

2.1 Contradictions

Chapter 81 - He Stole My Heart, I Stole His Child

Thyra POV

It's been years. Decades in the human realm, since I've gone back to check on the livelihood of Joseph's family. I haven't needed to check on them for any reason. Lucy survived, and Katherine, Joseph's daughter, was changed into a vampire by the Northern vampiric lord.

There was no reason to continue checking on them. They were the end of the celestial line....

That was what I thought, but it appears that the vampiric lord wasn't as forthcoming as he should have been. I didn't directly ask if Katherine had any children, but I thought that was an obvious thing to disclose.

I guess that is what I get for being over eager about returning to the fae realm. My exile for dishonoring my brother had finally been lifted, so when I thought that the last of the goddess's line had been saved, and I got the vampire's word that he would not be having any more children, I returned home.

My brother still will not permit me to go back to the courts, or his castle grounds, no matter how much I begged and pleaded. I didn't want to return for any other reason than to be reunited with what was taken from me, and the reason for my exile in the first place, but that was the precise reason he didn't want my return. He had already claimed what was mine as his, leaving no place for me. It had now been almost 3 years in Alfheimr, the fae realm, but on Earth, nearly 30 years had gone by. So I was living as a commoner in a small village when I felt the continual urge to return to Earth.

I was exiled for 20 years, the whole time wishing I could go home. Now that I was home, I felt a pull to go back. Like I was missing a fundamental part of my soul. Plus, my exclusive time in the human world changed me more than I had thought. I don't exactly fit in with the fae races as I did before, and the friends I once held dear knew of my exile and shunned me upon my return. I thought that was the reason I felt like I needed to return to Earth, so I planned on going back to fulfill my promise to my good friend, Joseph, and check in on his family.

Visiting Lucy's home, I told myself I was only going to check on her welfare, but when I found her house deserted, and discovered the deed was under a new name, I had to find out what happened to her.

It was strange. The new owner's mailing address was the same as the forwarding address for Lucy. When I went to investigate, I found her and Katherine living together in a werewolf pack, and learned that Katherine had given birth to a human child before being turned into a vampire.

I saw the child Lucy was raising before I left for Alfheimr, but with the adoption papers filed in the city court system, I thought the child was adopted from the human foster system. I didn't know she was Katherine's daughter. Lucy was always the motherly type, and I merely thought she was sharing her home with a pitiful child now that Katherine was out of her house. I didn't know she had adopted and raised her own granddaughter.

Again, I blame the vampire. He should have told me. He knew. He was there when the curses were laid upon the races.

Original vampires, having traded their humanity for eternal life, were cursed with needing living blood to maintain their undead lives. They would need to take fresh blood from their former brethren as payment for immortality.

Fae, being the original ones to tear the veil between worlds, giving not just us, but also deities and demons access to Earth, were cursed with shortened lives. The more time we spend in the human world, the shorter our lives become. A lifetime on Earth is about 10 lifetimes when we stay in our own realm. Before we tore the veil, we didn't die. We had eternal life and were life gods ourselves. Our own inferiority is what led to our demise.

Werewolves' history was a sensitive topic for many centuries. Because of our impact on Earth by tearing the veil, demons and other monsters were able to cross over into the human world. The werewolf race was not started out of selfish ambitions, like the vampire races, and many of the demonic and fairy hybrid races.

Werewolves were created to protect and survive. Rieka did what she did, made the deal with the deity, to save her small nomadic village from the monsters that plagued them in the wilderness. She tried to save her people, and took all of the curse upon herself to do so.

Her daughter, then her daughter's daughter, all the way to Lucy's daughter were the result of that curse. Their lives were all doomed to be cut short long before their time to make up for Rieka's cursed eternal life managing her creation.

To her credit, she utilized the curse to create shifters and werewolf villages all around the globe to help combat the growing demonic threat, eventually eradicating the demonic invasions, but even after that was complete, and there was no more threat to humanity, she and her lineage were still burdened with the curse. She was cursed of managing her creations for all eternity all alone in her own realm created for her by the gods who handed down the curses, and her daughter, her daughter's daughter, all the way down to Lucy were cursed with the opposite, soon facing death after finding their own partners.

Not only did Katherine have a daughter, her daughter was mated to a wolf. Not just any wolf, but the Alpha of Rieka's original pack, her first creation.

I peeked into the house that was designated as the alpha's house, and that was when I saw pictures of children, and I knew I had failed my friend. I knew that in my selfish desire to return home and not fully investigating the facts around Katherine and Lucy that I had let Joseph down.

The daughter of Katherine appeared to be fine for now, though I fear for her now that she has had a daughter herself. It is a blessing that her first child appeared to be a son, or the curse may have already started to take effect. After catching her in the packhouse with her mate, fornicating no less, I went to observe the children. The great-grandson of Joseph, who was a humble yet powerful witch, also being the son of an alpha, would be quite powerful one day. It was more curiosity than anything else that drew me to the children, but that was when I saw him. The most...alluring man. His bulging muscles and rugged appearance were in such contrast to the gentle and tender way he handled the children calling him grandpa.

That wasn't the end of it either. His eyes. Those beautiful and icy blue eyes called to me, and I felt an energy or maybe it was a spell like I had never felt before. He was the perfect man, but if those kids were calling him grandpa, that meant he likely had a mate already.

Werewolves are extremely loyal and faithful. I didn't have a chance.

That shouldn't be my focus anyway, but it irked me none-the-less. Instinctively, I felt like that man was mine. I can't explain it, but I was suddenly furious at the thought that he could belong to another....

Until I heard the wolves. That snapped me back to reality really quickly.

I had no reason to run, but I did. I teleported my way back to my rented car on the outskirts of the pack, confused by the strange spell I was just under while staring at the man.

~~~~~

4 Months Later

"Lord Antonio," I sneered as I finally worked up the nerve to enter his coven's territory. It feels like it's only been a few years since I last saw him, though it will be decades for him.

I went back to my realm for only a few days to retrieve what I had left of Joseph's research and the spells we cast to take the burden of the curse onto him. That was when a guard from the Southern Fairy Kingdom of Queen Aisling showed up at my cottage with a message that Lord Antonio had been looking for me.

I came back immediately, but a great amount of time still passed in the human world.

"Princess Thyra," he drawled in his familiar accent. All ancient and original vampires have the same way of purring their words in their fading ancient accents when they are trying to sound imposing. He sounds like a snake to me.

“Seems you have some explaining to do,” I muttered.

The bastard has the nerve to smirk. I hate this man’s smug attitude. He was very dismissive of me after he had changed Katherine to prevent the curse from taking her.

Katherine’s drug and substance abuse would have killed her. I saw the effects of the curse already taking hold on her before she was changed. I knew turning her into a vampire was essentially killing her, fulfilling the curse, but I should have known back then that she had a child since the curse was already affecting her so strongly.

Alyssa was a rare occasion of not having a daughter before the curse destroyed her. Lucy and Alyssa’s mother died during childbirth with Alyssa, and then Lucy had Katherine shortly after Alyssa was born. I was always curious as to why Alyssa died without having a daughter first. She left home and died in the same pack that her great-niece is the luna of now. There has to be a connection to that pack, the original pack, and the moon goddess’s distant daughters being mated in it.

I was told that the daughters of the moon goddess could not be influenced by supernatural forces to impede the curse. That was why Katherine did not inherit her father’s witch abilities. Seeing that young boy, though, I felt that same strong, familiar magic in him as I did Joseph, even at a distance.

There is so much I need to research, and I don’t have time to play games with a damned vampire with a god complex. I need to find out what the connection is between that pack and the moon goddess. Why does she keep pairing her daughters with men from that pack?

“I have been looking for you for quite some time, Princess,” he purred.

I grimaced at him. He surely knows I no longer hold that title. It was stripped from me by my brother when I....did what I did. I have no regrets, but I don’t like to hear the title any longer. It’s painful.

“Are you mocking me?” I huff, “You can’t be that ignorant.”

“I apologize if I offended you. I’m afraid I was that ignorant, which is why it took so long for me to find you. I kept sending word for Princess Thyra, not knowing there was no longer a woman that went by that name in your realm. It wasn’t until an....acquaintance reached out to the Southern Queen as a favor that I learned of what happened. Would you be more comfortable with me addressing you as Dame Thyra?”

I huff and roll my eyes. “Thyra. You can call me Thyra and I’ll call you Fang Fucker. Okay?”

His jaw ticks at the mild insult, but he knows better than to say anything. He asked me to come here, not the other way around. I may be a disgraced Fae Royal, but I’m still a royal by birth.

“Fine. Thyra. I need your help.”

I scoff, “Yeah. Okay. Why would I help you when you lied to me back then? You knew your partner had a child. Why would you not disclose that as I was helping you to keep her? Why would I help you with anything again?”

“Because it has to do with Katherine’s daughter,” he said solemnly. “I suppose you already found out about Bailey, but so did Katherine. I lost her because of my dishonesty, and I’m trying to make it right.”

“So you don’t want me to help Katherine’s daughter for any other reason than so you can selfishly reclaim your lover?” I scoffed, turning to leave. “No thanks. I will visit Katherine and Bailey myself, since you already revealed that Katherine is aware of everything. Does that mean Bailey is as well?”

He grimaces, then, after a few seconds, nods.

Good to know. There should be no reason I cannot simply visit the pack myself then. I would rather work with the wolves directly than work with this jerk.

I think that, then those piercing blue eyes and heated gaze fill my mind with the memory of that impressive man. Maybe working with the pack directly won’t work. If he has a mate.....

No. It doesn’t matter, Thyra. Snap out of it. He had markings on his neck. I saw it myself and know what that means. There is no reason to be having those thoughts or.....those cravings for a mated wolf.

Will I be able to work with them like this, though? And I did run away very suspiciously when I was discovered. Maybe it isn’t such a good idea to go waltzing into the werewolf pack and start talking about curses and other realms.

I stop walking at the doors just before I leave Antonio’s great hall. My shoulders sag and I sigh deeply.

“Okay, Fang Fucker. But you won’t lie to me again. You are to be forthcoming with everything this time, and if you leave anything out, I’ll be telling Katherine all about our first few encounters and the things I witnessed you partaking in. Understand?” I turned and gave him a hard look.

He grimaces, recalling those same memories from centuries prior in human time, when he was wild in all aspects of life, before having a daughter, as a result of his endeavors, tamed him down. I was a bit wild myself in my younger years, which led to my banishment in the first place. Never with him, but we crossed paths many times.

“I more than understand, Thyra. I want only the happiness of my love and her family.”

“Good,” I mutter. We want the same.

I can't help my thoughts going back to that man, though, and his intensity. I wonder what it is that makes that kind of rough but tender man happy? He was such a contradiction and I can't help myself but to wish I could one day figure him out.

Not your place, Thyra. Focus on not letting your first decent friend in this world down. You made a promise to Joseph. Thinking about a mated wolf is only asking for more trouble, Thyra. You've had enough trouble for a lifetime. You don't need more.

....No matter how much trouble those rough and tender hands and hypnotic blue eyes could be worth it all.

## 2.2 Sickness

# Chapter 82 - He Stole My Heart, I Stole His Child

Max POV

"No sign of her?" I asked Nate, both of us just getting back from runs deep in our territory, into the wilderness.

"No, but I did find something interesting," he muses, scratching his chin, standing butt-ass naked still as I'm slipping back on my underwear.

"What?" My excitement rose, thinking he finally caught a scent of her. The beautiful mystery fairy woman from all those months ago.

We found her scent in random places all over the pack, mostly in places Bailey and the kids frequent, which raised all of our alarms, especially Axel's. It wasn't until Katherine visited me and hesitantly suggested that she might be the fairy woman we had spent years looking for that our worry turned into hope.

We've been sending out search parties in hopes of finding her again, but haven't discovered anything new yet.

Well, unless Nate found something...

"What did you find?" I asked again.

He shrugs, a smug look on his face.

“What the hell did you find, you infuriating motherfucker!?”

“Wow, such a potty mouth,” he snickers.

“Put your damn pants on and just fucking tell me. Did you find her scent?” My former gamma is one more smartass statement from getting punched in his shaggy nutsack.

“Does my nudeness offend you?”

“Everything about you offends me, cunt-face motherfucker,” I growled. “Talk.”

“Hold on,” he bends down slowly, making a show of waving his hairy ass in my direction. “I don’t want to offend you too fucking much. Let me just-”

I plant my foot against his ass-cheek, hard enough to knock the asshole on his face, making him scream like a bitch. “You better get your mouth out of the dirt and kiss my sister goodbye, because your about to get yourself a year-long trip to the fucking mining plots in Alaska if you keep this shit up.”

Nate spits the mud and dirt out of his mouth, wiping it off his face while cursing under his breath. “So fucking touchy. Geez. you would think this fairy chick owed you money with how hard you’re looking for her. Even Axel isn’t as worked up about her as you.”

I turn around while he proceeds to get dressed, not because I’m trying to give him his privacy, but because I don’t want the asshole to see me blushing like Taegan during the she-wolf training classes at the mention of how desperate I am to find this woman.

I don’t know what it is about her, but I need to find her. I haven’t been able to get her out of my fucking head since I saw her all those months ago, and I want to know what kind of spell she cast on me.

She can’t be my mate. That ship has sailed. But the feeling I got from her was the same feeling that came over me the first time I saw Alyssa. I have already met my fated mate. That woman is not her, but the beast in me is restless to find her.

Shit, I need to focus on something else for a bit. I need my Aly girl. This cunt needs to hurry up and talk so I can get my cuddles in.

“So, as I was saying before you so rudely planted your foot in my ass, I caught a scent out there by the bluff with the small waterfall. Peaked my interest so I checked it out,” Nate finally starts talking.

“What was it? What did you find?” There are caves all around there. Maybe she is hiding out in one of them since we couldn’t find any trace of her in town.

“It was like you described. Earthy, grimy, but sweet in a way. Made my heart flutter for a second.”

“Grimy?” I wouldn’t describe her scent as grimy. Maybe she hasn’t showered or bathed since she is surviving in the wilderness. The water is probably too cold now that it's fall.

“Yeah. Filthy nasty. Like, I wanted to puke, but couldn’t look away because it was so fucking intriguing. It was sweet, but in a nasty, filthy, gross way.”

“What the fuck are you talking about?” I growled, not in the mood for his riddles.

“It's moose mating season. They were going at it like, well, me with your sister- OUCH! Hey, I’m just kidding!” he hides his face as I knock him in the back of the head, then land my fist in his stomach.

Douchebag. I should have known he was going to say some shit like that. “Back to the mining plot for you. Only you won’t be kissing my damn sister goodbye. Ass.”

“Ah, I was just playing,” he snorts, walking ahead of me as we neared the packhouse. “I fuck your sister way better than-”

He doesn’t finish his sentence as he takes off running, squealing like a bitch after a fierce growl leaves me. He’s fucking dead this time. I’m tired of hearing about him fucking Fiona. My sweet, kind sister would be better off without a crude prick like him.

I should have kept him out at the mining plot for the entire season, but with the search for the fairy woman, and then Courtney getting herself pregnant again, I had to bring him back home. She’s due next month and her dad and mate become sops whenever she is this far along.

Can’t fault them for that. I got pretty damn protective of my daughter-in-law when she was pregnant too. Hell, I’m protective of that girl all the damn time. She's a great gift to not just my son, but this entire pack. Her level-headed thinking and humble personality is exactly what we all needed after....after our last luna.

Shit, I need some Aly cuddles.

I send one more empty threat to Nate, who is racing in the direction of his house, laughing like a fool, then I start striding towards my son’s house.

Before I’m even to the porch steps, Aly manages to open the front door, her little arm extended as far as it can go to reach the doorknob, and a huge grin on her face.

“Gi-paw!” she runs to me, leaping off the top step with total faith that I’ll catch her. I’ll always catch her. She knows that. I twirl her around while she squeals, both of us laughing when Taegan comes running out, sighing in exasperation.



“Aly, you can’t open the front door by yourself! Mommy said no,” he puts his hands on his hips, trying to look tough.

Aly pouts, turning her face away from him with a huff, and his face falls like he’s worried his sister is mad at him. Poor kid. I’d be heartbroken too if my Aly girl gave me the cold shoulder like that.

“Aly, baby. Your brother is right. I’m happy you came out to see me, but wait for me inside next time. You have to listen to your mama and big brother.”

“TayTay mean,” she huffs, nuzzling her face into my chest, and my heart swells.

Taegan sighs, then turns to walk inside, looking defeated.

“Aly, you hurt your brother’s feelings. He just wants you to be safe and not get in trouble.”

Aly’s bottom lip juts out, and her eyes get big and glossy. I’m defeated. I’ll let her parents, well, her mom, correct her behavior. Axel is just as wrapped around her finger as me and her brother. We are all putty in her hands. Bailey is the only one with enough backbone to get onto her for anything.

Speaking of Bailey....

“Hey, munchkin. Where’s your mama?” It’s very unlike Bailey to leave the kids unattended like this. She would usually be the one to run out after Aly and tell her to wait inside.

“Bed-bye,” Aly says.

“Beddie-bye? She’s in bed?”

Aly nods. That’s weird. It’s early afternoon.

“Taegan?” I called out to him as I was walking in the house. He’s at the sink, filling up Bailey’s favorite tumbler with water.

“Yeah, Grandpa?”

“Your mom’s in bed?”

Taegan makes a face, and alarm bells start ringing in my head.

“Yeah.”

“Where’s your dad?”

“Daddy wurk-ing,” Aly exaggerates the word ‘working’ so she can say it right.

I set Aly on the ground in the living room with her dolls, then walked over to Taegan, who had Bailey's water and a couple of tylenol in his hand. "Watch your sister for me, squirt. I'll go take this back to your mama."

"But mommy said for me to do it. She said-" he bites his lip, like he almost said something he wasn't supposed to.

Okay, something is definitely going on. "Axel. Where are you?"

"At the lumber mill. Why?" The alarm in my voice must be noticeable, because he answered back in a worried tone.

"When are you heading home?"

"Soon. Why? What's going on? You sound like something is wrong."

I sighed, taking the pills and water from Taegan. When he tries to protest, I give him a look that makes him stop, then nod towards his sister. He grunts, but listens, walking over to Aly who is playing with baby dolls.

"Bailey is taking a nap, and the kids are watching themselves. I'm going to check on her now, but you should start back home now."

"On my way." He cuts off the mind link. He's close enough to mindlink, but still a good 45 minutes away if he speeds, which I'm sure he will.

This is very unlike Bailey. Something is up.

Walking back to their bedroom, my speed picks up when the smell of vomit hits me. She's sick. That's for sure. I wasn't prepared for how sick she was, though, as I walked into her darkened room.

Her face is ash-white, and the vomit is dripping all down her chin, onto the sheets and bed. I rushed over to her, checking her pulse, instantly thinking the worse.

She has a pulse, but her skin is burning up. I set the water on the nightstand and rushed into their bathroom, got a towel to clean her face, then lifted her in my arms to take her to the clinic.

"Taegan. Grab your sister and go straight to your cousin's house. I'm taking your mom to the clinic."

"But, mommy said not to tell anyone she was sick," Taegan whispered, staring wide-eyed at his mother who was passed out in my arms. "Is...is she okay, grandpa?"

"I don't know," I responded as we both rushed out of the house, him with Aly in his arms, me with his mother. "When did she start feeling sick, Taegan?"

He makes a face. “A couple weeks.”

“A couple of weeks!? She didn’t tell anyone?!”

“She said not to. She didn’t want daddy to worry.”

“Shit,” I cursed, picking up my speed. “Straight to Courtney’s house, Taegan. I’ll come get you later.”

“Son. Head to the clinic,” I mind linked my son.

“Why? Dad, you’re scaring me. Is she not okay? I can’t mind link her or get her to answer her phone.”

I stared down at Bailey, looking like death in my arms. “I don’t know what’s wrong, Axel. She was passed out and covered in her own puke.”

“Fuck,” he sneers, and I can feel his anxiety. I keep the link open until I get to the clinic, letting him know we are there and I’ll be with her until he gets his ass here.

Bailey. What the hell is wrong with you? And why would you not tell anyone you were sick?

The nurses, seeing their Luna being carried into the clinic, rush to get her on a gurney and two doctors start working on her right away. I’m pushed to the back of the room as she is stripped, cleaned, and put into a gown. They get her on an IV, take samples of her blood, and do all sorts of other shit while I just stare at her, praying she’s okay.

“Alpha, she’s stable, but we need her mate. We can’t do some of the testing or transfer her without consent because of the baby.”

“The baby?” I asked in bewilderment. Aly should be at my niece’s house right now. What does she have to do with testing on Bailey?

“The Luna is pregnant, Alpha. I told her before, CT scans are risky while pregnant, and we do not have an MRI machine here. I tried to refer her to a hospital close by, but she refused. With her suffering this severely now, I think the Luna needs one or the other immediately.”

“No,” Bailey mumbles, her eyes fluttering awake. “I won’t hurt the baby. I’m fine. It’s just morning sickness.”

“But, your white blood-cell-” the doctor starts, but Bailey cuts him off.

“NO! I’m fine,” she tries to push herself up in bed, her elbows buckling. I pushed past the doctor and nurses, helping her up into a sitting position in bed.

“Bailey,” I whispered softly. “You’re pregnant? Why didn’t you tell anyone? Does Axel not know?”

She presses her lips together, then slowly shakes her head. “I’m fine. I just had to get past the morning sickness, then I was going to tell him. I don’t want him to worry.”

“This is more than morning sickness, Bailey. This is-”

“I know,” she murmurs, knowing I’m about to say the curse, “I won’t let my mate sacrifice himself for me, and I’m not giving up this baby, Max.”

## 2.3 Intentions

# Chapter 83 - He Stole My Heart, I Stole His Child

### Bailey POV

I messed up. I was planning, hoping, that I could hide this pregnancy until the second trimester, knowing that with my other symptoms my overprotective husband and father-in-law would run themselves ragged trying to save me, or even convince me to terminate the pregnancy.

Axel suspected, but when I came back from the doctor and shrugged off his concern, he let it go. With the businesses being in their busiest seasons, and Max searching so adamantly for the fairy woman he saw by the chicken coop all those months ago with the theory that she was the Thyra woman we had been looking for, I’ve been spending more time on my own with the kids. Axel is usually at the lumber mill or visiting the plots for logging and mining, spending all day away, and even taking overnight trips for work more frequently.

Max stays with me and the kids when Axel is gone, but he is so wrapped up in the fairy encounter that, luckily, he hasn’t noticed anything off with me yet. Well, until now. I thought he would be gone until late again.

My sickness had never been this bad. I really just thought it was intense morning sickness and cramping at first, as well as migraines. The doctors wanted to do all these procedures to find out the source of the pain, but deep down I knew. I knew that it was that damned curse that had been hanging over our heads for the past few years. I knew that all the tests would be useless, and would only harm the child growing inside me.

Plus, it would ruin the peace my family was currently living in. Axel was thriving as a strong alpha. As a result, the pack was thriving. My kids were happy. Well, except when I would get

struck with a migraine or stomach pains. Taegan would worry about me, but the pain never lasted for more than half an hour. I never passed out or got that sick. It seems the further along in this pregnancy I am, the sicker I get.

I won't terminate the pregnancy, though. If the curse is going to get me, it won't matter if I'm pregnant or not, but deep down, I feel like this won't be the end of me. I won't let it be the end for anyone else either.

"Bailey, how could you? How could you keep this from us? You know how fucking messed up it is to tell Taegan not to let us know you were getting like that?"

I rest my hand on my father-in-law's cheek. "The way you are acting right now is why I didn't want you guys to know. If it's going to happen, I want you guys to stay happy as long as possible, and I'm not getting rid of the baby."

He gives me that stern, disapproving look that makes everyone else submit to him. I just chuckle lightly, scratching my fingers in his beard.

"Even if you look at me like that."

"Bailey," he sighs heavily, gripping my hand in his. "Axel's going to flip the fuck out. You know that, right?"

I laugh, then wince when laughing causes my head to throb again. Seeing me wince, Max hops up and starts fretting with his hands, wondering about me, like he is searching for some way to make me more comfortable, then yells at a nurse to bring me some damn tylenol.

I'm about to tell him to be nice, but before I can, Axel comes running into the clinic, his yelling echoing out in the halls, demanding to know where I am. When he frantically comes running to the bed I'm in, his eyes wide in surprise and panting like crazy, trying to catch his breath, I'm tempted to hide behind his father, feeling his anger in the bond.

Seeing me, lying weakly in bed, probably still looking like a mess and reeking of my own puke, his anger dissipates, quickly replaced with anxiety.

"What's wrong? What happened?" he asks, coming to the side of my bed.

The nurse Max barked at earlier comes back in with Tylenol and the doctor trailing behind. She hands the water and Tylenol to Max, who helps me to sit up and take it while Axel is still waiting for an answer.

"I could give you something stronger, but you already refused all prescriptions for narcotics because of the pregnancy," the doctor states. Axel's wide eyes get even wider, and he takes a step back as what the doctor just said sinks in.

I want to slap the doctor. I ordered him to not let the news of my sickness or pregnancy leave the hospital, and now that Axel and Max are here with me, I can tell he's taking advantage of the loophole in the order. He's been worried about me as well, but I've been stubbornly refusing everything he suggested, knowing it would be fruitless in the end. Only breaking the curse will cure me, and I'm not willing to break the curse at the expense of my family or my mate.

"You're pregnant?" Axel asks breathlessly.

"Maybe," I lifted Max's hand, hiding my face behind it. He huffed in amusement at me using him to hide my transgression from his son.

"Bailey. Come on," Max rumbles deeply. "How can you face off with me about this, but not your own mate?"

Max won't spank me. Axel will, then I'll be tied up in bed and not allowed to do anything but rest and recover.

Axel must sense my thoughts, because he groans, then kneels beside the bed, gripping my chin and forcing me to look at him. "Baby, why didn't you tell me?"

The pain in his eyes makes a silent whimper leave my lips. I can feel it. Feel his pain from my dishonesty.

"She's not just pregnant, son. Tell him, Bailey," Max says firmly but still tenderly grips my hand.

"Tell me what?"

I cringe back in the bed, then look at Max, pleading with him to help me explain, even though I have no right to.

"She's sick. Not just from the pregnancy," he says, his face softening while staring at me with solemn eyes.

"Sick? Sick with what? What's wrong?"

"That's what I'm trying to find out, but she won't consent to any testing," the doctor interrupted again. I'm going to send Taegan to him with a spoon in both hands if he doesn't stop running his mouth. "I think she may be having an issue with the pregnancy, and we may need to eliminate it, but she won't allow me to confirm or check her beyond an ultrasound and blood testing."

"It's not the baby," I sneered at him, giving him the meanest look I could. He doesn't look intimidated at all. Not until Axel and Max both growl at the doctor after throwing me a smug expression.

“I’m sorry, Luna. But I’ve been forced to stay quiet for too long. I don’t want to lose my Luna when there could be an easy fix.”

My heart softens for the doctor then. I have been putting him through the ringer to hide my pregnancy and symptoms. I even ordered him not to tell Courtney while she worked. Luckily, she’s been on maternity leave since last week, or she would have caught on. I should cut the guy some slack, though I am going to keep the threat of sending him Taegan and his spoons in the back of my mind just in case.

“It’s not the baby, doctor. I know it’s not, right?” I looked to Max for confirmation. He grunts deeply but nods, and Axel is rubbing a hand down his face, looking extremely tired all of a sudden.

“It’s not the baby,” Axel confirms too. “It’s the damn curse shit, isn’t it?”

I bit my lip nervously, then nodded. “I think so.”

“Why didn’t you tell me you were getting sick? I thought something was up, but you told me it was nothing. Just tummy issues.”

I look down at my hands, one gripping Axel’s hand, the other in Max’s still. “I don’t want you to try and sacrifice yourself for me. I don’t want you to try and do what my grandfather did.”

He makes a grim face. “You can’t decide that, Bailey. I am not going to just sit back and watch you die. You can’t stop me.”

“No, but I can,” Max roughly whispers. “If it comes down to that, Axel, I’m the one who will make the sacrifice for her. I won’t let my grandbabies grow up without both their parents, and I won’t let my pack lose their alpha or luna. If it comes down to it, I’ll be the one to make the sacrifice.”

I gasped, my heart wrenching in my chest. Shock fills the room, slowly being replaced with terror at the realization of what he just said sets in.

“Max....No. I won’t let you,” I whispered brokenly.

“You should just focus on growing my next grandbaby and resting for now,” he smiles reassuringly and kisses my head. “Axel and I are going to work on finding another way, so don’t worry. I need to go check on my grandkids,” he looked up to Axel. “Get her checked in and I’ll be back with the kids in a bit.”

Their eyes glaze over, and I groan, wanting to know what they’re saying.

Max chuckles, squeezing my hand one more time before leaving.

~~~~~

Max POV

Shit. Shit, shit, shit.

"Don't let her leave, Axel. She looked dead when I found her. Stay firm and make her stay here and rest. I'll find that fairy and figure this out." That's what I told my son confidently before leaving, but I feel anything but confident now.

Walking past a tree, I punch its center, cursing the moon goddess for putting this burden on my family and my sweet daughter-in-law. She is the daughter I always wanted, and now she might be on the verge of death.

Just like Alyssa.

I don't want my son to go through what I did, and I sure as hell don't want my grandbabies to lose their mother.

I would gladly lay my life down for Bailey. There is no question about it. But, we still don't know how to do that to where it will save Bailey. I don't know how to sacrifice myself without this Thyra woman who helped Lucy's husband to save her.

The tree falls with an echoing crack and thud as I punch it a second time, then I continue on in my emotional tantrum on the way to my niece's house.

"FUUUUCCCC!" I screamed, pulling on my hair, stomping the decaying earth beneath my feet. Not Bailey. Not now. This pregnancy is what is going to do her in. I know it, and she obviously knew it too. That's why she refused to tell us.

I have myself more pulled together by the time I reach Courtney's. Courtney lets me in, then waddles back to the couch to read a book. Aly is in her living room, napping on the floor next to Conner, looking like they passed out while watching a movie. Taegan is in the dining room with Calum and Casey, all of them with a tangled strand of Christmas lights in their hands.

"Grandpa!" Taegan pops out of his chair and runs for me, wrapping his arms around my thighs. "Is mommy okay?"

I fight hard to keep the grim expression off my face. "Yeah. She's fine. She has to stay at the clinic for a few days, though, so you and your sister are going to stay with me."

"Everything okay, Alpha?" Casey asks. "Taegan looked like a fucking wreck when he showed up carrying his screaming sister. I'm glad I was the one to answer the door and not Court. I got them calmed down before Courtney woke up from her nap, or she would have waddled her pregnant ass to the clinic to check on Bailey herself."

"No," I sighed, ruffling Taegan's hair and trying to smile reassuringly at him. "The curse."

“Fuck,” Casey says, then groans out loud.

“What?” Taegan asks. Looking between us suspiciously, knowing we were mind linking.

“Nothing,” Casey sighs. “I just think we aren’t going to get these Christmas lights untangled. How about we throw them away and buy new ones?”

“No!” Courtney yells from the other room. “You try that every year. Untangle those lights. You were the one who shoved them in the box without rolling them back in the spool so they wouldn’t tangle. You could be the one to untangle them.”

“Ah, baby. I’ll get you twinkles while I’m out, though?....”

Courtney was silent for a few seconds. “And snowballs?”

Casey chuckles. “Sure. As many as they have.” Courtney is only ever unhealthy when eating when she is pregnant. It almost makes me laugh.

“Shit, I forgot about pregnancy craving. I should go get Bailey her cinnamon rice cakes and those gross mustard pretzel things,” I mutter, remembering how much she ate of both while pregnant with Aly.

“Wait, why would you need to get Bailey her craving snacks?” Casey asked.

Taegan made a face at me. “Mommy said not to tell, grandpa.”

“Well, the cat’s out of the bag now. Your dad knows,” I told him.

He breathes a sigh of relief. “Good. Daddy and you will fix it. I don’t like it when mommy is sick.”

“Bailey is sick?!” Courtney came waddling into the dining room.

“She’s pregnant,” I smirked at her, trying not to laugh at the excitement on her face from hearing that. This is how a pregnancy announcement should be. Full of excitement. Damn the moon goddess for this curse.

“Hey, Court, why don’t you call your parents or Quinn to come watch the babies with you while me and the Alpha run to the store for the snacks?”

“Yay! Snowballs and twinkies!” she cheers, waddling back into the living room for her phone.

“Seems like we got some shit to talk about,” he mind linked to me.

Yep. Seems we need to be more vigilant in our search for the fairy woman. We have a time limit now, and I would be damned if I let my daughter-in-law die now.

Little did I know, I wouldn't have to wait for long to find her....

2.4 Mine

Chapter 84 - He Stole My Heart, I Stole His Child

Taegan and Calum came with Casey and I to the store, and I went ahead and got easy shit for me to cook for the kids since I would be taking care of them for the time being. I know my son, and know his ass will be with Bailey as much as possible, as he fucking should.

I can't believe she was trying to shoulder all this alone. That girl. I know why she did it, but it still irritates the hell out of me. She's our fucking Luna and my fucking daughter. It infuriates me to think about her suffering on her own, and neither Axel or I noticed, since we were so busy with other shit.

"Grandpa?" Taegan asked from the backseat as I drove all of us back to the pack.

"Yeah, kid?"

"Could I help mommy feel better with my magic?"

Casey looks back at him and shakes his head, answering for me. "You don't have a way of storing that much energy yet, kid. Remember what Xiomora said? You have to be able to draw energy from somewhere to use a lot of magic, and you aren't ready to do that yet."

Taegan makes a face, "But, she told me I had to wait for my mate to get the most energy, and Rosie won't be 18 for a long time."

"Stupid. Rosie isn't your mate. That's weird," Calum makes a face at him.

"You're stupid, stupid. Why can't she be my mate?" Taegan growled at him.

"You're both my cousins. That's weird."

Casey snorts, "It is pretty fucking weird to think about. My cousin is mated with my other cousin. Like we're in Alabama or some shit. Roll tide that shit on out of your head already. Weirdo."

Roll tide? What the hell is this city kid talking about now? I swear, Casey speaks a different gawd damn language sometimes.

Taegan growls, baring his little canines that had just started to come in. “Your face is weird.”

“Ouch,” Casey places his hand over his heart. “Is that any way to talk to your best friend?”

“Grandpa’s my best friend,” Taegan snaps. “Or mommy. You’re my gamma’s annoying dad.”

Casey scoffs, “Rude much? I don’t know why you keep denying we’re best friends. It hurts my feelings.”

“I’m gonna hurt your face if you don’t quit running your mouth,” Taegan growls.

Casey gasps, then slowly turns his face to stare at me, “He got that mouth from you.” I’m barely containing my laughter.

“And you got your wiseass mouth from your father-in-law.”

“Yeah,” Taegan stuck his tongue out at him, and I chuckled, watching in the rear-view mirror.

Calum sighs deeply. “I’m hungry. Why don’t you have snacks in the car, Uncle Max?”

“Because I’m not a sugar fiend like your dad,” I smirked.

“Here,” Taegan hands him half of the pack of beef jerky I got him at the checkout. Calum smiles brightly and takes it, doing a little happy dance with his dangling feet.

Taegan looks out his window, and I know his thoughts are going back to his mom. It’s hard to think about anything else right now. The little guy was burdened with keeping his mom’s secret too for the last few weeks, and now that he can talk about it, she’s in the hospital.

Guilt grips my chest again. I should have noticed. I should have been around more. I was so focused on finding the fairy woman, I missed something so important.

My mind was always occupied with the memory of her deep blue eyes and her glowing skin. I would zone out at times, imagining what that skin would feel like on the back of my knuckles, or how her lips would taste.

What the fuck is wrong with me? It's like I'm a prepubescent teenage boy again, pining after some unreachable woman. I even shamefully fucking jerked off thinking about how her beautiful face would contort at the pleasure I could give her. I'm so fucking ashamed of myself.

My grandkids and daughter-in-law needed me, but I was wrapped up in some crazy fantasy, using the excuse of finding her for the purpose of the curse, missing the curse impacting Bailey completely.

It's like I can't help myself, though. The memory of her consumes me at times. She may not even be Thyra. I may just be fooling myself, so I have the excuse to find her again.

Shit. I need to focus. I need to think of Bailey, not some fantasy. I've had 2 mates. I won't let my son lose his.

“Grandpa. Is that the vampire jerk’s car over there?” Taegan asks as we near the packhouse.

Sure enough, Lord Antonio’s G-Wagon is parked right by the packhouse. He is the only one with cars that are stupidly expensive and useless around here. At least he stopped bringing his Aston Martin into the pack. That shit was over the top. He kept bringing the sports car as a gift to his daughter, but Addi didn’t want it. Her and Steph have motorcycles they ride together, and share a pack issued SUV. She said she didn’t want her father’s pity gifts.

“Since Alpha is busy, want me to come deal with him? You have your hands full too with the kids.”

I shook my head at Casey. “He’s probably just here to see Katherine. Rick’s at the packhouse, so if I need help, I’ll get him. Go give my niece her HoHos.”

“Snowballs,” Calum corrects me with a mouth full of beef jerky.

Aly was awake, and started crying the moment she saw me, not happy about waking up with her brother gone and she could come. She wanted to go with grandpa too. Fiona and Courtney were fawning over her, and even Conner was trying to console her by sharing every one of his toys, laying them in piles around her.

She runs into my arms, making me feel 20 feet tall as she cries that she just wants me. Goddess, I love my grandbabies.

With much convincing, I got her to let me go and get her buckled in her seat in my truck for the short drive back to their house. I’ll stay in their guest room for now. Plus, I still need to clean up the mess in Axel and Bailey’s room. I don’t want Axel to have to worry about it later.

I kiss my sister and Courtney bye, flip Casey off with a smirk, then ruffle Calum and Conner’s hair before driving back.

Taegan helps to unload the groceries as Aly waddles her way inside on her own, struggling to carry a bag of apples all by herself, insisting on helping grandpa too.

After I get all the groceries put away, I put cut up apples slices on a plate for Aly and go to strip my son’s bed to get it in the wash.

Stepping in their room, I almost fucking puked myself. I'm gripping my nose, fighting the urge not to gag. The smell is so fucking worse than before. Shit, maybe I’ll just burn these fucking sheets and buy them a new one. I’m tempted to burn the whole fucking mattress.

As I'm walking out of their bedroom, towards the laundry room, my arms full of puke-crusted linens, someone knocks on the front door. I struggled to talk while trying not to breathe in the smell of the sheets in my arms.

"Taegan, can you get that for me?" I looked at him. He was staring at the door with a funny look on his face. "Taegan?" I groaned.

"Grandpa, it smells weird."

I groaned again, on my last bit of saved oxygen. "It's the vomit. I'm trying to get it cleaned up now."

"It's not that. Its-"

"Taegan, I really need to get this shit out of my hands. Get the door?"

I don't wait for his response, needing to get this smelly shit away from me.

I hear the door open, and the voice of Katherine wafts in from the other room as I'm rinsing the vomit from the sheets in the wash bin sink before shoving them in the washer, taking a clean breath of air in the laundry room. My shirt is now coated with the vomit, so I strip it off too, throwing it in with the sheets before starting the washer. I quickly wash my chest off to get some of the smell off me. There's no towel to dry off with, so I have to go back out to the living room with a soaking wet chest.

Antonio might care that I'm bare chested and wet, but I don't. Katherine is living with her mother, who is watching the warriors strut around naked all day, cheering them on like it's a sport in the damn Olympics.

I bet Katherine heard about Bailey in the hospital and called Antonio to come help. She has been respecting Bailey's decision to give her space, but she has been researching the curse just as much as me and Axel have been over the past few years. She cares about her daughter. No one who has seen her and the way she stares longingly at Bailey and the kids when she sees them from afar could argue that.

"Sorry, guys. I had to clean up a mess in the-"

When I walk into the living room, that scent hits me again. The scent I've been longing to smell again. The earthy, but super sweet smell of ripe fruit overwhelms my senses and those mesmerizing deep blue eyes are all I can see.

It's her. The woman I've been searching for all this time.

A possessive, guttural growl leaves me, and before I can think rationally, I'm striding towards her, her eyes igniting something carnal inside me. A feeling I haven't felt in decades. It's

overwhelming. All-consuming. It's like gravity is pulling me in one direction. Towards her. And I have no desire to fight against it. No. I want her. She is mine.

"Mate," the word leaves my lips in a violent, possessive snarl. I pull her stunned body into my arms and she doesn't fight me. "Mine," I growl, before my lips violently come down on hers.

~~~~~

Thyra POV

He's kissing me. This sexy beast of a man, with his glistening muscular bare chest, icy blue eyes, and...smelly, sour scent, is holding me in his strong arms, passionately kissing me, making my knees go weak. I'm not even bothered by the smell. His natural, musky scent is bleeding through, and I love it.

His lips are as fierce as his appearance, but his hands gripping my waist and neck are as tender as can be. I'm lost in his touch, taste, and the weird shivering sensation that comes over my whole body pressed against his.

I'm lost in the spell of this rough man's passion until little fists start hitting my leg, making me break away from his lips.

"Dats my gi-paw! Not! Yew-ers!" A pretty little girl with silky blonde hair and the same blue eyes as this man glares up at me. "Mine! Mine!" She screeches, getting between us and pushing us apart.

It seems to take a great effort from the man to let go of me. Eventually, he does, but his eyes never leave mine, fierce and possessive.

"Gi-paw! Mine!" The little girl pulls on his pants, and with a shake of his head, he manages to bend down and pick the little girl up, but still stares at me.

"Well, this just got interesting," the ass of a vampire chuckles before getting slapped on the chest by Katherine. "I'm sorry, my love, but it is seemingly amusing. You have to admit."

He took a step forward, "This is the previous Alpha. Alpha Max Kissinger. Alpha," he rests his hand on my shoulder, "This is Thyra. The fairy woman we have been searching for. She's come to help save your daughter-in-law and granddaughter," he then chuckles again, "Aww, your moon goddess. Rieka has a sense of humor, indeed. I look forward to seeing you both working together," he snickers.

2.5 Mine

## Chapter 85 - He Stole My Heart, I Stole His Child

“Mine,” the little girl continued to glare at me. I would think it was adorable the way she was acting if it was directed at anyone other than me. I’m a victim. He kissed me. I didn’t mind it....but I wasn’t the one who approached him first.

“Shh. It’s okay, baby girl,” the sexy man, Max, whispers against her head. Those same lips that were so passionately kissing me are now tenderly pecking her temple, and she wraps her arms tightly around his neck. Possessive little squirt.

“My gi-paw,” she reiterated, and I almost wanted to roll my eyes.

Yes. I get it. He’s yours, not mine.

His deep chuckle vibrating his bare, bulky chest makes my mouth water and some of the irritation leaves me. He is very pleasing to look at. That is for sure.

When I saw him before with his grandchildren, I thought he was mated. I can see the mate mark on his neck. Now that I’m able to really examine it, though, I can see it is faded, and not as prominent as other mated wolves.

“I will always be your grandpa, sweetie. That will never change. I am her mate, though,” he tells her, his deep, husky voice making my body tighten in certain places involuntarily.

“Mate?” the little boy who is obviously his other grandchild asks, looking at me completely differently from his sister. He doesn’t seem to dislike me. He is eyeing me like I’m the prettiest person in this room, making me chuckle. He looks like his grandfather a bit. The same blue eyes and some of the same facial features. “I thought Harriet was your mate? You said we could only have one?”

See. He has a mate. I want to throw my hands up in defeat. Why was he kissing me if he already had another? My heart drops at the thought. It doesn’t feel right to think this man belongs to someone else.

Max is rocking the little girl in his arms, a soft glow in his aura seeping out into her, making her sleepy. He seemed to be struggling with how to answer his grandson, looking between me and him guiltily.

“One at a time, little one,” Antonio chuckles. “When your grandmother died, it opened up the possibility for another to be his mate. Thyra seems to be your grandfather’s second chance mate.

I've only heard one other instance where this occurred, and coincidentally, it was the very first alpha of this pack," he muses, rubbing his chin.

"Rieka's mate?" I couldn't help but ask. This was not a story I had heard before. Probably because the fae do not care much about werewolf history or concern themselves with how mate bonds work. I do know that Rieka's husband was the first alpha of this pack.

Antonio nods, "When she was taken from this world into the celestial realm, she gave him a new love so he wouldn't be alone. He was the first mate bond she matched, after breaking her bond with him. Before she matched him, fate bonds seemed to occur naturally, like they do in the wild, but there were many errors that occurred, so she had to take matters into her own hands and assign mate bonds after that."

"What kind of errors?" the little boy asked.

"Abuse. Neglect. All sorts of issues. Wolves would go feral when they are rejected, and there were many ill-fitted bonds. Bonds between animals with little individuality and bonds between humans who are all different at the core was an issue that occurred right at the beginning of werewolf kind. Rieka took it upon herself to fix the issue, and mated her own husband first, before anyone else."

"That is so sad," Katherine pouts, looking forlorn thinking about the story.

"It was incredibly selfless. She was a brave woman. As was her daughter. They took the brunt of everything on themselves. To ensure her former mate lived happily, and the pack and werewolf kind prospered, her daughter left the pack knowing the curse was coming for her one day. She was left human, and merely told her father she wished to continue to live as a human among normal people. That was the reason that the werewolf kind remained ignorant of the curse and the origins of their moon goddess's power. They took on the burden all on their own."

"Sounds a lot like Bailey now," Max grumbles. "I thought your ass showed up here because of the shit she pulled and her being in the hospital."

"Bailey is in the hospital?!" Katherine yells, her eyes going wide with worry. Even Antonio looks concerned.

"You didn't hear?" Max furrows his brows. Even his eyebrows looked strong. I have to control myself not to stare at his face, the urge to memorize the movement of every facial muscle compelling me to do the opposite. I don't think I have ever seen a more gorgeous man.

"What happened?" Antonio was the one to ask.

"Mommy was sick," the little boy tells them. "She has babies in her tummy."



“Babies?” Max stares at him. He has been staring at me for the most part, while holding his granddaughter tightly to his chest, but now his attention is fully on his grandson. “Taegan, why did you say babies? Do you know something I don’t?”

Taegan purses his lips, humming softly while deep in thought. “Mommy said not to tell, though,” he eventually says.

“Taegan,” Max says his name in a hard voice.

The little boy sags his shoulders, then plops down on the couch beside me. There is plenty of space, but he's as close to me as he can get without actually touching me.

“Mommy told the lady with the wand and the yucky wet stuff that goes on her belly not to say anything to the doctor or anyone else, though.”

“Taegan,” Max’s tone was sharp, “I’m not going to ask you again.”

“Okay,” Taegan sags against my shoulder. If the moment wasn’t so serious, it would be cute how suave the kid is. “Mommy had two hearts in her tummy.”

“Two?” Katherine gasps, bringing her hands to her mouth. “Bailey is having twins? Is that why she was in the hospital? Is it too much for her? The morning sickness? Does she need help with anything?”

Max’s face goes serious, staring at his grandson like he is calculating in his mind what the boy just said, like it's a problem to be worked out. He then turns those icy blue eyes to me, and I can feel his sorrow, like he is losing something or mourning a loss.

He runs a huge hand down his face, then looks at Katherine. “It’s the curse. She’s not doing well, and she tried to hide it from us so we wouldn’t see her suffer or suffer with her. She’s pregnant, but it’s killing her.”

It seems I came here just in time.

2.6 Second Chance

## Chapter 86 - He Stole My Heart, I Stole His Child

Axel POV

“She’s finally asleep?” Rick whispers to me, sitting in a chair outside of the room Bailey is staying in. I plop down on the chair beside him, taking a deep, tired breath.

Bailey had another episode of severe stomach cramps and nausea, and completely refused to take anything stronger than Tylenol for it. I was forced to lie beside her, trying to comfort her with my aura as much as possible, and when she finally fell asleep, I needed to come out and clear my head, and was thankful when Rick showed up and mind linked he was out here waiting for me. It hurt to see my mate like that and not be able to do anything to help. I don’t know how she endured it on her own for so long.

“I had to help her get to sleep. I wish she would take the damn pain meds the doctor keeps trying to give her.”

“Man, that’s got to be tough. For both of you. Did you talk her into doing the scan yet?”

I shook my head. “I had the staff order an MRI machine, but it will be two weeks before one can be delivered. I might have to find a hospital that will let our doctors use it for a few hours or something.”

“Do you think we could find a hospital with an extra and just buy it, bring it back to the pack and offer to upgrade them with our new one? I could make a few phone calls. Money talks, and the pack can afford to blow the extra dough, especially for our Luna.”

“If you could, that would be great,” I smiled half-heartedly at my Beta.

“You got it,” he leans back, resting his head on the wall. After a few minutes of silence, he asks, “Know how far along she is?”

I shook my head. “She didn’t want to do an ultrasound again, and the doctor couldn’t find the results from the last one in her charts. She said she thought she was 8 weeks along.”

Rick whistled under his breath. “She’s almost halfway there, then. You could probably find out the sex and everything.”

“I know,” I grumbled. That was part of the reason I was so irritated she wouldn’t do the ultrasound. It makes me think that she is hiding more from me.

I’m tired of hearing her say, “I’m fine,” and “It’s not a big deal.” That shit I just witnessed, her hunched over, gripping her stomach and crying like she was dying is a fucking big deal.

“I hate to do this to you during our busiest season, but think you can cover for me for a while too? Pull Quinn from warrior duties and you both tackle the Beta and Alpha jobs together. I’m not going to be able to leave her. Not while she’s like this.”

“Already on it. Dad is on his way to the logging camp now to help too. We know you and your dad are going to have your hands full. The best thing you can do for our pack is to help our Luna feel better.”

“Thanks, man,” I sighed, looking up at the ceiling while running both my hands down my face. The weight of everything is pressing down on me, and all I can think about is how much I don’t want to lose my mate. I can’t lose her. It would ruin me.

“Speaking of your dad, where is he? I figured he would be up here cussing up a storm for the doctors to fix her or something like that.”

I laughed breathlessly, no real humor in my tone. “Yeah, I’m sure he would have been, but he’s got the kids. He’s getting them situated at home, then they’re stopping by later.”

Dad. I don’t want to lose him either, but I know he was serious earlier. He would give his life for hers. I love him for that, but still don’t think I can just let him give up his life for my mate. That is my responsibility to bear, but I have my daughter to think about too. This shit is so hard, all away around. There has to be another way than to sacrifice one of us in place of her. What are we going to do when Aly is facing the same thing as her mom? What if Bailey is pregnant with another girl?

“Hey, did you know that Lord Antonio is on pack lands?” Rick asked me.

I shook my head. “Probably here to see Katherine, or Rina as he calls her.”

That bastard. It’s like he was trying to give her a whole new identity with that nickname, erasing her past completely along with her real name. She won’t go by Rina here. She tells everyone to call her Katherine. The vampires are the only ones that insist on calling her Lady Rina.

“I thought so too, but he was parked at the packhouse. Not Lucy’s.”

I shrug. “Maybe Lucy complained about his car blocking her view.”

Lucy sits on her porch most of the day, admiring my men as they shift back and forth, between wolf and human form.

Rick chuckles deeply. “Sounds like something she would say. She whistled at me this morning and told me to move my tight little tooshie so she could get a better view of the single guys.”

A genuine laugh leaves me hearing that. “I’m so fucking glad my wife didn’t pick up that habit from her grandma.”

“No, but your son likes to ogle the she-wolves,” Rick snorted.

I shrug, pursing my lips. He thinks he's mates with the Miami pack's future alpha. I'm sure that flirtatious streak he has will stop eventually. A female alpha won't put up with it. Parker won't put up with it. Carli sure as hell won't put up with it.

We sat and talked for a while, going over what I had on my agenda the next few days before I found out my wife might be dying, and Rick assured me he and Quinn could cover all of it. Casey can handle all the warrior training and patrols on his own.

As we are wrapping up our work talk, I sense my kids and dad in the clinic, and can smell Katherine and Antonio, as well as the scent of earth and dirt along with them. Fairy. They have a fairy with them.

I look up at the same time as Rick, just as Dad rounds the corner and Taegan comes running down the hall towards me.

"Daddy!" he yells, jumping in my lap. Aly is sleeping against my dad's bare chest. I gave him a confused look for about half a second before turning my confusion to the fairy behind him, walking with Katherine and Antonio.

"Daddy, if mommy asks, you told him, okay?" Taegan whispers in my ear. "Take one for the team."

"One what? Told him what?"

Before Taegan could answer, my dad did. "Did you know she was having twins?"

"Bailey?" I asked, my brain still trying to catch up with the suddenness of this conversation.

"No, Rick, you dumbass. Yes Bailey!" Dad huffs. "Your pain in the ass wife is not just pregnant, but pregnant with twins. That makes her pregnancy so much more dangerous. She is a fucking human carrying two alpha pups, with a damn curse hanging above her head!"

"Shit," Rick mutters.

Shit is right. Fuck, Bailey. Anything else she's not telling me. "How did you find out?"

Dad sends a pointed look at Taegan, who is busy picking the lint off my shirt, trying not to notice.

"Taegan," I pushed him back so I could look him in the face. "Is there anything else your mom isn't telling me? I need to know," I tried to sound as stern as I possibly could.

The way he is biting his lips, I can tell there is more.

"Taegan?"

He huffs. "Alright, but mommy said not to tell."

"Not to tell what?" Dad pinches the bridge of his nose. "I swear, I'm going to put that girl over my knee."

"Oh, don't worry. I plan on doing just that once we get her better," I huff. "Taegan, what else is there?"

He cringes. "She said it would make you worry more."

"Why?" I asked in a dead tone, getting a little irritated at my own son's devotion to his mother.

"Because they're more sisters. She's having girls."

"Shit," I swore, banging my head back against the wall in disbelief. With Bailey and Aly, we have two sacrifices between me and dad. Now we have 4 girls to protect. There has to be another way.

"Son," dad says in a measured voice, "I know I'm not the best at math, but there are two of us and-

"Four of them. I know," I completed his thought out loud. "Who is going to sacrifice themselves to protect them? If you save Bailey, and I save Aly, there is no one else who can sacrifice themselves for the other two."

What the fuck are we going to do?

"You don't need to sacrifice anyone," the fairy woman says, looking between us like we are crazy. "I found a way to break the curse."

"What?" Rick murmured beside me.

"Who are you?" I asked, eyeing her up and down, noticing the difference in the way she looks at my dad, like she's smitten, than the way she looks at me, with mild disinterest.

"She's grandpa's mate!" Taegan grins, like he's thrilled about the impossible notion.

I scoffed, not believing him. He thinks all pretty girls are someone's mate. He is probably just confused, since the woman seems to appreciate my dad and his half-nakedness.

"Grandpa doesn't have a mate anymore, Taegan. That's not funny."

"It's true," Dad muttered, looking at the woman for the first time since he walked in. He's looking at her in a way he never looked at my mom. There is adoration and a tenderness in his eyes I've never seen before. "She's, uh, my second chance, it appears."

“Don’t you mean third?” Rick tilts his head in confusion. “I mean, I know Luna Harriet was a chosen mate, but your fated mate was Alyssa, Lucy’s sister, wasn’t it?”

It's true. If this woman really is my dad's mate, or second chance mate like he is apparently claiming, that would make her his third. I have never heard of someone actually getting a second chance before. I thought it was a myth. It's extremely rare if it's not.

“What?” the woman gasps. “Alyssa was your mate?”

Dad furrows his brows, a deep scowl indenting his face. “Yes,” he says after a few scrutinizing seconds, “She was my first fated mate.”

Her face falls, “Oh,” is all she mutters.

“Is...is that a problem?” he asks anxiously. “Did you know Alyssa?”

She smiles sadly, then nods. They continue to stare at each other, some kind of sad communication passing between them as they completely forget about the rest of us. Dad isn’t even rubbing Aly’s back anymore, and she is stirring restlessly in his arms, on the brink of waking up.

“Who are you?” I asked again, passing Taegan to Rick and standing to get my daughter from my dad. The only answer I got before was that she was my dad’s second chance mate.

She forces her gaze away from my father, smiling sadly at me. “My name is Thyra, young Alpha. I was a close friend of your mate’s late grandfather, and I’ve come to help you break the curse.”

## 2.7 Chess

# Chapter 87 - He Stole My Heart, I Stole His Child

## Thyra POV

“May I take a look at your mate, Alpha?” I need to assess how far along the curse is, and how much time we have to break it. The information I painstakingly received after demeaning myself by pleading with my brother told me how to break the curse, but it would be a journey. A hard journey between realms.

He assesses me, measuring my words and those spoken by his father, I'm sure. I never expected the older alpha to have been Alyssa's mate. The moon goddess almost seems cruel with all these coincidences.

I may be his second chance mate, but I don't know how I am going to meet that standard, or even meet his gaze again, knowing that I basically advised his first mate to not fully accept him and accept the curse if she didn't want him to face the same fate as her brother-in-law. I didn't know any other way back then. I had no way of retrieving the information I have now.

I feel like even more of a failure to Joseph now.

The alpha nods once, a firm dip of his head with authority only an alpha wolf could possess. He looks much like his father. The way he is maintaining his authoritative stance, exuding so much power and control while at the same time tenderly cradling his daughter with affection is such a contradiction, just like Max.

I smiled gently, moving past him into the room of his mate.

"Can I come with you?" Max's deep voice made the hairs on the back of my neck prick up and my belly tighten. This mate bond is like nothing that I have ever felt before. I don't think I could resist my attraction to this man if I wanted to.

I nodded, not turning to face him again. It takes too much effort to turn away from him, and we have no time to waste on these confusing feelings right now. Plus, I don't want to embarrass myself again. I don't like feeling so unnerved around so many people I do not know.

Bailey is asleep in sweat-soaked sheets on the wide hospital bed. Her aura is tainted, that is for sure, but the blackness of impending death is still faint, meaning we have some time. Not much, but enough. My guess is that this pregnancy is what was going to be the curse's device to her doom.

Max comes up next to her, stroking her cheek gently, smoothing some of the hair off of it and behind her shoulder. He handles her the same way he handles his granddaughter. Tender and lovingly.

This man shows affection for his women, that is for sure. His daughter-in-law and granddaughter, soon to be granddaughters, are all lucky to have him. I am undeserving of such a man.

"I should call someone in here to change her sheets," he murmured, straightening the bedding out around her.

"You care for your daughter-in-law greatly, it seems," I can't help but to comment.

He smiled crookedly, making my belly tighten again. He's looking at her with so much love and tenderness, I almost feel jealous. I don't know why. He may have kissed me, and I kissed him

back, but there is nothing between us besides this mate bond. The mate bond is a strange, powerful thing.

“She’s like my daughter. I always wanted girls. I was very grateful when she came. She’s as much my daughter as Axel is my son. She’s given me a reason to look forward to each day and treats my son well. Well, until she decided to take it upon herself to hide this shit from us.”

“She most likely didn’t want to worry you. Hearing the two of you talking about sacrificing yourselves, she obviously didn’t want that.”

“I know she didn’t, but she can’t stop us. If that’s what I have to do to keep her alive, I’m doing it,” he mutters stubbornly.

“Well, good thing you won’t have to. It will be hard, but I found a way to break the curse. The celestials who cursed Rieka are the same who cursed the vampiric and fae races as well. It was written in our records how to release the curse. I just didn’t have access to those records at the time Joseph requested my help.”

He looks at me, studying my face for some time, and the way he does makes me blush and my skin tingle. “How did you access the records now?” he asks, though I sense he wanted to ask something else.

“My brother,” I answered vaguely. I really don’t want to bring up my disgrace in the fae kingdom with this man.

A few seconds later, Alpha Axel enters the room, his daughter waking in his arms and his son by his side.

“They wanted to see their mom and tell her goodnight before I sent them to Rick and Quinn for the night,” Axel tells his father, passing the little girl to Max and lifting Taegan gently on the bed.

“I can keep them tonight. I was planning on staying at your place,” Max argues. Alpha Axel looks over at me, then back at him.

“Dad, if you found your second chance mate, I don’t think I want you watching them on your first night together,” he cringes.

My cheeks heat at what he is insinuating. Mating and marking are done quickly for the werewolf kind once they find their mate. Of course, this is what is expected between us, though I don’t know how comfortable I would be with that now, knowing he was originally Alyssa’s mate.

“You don’t have to worry about that, son,” Max grumbles, and even though I was just thinking that it would be impossible to be with him in that way after what I learned, my heart still falls to the floor. Is he thinking of rejecting his bond with me?



“You know as well as I do that the bond is too hard to fight, dad. It’s okay. Quinn is on her way over here now.”

Max looks at me with a heart-wrenching expression. Is he really going to reject me? I need him or his son, though, to complete this journey to save Bailey. With his son seemingly unable to leave his mate’s side, I thought it would be Max to come with me. If he rejects me now, how will we be able to cope being around one another during this time?

“If we can’t break the curse, I’m still going to be the one to sacrifice myself to save her. If I accept you as my mate now, it will hurt you if or when I do that. That isn’t something I’m willing to do. I don’t want to hurt you.”

Ahh. There lies the underlying issue. Even though I feel less heartbroken, knowing he isn’t planning on rejecting the bond, it still hurts to think about him killing himself to save his daughter-in-law. I will help him to break this curse just so he doesn’t have to do that.

“Gi-paw sad?” the little girl rubs her hands on his cheeks, drawing his attention down to her.

He smiles, but the smile doesn’t reach his eyes. “I’m okay, baby girl. Why don’t you kiss mama night-night so you can have fun with Uncle Rick and Aunt Quinn tonight?”

She wraps her arms tightly around his neck. “I want gi-paw,” she pouts.

“I know, Aly, but grandpa has to have a sleepover with his mate. They have to talk about lots of stuff. Can you spend the night with Aunt Quinn just for one night?” Alpha Axel comes up and rubs her back, trying to ease her away from Max, who looks like he is stuck between a rock and a hard place.

“My gi-paw,” she doesn’t let up her hold, but turns her head to glare at me. “Not yours. Mine,” she states venomously.

This little girl is never going to like me.

“What’s going on?” a meek voice breaks the tension. Bailey is awake, looking curiously between me and the two men trying to handle her daughter.

“Mommy!” Taegan cried, falling against her and holding her close.

All the attention shifts to her immediately, both men surrounding her, fawning over her as she struggles to sit up in bed. The baby is just left glaring at me, still clinging to her grandfather with a cold look directed at me.

Yes. Yours. I got it.

~~~~~

“So you found your second chance mate!?” Bailey asks, grinning brightly at me.

Axel just explained to her everything going on, telling her who I was and why I was here.

Katherine and Antonio came into the room, sitting quietly on a couple of chairs against the wall, while the other couple were out in the hall, waiting for the kids who were still clinging to their mother, not ready to let her go. Alpha Axel and the kids sat on the bed with Bailey and Max stood protectively over her, grunting in answer to her question. He is trying to act stern with her, upset about the fact she hid her pregnancy and all the details about it. His stern act isn't working. I can tell she has him wrapped around her finger just as much as her daughter.

Max seems tough as nails with everyone else but the women in his life. I'm almost embarrassing myself by practically drooling over him. I want him to treat me tenderly too, and I know he could. I just don't know if I deserve it, or if he would want to keep me around after learning about my connection to his first mate.

“Quit being a butt and glaring at me. This is a happy day! You have a second fated mate. We should throw a party or have a family dinner or something. This is so exciting!” She turns that smile at me again and I grin in return.

She looks much like Joseph, which is quite enduring. He had a bright and friendly personality. She seems to have one too. She's dying and she wants to throw me a party to welcome me into the family. She's adorable.

“Babe, what did we do after I first found you?” Axel raised his eyebrows at her.

Her dimples appear on her blushing cheeks, making everyone laugh, even the vampires.

“What did you do, mommy?” Taegan asks, and I giggle all over again.

Max turns his attention to me, and a soft smile graces his rugged face.

“Played chess,” Axel ruffles his son's hair.

“That's boring,” he groans, “You should play Super Mario, grandpa. She might run away if you bore her with chess.”

“I'll keep that in mind, kid,” Max snorts, sending me a look that makes my thighs press together involuntarily. I motion he doesn't miss. I don't think any game he wants to play with me would be boring.

“We need to talk about our plans and when we are leaving,” I said, changing the subject.

“Leaving?” Bailey asks, cocking her head to the side. Max and everyone else, everyone except Antonio looked at me expectantly, waiting for me to explain more. Antonio knows, and is just sitting back in his chair, playing with Katherine's hair.

“We need to break the curse. That’s why I’m here. To do that, we need to travel to the goddess’s realm,” I said in a measured voice. The party idea is sweet but we really have more pressing matters to deal with, and a time limit as long as her current pregnancy, which could be less than 2 months with the shortened werewolf pregnancy and the fact she is carrying twins. That may seem like a long time, but time works differently between realms. We really don’t have time to play chess or anything else.

“We?” Katherine cocks her head to the side, much like her daughter just did.

“I need an alpha from this pack to break the curse,” I tell them. I guess with all the other distractions, I haven’t really had a moment to explain everything to them. “I need an alpha of this pack to travel to the goddess’s realm with me to visit Rieka herself and break the curse. I can’t do it without a Blue Cliff Alpha, and no one here has a way of traveling between realms.”

“You do?” Alpha Axel asks me.

I smirk cockily, “Oh, I have my ways. Have you ever ridden a horse?” I asked Max.

“Um, yes?...” he answers in a level tone.

“What about a flying one?”

2.8 The Past

Chapter 88 - He Stole My Heart, I Stole His Child

Max POV

Finally, I get some alone time with her. With my mate. My miracle, second chance mate.

I love the snot out of Aly, but she is a possessive and clingy little alpha female, and didn’t seem open at all to Thyra coming near me. I usually love that side of her, when she chooses grandpa over all others, getting all worked up to have all of my attention. I love giving it to her, but if I’m being blessed with a second chance, well, a third chance at love, she is going to have to learn how to share.

It still makes me feel ten feet tall when she acts like that, though.

Thyra and I are walking back to my cabin, back behind the packhouse, in an ominous silence. It makes me nervous about how deep in thought she is.

I know I'm not some young hunk like the guys Lucy is always fawning over, but I don't think I'm that bad. I mean, I'm not about to kick the bucket or anything. I know I'm not anywhere as gorgeous as she is. She is obviously royalty in the fairy kingdom, though there seems to be a story there.

If she was friends with Lucy's late husband, she is obviously older than me. Well, maybe. She doesn't look like it. She looks young. Very young. She looks not much older than my own son, but Axel was born years after Alyssa died.

Alyssa. Thyra knew Alyssa. I wonder how well she knew her.

"Um, Thyra," I murmur nervously. She turns her gorgeous eyes to me questioningly, and my heart starts beating excitedly inside my still bare chest. I almost wonder if she can see it, the way her eyes glance down my pecks, but then they continue to travel to my exposed abs and a beautiful shade of pink taints her cheeks.

I still got it.

"Yes?" She looked at the ground as we walked, hiding her expression with her hair.

"Are you, um, okay with the whole mate bond with me? I know I'm not in my prime any longer, and don't want to pressure you into, uh, playing chess or anything like that with me if you, uh, shit," I stumble over my words, trying to find the right way to word all the questions swirling around in my head.

Her giggling draws me short and makes the clouds clear in my stormy thoughts. "You're cute," she grins, making my cheeks redden this time.

"I'm not cute," I huff, "Handsome, dripping with fucking sexiness, maybe, but no one has called me cute since grade school."

"Humble too, aren't you," she chuckles.

"The humblest," I grinned.

She laughs breathlessly for a few more seconds, then sighs, "Yes, Alpha Max. I am okay with the, uh, mate bond. I'm surprised, but it explains why I was so drawn to you too. I think we have other things to take care of, and a hell of a lot to talk about before we jump into the, um, playing chess part of it all."

I nodded, rubbing the back of my neck. She's right. I can't be focused on getting my fucking jollies off while my daughter-in-law is dying.

When we got to my cabin, I let her in, holding the door open for her, then following her inside. My office at the front of my cabin is littered with maps, news articles, surveillance photos, and

any clues we found over the last several months while trying to find her after I spotted her near my grandkids' chicken coop all those months ago.

Her eyes skim the walls curiously, then I usher her to keep going until we get to my living room. It's littered with toys, and there is still a tea set from Aly set up on the little wooden table I have for her. The mess of toys is a lot less embarrassing than the evidence of my obsession with finding her in my office.

"Looks like a toy store exploded in here," she chuckles dryly.

"Sorry," I muttered, hurrying around the room with the toy bin Bailey set aside for me, "My life is ruled by midgets most of the time. I would rather have them stay with me than go to daycare."

"That's sweet," she smiles warmly.

"Yeah," I chuckle, "I'm a sweet guy. Well, to my family at least."

"Your family or just the women in your family?" she smirks. "Both those girls have you wrapped around their fingers."

I shrug, "My sister and niece had me well trained, I guess."

"Not your, um, former mate?"

I cringe, not ready for this conversation. I'm not ready to reveal how much of a disappointment I was in my chosen mate bond, and how helpless I was with Alyssa.

"My mate and I had a, uh, complicated relationship. We weren't close," I said, after several moments of awkward silence as I finished cleaning the room of the kids' mess.

"I'm sorry," she says awkwardly, looking down at her hands. Those hands of hers are even gorgeous. They look delicate and graceful, even in an awkward conversation like this where she is knotting them in front of her. "I didn't mean to pry."

"It's not prying, Thyra," I told her, setting the basket on the ground and coming to stand in front of her. "Honey, you're my mate. You... You own me, and everything about me. You are going to have me more wrapped around these beautiful little fingers than Bailey or Aly ever could," I husked deeply, taking her hands in mine and bringing them to my lips.

She gasps, and I can smell her arousal, igniting my desire for her even more. The sparks when I touch her are so different from the ones I had with Harriet, which rarely occurred. I have this hunger building inside me I haven't had since, well, Alyssa. Even then, it was different. Alyssa was delicate and frail. I had to be careful with her. I have a feeling that careful is the last thing Thyra would want from me.

I loved both my past mates. Different kinds of love, each of them, but I did love them. This feeling that overwhelms me being this close to Thyra is completely new. Unique only for her.

I run my knuckles over her velvety cheek, groaning slightly when she moans from the sparks.

Waiting is going to be the death of me, but she's right. We can't get lost in each other now. As much as I want to do that after the shitty day learning of the curse running its course on my daughter-in-law; as much as I would love to drown myself in the feel of my gift from the same moon goddess that is damning Bailey, I can't.

"So," I cleared my throat, taking a few steps back so we could both think clearly once again. "You really know how to break the curse?" I asked.

Thyra shakes her head, probably to clear it from the lusty thoughts that I hope mirrored my own. She places a hand over her chest, then takes a few deep breaths as she nods. "I do. I had to get my brother to hand over the archives, but I found it. I found out how to break the curse."

Thyra POV

Hearing this sexy man tell me that he belongs to me almost made me combust right then.

Man, what I would love to do to this man who claims he belongs to me.

Then, the thought of Alyssa creeps into my mind, and those desires tamper down just enough for me to get a hold of myself again.

You have a job to do, Thyra. You have a promise to keep with Joseph, and each moment we spend flirting like this brings us a moment closer to Bailey's death with no progress in stopping it.

Yes, I know how to break the curse. I was hoping Bailey wasn't yet suffering any effects, because I'm not sure what the time difference will be going into the celestial realm. Ten years in this realm is one year in mine. I can only hope the difference isn't that significant once we cross over. If it is, we will have days to complete our journey. If we don't hurry, she might not be here when we get back.

I'll have failed my friend not once, but twice.

"How were you able to find a way to break the curse, but that ass-wad, Antonio the prick, didn't know about it? The bastard was fucking there when the curse was cast, wasn't he?"

I shook my head. "No. The fae and vampires were the first to be cursed. Vampires were so lost in their bloodlust for so long that they cared little for anything else. The bastard was there, I'm sure, because Antonio's bloodsucking fiends were some of the monsters plaguing Reika's village, but I doubt the celestials cared to share the outcome of the curse with the vampires, and the vampires wouldn't have stuck around the werewolves long enough to find out. Your kinds have never

really meshed well. Reika's husband and his warriors started hunting and killing the monsters plaguing them the moment they had the power to shift. He knew of Reika and the curse, since she had been turned into your moon goddess as a result, but he knew nothing of how to break it. We have it in our records because we were the ones who tore the veils between worlds. We documented everything so we could never forget and never repeat our mistakes." We are a proud race. Our ancient king, my grandfather, and the rulers that ruled with him across our world paid dearly for their sins, and didn't want their children to suffer as well.

"But you're telling me we need to enter the celestial realm now? Isn't that repeating the same sins of your past?"

I smiled sadly at him. "No, because this curse was meant to be broken. That's why the celestials gave us this information to begin with."

"How do you know that?" He asks, plopping down on his couch. He still doesn't have a shirt on and his chest and abs contract in a delicious way with the motion.

"Because the curse came with conditions. Once those conditions were met, the curse could be broken, but only by the moon goddess herself."

"What were the conditions? Why now?"

I cringe, not wanting to answer. He won't like the answer, because he would be living a very different life if I had done my job properly in the past. I didn't even bother to find out who Alyssa had been mated with, and when I returned to my realm after my banishment was lifted, I was so focused on getting back what I lost, I forgot about my promise to Joseph for some time.

"Thyra?" Max looked at me questioningly.

Here it goes. Just rip the bandaid off, Thyra.

"When the lines connect again, that's when the curse can be lifted. When a descendant of the goddess and an alpha from the original pack become fated mates, an occurrence that will come naturally, not orchestrated by Reika, that is when she can finally lift the curse on her daughters."

"Oh," Max murmurs. His brows furrowed as he thought over what I had just told him. It takes a few minutes, but I can tell the exact moment when it clicked; what this information could have done for him and Alyssa. "Oh," he repeats, only in a deeper, sorrowful voice.

"Yeah," I whisper. If I had gained this information decades prior; if I had humbled myself enough to beg my brother for it back then, I could have helped to save Alyssa. I could have saved Max from ever losing his first mate.

2.9 Guilt

Chapter 89 - He Stole My Heart, I Stole His Child

Max runs his hands over his face, a stressed look coming over him. I feel horrible. If I hadn't been so selfish, I could have helped him. No, I wouldn't be his mate now, but neither of us would be the wiser. He could have lived happily with Alyssa.

"I'm sorry," I whispered. He asked me if I was okay with the mate bond, but now I feel I need to ask the same. It's my fault his first love was lost.

He sighs heavily, then pats the cushion beside him on the couch, indicating I should sit.

I tentatively move to sit beside him, slowly lowering myself to the couch as he watches me. His eyes, filled with so much emotion in their icy depths, roamed my face, his lips pressed together grimly. It takes all my control not to squirm under his gaze.

"Why are you sorry?" He asks after an extended silence.

I bit my lip nervously. "If I had acted back then, I could have saved her," I whispered.

He nods, then turns his eyes up, staring at the ceiling. "That may be true, but she didn't say anything either. She knew, and kept the secret until she left me. I never even marked her."

I wince, "I told her not to. I didn't know of another way to break the curse than making a sacrifice, and she didn't want that. I told her not to let you mark her so you wouldn't feel her pain, and to keep the secret until...until the end." He winces at my confession.

"You didn't ask your brother for the archives back then?" He asks calmly.

I shook my head. "I was banished from my realm for some time. It wasn't until about the time Katherine was turned by Antonio that my banishment was lifted."

"Banished?" His tone was curious, but not judgmental. I just nod. I really don't want to explain the circumstances behind it.

"Hmm," Max rubs his scruffy chin, and my mind wonders momentarily how his scruff would feel against my fingers and skin. I don't deserve to find out, though. "It sounds like you both made the best choices with the information you were given."

I looked at him questioningly. He couldn't mean that. I have always heard how powerful the mate bond was, and how important it is, especially to an Alpha.

He places his large, callused and scarred hand on my knee. Those scars are proof of his life of hard work and endurance, which I find unbelievably attractive, like everything else about him.

“I loved Alyssa. I still do, but if things hadn’t happened as they did, I wouldn’t have Axel, which means I wouldn’t have my stubborn but amazing daughter-in-law, and there would be no Taegan or Aly. I would never wish for a world without my grandbabies. I wouldn’t have met you either, Thyra,” he cups my face in that same rough and sexy large hand, “You are my second chance at happiness, honey. Don’t taint that by apologizing for something that was never your fault. The way I see it, none of this shit about the curse is your concern, but you’re helping us anyway. Don’t apologize for that. You don’t need my forgiveness, but my endless gratitude.”

A broken sob leaves me, and I don’t realize I’m crying until Max wipes my tears away with his thumbs.

He dips his face to mine, and I close my eyes, lost in the sensation of his lips. Damn, these sparks are indescribable. This pull towards him is indescribable.

I underestimated this mate bond and how all-consuming it can be.

As he pulls away, he rests his forehead on mine. “Thank you,” I whisper.

“No, thank you. Thank you for being here now.”

Max POV

As much as I loved Alyssa, she chose her fate. I know she chose to come with me, not because she was choosing me, but to prevent her sister from learning the truth about her sickness, and to take the burden off Lucy so she could take care of Katherine instead of her. If those weren’t factors, I don’t think Alyssa would have chosen me over her sister.

What ifs and could have beens are pointless in these situations. They just make you miserable. I’m happy with my family, and I wouldn’t have them if things had played out any other way.

Plus, I’m being given another chance. I’m being blessed with an extremely rare second chance mate. Who’s to say this wasn’t our fate all along?

Thyra’s sweet breath washes over my face, her sweet, ripened fruit scent is driving me wild. I want her. I want to take her and mark her now, showing her just how thankful I am that she is here now, but I know the timing isn’t right.

We need to focus on Bailey.

“So,” I muttered, after quickly pressing my lips to hers one more time. “About those flying horses…”

She giggles, making a broad smile stretch across my face. Her laugh is sultry and sexy, just like everything else about her.

“Right. We need to get back to planning,” she says softly, her plump lips distracting me momentarily. They taste so sweet, and are so tempting.

“You tell me what the plan is, and I’ll follow you,” I mumbled, trying to reign in my desire to mate and mark her. “You’re the boss here, honey.”

“Mmh, I like being the boss,” she smiles. “Well, first we need to plan our route to the falls.”

“The falls?” I asked. “What falls?”

“Blue Cliff,” she states, as if it’s obvious, “that’s what this pack is named after, correct? The waterfalls that fall over Blue Cliff. That’s the entrance to the realm the moon goddess resides in. That cliff is where your kind was created, and it’s where she was cursed.”

“Those falls?” I grunted, rubbing my chin as I ran through my memories, trying to remember anything that could resemble an entrance to another realm or whatever. “Honey, I’ve lived here my entire life, been to the cliff and those falls more times than I can tell you, and I never saw anything like that there. It’s just rocks and water.”

“To the naked eye,” she smirks, like she’s got a big secret. “Have you ever gone through the falls?” she asks.

“Uh, yeah. Used to play in them all the time when I was in my younger years. Took the kids there just last summer too.”

She bites her bottom lip, trying to hold back her knowing grin. “What about from the top of the cliff?”

~~~~~

Axel POV

“I like her. She seems nice,” Bailey grins, munching on the rice cakes my dad bought for her. Katherine ran back to our house and packed a bag for Bailey, and brought over the snacks as well.

She dropped it at the nurses station to not disturb Bailey, not wanting to upset her, but Bailey knew it was her who left the bag for her. She even said that Katherine could have brought it into the room herself.

Bailey might not think of her as a mom, but she doesn’t hate her.

“Do you think your dad will mark her tonight?”

I sigh, not wanting to think about my dad marking and mating anyone. I'm too overwhelmed with this curse shit to entertain those cringy images. "I don't know, baby. Maybe." I hope they're talking about how to break this damn curse, now fucking right now.

"Axel! Be more excited! Your dad has a mate now."

I almost growled at her in frustration. "I'm sorry if I can't show your level of excitement right now. I'm a little too fucked up about my mate being on her fucking death bed and lying to me about it."

"Hey," she scowls at me, looking as adorable as ever in her anger. "Stop that. I'm not dying. She said she knew how to break the curse."

"Okay," I grumbled, "Let's put that shit aside for a minute. Let's talk about you hiding being pregnant from me. And the fact you're pregnant with twins. You also left out that they're girls. Anything else you would like to add?"

She turns her nose up defiantly. "No. If I told you, you would just have freaked out like you're doing right now."

"No shit," I muttered. "Bailey, this is serious. If dad hadn't found you earlier, you would have kept lying to me."

"I wasn't lying," she murmurs, "I just didn't tell you."

"That's lying and you know it. Baby, you had Taegan keeping secrets from me. Our fucking son had this shit on his little shoulders, but you didn't tell me?"

She grimaces at that. "I know. I shouldn't have done that, putting that pressure on him. It really hasn't been that bad until today, though. I would just get migraines and cramping. It always went away after taking Tylenol."

"It's not just the fact you were getting sick. You told him to lie to me, Bailey."

She presses her lips together, making her dimples indent her adorable cheek. Goddess, even when I'm pissed at her, I find her so fucking adorable. If she wasn't sick, I'd drive my point into her another way, but I have to settle for just talking to her for now.

You best believe once this curse is lifted I'm easing these frustrations with my mate in a much more fun way, for both of us.

Shit, we have still been making love almost every night. That can't be good for her body. Not while she's been struggling with this sickness and pregnancy on her own.

"Baby," I whined, resting my head on her lap. This is too much.

“I know, Axel. I’m sorry. I’ll apologize to Taegan tomorrow and tell him how wrong it was to ask him to keep this from you,” she says softly while running her fingers through my hair.

“What if I was away when you fainted? What if I was at the mining plot? Alaska is so fucking far, Bailey.”

She groans, “Your dad was here.”

“Thank the fucking goddess,” I growl, remembering how panicked my dad sounded in the link. “He told me to spank you.”

She giggles, “You can if you want.”

I growled again, looking up to glare at her, “Don’t fucking tempt me.”

“My, my,” she clicked her tongue, “You have such a potty mouth when you’re angry.”

“Because I’m fucking frustrated as fuck!” I groan, “I don’t know what to fucking do or how to fix this.”

She smiles sadly, gripping my face and bringing it to hers. Her lips feel chapped against mine, but the tingles that run over my skin are as powerful as ever. I find myself deepening the kiss after only a few seconds of trying to resist her and her warm, vanilla scent. The scent is mixed with the scent of apples now. It’s subtle, but now that I know she’s pregnant, I can catch the scent.

It’s fucking fall. Apple scents are everywhere. If I wasn’t so damn busy lately, maybe I would have picked up on the change before she was in the damn hospital. If she was a werewolf, it would have been a stronger scent change. Her being human makes those changes harder to pick up on when they change slowly over a long period of time.

Nine weeks. She is nine fucking weeks along. I should have picked up on it sooner.

I pull away from her as guilt starts to eat away at me.

“Hey,” she whispers, “Stop it. I can still feel you, butthead. Quit trying to take the blame on yourself for something I did. I was in the wrong, not you.”

I groaned, “I should have noticed.”

“Axel, stop. Nothing would have changed if you had noticed sooner. You would have just been hurting the pack by worrying about me for longer. You are the Alpha and have duties. The timing of all this was perfect. Too perfect. What are the chances of Thyra coming the same day I get worse? The chances of her being your dad’s second chance mate? I can feel it; feel that everything is going to be okay.”

“You can’t know that,” I growled.

She ran her fingers through my hair again, “I do. I know it. I know everything will be okay. Soon, the only issue we will face is teaching Aly to share her grandpa,” she giggles.

I huffed. “That might be impossible.” Aly was not happy about leaving with Rick and Quinn. She threw a temper tantrum for my dad until Rick promised to take her to get ice cream at the packhouse before heading to their place. Even then, she was mumbling baby talk that sounded a lot like she was cursing my dad’s new mate out. She is not as happy for my dad as Bailey is.

“Everything will be okay, babe,” Bailey whispers, bringing my lips to hers once again.

I almost believe her, but when our lips part, a grimace comes over her face before she buckles over the side of the bed and throws up the rice cake she just ate all over the floor. My heart drops when I see the tinge of blood in her vomit as well.

Shit.

2.10 Flirting on the Clock

## Chapter 90 - He Stole My Heart, I Stole His Child

Thyra POV

Max and I had one of his many maps from his office out on the table, pretending to discuss our route to the falls, when we were really just flirting, using the close proximity while looking over the map to press closer together.

He’s staring at me, his hand resting on my lower back as I lean over the table, absentmindedly running my fingers over the scale as I pretended to measure the distance between here and the falls.

I have two of my family’s Pegasus horses. The distance does not matter when I can summon them to me and we can be there in a matter of minutes. When he brought the map out, I didn’t want to ruin the opportunity to be close to him by letting him know that. Not after that intimate moment of him accepting me, despite my faults.

“You sure seem fixated on the distance,” he muses, his rough hands on my back sending magical sparks straight to my tightening muscles between my legs.

“Mmhmm,” I hum, not wanting to embarrass myself by trying to form actual words.

He chuckles deeply, making my belly tighten.

“So, is it just me and you going on this trip, or is that dickless vampire coming too?” he asks.

“Dickless?” I giggled.

“Yeah. He’s a total pussy,” he mutters, making me laugh.

“I take it you hate him too?” I asked.

He huffs, the masculine sound making the hairs on the back of my neck tingle. “I don’t know many people who like that selfish prick.”

“Well, he is a vampire. Original vampires were created from selfishness. He has been here for centuries, in control of his own domain. He never evolved from his origins.”

Max furrows his brows. “What do you mean?”

Hmm. How do I explain this to him? “Other first generation vampires get out into the real world. They’ve learned they can not be in control of everything around them. Antonio never got that little life lesson. He’s always ruled his coven and lived selfishly with no repercussions. Not until he imprinted on a descendent of the moon goddess,” I chuckled, “Reika is probably teaching the asshole a lesson through Katherine. About time someone did. He’s been insufferable since I met him. Even his daughter doesn’t like him.”

The asshole has always been a headache to deal with.

“Makes sense,” Max murmurs, running his fingers up and down my spine. A moan leaves me before I can stop it. His touch is too much. With the sparks dancing across my skin and the fire igniting in my belly, I have no control over my reactions towards him.

He chuckles deeply. “Don’t start that, now, or I’m going to be tempted to have you doing that all night.”

A thrilling chill runs down my spine, and another groan leaves me from his threat. He growled possessively, encircling me in his arms. His large hands flatten on my back, then slowly move down to firmly rest on my ass.

His beautiful icy eyes were staring at my lips, an arrogant expression across his face. He knows he has me trapped in his spell. He said he was mine, but at this moment, I’m completely his. He’s in control of me.

My hands move up his bare chest, making him growl softly. When they wrap around the back of his neck, I push my body closer to his, gravity pulling me in his direction.

When his lips meet mine, our kiss isn't cautious or tame. It's wild, heated; our saliva mixes as our tongues tangle with one another's. Both of us like animals, trying to claim the other.

His hands are squeezing and gripping my ass, pulling me firm against his hard body.

When I feel his dick growing taunt against my stomach, it makes me gasp.

I want it. I want to taste it, then feel it inside me as he ravages my body, tearing me up from the inside out.

My hand skims down his chest, then rubs his length through his jeans, making him groan. It's huge, just like the rest of him.

"Ah, fuck. I can't wait, honey," he husks in his deep, sexy voice, making me whimper, "I need you now."

I squeezed his dick through the tight fabric of his jeans, making him hiss. "I need you too," I whispered desperately.

His groan as he bends and lifts me by my ass is primal, making my core leak as my legs circle his waist. The friction on the fabric rubbing against my sex pressed against his hard body makes me groan.

I want him. I've never wanted a man more in my life.

He carries me to what must be his bedroom, laying me gingerly on the mattress while his hips buck against my heat.

There is too much fabric between us. Too much in the way. I fumbled with the buttons on his jeans while his hand moved down my front, kneading my breast roughly. My nipple is caught between his fingers, making me cry out and almost combust right then.

My chest has always been my weakness, and he must realize that with how adamantly he is teasing my breasts now. I can't even get his zipper all the way down as I start thrashing wildly about beneath him.

He growls as he lifts and pulls my shirt quickly over my head, his mouth coming down to claim a peek, teasing my nipple between his teeth.

My hips are gyrating against him, finding that sweet friction I need against his firm dick.

I'm grinding against him, so close to cumming just from him teasing my chest. When he bites down hard, making me scream out, I fall over that cliff of pleasure, falling endlessly into a mindless orgasm.

“So fucking perfect,” he growls, tracing his tongue around my nipple, easing some of that sweet pain from his rough biting.

He’s standing over me now as my mind comes back to me, looking as sexy and imposing as ever. His mouth is slack and his icy eyes melt as he stares down at me.

His dick is in his hand, being worked up and down by him while staring at me hungrily. I lick my lips, hungry for a taste of him.

The slit at its end is beaded with precum and I want so desperately to see how it tastes.

His free hand moves to unclasp my pants, but before he has the button undone, his eyes glaze over and his expression changes.

He groans out loud, re-buttoning my pants after a few seconds before attempting to tuck himself back in his jeans.

“What’s wrong?” I asked, confused by his behavior.

Did I do something wrong?

He sighs heavily, his face full of exhaustion and regret. “I’m sorry, honey. Axel just mind linked me. Bailey’s doing pretty bad again.”

Oh no. I grabbed my shirt, scooted to the end of the bed and hopping up before pulling it back on over my head. My nipples are still sensitive and rubbing against the fabric, but that can’t be helped.

Max moves to his closet and grabs a thermal long sleeve shirt, pulling it on over his head before slipping on a jacket. He grabs a thicker coat and puts it around my shoulders before dipping his head down and briefly kissing me.

“Rain check?”

I rested my hand on his cheek, smiling reassuringly while nodding. “Let’s go save your daughter-in-law.”