

Chapter 26

The queen of the supernatural sat next to me at the end of the dock, looking unbelievably ordinary in her sandals, jean shorts, and black top.

I pulled my towel—the one Liam had rushed to the cabin to grab for me—tighter around my shoulders while I studied her closely.

She smiled, her blue eyes glittering as she tucked her legs beneath her.

It was no wonder I recognized her. I'd read a bit about Belle Stoll. She was the mate of Grayson Stoll, Ace's cousin and the new king of the supernatural.

Belle was just as beautiful as the pictures I saw of her in my books about werewolves. She *looked* like a queen, even with her casual clothes and loose hair.

Give her a fancy dress and a corset, and she wouldn't have looked out of place in a Jane Austen novel.

Liam—the *vampire*, apparently—stood behind Belle with his hands on the back of her chair, looking like he wanted to be anywhere else in the world.

They had both apologized profusely after my tumble into the lake, but even with their apologies, it had still taken me a second to lower my guard enough to sit down and have a conversation.

They had appeared out of nowhere. Literally. Belle had explained to me that she had used her powers of apparition to teleport here.

Liam had tagged along without permission.

As if all of that was just a normal thing for a person to be able to do.

Belle told me she had once been human, but she became a fairy after mating with Grayson. Hence her special powers.

I pressed my fingers into my temples and squeezed my eyes shut. My head was pounding. Despite putting my silver bracelets back on, I could feel Ace attempting to break into my mind.

He was worried about me. I knew. More than worried—he was frantic. He'd felt my panic and fear when I saw Liam's red eyes and fell into the lake.

"Is everything okay?" Liam asked me. "You didn't hurt yourself when you fell into the lake, did you?"

"No. No, I'm fine." I dropped my hands and attempted to smile. "Ace... I mean, my mate... is... Well, he's —"

"Trying to break into your mind because he wants to know where you are?" Belle finished for me.

My lips parted. "Um, well, yeah... How did you know that?"

Belle gave me a knowing look. "Been there. My mate did the same when I tried to run away. Having someone constantly banging on the inner walls of your mind causes one hell of a migraine, doesn't it?"

I nodded, shocked she knew exactly what I was going through without me having to tell her. "I think he felt my distress when I fell into the lake."

"But I thought your mate hadn't marked you yet," Liam said. "He shouldn't be able to mind-link with you yet. Or feel your emotions. Especially when you're so far from him."

Belle's eyes fell to my neck, onto my unpierced mating gland. "Ace never marked you?"

My hand went to cover my mating gland. I felt uncomfortable having their eyes on it.

I winced. The spot was so tender.

"No. He wanted to wait until I knew everything and was okay with it."

"My mate marked me in a dirty airplane bathroom only a few hours after meeting me," Belle said.

She looked up at Liam behind her and frowned. "I thought it was common for male wolves not to be able to hold themselves back from marking. Should Grayson not have done that?"

Liam gave her a bewildered look. "Uh, no. Consent and all that. It applies even in the werewolf world."

Belle crossed her arms. "Well, that jerk..." she grumbled under her breath.

Liam shook his head before settling his gaze back on me. "Your bond must be pretty intense if Ace can feel your emotions when you're not even fully mated. And from so far away too."

I sunk deeper into my chair. "That's what everyone keeps telling me. I guess our connection is stronger than most."

"I knew you and I would have a lot in common," Belle said to me, her smile growing. "I have a strong connection with my mate too."

"That's why I'm here. As soon as I heard there was another human girl mated to an alpha, I knew I had to meet you."

"I was going to arrange a day for us to meet with our mates—since they're cousins and everything—but then I heard you ran away from your mate and were all on your own."

"I've been in a very similar situation. I decided you might need someone to talk to who could understand what you're going through. So, I decided to pop by."

"Literally," Liam mumbled.

Belle swatted at him. "Yeah, I'm sorry for scaring you. I'm still learning how to control my..." She hesitated. "I'm sort of a... Well, it's hard to explain, but after I mated with Grayson, I became a—"

"A fairy," I finished for her. "You said. That's how you got here."

"You used the same power you developed during the battle against Azazel Mortar when you needed to get to your mate when you felt he was in trouble. You...apparated? Is that the right word?"

Belle's face went slack. "Um, yeah. That's all right. But..." Her brows furrowed. "I'm sorry, how did you know all of that? I thought you were human. Didn't you only recently learn about werewolves?"

I nodded. "I did. Just a few weeks ago. But I've been doing a lot of research. I was...sick for a while and had plenty of time on my hands, so I read a lot of books on werewolves."

"And there was information about *me* in those books?" Belle sounded dumbfounded.

"Yeah, a lot actually. I know you met Grayson Stoll on a flight to Paris, that you obtained the fae powers of former Queen Evangeline Viotto after you completed your mate bond..."

"...and I know you ran away from Grayson because you thought he was mistreating you when, really, his body was being possessed by the former vampire king Azazel Mortar."

Belle's jaw was practically on the floor. Liam, on the other hand, looked sort of impressed.

I quickly backtracked. "Sorry, I didn't mean to sound like a stalker. I only took a special interest in you because I knew Ace was cousins with your mate."

"And because you're a human like me. Or used to be at least. Like you said, you're technically a fairy now."

Belle laughed. "Yeah, I guess. It's weird to think there is already information about me and Grayson in history books and stuff."

"I mean, I've known the dude for less than a year. I've only been queen for a few months."

Now, that was crazy to think about. It felt like it had been years since I was standing in Ace's bedroom after our first time together, listening to him tell me about a cousin I didn't know he had.

Grayson had demanded Ace come to visit him.

The things I'd learned since then... The things I'd seen... All in the span of four months.

"You're not planning on telling Ace where I am, are you?" I asked.

Belle scooped. "Absolutely not. Like I said, I've been in your shoes. I won't be telling your mate a thing."

I let out a relieved sigh. "I'm glad you came. Even if I was a little surprised. It's nice to have the company. I..." I sucked in a shaky breath. "I've been alone for a long time."

"That's probably for the best. Your mate would have found you otherwise," Liam said. "Werewolves are natural hunters—trackers. And resourceful as fuck."

"It's a miracle that he hasn't found you already, especially since he has every werewolf in the country looking for you."

I wasn't surprised to hear that.

"Still, it's not easy to isolate yourself like this, even if it's necessary." Her eyes scrambled over my face as she thought. "Would you like to come back to Zaweth with me?"

I blinked. "What?"

Liam stepped forward. "Belle...", he warned.

She held a hand up to him. "No, I think this is a good idea. You could come back to Zaweth and stay in an apartment in the palace for as long as you need."

"And then, you wouldn't be alone. You could hang out with me and Liam and our friend Minnie until you feel better."

"You...you want to take me to the supernatural kingdom?" I asked.

Belle nodded eagerly. "You can do exactly what you're doing here but around other people. I would love to show you around and exchange stories. I haven't been around another human in months."

"But what about Ace? Wouldn't he find out if I were to stay in Zaweth? Someone is bound to recognize —"

"That's not going to work," Liam said, cutting us off.

"And why the hell not?" Belle asked.

"First of all, everyone will be able to smell her. Her scent is..."

He glanced at me, his nostrils flaring. "It's strong. Stronger and *sweeter* than any other scent I've ever witnessed. She smells like an omega."

"And since there aren't many omegas out there, someone is bound to figure out who she is."

"Especially in a kingdom full of vampires and werewolves who would love nothing more than to sink their teeth into her."

I sucked in a breath. "I thought only werewolves mark their mates."

"Werewolves will want to mark you as their own. Vampires... They will just want a taste of your mouthwatering blood."

"He's being dramatic. No one is going to hurt you." She turned back to Liam. "We'll mask her scent."

Liam scooped. "Even I'm having a hard time convincing my vampire he doesn't need a taste of her blood. There's not a scent blocker in the world that is strong enough to mask her scent."

"Wait, I'm on suppressants," I said. "My scent should already be masked."

"Suppressants block your perfume so no one knows you're close to being in heat," Liam explained. "I can still smell that you're an omega. No scent blocker is going to change that."

"Who said anything about scent blockers?" Belle studied me with a mischievous grin on her face.

A warm sensation cascaded through my body. My spine straightened. It wasn't an unpleasant feeling, but it was definitely an unnatural one.

Thankfully, it was over a second later, and Belle leaned back in her chair, looking thoroughly pleased with herself.

Liam looked between the two of us. "What the fuck just happened?"

"Smell her again," Belle told him.

"Smell her—?" Liam's words were cut short as he inhaled deeply. His eyes widened. "Did you just wipe her scent?"

Belle's grin showed all her teeth. "Yep. Did it work?"

He stepped forward and took another long inhale. "Well...yeah. It did. When did you learn how to do that?"

I grabbed the collar of my shirt and brought it to my nose. All I smelled was laundry detergent and my deodorant. Nothing out of the ordinary. But maybe that was the point.

"Just now," Belle replied. "Now her smell and 'omega status' won't be an issue."

"More dominant wolves might still be able to recognize her status," Liam pointed out.

"How?" I asked. Did I have it tattooed on my forehead or something?

"You look like an omega. And I'll bet you act like one too when you're around more dominant wolves. Omegas get edgy and scared in those kinds of situations."

"Then we'll just keep her away from dominant wolves." Belle shrugged. "Shouldn't be that hard."

"You're going to hide me from your mate?" I asked.

I didn't see how that would work out. Ace could always tell when I was keeping secrets from him and wasn't very good at making me spill the beans. Surely, it was the same with Belle and Grayson.

Belle winked at me. "What Grayson doesn't know won't hurt him."