



His Witness To Have

Author: *Summer Rose*

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Description: An unusual chill seized the air of the quiet Destiny falls as dark clouds robbed the Earth of the sun's light. Brie Miller wanted nothing to do with the outside world. It had been two days since her short meeting with Mack. She missed him terribly. Brie could feel her insides shudder at the impact. It hurts each time she remembers the night they shared. Mack's disappearance left a void inside her that needed tending. So, she decides to return to Chicago in a desperate bid to find him and take care of her friend Rachel who was just discharged. But Brie crosses paths with someone she never expected instead. As more women are kidnapped by the Brotherhood of Blood, no one is safe. And her sudden move proves to be a little more overwhelming than she realized. What's in store for Brie in the Windy City? Will she finally find Mack? Or will her unexpected encounter lead her to something else instead?

Total Pages (Source): 11

CHAPTER ONE

The air lacing the atmosphere of the quiet Destiny Falls never felt as thin as it did that day. It was cold. Very cold. The sunlight was dimmed by the dark clouds in the sky, and Brie Miller wanted nothing to do with the outside world.

It had been two days since her concise meeting with Mack. She missed him beyond her wildest dreams, and it hurt each time she remembered the night they shared.

"Brie!" She could hear her mother's faint voice calling out to her. Her mother kept trying all she could to make her happy after Mack's disappearance. Using her cooking skills to her advantage, mornings were filled with breakfast and homemade treats. Afternoons had variety because she didn't know what her mother would spring on her. But Brie was tired of the cheering up. She was tired of all the food and kind words of encouragement her father would occasionally give her. She wanted to forget it all and live her life—alone.

It didn't make any sense to her why Mack would just show up at her doorstep and disappear without a trace. She found herself wanting him even more now that she had had a taste of what it was like to be his. A momentary taste she wished would last longer.

She remembered the last words she heard him say, I love you. Never forget it, no matter what happens. It floated in her head like a bad headache. It was looking more like an empty statement now as she glanced at the other end of her bed. Empty. You don't leave someone you love, she kept telling herself.

"Brie!" The call from her mother got louder this time. She pulled off the bed covers from her face and encountered daylight. Not exactly a sight she wanted to behold again.

It took all the strength she had to haul herself out of bed. She made her way to the kitchen, and a puppy followed closely behind, nudging at her leg with each step she took. She ignored it and greeted her parents on instinct as soon as she entered.

The look on her mother's face changed from a light one to a look of pity as soon as Brie stepped into the kitchen. She always had that look whenever Brie was nearby.

"Brie, darling, breakfast is ready. You should eat up," she said as she tossed a plate of bacon and a seasoned omelet on the table. Her father got up from the table and walked to the fridge to get a carton of orange juice.

"Have some juice while you're chowing down," he said cheerfully, pouring it into a glass. Brie loved her parents so much. She appreciated the constant effort they put in to cheer her up, but she wasn't going to sulk forever. If Mack wanted to leave, then he should. He had the option to, after all.

Brie sat down at the breakfast table and poked her fork into the crispy bacon on her plate. Why did he leave? she kept asking herself.

She immediately snapped herself out of her trance and proceeded to push every thought about Mack away.

"How's Rachel? Has the hospital called yet?" she quizzed.

"They placed a call this morning," her father replied with his mouth full. "She has recovered quite nicely, and they're planning on getting her discharged by the weekend."

"Okay," she replied in a nonchalant tone.

Rachel had been dragged into this mess because of her, and she suffered the most. She remembered watching Rachel get beat up by those horrible men while she remained bound to a corner, helpless, unable to do a thing.

They tore her clothes and attempted to rape her while she fought with all the strength she could muster. She remembered every punch they landed on her face each time she resisted. Every tear she had shed after every blow and the shriveled screams she let out when her strength was diminishing. Brie couldn't stop the tears from gathering in her eyes at that moment.

They didn't really do much to Brie compared to what they did to Rachel. They just tied her up and threatened to kill her a few times, but she couldn't understand why Rachel had to suffer so much. She didn't deserve it. She was just unlucky to be with her when they kidnapped her.

Brie pushed her plate forward without taking a bite. "Mom," she began, "I'm going to the hospital in Chicago to see Rachel."

"What?!" her parents exclaimed in unison.

"You heard me. I'm going to Chicago to see Rachel."

Her mom left the potatoes she was washing in the sink and rushed over to her side to place a firm hand on her shoulder.

As if on cue, her father chipped in, "You're not leaving this house, young lady, and definitely not back to Chicago."

Brie glared at her father. "Why not?"

"Baby, you're recovering," her mother said softly, maintaining a firm hand on her shoulder. "It wouldn't be a good idea to go back to Chicago. What if those guys come back for you?"

Brie looked indifferent. She had expected them to be totally against the idea, but she knew she couldn't stay here anymore.

"I'll be safe. I promise." The look in her eyes was fiery. "I need to make sure she has someone to take care of her as soon as she's discharged. And it's not like I'm really doing anything here in Destiny Falls."

Her father snapped, slamming his hands on the table with a force that made the cutlery rattle. "Brianna Miller! Listen to me and listen well. Under no circumstances are you to leave this house for Chicago! I mean it!"

Brie didn't want to hear it. She broke free from her mother's grip and stood up to face her father.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 2:38 am

"Rachel needs me!" she said before storming out of the room. That was the most chaos they had had in the house since the dogs and cats had a fight. And her father stood, stunned as he watched his daughter disappear into the hallway.

CHAPTER TWO

Brie could feel a fiery pit in her stomach. She had never been one to yell at her parents, but she needed to go back to Chicago at all costs. She entered her room and slammed the door behind her, releasing all the tears that had built up during breakfast.

She really wanted to go see Rachel. She needed to be sure that she was fine and apologize for roping her into such a dangerous situation, but she felt that wasn't the real reason she was so adamant about going back to Chicago.

She reminisced about that feeling. The one that overcame her when she discovered that Mack hadn't really transferred from Chicago. Could it be hope? It must have been hope.

Mack was really all she wanted. She had realized that long before she was kidnapped. The night they shared together made her want him even more, and she was willing to do all it took to get him back.

She fished her phone from her bedside table and tried to call him once again, having this blind hope that he would pick up and tell her it was all a mistake. All a trick he was playing on her to see if she could still hold on to him. She really wanted it to be. On the third ring, she couldn't handle it anymore and ended the call.

Brie had not always been the strong one. That was the exact reason why she kept to herself in the first place. She hated being hurt, being used as if she wasn't important. She dropped the phone on the bed and crouched behind her door, plopping her head in her hands. The tears flowed out once more; she couldn't help it.

After a while, she decided to pull herself together. Snatching her bag from underneath her bed, she walked over to her closet and hurriedly stuffed a few clothes in it. She couldn't take much. Only a few things were needed. The trip to Chicago was going to be a long and potentially damaging one, but she was determined to find Mack no matter what.

A sudden knock on the door came echoing through her room, and she rapidly stuffed the half-full bag back under her bed. Running her pajama sleeve over her eyes to dry the tears, she opened the door to her mother at the entrance. It was obvious she was worried about her. She hadn't fully recovered from the trauma of the kidnap, and she obviously hadn't recovered from the pain of Mack's desertion, but she didn't want to worry her parents anymore.

"Brie, baby. How are you feeling?" she asked cautiously.

"Mom, please let me go to Chicago. He wouldn't have shown up here if he didn't want me," she said abruptly, nearly in tears again.

Her mother stepped in, embracing her tightly until the tears couldn't stop flowing out.

"When you love something, you want to go after it with everything you've got," she said in a warm, comforting tone.

Brie broke free from the hug. "So, what does this mean?" she asked with a sniff.

"Please be careful on your way to Chicago, darling." Brie's eyes lit up instantly. "And

extend my love to Rachel while you're at it. She needs you."

"What... What about Dad?"

"Leave that to me, honey. Just promise me that you'll be careful."

Brie hugged her mother again, lovingly stroking her hair and whispering in her ear, "It'll be fine."

And with that, Brie pulled away and continued packing her things. She planned to leave for Chicago the next day.

She picked up her phone lying close to the door and dialed Rachel's number, which she left to ring on speakerphone while she was packing. Her mother had exited her room, and Rachel finally picked on the last ring.

"Hello?" she said faintly.

"Rachel! Oh my God, are you okay? How is the hospital? I heard you're getting discharged soon," Brie blurted. She let all the worry and anxiety pour out in her words. They had been bottled up for too long.

"Brie? Is that you?"

Brie wanted to cry again. Her best friend was alright. And she could finally hear her voice.

"Yes, babe," she responded. "I'm coming to Chicago tomorrow morning."

"What about your parents?" Rachel quizzed in a slight tone of a question.

"It's been a rough patch, but I hope they really let me leave after what happened."

"And Mack?"

Brie froze. She was expecting that question, but she didn't really expect it to hit her that hard. She could feel a tightening in her chest as Rachel mentioned his name.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 2:38 am

"I need to see him and thank him," she confessed. "God knows I would've died if he didn't risk his life to rescue..."

"Rachel, what's your health status? Are you still sore?" Brie cut in, trying to put off every discussion about Mack.

Rachel paused for a while. "Yeah, it still kind of hurts. Most of the swelling on my face has gone down, but I'm fine regardless."

"That's great! I'll come to take care of you personally when I get there," Brie said, continually attempting to stray away from the topic. "I'll see you tomorrow," she finished in a softer tone.

"I'll be expecting you," Rachel answered before ending the call.

Holding the phone close to her chest, Brie heaved an obviously heavy sigh. It's going to be fine.

The road back to Chicago was practically empty and unusually quiet. News flying around was that most of the residents fled the city after they heard about the kidnapping of Rachel and Brie. Nobody felt safe, and it was understandable because nobody could tell who would come to cause mayhem again.

The taxi arrived at her apartment, and it was in the worst state. She hadn't been there in almost two months, and she knew she had to brace herself for the worst when it

came to the Brotherhood of Blood – and in cleaning her apartment.

She plopped on her couch, and her phone lit up. What she saw on it sent her heart beating uncontrollably. It was a text from Mack and it read.

I miss you.

CHAPTER THREE

Brie stared at her phone as though she had seen a ghost. A mixture of anger and anxiety formed in her stomach as she read those three words repeatedly to herself.

Mack texted her? After abandoning her? Anger started dominating the other things she felt, and she switched off her phone.

Screw you, she muttered under her breath.

After hours of cleaning up and sorting out her stuff, her stomach rumbled hard. She hadn't eaten since the morning before when she had the tussle with her parents about traveling back to Chicago. She took her coat off the hanger and decided to go out to eat.

She walked past many familiar places. Places she didn't think she'd miss, but she did. Arriving at a nearby diner, the sudden recollection of the incident that happened with Bryan and his wife at the diner in Destiny Falls surfaced in her thoughts. She remembered how Mack had pulled her out of that dire situation, and she began to miss him even more. Everything she saw, said or thought about always found a way to link itself to Mack. She couldn't take it anymore.

Settling down to eat, she placed her order and waited patiently for her food to arrive. Then out of the blue, she heard her name being called from the other end of the diner.

It was a short, plump middle-aged man with a stomach the size of a soccer ball or two. He was with a couple of other guys, but he excused himself to walk toward where she was seated.

"You're Brianna Miller, right?" the man said swiftly. Scared, Brie figured she shouldn't give out her identity so easily to prevent her from being a victim again.

"Who are you?" she responded instead.

He quickly dipped his hand in his breast pocket and brought out a folded wallet, which he opened to reveal a badge. "I'm Deputy Chief Daniel Rodgers. The Head of the FBI, Chicago department."

Brie wore a confused look.

"I know you were connected to Agent Mack, and I am so sorry about what happened to you. I never got a chance to visit you because you didn't check into the hospital here."

As soon as Mack's name was mentioned, Brie didn't listen to anything else the man said. "Where is he now?"

"Agent Mack?" he asked. "He hasn't been to work in days. The last time I heard from him, he told me he was going back to Destiny falls. Nobody has heard from him since."

Brie's heart sank. Where could he be? She thought to herself as she flashed fake smiles to Deputy Chief Rodgers, who was busy chattering away about something she wasn't listening to. She pulled out her phone and stared down at the text from Mack.

"How are the members of the Brotherhood of Blood that were captured that day?" she

blurted out as soon as she snapped out of her trance.

The Deputy Chief sighed. "We interrogated them, and they were reluctant to talk – very reluctant. So, we had to resort to other means."

"What kind of means?"

"I'm sorry, but I can't disclose our techniques," he paused and then continued, "Let's just say two of them are currently singing like a canary while the rest of them are still holding out but refusing to talk. It's like they swore some sort of oath of silence..." he said as his voice trailed off.

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 2:38 am

There hadn't been any recent news of kidnappings or murders in Chicago since they had been captured, but he was still frustrated on this case because Kamal, their leader, was still at large.

Their conversation was interrupted by the waiter bringing Brie's food. Deputy Chief Rodgers eventually excused himself and went back to the other end of the diner.

Brie began to wonder what exactly he wanted from her. Although he looked as though he was genuinely concerned about her safety, she sensed something fishy in their conversation.

While she was eating, she sent a quick text to Rachel:

BE THERE IN A FEW

She received an instant reply from Rachel and dropped her phone with a smile, trying not to let her mind wander off.

Getting a cab in Chicago was never this easy, especially to the hospital. There is usually a crowd of people struggling to get in with you, and sometimes a fight would erupt on the streets. There were patrol stations positioned in almost every corner of every street, and the security had tripled. Nobody trusted anybody again, and all eyes were peeled because Kamal was still on the loose.

As soon as Brie arrived at the hospital, she walked up to the receptionist who directed

her to Rachel's room. As soon as she entered, she saw her friend in a sitting position. She had a bandage on her head, and was out of the bed, staring out the window as Brie slowly approached her. As soon as Rachel noticed her, she jumped to her feet and embraced Brie in a warm hug.

"Babe, I've missed you so much," Brie started. "I'm sorry for everything you've gone through because of me." She was about to break into tears again.

Rachel tore away from the hug and placed her palm on Brie's face. It was hot with tears as she brushed some aside with her thumb.

"I'm glad you're alright," Brie said. Rachel was still silent but wearing a smile.

Brie was glad Rachel was alright. Fit enough to be discharged the next day, but she wished she could stop her mind from gravitating toward the thought of Mack. She felt guilty that all she could think of was him. Even though she was here with her friend that nearly died, Mack was still a prominent thought in her head.

A nurse walked into the room to give Rachel her last dose of medication, and as she turned to leave, she stopped dead in her tracks in front of the television screen. She suddenly panicked and turned up the volume of the TV. There was a breaking news headline:

**TERROR RETURNS TO CHICAGO AS TWO WOMEN FEARED KIDNAPPED,
GO MISSING ON A HIKING TRIP**

Brie's heart stopped, and Rachel started panicking; they're back.

CHAPTER FOUR

Every day was practically a run — a run from all the problems in his life. Mack woke

up from his bed with his heart racing and in a cold sweat. He had another nightmare. They kept coming, growing more frightening each time he slept. They were all about Brie, each one with a more gruesome thing happening to her.

Ever since he disappeared from her side at Destiny Falls, he didn't have the guts to call or pick up any of her calls. He loved her, but he wanted to protect her at all costs.

Ever since they crossed paths, he had done nothing but put her in danger. He felt guilty for every single thing that had happened to her. Immediately after he rescued Rachel from the den of the Brotherhood of Blood, the last thing he could remember was being hit by something hard. As soon as he woke up in the hospital, he was told that Brie had been taken to Destiny Falls, and he immediately felt thankful for her safety.

He didn't know how badly she was hurt, but if he was to judge by how he found Rachel, he couldn't help but feel worried. Then he set out on the long journey to Destiny Fall, without having to fully recover himself. He had to see her. He had to confirm with his own eyes that she was safe and sound, so he took a break from work, in addition to his sick leave, under the pretense that he was going home to recuperate and drove all the way down to see her.

His heart was in his throat when he pulled up to the front yard of her house. It had the same warm and friendly atmosphere as when he came the first time, but it made him even more nervous.

As soon as he saw her out on the front porch, he was petrified. There she was, sitting as though she was expecting his arrival. He couldn't control himself any longer. All his desires came pouring out the moment she saw him too and, like magic, had a blissful night together. But Mack wasn't completely at ease.

The more he thought about her, the more he wanted her. And him wanting her would

only pave the way for more adversities, so he decided to close Brie out of his life. Protecting her from his bad luck and choosing to suffer alone.

Mack got up from his bed and went into the bathroom. After getting out, he looked through his phone and saw a missed call from Brie. She was trying to get to him again and making it even harder for him to stay away. He didn't want to ignore her for long. He knew she was hurting on the inside all because of him, but he wanted her to know that he still cared – very much.

But he didn't want anything to happen to her, not again. He sent a very short text, hoping to signal to her that he was still there but just couldn't be with her. He hoped she didn't resent him for leaving, but he had no choice.

A part of him yearned for her, more than he expected it to, but until Kamal was caught alive or dead, Brie was always going to be his target. Even more likely when he's around her.

Kamal had failed to kill Brie twice now. The first time at the animal shelter when she first saw him, and the second time when she was kidnapped to get to him. Kamal has been in hiding ever since their den was uncovered, but Mack was certain that he would not rest till he punished Brie for exposing his identity to the public.

Mack turned on the TV and saw the breaking news of the women that were kidnapped on their hiking trip. He felt a sharp pain in his head as he remembered the blow he received while fighting Kamal and his men in order to rescue Brie and her friend. He also remembered the death of his friend Dave, who got shot in the process.

Mack felt extremely overwhelmed, but he needed to push forward if he ever wanted to live in peace. Kamal was a tricky one; he was last spotted in New York when he fled. What are the odds that he could be back in Chicago to exert his revenge on them already? He quickly put on his uniform as he made his way back to work to inform

them of the latest proceedings.

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 2:38 am

Early Saturday morning, Brie and Rachel were out of the hospital. Scared to be apart from each other, they both agreed to stay with Rachel's grandparents, who lived quietly in the outskirts of the city. The environment was peaceful and serene, perfect for retirement, and Brie was glad to be surrounded by such loving people.

For a few days, she lived in happiness and peace, almost completely forgetting about her traumatic experience. Rachel was recuperating quite well also, and it seemed like life wouldn't go toward a bad turn anytime soon. But that wasn't the case.

A week after Brie and Rachel had settled down, Brie got a mysterious text from an unknown number.

Welcome back, girlie. I've been waiting for you.

CHAPTER FIVE

"Two women have been missing for more than a week!" Deputy Chief Rodgers shouted as he held a meeting with all FBI officials and agents. The police had tried all they could, but all to no avail, so they had the case transferred to the FBI special team.

The deputy chief was standing in front of a whiteboard that had indecipherable scribbles made with a red marker. "The victim's families have been in and out of the police station in tears and worried every single day since then. We have to intervene," he continued before coming to a sudden halt in front of everyone else.

After what happened to Mack and with the demise of agent Dave, nobody in the FBI department wanted to be part of a rescue mission anymore. Strange right?

The room was filled with suffocating silence. Deputy Chief Rodgers didn't move from his position and looked as though he was stuck there. He stared back at the face of everyone seated, looking at him. Mack was seated at the desk on the other end of the room, lost in his own world but still chipping into the meeting they were having every once in a while.

Everyone in the department was scared of the Brotherhood of Blood, Kamal especially, and would dread every part of it if they were deployed on a search for the victims. If Kamal was the one who truly masterminded the kidnap, then they were in for a hard one.

"In the light of the recent developments, a search will be conducted on Mount Olive, which was the last place the victims were seen. Starting tomorrow," Rodgers announced, still standing in the same spot.

The silence continued; nobody dared to defy Rodgers's orders. Nobody was bold enough – nobody except Mack, of course.

"I think we should put the search on hold, sir," Mack called out from his spot at the other end of the room. Everyone turned to face him. Whispers and murmurs fly around the room. What was he doing?

Rodgers was stunned. This was the same guy who insisted on taking his own team to a rescue mission and nearly got killed.

"Agent Mack, why should we put the search on hold, if I may ask?"

"Because I don't want us to lose any more men. We have to be more calculative in

our approach when dealing with Kamal. He always seems to be one step ahead of us..." then his voice trailed off. "We can't afford to lose anyone else."

The deputy chief scoffed. "So, what are you saying we do about this situation Agent Mack?"

"Let's lure him out."

"What?!" everyone shouted in unison. The murmurs in the room intensified.

"And how do you plan on doing that?" he asked in a surprised tone.

"If we find something he is looking for or someone at the very least, then we can find a way to negotiate with him for the release of the women. And maybe even pinpoint his location carefully enough to capture him."

"Negotiate with a serial killer? You must be out of your mind!" he yelled. "First, you get Agent Dave killed in your reckless rescue mission, and you barely make it out alive yourself. Do you think we would listen to anything you say again?"

Mack kept mute. There he went with the blame game again. And for the second time, he found a way to lay everything on him again. He felt a ball of rage form in his stomach, ready to explode, but he tamed it down as much as he could.

"With all due respect, sir, I just made a suggestion to the team. I will not sit here and be the pit you toss your worries into." And with that, Mack stood up and left the office. I'll show him...

Mack took a small pistol and stuffed it in his belt. He had a plan, and he was going to execute it whether or not he had the support of his teammates and colleagues.

He exited the FBI office and headed down to the old building the Brotherhood of Blood used as their den before they were discovered. It still reeked of sulfur, and Mack could feel his lungs shriveling from within. He was alone, with a tiny pistol cocked in his right hand and a keen eye to watch out for any clue that might help him get a step further from his current dormant state in this case.

He ascended the staircase that led to the rooms on the second floor, and he heard a strange sound, like some sort of rattling going on in one of the rooms. He held his weapon tightly and positioned his finger on the trigger, getting ready to shoot when necessary. He got closer to the door and placed his ear over it to listen. The rattling got louder, and in a swift, confident move, he kicked the door down.

What he saw behind the door shook him down to his bones.

CHAPTER SIX

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 2:38 am

Brie had a hard time sleeping. The message kept haunting her all day, and she had no idea who it was from. She normally wouldn't have given such a message a second thought and dismissed it as a wrong number, but something about that message sent a familiar shiver down her spine.

She made sure she didn't go out alone just to avoid being a victim of another unfortunate circumstance and told Rachel to be cautious also.

Brie was jittery. She suddenly started feeling unsafe and couldn't shake the feeling of being watched. She told Rachel about the text the next day, and her friend told her not to worry about it, dismissing it as a text sent from a wrong number. The same thing I would've said.

Brie's phone lit up again at that moment in the middle of their conversation, but this time, the sender of the text was someone totally unexpected... It read:

I'm in Chicago for business; let's meet up.

It was from Bryan...

The startled look on Brie's face could not be explained. She stared at her phone as if she had just seen a ghost and hesitated to pick it up even when the text flashed right before her eyes.

Why was Bryan texting her? Why did he suddenly want to meet up with her after their last not-so-friendly encounter in Destiny Falls? Had he forgotten about how he made her feel so inferior compared to his trophy wife? All the pain she went through

because of him, and he just expected her to sweep it all under the carpet and meet up? He must be joking.

She left the text unanswered, and her mind shot back to Mack. He was there for her when she felt completely useless. He made her feel more like a woman than Bryan ever did all the years they dated. If only he was here now, she wouldn't have even considered picking up Bryan's call. If only she could just see him one more time, that maybe he would've made her forget about her bad thoughts.

Her thoughts suddenly got interrupted by the loud ringing of her phone. She looked at the caller ID, and her mood turned sour. Bryan was calling, and she had no intention of picking up. Rachel walked out of the room, and by the time she was back, Brie's phone was blowing up with calls from Bryan while she sat there staring at the phone like a fascinated child.

"I think you should pick up. At least see what he wants," she said, stuffing a cinnamon roll into her mouth.

Brie was nervous. She wasn't ready for this, but she was curious as to why Bryan suddenly needed to see her.

"Hello?" she answered, with a hint of nervousness in her voice.

"Hi, Brie. It's Bryan. In case you... Um... Deleted my number." He didn't sound like his usual cocky self.

"Hey, Bryan. What's up?" she said in a softer tone.

"I really need to see you as soon as possible. I need your help."

The words struck her hard. Bryan needed her help? With what?

"What do you need me for? I'm not really useful in a lot of things..." she muttered.

"My sister has been kidnapped. I think it's the same guy that kidnapped you and your friend a few weeks back."

Brie went cold. "Your sister was kidnapped?! What? When?"

Bryan let out a sigh. It was obvious he was exhausted from his tone. "She went hiking with her friend up Mount Olive, and they didn't come back."

She suddenly remembered the news she heard about the recent abduction.

"What do you need me for?" she asked again.

"I want you to come with me to the police station. Write out a statement. Describe what the guy looks like. Anything that would lead them to rescue my sister."

Brie started feeling bad for him. This was probably what Mack felt like when she was abducted. The restlessness, the mental struggle, and having to accommodate the thought that your special one could be dead at any time. She could hear the terror and anxiety in his voice. She had never seen this side of Bryan.

"Calm down, Bryan. I'm sure the police are already doing something about it. It's going to be al—"

"Please!" Bryan said, cutting her off. "They'll probably do better if they have a little push. Especially since you've been a victim."

Brie didn't know what to say. She had promised not to get involved with the police or anything relating to the kidnapping. She wanted to stay away from all that and not relive the experience, but it was difficult, knowing that someone else was going

through the exact same ordeal she went through.

"Bryan... I'll... I'll think about it, okay? I've been through a lot recently, so I need some time."

Bryan was silent for a few seconds. Brie held her breath and hoped he didn't yell at her the way he used to whenever she didn't do what he wanted.

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 2:38 am

"It's fine Brie, take your time. If you decide to help, I'll be here. Thank you, and I'm sorry," he finally said.

Bryan was sorry? Her return to Chicago has been filled with a lot of surprises.

"What are you sorry for exactly?" she decided to ask.

"Everything," he answered sincerely. "Every single thing I've ever done to hurt you."

Brie had to pinch herself to make sure she wasn't dreaming. She cast a look at Rachel, and she gave a nonchalant shrug of her shoulders in response.

"Oh well, that's alright. I guess we just have to let bygones be bygones at the very end."

"Yeah, I guess so. Bye then."

"Yeah, bye," and the line went dead.

As soon as the call ended, Brie dropped her phone on the counter and held her head in her palms. Why did he have to apologize now?

Rachel pulled her chair closer to her and sat down with a plop. "Did he want to get back together with you? After abandoning and abusing you?" The look on her face was emotionless.

"Woah! Calm down, Rachel. Nobody mentioned that." But she still retained that look

on her face.

"He just said he needed my help. His sister has been kidnapped. Probably in the clutches of those bastards, too."

"His sister?"

"Yeah, and her friend. Up Mount Olive."

"Then why did he just end up sounding desperate for whatever he wanted from you?"

Brie had no idea. She wanted to believe that Bryan had truly repented from the way he was. His current attitude made Brie sympathetic, and she really wished that at the end of it all, she wouldn't regret considering helping him.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Mack had never been the type of guy to play by the rules. He hated when people looked down on him for that, especially when his plan unexpectedly went south.

He was in the former hideout of the Brotherhood of Blood. He hated it there because the horrible memories came flooding back as though they had just happened yesterday.

He was drawn to one of the rooms by an unusual sound, and he mustered every courage within him to kick down the door, and what he saw behind the door was shocking.

It looked like a shrine. It had pictures of women – lots of women who were either bruised, badly swollen, or bleeding from a part of their body. They looked like the victims of his kidnapping spree. He recognized a few of them, specifically the ones

that were dead, a few others he hadn't seen before. Were there more women still captured and locked up somewhere by this psychopath?

There were candles arranged around the pictures, which were placed directly under the window, and they burned very dimly but had this strange crackling sound. It looked like they had something burning in the flame of the candle, but he couldn't tell what it was.

He moved closer to the shrine and drew back when he saw and recognized a picture of a badly hurt Rachel, and the image of how he found her flashed in his head. He tried shaking the thought off, but he was immediately terrified when he noticed a picture of Brie sitting somewhere in the middle of all the others.

She wasn't really hurt compared to the other women – except for a few noticeable bruises here and there in her face. Why the hell was she the only one not really hurt or killed by Kamal? Something didn't feel right.

He wanted to take out his phone to take a picture of the disturbing sight in front of him, but he realized he had left it at the office. He took one last look at the shrine and left the room immediately without looking back. That definitely shook him. There was more to this serial killer than meets the eye.

As soon as Mack left the room, he couldn't shake this feeling of being watched, but he ignored it and proceeded to look around the building, searching the ground floor, this time for any other clues. After combing through every corner of the ground floor, satisfied that there wasn't anything else apart from the creepy shrine he had seen upstairs, he went to leave.

There was a part of him that told him to go back to the room with the shrine. The sight of that thing disturbed him so much, especially when it looked as though Brie could potentially be in danger again. He constantly brought up different questions in

his head he couldn't seem to answer. Why Brie? Why wasn't she hurt like the others?

He made his way up the creaky stairs again and skillfully maneuvered his way through the semi-dark corridor into the now open room. He took one last look at it and decided that he needed to get extra hands, especially the forensics team, on board for this. Something needed to be done about this.

He swiftly left the building with the image of that shine burned into his memory. He had told himself that he was going to avoid Brie to reduce her risk of danger, but he realized that she was in even more danger if he didn't do anything about it.

He made his way back to the FBI headquarters and went straight to the deputy chief's room in a rush, panting heavily as he burst through his office door.

Page 8

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 2:38 am

"Sir! I just returned from the abandoned den of the Brotherhood of Blood, and I found something very disturbing. I advise that we mobilize some men and the forensics team to take a closer look," he said very quickly.

The deputy chief was shocked. "You went to a danger zone? By yourself?" he quizzed, maintaining this disgusted look on his face as he kept looking at the exhausted agent in his office.

"Sir! We have no time for this! Please, we need to go back to the building! What I saw could be a clue to help us in this case."

"And how am I sure you're not just talking gibberish?" he questioned with a stern voice.

"Please, sir, let's just get some men to follow me back. I have something to show them."

And with that, a team was quickly put together, and Mack led them back to the building. They ascended the staircase, and on getting to the corridor, Mack noticed something even more unusual. The door he had kicked down had been replaced as if it was never damaged in the first place; he had a bad feeling about that as he stopped in his tracks right in front of the door.

The other members of the team pushed a stunned Mack away from the door, entered the room, and saw nothing. The shrine had disappeared.

The FBI agents were confused and set out to search other parts of the building. To

Mack's paralyzing dismay and to their disappointment, nothing was found in the building. Everything was gone...

CHAPTER EIGHT

Brie tossed and turned in bed. She was to meet Bryan the following morning at the police station, and although she felt uneasy about it, it felt like the right thing to do. She knew she was compromising her safety again, but she felt obligated to at least help, one way or the other, to prevent other women from having to go through the same ordeal she went through in the hands of the Brotherhood of Blood. Maybe, just maybe, they would find a way to put an end to all this madness.

She had decided to remain anonymous to every question they asked and to also request maximum protection by the police to safeguard Rachel and her. She didn't want to take any chances, and she prayed that she wasn't making a mistake.

The morning came sooner than Brie expected and at 8 am, she was already out of bed, preparing her mind, body, and soul for the tedious day ahead of her.

By 10 am, she was out of the house and walked to get a taxi to take her into town. She couldn't relax and felt tense throughout the entire taxi ride.

Bryan had told her to meet him in front of the Chicago bank, which was a short walk to the police station. She hadn't been in that area in months, but she still remembered when she had to go there almost every day to aid the case however way she could.

The taxi dropped her off at her destination, and she swiftly paid the fare. Bryan was nowhere in sight, so she paced around the front of the bank for a while. She spotted a tall, dark manly figure approaching her, and she was gripped with fear. Could that be Bryan? She hadn't seen him in a while, so she wasn't too sure.

The man wore a baseball cap so she couldn't make out his face. He drew nearer and nearer, and Brie started sensing this dangerous vibe from the man. What if it wasn't Bryan? She got scared, and she wanted to quickly enter the bank for safety when the man reached out to grab her by the hand. She was about to scream, but the figure quickly pulled off his baseball cap, and Bryan's facial features started coming into focus.

"Hey," he said with an apologetic look in his eye. "I didn't mean to scare you like that."

"You scared the hell out of me!" she said defensively. "Why did you dress like that?"

Bryan looked down at his clothes and realized he might be mistaken for something dangerous in present-day Chicago. "I'm sorry, but I didn't want to be recognized by anyone here on the street."

Brie was confused. "Recognized?" she questioned. "I thought you still lived in Destiny Falls with your wife?"

Saying the word 'wife' triggered something in Brie. She didn't think she'd feel anything, but I guess she hadn't totally buried her past with Bryan.

He cast a look of surprise on her. "I moved out of Destiny Falls years ago. I never really settled in one place. I was practically out and about due to business, so I have some pretty solid connections here and there." Brie just kept staring at him.

"I also work in this bank here," he said, looking up at the story building behind them. "I ran away from work today. Another reason I don't want to be seen around here." Brie was impressed, but she couldn't do anything but stare at him. "And as for Paula? We finalized our divorce last month," he continued. This time, Brie couldn't hide the look of utter shock on her face.

"Why?"

"She didn't like the fact that I wasn't settled. I guess she couldn't take it anymore, so she decided to split."

Brie couldn't explain why everything Bryan said so far relieved her. Bryan was changing. He didn't seem like the same man who had snickered at her at the diner in Destiny Falls. He felt... Different.

"So, are you willing to help me out?" he asked as if waiting for a clear confirmation from her.

She forced a weak smile. "I wouldn't have left my house today if I wasn't going to," she said. "Shall we?"

They walked down the road and passed the animal shelter she used to work at. It was closed temporarily. After her and Rachel were kidnapped, Rachel's sister had to call in the animal protection agency to pick up the animals into their care. Since neither she nor Rachel was ready to go back to work anytime soon, Brie couldn't help but feel overwhelmed. A lot of things had happened within those few months that she was thankful she made it out alive and healthy.

They got to the police station, and she saw an FBI station wagon parked out in front. Her heart skipped a bit as her mind shot back to Mack. Could he be here?

Page 9

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 2:38 am

She followed closely behind Bryan as he led her in, his hand in hers. As soon as they were in, they were directed to the Violent Crimes Department where she was asked a few questions about her ordeal in the hands of the Brotherhood of Blood. She braced herself for every question they asked, and she did a pretty good job answering them.

As soon as she was done with the first round of questioning, she was told to wait at the lobby before they proceeded with the next. She sat patiently beside Bryan in the waiting area, and her nerves started to get the best of her. She was fidgeting, and Bryan slipped his hand into hers. "It's going to be fine," he whispered before pulling the corners of his mouth in a smile.

Suddenly, a voice was heard in one of the rooms, and Brie had to be sure she didn't hear things.

"I told you! It was there!" came the voice. It sounded like it was coming from one of the rooms down the hallway.

"Yes! Yes! I saw it with my own two eyes. There was a shrine there, and it had pictures of the kidnapped women!" came the voice again. This time Brie instantly recognized who the voice belonged to...

CHAPTER NINE

Brie was frozen to her seat. That was Mack's voice. She was sure of it. She remembered that same voice when he was in her bed—softer, whispering sweet nothings into her ears and breaking out in sensual moans when they made magic. The voice now had a harsh tone — a tone of frustration.

"You think I'm crazy, right?! I'm telling you that I saw this! You have to believe me!" it came a third time. Brie wanted to run into the room to see his face. His face that she had missed so much, but she was being held down by Bryan, whose hands were still in hers.

The door to the room suddenly darted open, and Mark appeared, storming down the corridor in a rage that could melt iron. He didn't seem to be paying attention to anything else around him until he saw her at the end of the hallway, holding hands with someone totally unexpected.

He stopped in his tracks and stared at Brie and Bryan. The look on his face couldn't be tied to one emotion. He was confused, though.

Brie broke free from Bryan's hold and stood up, staring back at Mack with the same intensity. There she was, standing face to face with the man who had run away from her after confessing his love to her. The man who left her all alone when she needed him the most, and she could feel the tears building up.

Mack just stood there, dumbfounded. Unable to speak or react to Brie's presence. It felt like forever, and he missed her so much. He felt a wave of relief wash over him, seeing that she was hale and hearty, but also a spark of rage when he saw she was with Bryan.

He took a few steps forward, and Brie stepped back as if warning him not to come any closer. She was scared. Scared that she would melt to the ground if he touched her. Scared that she wouldn't want to ever let go if he held her. All she could bring herself to do was to stare back at him.

"Agent Mack!" called out a voice from the room he just darted from. "The chief of police wants to see you in his office immediately."

Mack didn't take his eyes off Brie, and Bryan stood up to lead Brie out of the hallway to the interrogation room for her next round of questioning.

As soon as Brie and Bryan were gone, Mack felt broken. Why was she with him? Were they back together again?

He couldn't feel his heart beating anymore. It felt like all the life had been sucked out of him the moment he saw them holding hands. He felt defeated that his plan to protect Brie only led her to the hands of another.

He took a step back and heaved a heavy sigh. Forcing his legs to move towards the Chief of Police's office.

Brie was shaken. She didn't expect to see Mack here, not like this. Not when she was with Bryan. She could feel the hurt that showed on his face when he noticed that her hands were in Bryan's. It wasn't what it looked like.

She wanted to run back to the hallway and run to him. She missed him a lot, and she wanted to see him again, but she was led into the interrogation room before she could even have the chance to collect her thoughts.

The day was a long one, but she felt a little fulfilled. She had managed to brush the thought of Mack that constantly found its way to her head and focus on the interrogation.

Bryan escorted her out of the police station, where she stood staring at the slightly less busy Chicago evening road. She was about to board a taxi back to Rachel's grandparents' place, but she was stopped by Bryan.

"Brie... I.." he started, trying to force the words to fall out of his mouth.

Brie just stood there. "What is it?" she finally managed to say.

"I just wanted to apologize to you in person for everything I had put you through all those years when we were together."

"I have forgiven you already, a long time ago," she responded, turning back to walk towards the direction of the taxi she had stopped.

"Please, listen to me." And Brie came to a halt, slowly turning back to face him. "Brie. I have been nothing but an asshole to you all these years," he began, "causing you nothing but pain and sorrow, and I want to truly say I'm sorry for everything."

Brie remained silent.

"I have been doing a lot of thinking recently after my divorce with Paula, and I realized that I was truly an idiot to let a sweet soul like you go..."

Brie didn't like where this was going.

Page 10

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 2:38 am

"I wanted to ask for one more chance, Brie," he said finally before pausing.

That was now what Brie was expecting to hear. Her confusion indicated with a "What?"

Bryan placed his hands on her shoulders and looked into her eyes. "I want you to please give me another shot. Another chance to prove to you that I can be the man you want me to be."

"Listen, Bryan, it's getting late," Brie finally managed to say, breaking free from his gaze, "I have to leave soon if I want to get back on time. I can't have Rachel and her grandparents worry about my whereabouts. I'll call you..."

And with that, she slipped away from his hold and walked quickly into the taxi cab. She looked away from him as the taxi started moving, but she could feel that he was still standing, watching as the vehicle disappeared into the road.

Where exactly was her life heading to?

CHAPTER TEN

Mack got home that evening. Frustrated from every part of his life. Somebody had somehow been watching him as he entered the former den of the Brotherhood of Blood. As soon as the shrine of kidnapped women was discovered, and when he left to get back up, everything disappeared.

Everyone in the police force and the FBI thought he had gone insane on arriving at

the scene. He could swear with every nerve in his body that he saw what he saw, but nobody believed him.

Then on getting to the police station to try to convince them there, he encountered another unexpected event. Brie was back in Chicago. His joy grew no bounds when he saw her, but it was immediately diminished when he saw her with someone else, her hand in his. Why did it have to be Bryan, of all people?

He knew of her past relationship with him. He knew how he made her feel, so what was she doing holding hands with Bryan at the police station? Did he convince her to leave Destiny Falls with him to mock him? Did she by some chance still love him? He had so many unanswered questions and so few answers to them.

Mack felt heartbroken. He felt bad for leaving her in the firstplace. Maybe she would've been his instead. He reminded himself of the beautiful night they shared a bed in Destiny Falls. Her body, her soul, her everything was his for the night, but he didn't stay to own it longer. He left her wanting, and she probably felt rejected by him.

Mack was confused. All parts of his life were falling apart. He was well on the way to losing his job and the woman he loved at the same time. How much worse could things get?

He walked into the bathroom and turned on the shower, letting the drops of the cold waterfall to his feet before getting in. He stood, allowing the water to wash his entirety from top to bottom. He wished the water could wash away his rotten luck. He had too much of it to handle on his own.

When he stepped out of the shower, he spotted his phone on the counter. It lit up, and he went to check out what had come in.

It was a text from an unknown number. It had a picture attached to it, and when he opened it, he saw an image of the shrine he saw at the building earlier in the day. Brie's picture was encircled in a red outline, and he read the text below:

I'm really coming for her this time.

Mack went rigid. Whoever this was must be the same person who cleared up the shrine before he got there with his team.

Mack got angry. He responded to the text:

Where are you?

He waited patiently for a reply, and after two minutes, he didn't get one. This was getting harder and harder for him.

After he dried up and got dressed, another text came in:

Come along, and let's negotiate. November 27th. Under the South Gate Bridge. 8:30 pm.

Something felt off. He had studied Kamal for years, and he knew his tactics, but he was always somehow one step ahead of him. He didn't want to mess up this time, so he needed to have a plan. He checked the date and realized that it was November 21st. He had six days to do something different this time.

Brie was the main target. His heart twitched when he thought of her as a victim again. He knew Brie was the one who brought Kamal into the light, and he would stop at nothing to have her killed; he was sure of it.

Mack navigated to his call log and placed a call to Brie. It was almost 9 pm, and he

feared she would be asleep by now, but he had to get to her as soon as possible.

She picked up at the last ring and answered in a groggy voice. She was definitely sleeping and didn't look at the caller ID before she picked up.

"Hello?" she said, the sleep evident in her voice.

"Hi Brie," Mack said nervously.

Brie jumped from the bed as soon as she recognized the voice. She walked out of the room because she didn't want to wake Rachel and went to the balcony.

Page 11

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 2:38 am

"Mack?" she asked with a tone of confusion.

"Brie, I've missed you so much, but we need to talk about something extremely important. Can you make it to town tonight?"

Brie was frightened. Mack had worry evident in his voice, so it must truly be a matter of utmost importance.

"If I'm lucky enough to find a taxi, I should," she replied.

"Can you come to my place? I'll leave the door open for you," he said. "Please be safe," he added before ending the call.

Brie went back in to change. She took a piece of paper from the table and quickly scribbled something on it, leaving it on the bedside table before exiting out the door.

Chicago was beautiful at night. Brie managed to find a taxi, and she was on the way to Mack's place.

As soon as she arrived, she rushed up the flight of stairs to his apartment and carefully turned the doorknob. It opened, and she went in, locking the door behind her.

The apartment came into focus, and she saw Mack stand up from one of the couches.

"Brie...3" Mack muttered, running toward her and enclosing her in a tight embrace.

Tears fell from Brie's eyes. "Why did you leave me?" was the first thing she managed to say.

"I'm sorry. So sorry. I wanted to protect you. I didn't want you to get hurt," he said with tears falling from his face too.

They remained in that position for a while, and when they had managed to regain themselves, Mack's face wore a look of seriousness.

"Brie, you're in grave danger now."

"What do you mean?"

He went to fetch his phone and showed her the picture of the shrine. She gasped when she saw her picture encircled with the threat written beneath it.

"Kamal wants to kill me?" she said in fear.

"Someone wants to kill you," he responded with a hint of uncertainty in his voice.

"But I'm not sure it's Kamal this time."

To be continued...