

## Just Business

Aphrodite:

Exhausted and emotionally drained, I stumbled into my apartment and collapsed onto the bed. I was relieved to find that Lara wasn't back yet, as it meant I had more time to myself to collect my thoughts.

After a few minutes of rest, I dragged myself into the bathroom and turned on the shower, letting the hot water wash away the stress of the day.

As the water cascaded over me, I closed my eyes and tried to clear my mind. But no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't shake the memory of Asher's touch, the feel of his lips on mine, or the intensity of his gaze—it felt like he had already imprinted his mark permanently on my soul.

After what felt like hours, I finally turned off the water and stepped out of the shower, feeling slightly more composed. I wrapped a towel around myself and made my way back to my room, needing some much-needed rest.

As I climbed into bed and closed my eyes, the image of his dangerously handsome face appeared in my mind, making my body feel hot all over. The mate bond between us had ignited, all thanks to that kiss. Why wasn't he ugly? Gosh.

I managed to push away thoughts of him, remembering the consequences of accepting him as my mate. Just as I was on the verge of sleep, I heard loud footsteps, and suddenly my door burst open, startling me awake. Lara rushed in, her eyes wide with panic.

"Aphrodite!" Lara cried, screaming my name at the top of her lungs, and immediately I sat up in bed.

"Are you okay?"

No

I felt a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach, knowing that she had heard everything. I couldn't lie to her, even if I wanted to. I had expected her to start scolding me and bombarding me with questions, but instead, she rushed over to me, her arms outstretched, pulling me into a hug that I desperately needed.

I knew that I had a lot of explaining to do, but I was relieved that she wasn't judging me and was giving me a break. Lara was the most understanding person in my life, and I could only wish my mom could be like her.

After a few minutes of hugging, she finally let me go and cleared her throat before sitting beside me on the bed.

"So you're truly going to reject him?" Lara asked, trying to hide her shock, and as she stared at me, I could see millions of questions swimming in her eyes.

"I... I don't know, Lara," I whispered, thinking of the right words to use to convey my emotions to her.

"I can't be with him."

Lara immediately stood up, running her hands through her hair, before narrowing her eyes at me, her hands on her hips.

"If you do that, it'll be his sixteenth rejection. Our job is to help people find love, not reject them; that's why we created this app in the first place," she yelled, frustration evident in her voice, her hands thrown up in the air.

I ran a hand through my hair guiltily, knowing everything she said was true. But I had no choice. Either I rejected him or I died.

"I can't be with him, Lara, and you know why," I said, biting my lip until I tasted blood. "What if he finds out my secret? It'll cost me my life. I can't take that risk."

Lara's expression softened, and she reached out to take my hands in hers. She was the only one who knew about the type of wolf I possessed and how dangerous it was—not even my parents knew.

Unlike other werewolves, mine wasn't ordinary. It wasn't special in a good way; it was dangerous. My wolf, or as it was called, the Devil Wolf, was said to be possessed. It had two horns on its head and red eyes, marking it as a creature of darkness.

Because of its nature, there was an order to have it killed on sight, and anyone found with such a wolf would meet the same fate. It was a death sentence hanging over my head, and I couldn't risk revealing it to anyone. Worse, now my mate was the Alpha King, who had implemented such laws.

If I accepted the bond with him, he would die during the mating process when we were both supposed to run in our wolf forms and mate. It was a risk I couldn't take.

"I understand, Aphrodite. I'm so sorry I sounded selfish. I didn't think of that," she said quietly.

"But you can't run away from him forever. Eventually, you're going to have to face him." I shook my head, feeling a sense of despair wash over me.

"I know," I whispered. "But I don't know if I'm strong enough to do that. He's everything I never expected." I muttered, feeling the weight of my secret pressing down on me. That was one of the reasons why I had gone to school in the human world: I wanted to be a normal human and escape the reality of being a werewolf with a dangerous secret.

That was another reason why I wanted to spend the rest of my life with a human who didn't know about our laws. If Elijah, my ex-boyfriend, hadn't rejected me by running away, I wouldn't have to deal with this situation. But the poor guy took off like a shot after seeing my wolf with two horns.

"But why did you lie to him about being married and having kids?" Lara's voice was gentle, but there was a hint of amusement in her tone.

"I... I don't know, Lara," I admitted, feeling tears welling up in my eyes. "I panicked. He kissed me unexpectedly, and I didn't know what to do."

Lara reached out to me, wrapping me in another comforting hug. "It's okay, Aphrodite," she said soothingly. "But if you don't want to be with him, then we need to find someone else for him and forget the fact that you are his mate. We still have a job to do, and we need Noah's help with the lawsuit."

I couldn't be with Asher, not with the secret I was hiding. But maybe, just maybe, I could help him find someone else. Any woman would be lucky to spend the rest of her life waking up to such a handsome man sleeping beside her.

I clenched my fist angrily at the thought, but I couldn't dwell on my jealousy as Lara pulled away from me and reached for her laptop, quickly pulling up a list of potential matches.

"Last night I had been going through some lists of women who might meet his standards," she said, scrolling through the names. "And I think I found someone who might be perfect for him."

"I was the only one perfect for him, and that's why I was his mate," I wanted to say, but I bit my lip harder, refraining from speaking.

She clicked on a name, and a picture of a beautiful woman appeared on the screen. She had long, wavy hair and striking blue eyes. There was a confidence in her gaze that drew me in, and jealousy seemed to consume me. But I had no right to be jealous.

"This is Sophia," Luna said, her voice filled with excitement. "She's the daughter of a powerful alpha, and I think she'd be perfect for Asher."

I looked at the picture of Sophia, feeling a sense of hope rising within me. Maybe this was the solution we had been looking for—a way to help Asher find happiness without putting myself in danger.

"Okay, let's do it." I muttered. "Let's help Asher find his mate."

As Luna and I were discussing potential matches for Asher, my phone suddenly rang, jolting me out of our conversation. I glanced at the caller ID and saw that it was my landlord.

"Hello?" I said, answering the phone.

"Aphrodite, it's your landlord," came the gruff voice on the other end of the line.

"I've sold your office building to someone else, and they want to use it immediately. You need to come get all your belongings before they throw them out onto the street."

My heart sank as his words sank in. I had poured my heart and soul into that office, and now it was being taken away from me.

"I understand," I said quietly, trying to keep the disappointment out of my voice. "I'll be there as soon as I can." I hung up the phone and turned to Lara, my eyes filled with tears.

"Lara, we have to go," I said, my voice trembling as I hastily put on my clothes.

"Our office building has been sold, and we need to get all our belongings before they throw them out onto the street." Lara's eyes widened in shock, and she jumped to her feet, ready to spring into action.

"F\*\*k, I can't believe that backstabbing old man. I had a cup of coffee with him this morning, and he never mentioned this. What changed suddenly?" She asked, grabbing her keys and heading for the door.

"We don't have much time."

As we rushed out of the apartment and into the car, I fought back the tears that threatened to spill. Everything kept falling apart, and I didn't know how to stop it.

Racing towards my office building, I knew that I had to try and get myself together, if not for me, at least for the sake of Lara. I couldn't let everything I had worked for slip through my fingers without a fight.

As soon as we arrived at my office building, my heart sank at the sight that greeted us. My landlord, along with a group of men, were hauling my belongings out onto the street.

"What is going on here?" I demanded, glaring at the man with grey hairs. The landlord turned to me, a sneer on his face as he adjusted his washed-out glasses between his eyes.

"I told you, Aphrodite. The building has been sold, and the new owner wants to use it immediately. You need to get your stuff and get out."

"But you can't do this!" I protested, panic rising in my chest. "You didn't even give me any notice!" The landlord shrugged, clearly unconcerned.

Greedy bastard.

"The owner was impatient. He wanted the building cleared out as soon as possible."

"Who is the owner? Can I at least talk to him?" I demanded desperately, trying to keep my emotions in check and stop myself from punching my landlord in the face.

The landlord pointed to a tall figure leaning by a window, observing the sky. Hearing my cries, the man turned around, and my heart stopped dead in my chest as I blinked rapidly to make sure that I wasn't seeing double. It was Asher, with a cigar between his lips, staring at me with cold eyes.

I felt as though the ground had dropped out from beneath me, and I struggled to keep my composure. How could this be happening? How could the man who was supposed to be my mate be the one responsible for taking away everything I had worked so hard for?

I couldn't contain my anger and betrayal, tears streaming down my face.

"How could you do this to me, Asher?" I cried, my voice breaking, watching him take one last puff of his cigar before tossing it into the bin.

"Don't take it to heart, little mate. It's just business." He said, his tone cold and indifferent.