen, "Sweetheart

"I don't think that's a good idea." Aiden interjects.

"You should heed their advice, sir, Dr. Kane sighs, "Mrs. Durand's remains are unrecognizable. Seeing them would only cause you further distress."

"I want to see the body." I repeat authoritatively.

"As you wish, Alpha."

Dr. Kane pushes open the morgue's heavy double doors, leading me into the stark, chilly room with solemn finality. Aiden follows at my side, his bearing rigid with agitation. Don't do this, Bastien. He pleads in my head. Don't torture yourself this way.

I have to do this. I think back, watching the doctor pull one of the locker doors open and slide a gurney from the refrigerated compartment

A crisp white sheet covers the slab, draped over a small round lump rather than the typical shape of a prone body. He gingerly pulls back the covering, and my heart falls out of my chest, clattering to the ground at my feet.

A tiny, burnt husk is all that remains of my mate, her blackened limbs curled into a fetal position. Her scent is gone, replaced by the noxious perfume of soot and smoldering decay. My legs give out, and I crumple to the floor, smashing my disembodied heart to bits as I finally acknowledge what can no longer be denied.

She's gone.