

Pregnant and Rejected by My Alpha Mate Chapter 61

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Chapter 61

Bastien's POV

This isn't right.

The lab report in my hand is as clear as day, and its conclusions unmistakable, but it can't be right. I've read it at least ten times now, scanning the page over and over again, looking for any sign of hope, any hint that the samples got mixed up or were contaminated in the lab. Yet every time the information remains the same. Beneath columns full of DNA markers I cannot even begin to understand, read the damning words:

Probability of Paternity: 0%

I don't believe it. She has to be mine.

Selene, who turned pale and ashen the moment my mother revealed the envelope, squeezes the pup in her arms a little tighter. I can't see Lila's face, but I can hear the delicate wafts of her breath as she slumbers in her mother's arms, completely oblivious to the disaster unfolding around her.

Selene furrows her dark brows and pouts her full lips, her beautiful face sullen and wary in equal measure. My stomach is in my throat, and the room around me is spinning out of control. She was telling the truth. I think simply, unable to process any more complex feelings than shock and pain.

I'd been so sure. I felt connected to Lila from the moment I saw her, and we bonded almost instantly. That has to mean something, doesn't it? Surely I would not feel so possessive of another wolf's child.

I suppose it might simply be the fact that she's my mate's daughter; after all, how could I not feel drawn to a pup who has so much of Selene in her? Maybe my mother was right, and I just wanted to be Lila's father. Maybe I didn't want to believe my mate had truly chosen another wolf over me.

But she did. Selene chose Drake Cavanaugh's pack over mine. She chose him for her protector; she chose him to father her pup.

Axel is howling mournfully in my head as I finally lower the paper. Every eye in the room is on me, and I realize they're waiting for me to say something. "She isn't mine," I repeat, dropping the test results onto the side table. "The DNA wasn't a match."

Shockwaves reverberate through the room, surprised and disappointed faces mingling with those of relief and triumph – but all remain silent. Axel is anything but. Howling has turned to ranting and raging, decrying the results with savage snarls and vicious growls. My head is so full of his fury I almost forget where I am.

A pair of cerulean and lilac eyes glow through the haze of blurry bodies and unfocused faces filling the room: beloved, ethereal and far too painful to look at now that I know the truth.

"I told you so." Selene tells me with an odd catch in her voice. "More than once. It's your own fault for not believing me." My mate's cold words slice me straight to the core. I assumed she was so upset about the test because she thought her lie would be revealed. Now I realize she was simply afraid of how I would react to learning Drake really is Lila's father.

She was right to be afraid.

Her voice set off my wolf even further, and he claws at the surface of my skin, desperate to get out. I'm not sure if I want to kill Drake or claim Selene. Frankly, I like the sound of both options. Of course, who's to say I need to limit myself to one? Every instinct I possess is urging me to defend what's mine, and Axel is positively rabid with the need to attack – whether in violence or passion.

My mother is looking at me with sympathy and concern. Unless I'm mistaken, she's upset by the results too, but she can also see that I'm in very serious danger of losing control. "Bastien?" She asks hesi-

tantly. "Are you alright?"

My shoulders rise and fall with the force of my shallow, seething breaths, punctuating the violent pounding of my heart. I know I'm barreling towards doing something I'll regret, but even if I could stop myself, I don't want to.

I'm done trying to be good, I'm done trying to be worthy of a woman who betrayed me. I'm 'an Alpha, not some feeble Omega. It's my job to lead and protect at all costs, to dominate and control, not coddle and pacify.

Aiden can sense the feral energy rolling off my body like a dark storm. "You need to pull back brother." He says, adding through our link, Don't forget, there's a pup in the room.

The red haze blinding me thins for a moment, parting like fog before billowing back. It ebbs just enough for Aiden's words to filter through to Axel, and together we try to force

down the bloodlust consuming us. Clenching and unclenching my fists, I will my pulse to slow. I can't give in to my instincts with Lila here, no matter how entitled I'd be to do so.

I'm beginning to realize this was never going to turn out well. Whether my mate lied and stole my child, or bore one with another wolf, I was always going to lose. It's a reminder of everything that's wrong between us, further proof of how little I truly know Selene.

Selene had loved me, hadn't she?

Had I imagined it all?

Was our entire relationship a fantasy I created in my mind?

I can't believe it was all a lie. The night Selene shifted, she admitted how deeply she cared. She'd been out of her mind with pain, but almost seemed more devastated by the idea I'd rejected her. How many times has she told me that I had my chance, that I'd wasted it?

But if she truly loved me so much, how could she take another mate so quickly? How could she be happy when I was in the depths of despair, barely surviving the heartbreak of losing her.

"Why?" I demand, pouring all my confusion and grief into the words. "Why did you do it?"

"You know why, Bastien." Selene answers with exasperation. "It was never going to work between us."

"We were happy." I argue, trying to understand.

"No, we weren't!" She exclaims. "Not at the same time at least." My mate sighs, appearing to grapple for patience. "We were doomed from the beginning." Do I imagine the pain in her voice? "A marriage can't be built on pity and obligation. I couldn't give you what you wanted, and you couldn't give me what I needed. That's not either of our faults, it's just the way it is."

"You gave me everything I ever wanted and more." I profess fiercely, blocking out our audience so that I can speak to Selene, and Selene alone. "How can you think otherwise?"

"Because you made me think it!" She half whispers, half shouts. "You married me out of duty, you stayed with me out of duty. Whatever feelings that might have developed along the way don't change the fact that we started out on false pretenses."

I want to scream that there were never any false pretenses in our relationship, but before I can open my mouth, Drake Cavanaugh steps forward.

“Enough, Bastien.” He crosses the room to stand beside Selene, “you can go around in circles arguing these things all day.” He declares, putting an arm around her shoulders, “But that won’t change the past.”

I knew from the beginning that Drake had feelings for Selene, I could see it in his eyes the first time I ever saw them together. However, it was one thing when the feelings went one way. It’s another to see Selene return them. Seeing Drake with my mate and the pup which should be mine, is enough to make me want to kill the young Alpha, and the desire only increases as he continues to speak on Selene’s behalf.

“You had your chance. You lost it.” He sneers.

“This doesn’t concern you, Cavanaugh.” I hiss.

“It does.” Cavanaugh snaps. “As it involves my mate and my pup.”

My claws and fangs extend, the anger I’ve so recently mastered exploding once more.

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“You came.” Drake continues. “You warned us about the bounty and now we’re prepared to face the threat.” His emerald eyes sparkle cruelly. “We’re grateful – truly, we are.” He drawls, “But there’s no place for you here beyond that.”

“Is that how you feel too?” I ask Selene.

She frowns, swaying on the spot as she rocks Lila and eyes me cautiously. “Yes.” She finally murmurs. “I just want to be free Bastien. To live my life as I wish. I don’t want to be tied to the past or spend my days dwelling on things I can’t change.”

At that moment, Axel roars so loudly I know I have to leave. If I stay one minute longer I’m going to attack, and whatever else might happen between us, I can’t let that happen.

Certain I’m going to shift before the minute is out, I betray my every instinct, and walk away from my mate. I take off at a run, fleeing before I can retaliate against Drake – and disappearing into the night.

Pregnant and Rejected by My Alpha Mate Chapter 62

Pregnant and Rejected by My Alpha Mate

Chapter 62

However I thought this day would go, I never could have predicted this.

I'm so overwhelmed and confused I don't even know where to begin, but the strange reality remains: I'm safe. Lila and my secret are safe from my mate, and though I cannot even begin to understand how it happened, I am eternally grateful.

This doesn't make sense. Luna whimpers.

No, I agree, it doesn't. But thank the Goddess it happened.

Weren't you listening to what he said? Luna presses. He wants you, whatever else happened before, he wants you now. He wants Lila.

Well he can't have either of us. I argue. I've had my fill of men pretending to be innocent, refusing to be accountable for their actions.

I can't deny how deeply his words touched me, how deeply I wanted to believe them. I've dreamed about Bastien saying precisely these sorts of things to me a thousand times, but I refuse to let him hurt me again. I refuse to be the vulnerable, foolish girl who he destroyed without a backward glance.

Lila is still sleeping soundly in my arms, and though Drake continues to stand sentry at my side, Bastien is long gone. Aiden and Donovan tore out of the room after him, leaving only a few Nova guards and Odette behind.

I've been watching my mother in law very carefully. I've missed her so much: her love, her warmth, her understanding. Yet she is not looking at me with any of those things now.

Odette continues to stroke my pup's hair and whisper soothing nonsense in her ear, and though she does not seem angry with me, neither is she calm. I can count on one hand the number of times I've earned a lecture from Odette, but it's clear I have one coming now.

She waits until Drake steps away from us, not wanting to be overheard. "I don't know everything that happened between you," Odette finally broaches when we have a semblance of privacy, "And I don't know what's happened since. But I do know this. My son loved you with his entire heart, and thinking you died destroyed him. You have no idea what it was like afterward."

I clamp my eyes shut, not wanting to picture the events she describes. "You were there, Odette. You saw the way it was that last night. He chose Arabella."

“Nothing is ever as simple as it seems, Selene.” Odette counters. “I admit, at first I thought he was crazy for, accusing you of being involved with the kidnapping, but that was never what he intended. It was to appease the police, nothing else.”

I know my supposed death can't have been easy, and I've always felt guilty for letting everyone believe such a horrible lie, but I also can't apologize for doing the best thing for my pup. “You're a mother, Odette.” | murmur, ‘You know what it's like. Arabella wanted me dead, Bastien seemed to take her side, and I barely survived any of it.’ | sigh. “By the time Lila came along... even knowing what I do now... I had to do what's best for her, and that wasn't Elysium.”

“No.” Odette agrees, “But it could be now.”

“How?” | inquire hotly, “Arabella tried to kill me over and over again, and Bastien still chose her.”

“I have news for you, Selene.” Odette announces, “Arabella has fled Elysium to avoid Bastien's retribution over her crimes against you.”

#Chapter 62 Together

“What?” I ask in astonishment.

“He didn't know,” Odette insists, “and no matter how he felt about it, he would never stand for anyone threatening his mate.”

“I know that.”

“Do you?” Odette ponders, “Do you know how deeply he cares for you, wants to be with you?”

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“I know that my daughter will never be safe with Arabella out there.” | combat coolly, “and I know that until she is behind bars, that can't happen.”

Odette frowns. “I just want you to be happy, my love.”

“Then you don't have anything to worry about.” I promise. “As long as I'm here with Lila, I'm happy.”

It takes a while for the room to clear. Bodies slowly filter out, starting with the contingent from Elysium and eventually spreading to include the members of the Eros pack..

I've been waiting for everyone to get out since the moment Bastien read the test results, and the solitude can't come too soon. "What in the Goddess's name just happened?" I demand when I'm finally alone with Drake. "Did you do that?"

Drake frowns, "What, doctor the test results? No." He replied simply. "I thought maybe you were responsible."

"I didn't have any idea." I breathe. "And it doesn't make any sense." I cry, "Bastien is Lila's father – without question."

"You never..." Drake trails off suggestively.

"I've never been with anyone else," I inform him coolly. "There had to be something wrong with the sample."

"That or the Goddess was really looking out for you." Drake contends.

I don't know the truth of the matter. What I do know is that DNA won't be the last of my problems. Bastien is no pushover, and unless I'm very mistaken, this won't be enough. "Are you okay pretending she's yours?" I wonder aloud.

Admittedly, Drake has always claimed Lila to a certain extent, but never like this. His reputation throughout the pack is as a fearless leader, and there are always dozens of she-wolves sniffing around him. Will those things change if he announces Lila is his daughter?

Will the she-wolves accept it and move on? Or will the more ambitious social-climbers take my daughter's existence as a threat the same way Arabella did.

"Of course," Drake agrees without hesitation. "I just worry how the pack will react." He sighs, "And I worry it won't be enough to get rid of Bastien."

"I know," I murmur, nuzzling Lila, "He's attached to her already. He can feel their connection whether he understands it or not."

"He's not your only problem." Drake shares ominously. "I've put off taking a mate so long... and our relationship..." He trails off indecisively, "There are she-wolves in Asphodel who will take this as a threat."

"But there's nothing actually between us!" I exclaim. "Surely they know that."

There's an odd look on Drake's face: disappointment, frustration and anger entwined with his concern. I've worried about Drake's feelings for me a few times throughout the years, but we've never been in a situation like this. His role in my life has never been questioned this way, and as much as I want to brush it aside, I can't

#Chapter 62 Together

Bastien's re-appearance is complicated for a thousand reasons, not the least of which is that he's putting pressure on the delicate balance I've struck here. I don't want anything to change, but the more time that passes, the more I fear things have already changed beyond all comprehension.

"People aren't always that logical." Drake broods, interrupting my thoughts. "But we have bigger problems."

"Don't worry about the bounty," I try to instruct.

"No. I will worry about the bounty." He insists, "I can't believe you didn't tell me about it and don't you dare pretend you didn't."

Feeling suddenly very petulant after withstanding the disapproval of both these men, I argue, "I refuse to let fear rule my life. Our lives." I correct, squeezing Lila gently. "I knew about the bounty," I admit, "but it was always going to be there no matter when I went. I can't run forever."

"It's not about running!" Drake corrects, "It's about, talking to me, letting me in so I can protect you when you need it."

"I've had enough of Alpha's coddling me under the pretense of protecting me or doing 'what's best.'" I argue, "I came here because I wanted to be free, not because I wanted a different wolf to boss me around."

"I understand that." Drake insists, "But it doesn't change the fact that you're facing very real dangers." His eyes narrow. "Why does Denizen want you, anyway?"

"I can't tell you." I exhale, "And you don't need to tell me about the dangers." Honestly, do these wolves think I'm oblivious? Do they think I'm suicidal or that I don't care about my pup. I want to avoid the Calypso Alpha more than anything, but I also know that hiding is only a temporary option. "One way or another, I have to be able to build a life for myself, Drake. I can't do that if I'm always looking over my shoulder."

"Maybe not," He concedes, "But you need to, at least for a while longer."

Drake's green eyes are full of emotion. He's looking at me in that intense way which never fails to make the hair on the back of my neck stand on end. The Eros Alpha has never made a move or propositioned me, but the more time that passes, the more convinced I am that he has feelings for me. When he looks at me this way it seems impossible to pretend otherwise, and as uncomfortable as it makes me, it also strengthens my resolve.

Drake has been an incredible friend these past few years, and I trust his advice, but he's far from unbiased. He's another Alpha who wants the best for me.

But I want the best for me too.

I want the best for Lila in a way he never will.

"You have my word, I'll do whatever is necessary to keep Lila and myself safe." I vow, tilting my chin up. "Maybe that means I have to find a new pack, maybe it means going very far from here. But I won't return to Elysium, and I won't be forced to hide in my own home." I insist.

"Alright," Drake agrees, his features softening as he reaches one large paw to me, "I'm sorry. We'll find a way through this,"

I settle my hand in his, smiling gently and feeling infinitely grateful for his support, "Together."

Pregnant and Rejected by My Alpha Mate Chapter 63

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Chapter 63

Odette's POV

I don't transform very often anymore.

It hasn't felt the same since Gabriel died, and though my wolf gets restless like any other, this freedom has a cost. I always miss my mate more when I shift. The pain of his absence is most acute in my soul's truest form, and I feel eternally guilty for going on without him.

Even so, there's no avoiding it tonight.

Bastien disappeared into the darkness in such a fit of rage I'm afraid of what he might do if he's left alone. Aiden and Donovan went after him, but I do not trust them to pull him back from the edge, and I know they will not tell him what he needs to hear.

I follow Bastien's path at a steady lope, trotting along in his footprints hoping he's not so far ahead that my efforts are in vain. If he gets it into his head to kill Cavanaugh or seek retribution, war might follow, and that's the last thing we need.

Bastien may be the one at risk of inciting chaos, but Selene isn't doing much better. I swear I've never met a more stubborn pair of shifters: both determined to get their way, neither willing to give an inch.

It's no surprise coming from my son, the Alpha: He's used to getting exactly what he wants and setting for nothing less. Selene, on the other hand, has always been so soft and pliant. It is unlike her to dig in her heels this way, but having a pup changes everything.

Right now, my daughter-in-law is not the sweet, skittish she-wolf I used to know: she is a mother protecting her young, not to mention a woman who feels betrayed by her mate. I don't know everything that happened in their marriage or the events which have transpired since, but it's clear to me that Selene is under the impression that Bastien never loved her. Until my son understands and accepts that, they will never move forward.

Leaving the salt marshes and mangrove forests of Asphodel is a breath of fresh air. It takes miles for the landscape to transform into rolling hills and lowland valleys. I can see mountains in the distance, but Bastien has not gotten that far.

I follow his scent to the base of a particularly steep slope, where Aiden and Donovan stand sentry,

- blocking all trespassers from approaching their Alpha.

I stop before them and wait, giving them my most imperious glare. Donovan caves first. He may have age on his side, but he also spent three decades at my husband's side. He knows a losing battle when he sees one.

Aiden glances at his partner skeptically, engaging in some silent debate lost to my ears before he grudgingly moves out of the way. I trot past them with a little huff, soon setting eyes on Bastien up ahead.

I move across the ridge towards the huge black wolf, meeting his glowing silver eyes as I approach. For a moment I think he might turn his back on me and run, but I emit a soft growl with the order, don't even think about it.

His muscles relax – even if his eyes do roll back into his head – and he sits down on the hard rocks, I came out here to be alone.

I'm aware. I inform him derisively, but sometimes being alone isn't what you need.

I don't need a pep talk either, Mother. He counters grumpily, you can't make this better.

I don't think you need a pep talk. I agree warmly. I think you need a good smack on that hard head of

yours.

*Chapter 63 Family isn't About Blood

His furry head swings around, outrage that I haven't automatically taken his side clear on his face. She left me. She chose another wolf. He rumbles, She gave him... He trails off, emotion thick in his voice, Lila should be mine.

Blood doesn't make a father, Bastien. I state firmly, settling beside him. Being a parent is about showing up and putting in the work. It's about providing love and support over a lifetime, giving a pup structure and discipline – and everything else necessary to raise strong, independent adults.

I duck my head, trying to catch his eyes and refusing to continue until his molten gaze returns to mine. Drake isn't Lila's father. She might have his DNA, she might enjoy spending time with him every now and then, but he isn't her parent. I insist. And whatever Selene might say, he isn't her mate.

I can see Bastien gearing up to argue, but I cut him off. I don't know how Lila was conceived, but it's clear to me that – however they started out – Selene doesn't want anything more from Drake than friendship and protection.

She doesn't want me either. Bastien growls.

It takes all my willpower to smother the laugh trying to bubble up in my chest. Sometimes I don't know what the Goddess was thinking, putting men in charge. I admit, you can be the most obtuse lot.

Excuse me? Bastien replies, appearing thoroughly affronted.

You are a fool if you think Selene doesn't want you. I proclaim.

Bastien straightens, pulling up to his full height as if I'm a pack member he can intimidate rather than the being who gave him life. The wolf and the woman are not the same. He argues. I know her wolf recognizes me. That isn't the problem.

The problem, I sigh. Is that you are so absorbed in your own feelings that you have blinded yourself to Selene's perspective. A memory floats to the forefront of my thoughts, my recollections rolling off my tongue as the images take shape in my mind. The day your father died – the day you were supposed to have your rejection ceremony – Selene was heartbroken. She told me it was what you wanted, not her.

The big wolf grimaces. What are you talking about?

I'd forgotten until now... with everything that happened after. I confess, but she thought you didn't love

her.

How could she possibly? Bastien demands, I love her more than anything, I always have.

I close my eyes, aching for the beautiful young woman who landed on our doorstep all those years ago. Bastien, you see the scars of Garrick's abuse in her nightmares and pain loss of her wolf, her mistrust of strangers and fear of men. I explain patiently, but the worst scars are the ones you cannot see. Selene spent the most formative years of her life being told she was worthless and unlovable. Garrick spent eight years telling a child that no one could ever want her, and she believed him.

You have to stop thinking about your relationship in terms of reality and fact. I advise, And start considering how things might have looked to someone who believed she was not worthy of attention or deserving of love.

Bastien's eyes fall shut, a pained expression overtaking his features, The night Selene shifted, she kept saying I only married her out of obligation, and that the only reason I wanted her now was because of her wolf. He continues, I told her it wasn't true but I don't think she remembers. Then I learned that Arabella told Selene I was rejecting her so we could be married.

I nod, wishing I could rip Arabella limb from limb for putting those thoughts in my daughter-in-law's head. And then she tried to kill her. I remind him. Selene's life was in danger and she was convinced you didn't want her and never had. She's spent the last three and a half years letting those ideas fester. I can not blame her for distrusting you now, especially not when she fears for her pup as well as herself.

But she has her wolf now. I can see the gears turning in my son's head, trying to accept my words

#Chapter 63 Family Isn't About Blood

while still rationalizing them against the events of the past few days. She knows Arabella was lying, she can feel our bond.

That may be so. I concede. But Selene has been lost for as long as I've known her – and she's still lost now. I claim with more certainty than I can express. She may be stronger, she may be more confident and better at hiding her feelings, but mark my words, Bastien: she doesn't know what she wants and she's terrified of being hurt again.

Forget everything else that's happened. I beg him. Forget the past, forget your pride and hurt feelings. When it comes down to it, the only thing you need to know is that Lila is a pup without a father and Selene is a she-wolf trying to survive without her mate. I

implore him to understand, Your mate is trying to protect her child from a world that nearly destroyed her, and keep them both safe from wolves who want them dead.

Already I can see Bastien swelling with anger, but I'm not taking any chances. Leveling my son with the sternest glare I can muster, I hammer my point home. If you let a few silly test results change your feelings about them, you aren't the wolf I thought you were.

Pregnant and Rejected by My Alpha Mate Chapter 64

Pregnant and Rejected by My Alpha Mate

Chapter 64

A pair of guards flank the entryway to Selene and Lila's room in the Pack House. Apparently our arrival, combined with the threat of the bounty, was sufficient to cajole my mate into moving in – if only temporarily.

The guards try to block my approach, but quickly quell beneath the force of my scowl, stepping aside so I can knock. Bracing my shoulders for a fight, I rap on the heavy wood, listening to the movement inside with baited breath.

The door swings open, revealing a startled looking Selene. Her hair is up in a messy bun, and her soft blue sundress appears to have been splashed with water. I can smell the remnants of bubble bath and shampoo, and suspect I've just missed bath time.

"Bastien." Selene greets me stiffly, her nervousness clear for all to see. My wolf whines, wanting to comfort his mate, but I hold him off. I don't want Selene to be afraid of me, but I can't show her any reprieve – not yet.

Bracing my hands on the doorframe, I loom near, but do not enter the suite. "We need to talk."

Selene shifts uneasily on her feet. "I'm in the middle of getting Lila to bed."

I glance over her head, searching the small set of rooms with curiosity. Sure enough, Lila is curled on the couch in a pair of footie pajamas, her hair still damp from her bath. Her eyelids flutter heavily, though she clearly wants to stay up. Every few moments she gives herself a little shake and opens her beautiful eyes wide, stubbornly fighting the drowsiness threatening to pull her under.

My heart swells in my chest, overflowing with warmth and affection for the adorable pup. I thought I would feel differently, now that I know she isn't mine. I thought I'd been

imagining the bond I feel with her, that my delusional mind had constructed some fairytale out of false hope and stupidity.

Looking at her now, I know I imagined nothing. I feel every bit as besotted with the tiny creature as I was the moment I first laid eyes on her. I don't see Drake or remember Selene's betrayal. I don't feel the sting of resentment and jealousy – there is only love. Love for the silly she-wolf fruitlessly attempting to block my view of the apartment, and love for the perfect being she created.

"I can wait." I inform Selene, striding past her without asking for permission to enter.

A strangled noise sounds in Selene's throat as she watches me cross the room to the overstuffed sofa. A wide grin stretches across my face when Lila notices my arrival and perks with happiness to see me.

"Bashun!" She exclaims, her excitement fending off sleep just a little while longer.

Thook my hands beneath her outstretched arms, pulling the toddler up and into my embrace, "Well, what have we here?" I grumble playfully, "Can this be the same pup I saw a few hours ago? She's so clean!"

Lila immediately snuggles against my chest, though her nose crinkles up with indignance. "I's already clean!" She informs me with a pout, "I didn't need bath."

She reminds me so much of Selene I can't stand it. Even cranky, she's still so sweet my teeth hurt. "But you smell so good now." I tease, "So good I could eat you right up!" I nuzzle her shoulder making nom nom nom sounds, and Lila breaks into hysterical giggles, wriggling in my arms.

I can see Selene approaching out of the corner of my eye, still looking uncertain, "There will be no eat ing any pups tonight." She announces softly, "It's bedtime."

"I wanna story." Lila declares, looking up at me from beneath her eyelashes.

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Selene's hands reach out to take the child from me, but I turn away before she can make contact. *That can be arranged." I tell Lila indulgently. "Which room is yours?"

"Dat one," She answers immediately, pointing behind me.

Without giving Selene a backwards glance, I carry her pup to bed, tucking her in and settling beside her on the small mattress. My mate follows closely, hovering in the doorway and watching us with a mix of dis belief and confusion. Catching her between my crosshairs, I extend my free arm, inviting her to come lie on my other side.

Selene shakes her head defiantly, and I narrow my eyes, emitting a low rumble while Axel howls for his mate. Selene's body twists and visibly quakes as the sounds move through her, and she wrenches herself

away from the door to escape the sensations.

Alone with Lila, I ask, "Does your mommy tell you stories every night?"

She nods sleepily, cuddling into my side, "Mhmm."

Axel is practically purring with happiness, so content is he to be near Lila. The only thing missing is Selene, and I know part of him is still calling to her wolf, no matter how she fights. "Do you want to hear one of the ones she tells, or something new?"

Lila thinks for a moment, finally squeaking, "new!"

"Alright." I smile softly, searching for the right words to begin. "Once upon a time, there was a brave little wolf who was taken prisoner by an evil sorcerer. He was very *mean* to her, and very bad." I explain dramatically. "He kept her locked away in a cage with no light and no people to talk to. He gave her potions to make her weak, and told her terrible things so she would not have the heart to fight him."

"Why?" Lila murmurs with a frown.

I grapple for an answer that doesn't involve curse words. "Because some people are so unhappy with themselves, that they want to make the rest of the world unhappy too so they aren't alone." I finally answer, "but one day the little wolf outsmarted the sorcerer. When he wasn't looking, she hit him over the head and ran to freedom, where she met a handsome prince who vowed to love her forever."

Glancing at Lila to make sure she's still awake, I press on. "Still, the little wolf was very afraid of the prince because of everything the sorcerer did to her. She thought he was like the man who hurt her, and because she remembered all the terrible things the sorcerer told her about the world, she convinced herself the prince didn't really love her and ran away.

"She ran away?" Lila repeats with a furrowed brow.

"She did." I confirm, "and for many years, the prince thought she was lost forever. He barely survived it, and spent all his time dreaming of the past, wishing that his little wolf would find a way to come back somehow." I trail off for a moment, petting Lila's hair.

"Why are you sad?" Lila's small voice startles me from my reverie, and I realize I've paused for longer than I intended.

“Because this part of the story is sad.” | explain simply. “The little wolf was so afraid of the prince that they both ended up alone and heartbroken for far too long, and it wasn’t until another sorcerer came along

“Was dis sorcer bad too?” Lila wonders aloud.

“Very bad.” | confirm, “But luckily, though he wanted the little wolf, he didn’t know where to find her. When the prince heard about the sorcerer’s search, he traveled to a far away land and discovered his little wolf’s hiding spot. He was so excited when he found her, he thought everything would be alright – but it turns out the little wolf had a secret.”

“Secrets not good.” Lila interjects sagely

#Chapter 64 Still Mine

“Most secrets aren’t.” I agree, “But sometimes – when secrets are to protect someone – they’re okay. The little wolf kept her secret to protect something very precious indeed – a baby.” The pup beneath my arm turns her face up to me, listening intently now. “Now, at first the prince was very upset. He wanted the baby to be his, but she wasn’t.”

A tiny hand clutches at my own, and Lila squeezes my fingers in sympathy as she watches the emotions flit across my face. “The prince never learned to share, and it was very hard for him to understand why his little wolf ran, or accept that her child belonged to another. However the more time he spent with them, the more he realized that none of that mattered.”

“Secrets and fear are very powerful things,” I explain, “but love is stronger. It is stronger than loneliness or heartbreak, it is stronger than all the evil sorcerers in the world. And sometimes happiness isn’t about everything going right or the way you expected. Sometimes it’s simply about choosing love over all those other things.”

“So what happened?” Lila whispers, her eyes closed and her body going just a little bit more limp with every moment that passes.

“They chose love... and when the sorcerer saw the strength of their love, he knew he was defeated.” Lila’s breath is slow and even now, and as I untangle myself from the bed and her small limbs, I lower her head to the pillow. “The sorcerer went away, and the little wolf, her baby and the prince, all lived happily ever af

ter”

Lila is smiling in her sleep, and I find it nearly impossible to take my eyes off of her. I could watch her sleep for hours and never get bored.

My mind had already been made up when I arrived at the Pack House this evening, but even this brief time with the pup has convinced me I’m doing the right thing. My mother

is correct as usual, the test results haven't done a damn thing to alter the bond I feel with Lila.

Blood doesn't make a parent, and I don't care that Lila doesn't share my DNA.

She is still mine.

They both are.

Pregnant and Rejected by My Alpha Mate Chapter 65

Pregnant and Rejected by My Alpha Mate

Chapter 65

Bastien's POV

I close the bedroom door as quietly as I can, unsurprised to find my mate waiting on the other side. I almost smile; some things never change. *My little mate* seems just as prone to eavesdropping as ever, and

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stands with her arms coiled defensively around her body, eyeing me with apprehension.

"Still listening at doorways, little wolf?" I ask, striding forward until I'm towering over Selene and she's forced to back away to escape my shadow.

Rather than answering, she glowers and says, "Why did you do that?"

"Do what?" | feign ignorance, "Put your pup to bed?"

"No." She corrects me immediately. "Why did you say those things to her?"

"Because Lila wanted a bedtime story." I shrug, watching her skirt away from me with amusement. She should know better than to run from a predator – especially her mate. I follow her at a distance, never coming close enough to make contact, but making my intentions all too clear.

You can run, little wolf. Axel rumbles, but you can't hide.

"What did you think of it?"

Selene is beginning to look rather distraught, like a cornered rabbit with nowhere to turn. "It sounded like a fairy tale." She replies dismissively.

"So?" I ask, taking too much pleasure in baiting her. "What could be better for a growing pup?"

"Fairy tales aren't real." Selene argues, a red flush working its way up her cheeks.

I study my mate for a long moment, absorbing the blend of fear and arousal muddying her pristine scent. I can hear her pounding heart and panting breaths, and see the confusion tangling her nerves. Her pupils are great black discs, surrounded by coronas of blue and violet.

Perfect. Axel purrs in my head.

I have to agree. My mate is straddling the precipice of lust and nervousness which never fails to send my blood rushing south. It's been too long – far, far too long – since I've seen her this way, and far too long since we've mated. She's perfectly primed, probably nearing her heat and pushed over the edge by my wolf's provocation. But I still must wait a little while longer.

"Why aren't you with Drake, Selene?" I question sharply.

Completely thrown off balance by the unexpected question, Selene scrabbles for an answer before feebly claiming, "I am."

"No. You joined his pack, you let him father your child, but you aren't together." I assert, prowling near her. "He hasn't marked you, he hasn't formally recognized Lila as his child, and he hasn't moved you into the Pack House until now."

"Because I didn't want him to." She counters, crossing her slender arms over her chest defiantly. "I didn't want a mate – I don't want a mate." She amends, "Drake understands that. He respects it. There are no strings in our relationship."

"And why are you so determined to live without a mate?" I inquire, "what is so terrible about strings?"

"Stop it, Bastien." Selene pleads, "I know what you're doing and it's not going to work."

#Chapter 65 Worth It

"What am I doing?" I ask innocently, stalking her skittish movements.

"You're trying to make me think you love me, and that you'll accept Lila no matter her paternity – so that I'll mate with you." She accuses, looking over her shoulder to make sure her escape path is clear.

That was a mistake. I take the opportunity to close the distance between us, flitting forward so that I'm standing mere inches away when she turns back to face me. I clamp my hand over her mouth before she can cry out, and lock my free arm around her waist, gluing our bodies together.

"Shhh," I croon, shifting my hand to cup her cheek, "I'm sorry, I just didn't want you to wake Lila."

Though her mouth is uncovered, Selene does not try to speak. She holds herself completely still, not frozen in terror, but tensed to the point of shaking – as if she's fighting some internal battle I cannot see. I wonder if her wolf is doing as Axel is: urging her to rub herself all over my body to mark me with her scent.

"You're right, Selene." I declare gently, "I am trying to make you think those things" I let the words hang in the air, giving my mate time to backtrack our conversation. When she remembers the last words spoken before I surprised her, her brow furrows in consternation.

Unable to help myself, I press my lips to her wrinkled forehead with a deep chuckle. "Not because I want to mate with you – though I absolutely do." I promise, "But because that is the way I truly feel."

Selene is already shaking her head, tears welling in her eyes. "You're being cruel." She accuses.

Tracing my hand up and down Selene's spine, I search her expression, "How, sweetheart?"

"Lying about loving someone is a horrible thing to do." She informs me, eyes narrowed to slits. "You broke my heart once, wasn't that enough?"

"Careful, little wolf," I growl, tightening my grip on her small body. "I don't mind if you eavesdrop, or push me away, or even run from me." It takes nearly all my strength to keep the anger I'm feeling out of my voice, and I only succeed in part. "But don't you ever, ever, accuse me of not loving you."

I slide my hand into her long hair, tangling my fingers into a fist and tugging her head back so she's forced to look me in the eye. "I love you, Selene." I profess. "I have always loved you and I'm so sorry I didn't show you enough." I insist. "I was trying to protect myself. I didn't think you could feel our bond without your wolf and I believed you were going to leave me."

Selene whimpers, and I can feel her wolf trying to submit to me, trying to pull her eyes downward even as I force them up. "And I don't care if Lila is Drake's, or anyone else's. I love her too."

“You don’t even know her.” Selene hiccups, “And you don’t know me anymore. I’m not the same person I used to be.”

“I know you made her.” I proclaim, “That’s all I need to know.”

Selene’s black lashes fall shut, forcing out a few tears which slide in rivulets down her cheeks. Her full lower lip trembles dangerously, and I lower my forehead to hers, “And I do know you, Selene.” | murmur. “You’re my mate, I would know you anywhere.”

She shakes her head helplessly from right to left, never parting her skin from mine. “I want to believe you.” The words are so quiet, I can barely hear them.

“Why can’t you?” | press, massaging her nape and letting Axel’s purrs of encouragement vibrate in my chest.

Selene gathers in a deep breath, building up the courage to voice her fears. “Because it doesn’t make any sense.” She exclaims weakly. “You could have anyone. Why would you want me?”

A fresh burst of rage sets my blood to boil, sending the molten liquid surging through my veins with ruthless fury. My mother was right. I wish I could kill Garrick all over again for what he did to my mate. That anyone could put such wretched thoughts in her mind is enough to make me physically ill, and I want to go back in time and rip the wolf from limb to limb.

#Chapter 65 Worth It

“Look at me, Selene.” I instruct huskily, trying to keep my grip on her body gentle even as visions of dismembering her stepfather dance in my head.

It takes a minute for her to comply, but her soaked lashes eventually part, and I plummet into pools of cerulean and lilac. “That’s it.” | praise gently, petting her everywhere our bodies connect. Forcing the connection as long as I can bear before answering her question, I finally explain, “I want you, because you are all I have ever wanted in a mate, and everything I never knew I needed.”

Selene tries to close her eyes again, but I tug lightly on her hair, prompting her to meet my gaze with out reserve, “The goddess created us for each other.” I remind her, “There could never be anyone else for me. It has always been you, Selene.”

I’m not sure whether my words overwhelmed her, or her own complicated feelings are rising to the surface, but her eyes begin to overflow again. I let her bury her face in my chest now, wanting to soothe away her hurts even as I strive to push her out of her comfort zone. “I’m scared.” She breathes shakily.

“I know, baby.” I sigh, pressing my lips to her temple. “That’s how you know it’s worth it.”

As the last words leave my mouth, a loud rap sounds on the door. Without waiting for permission to enter, the wooden panel swings open, revealing Drake Cavanaugh at its center. His gaze is locked on Selene, on her position ensconced in my arms and the tears in her eyes.

I only have a moment to react. One second Drake is watching us with disgruntled disbelief, the next he's flying at me in a fit of temper so violent his wolf bursts through his skin. I only have time to toss Selene out of the way before shifting to meet him.

Whatever his motives, the Eros Alpha just made a critical mistake. It is one thing to attack me on neutral ground or a battlefield, it is another thing entirely to let fly when my mate still stands in the line of fire. No matter what he intended, Drake Cavanaugh just gave me license to put him down – once and for all.