

Chapter 51 : Wait For Me Tonight

Madalynn chuckled at my comment, nodding her head. "Yes, it's a busy day for me."

I thought the reminder of the engagement party tonight would break me even more, but oddly, it didn't affect me as much as I thought it would. Perhaps, I was finally getting used to the heartbreak.

"Miss Rosalie," Romero's Beta greeted me. "It's a pleasure to be at your service."

Thad mixed feelings towards him. The first time we met, he burst into my room with Madalynn.

However, he was also the one who apologized on behalf of Romero and Madalynn.

"May I at least know your name?" I asked, turning towards him.

"Damian," he replied quickly, his dark gaze sweeping over my figure.

I nodded my head as a greeting. "Please call my Rosalie."

The crack of thunder sounded in the distance. There was no doubt that a storm was approaching. I had heard there might even be flooding in the valley of the capital city.

I used to love sitting next to an open window and watching the rain fall down from the sky, its water seeping into the earth to help spring forth new life. All of it was part of a never-ending circle that created and then took away the things we held dear.

I turned my attention from the window back to Madalynn.

"I'll do it. The sooner, the better."

I needed to get away, and besides, I couldn't bear to get in between an engaged couple.

"It would be a bit rushed..." Madalynn frowned, exchanging a look with Damian.

I bit my lower lip, and my heart ached. "Please..."

Madalynn hesitated for a moment, then looked towards Damian. "What do you think?"

Damian simply nodded affirmatively.

"Are you sure?" I was shocked that they were able to make something happen so quickly.

A small smile peeked across Madalynn's face. "Yes. If you want to go tonight, then it will happen. To be honest, it's 'the sooner, the better' for me, too."

With the timeline decided, I was lost in my own thoughts for a moment. It was almost too good to be true.

In particular, I still had my reservations about Madalynn.

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Madalynn was irritated by my silence. "Do you want my help or not?" she bit out, staring at me. "You said you wanted to go, and tonight is the perfect opportunity for it to happen. Everyone will be at the dinner, and the approaching storm will give cover for your escape."

She was right.

Standing to my feet, I walked toward the window, looking out at the approaching black clouds in the sky. My fingers fiddled as I tried to absorb what she was telling me.

I sighed.

"Okay," I said. "What do I do?"

I was taking this opportunity. My courage came and went, and I needed to make this happen, before I changed my mind

Madalynn glanced at her father's Beta. "Damian?"

Damian nodded, and then proceeded to explain the plan. "The party will start at 7:00 tonight. Most of the guards will be assigned to the event to ensure the safety of the guests. The ladies' washroom across the main dining hall has a window looking out on the garden. I'll wait for you outside of that window at

7:45.”

Now I understood why she sent me the dress and the accessories – the inner layer of the dress could be converted to a comfortable full-length black jumpsuit for my escape, and one of the accessories was a watch.

Damian emphasized, “Be on time. Otherwise, we’ll both be caught.”

“Where are we going afterwards?” I asked.

We’ll head to a cottage in the woods outside of Mirage. There, we can put on disguises before we head out to the port.”

How far is the cottage? What do I need to bring with me?” I wanted to gather as much information about the plan as possible so I knew what to expect.

“About two hours of running. You don’t need much.” Damian answered patiently. I noticed that Madalynn, however, was getting frustrated at the time we were spending on details.

“But once they find out, they will send men after me. Ethan isn’t a man to give up easily,” I said with a sigh. Especially since I carried his heir.

“They won’t if they believe that you are dead,” Madalynn answered coldly.

Before I could ask anything more, Madalynn turned, making her way towards the door. My eyes drifted from her to Damian, who bowed his head gently to me and then followed her out.

Damian seemed to have a solid plan put together- a real escape plan.

I looked at the clock. It was just past four. The clock was ticking down, and my time left in this place was growing to a close.

Sitting on the sofa, I stared off into the distance, thinking about what I was about to do. Never in my life had I ever attempted something so daring. Never had I ever been a risk-taker. Never had taken a chance and defied orders.

My hand fell instinctively to my stomach.

The small bump grew larger every day, and it kept reminding me to make the best choice for us. This wasn’t about me anymore. It was about the baby- and making sure I survived to protect it.

However, before I could do anything, the door opened once more.

“Rosalie!” Ethan’s voice was a bit rushed.

I turned around to face him,

“I heard Madalynn...”

My gaze landed on the crease in between his brows, and then moved down to his breathtaking eyes.

After today, I would never see those eyes again.

He would be gone from my life forever.

“Madalynn didn’t mean any harm,” I replied softly.

He didn’t waste time, crossing the space between us. He knelt in front of me and looked at my stomach with a worried glance. “Is everything okay?”

Of course, he was worried about the baby.

Pressing down my longing for him, I chuckled bitterly. “Yes, the baby is fine. I’m just a little emotional and stuck in my thoughts.”

“Just that?” He studied my face, obviously still suspicious.

“Why are you here, Ethan?” I asked, shaking my head as I stood on my feet.

“I just had this feeling that I should come check on you...”

Turning from the table, I again assured him, “The baby is fine.”

“Not the baby-” he began.

I was taken by surprise, trying to absorb what he was saying.

He was actually here to check on me?

Then he hesitated, reached into his jacket pocket, and pulled out a small box. "I have something for you."

Stunned, I held out my hand, and he pressed the box into my palm.

"What is it?"

His lips curled up a little. "Open it."

I opened the box. Inside was a beautiful necklace with an elegant teardrop diamond pendant.

I gasped, not sure what to say. It was a beautiful gift- and came at the absolute worst time.

"It's beautiful," I said, but then added with a sigh, "but it's too valuable for me to accept..."

Seeing his stiff expression, I quickly added, "But thank you so much for the thought. It means a lot..."

"Don't move." He ordered in a tone that was not negotiable.

He pulled the necklace out of the box and walked around behind me.

His arms wrapped me from the back, and he gently clasped the necklace around my neck, ignoring my protest.

"Keep it for me." He murmured in my ear.

His voice sent shivers down my spine, and my heart started to race uncontrollably.

Ethan." he always had a way to make me do whatever he wanted me to.

I turned around and saw a look of satisfaction on his handsome face.

"Thank you if you insist," I replied. What else could I say?

He seemed to be happy that I didn't try to take it off.

I sighed silently. I just couldn't reject him, even for something as small as a gift! Why, Ethan- why did you give this to me if you wanted my life anyway?

Tears welled up in my eyes again.

He leaned toward me and wiped them away gently. Then he carefully brushed a strand of loose hair behind my ear. "I'll be back tonight. Wait for me, okay?"

I wanted more than anything to say yes, but I knew that, if he did come back, I wouldn't be here.

The necklace was a kind gesture, but it didn't change anything. I needed to survive.

And that meant I needed to make sure there was enough distance between us before he discovered my escape. I couldn't have him coming back early.

"You know that won't be possible," I whispered, leaning in close to him. "Tonight is the announcement of your engagement, and you must keep up appearances for the sake of the alliance.

"I do what I want, Rosalie," he growled in a low voice. "You of all people should know this by now."

I shook my head. Then I looked him in the eye.

"So kiss me, then. One last time."

He didn't waste another moment, and his lips descended down upon mine in a deep and passionate kiss. His tongue demanded entry into my mouth that I gladly gave him. I wanted to remember this kiss forever. If I was to never see him again after this moment, I wanted to take in everything about him.

Ethan may not have been my mate, but he would forever be my love.

As the kiss broke off, I looked up into his eyes.

All of sudden, I questioned if leaving was really the best choice. That hadn't been the kind of a man who only saw me as a breeder. It couldn't be.

'One last chance,' I told myself, 'This is your last chance to change his mind, Rosalie. Then you have to make your decision and never look back.'

"I can't wait to have the baby, Ethan," I whispered as my hands laid flat against his chest. My eyes searched for any sign of recognition within his own.

His hand cupped my cheek and his thumb gently caressed my skin, but he remained silent.

"Perhaps. I don't have to leave after the baby is born," I said softly. "I know you will never want me in that way, but perhaps I can stay to help raise the child."

Ethan's eyes softened a little, and there was a slight hint of uneasiness in them.

Silently, in my heart, I begged him to change his mind. I wasn't even asking for much. If he showed me a little mercy, if he gave me the least hint of possibility, I would stay.

I waited patiently for his answer. I was betting with my life.

It felt like a century, but finally, he broke eye contact. He pulled away as if avoiding my touch.

I could almost hear the sound of my heart shattering.

"I must go, Rosalie. I cannot be late for a dinner that is in my honor. But wait for me tonight." Chapter 52

For the next couple hours, I sat in a chair and watched the rain coming down outside, thinking about all of the time I had spent with Ethan.

With every flash of lightning in the distance, memories of him flashed before my eyes. I thought of the gentleness he'd shown me when we made love.

My hand automatically went to my abdomen where the child was growing.

I couldn't believe that someone would show me tenderness, make a baby with me, watch me give birth to their child... and then kill me.

But that was Ethan's plan, and that meant I had to go.

Even if that meant I needed to trust the likes of Madalynn, who had told me herself she didn't want her child to be second in line to the throne. My baby's life was hanging in the balance. But I had to take the gamble and try.

A knock on the door pulled me away from the window. Tonight hadn't been quiet for me at all.

Vicky entered, walked toward me, and wrapped her arms around my neck.

"I wish tonight wasn't happening," she said, staring at me with tears in her eyes.

My heart dropped. How did she know?!

"Vicky..." I tried my best to smile. "To...tonight?"

As she pulled back from me, she gave me her own confused look.

The engagement party."

I silently let out the breath I was holding and nodded my head.

"Well," I said, "nothing can be done. Ethan has made his mind up on what he wants. It was for the alliance. He didn't do anything wrong."

"I know he cares about you."

"It doesn't matter if he does or not. I will never be enough for him, Vicky. I'm just a breeder."

Vicky shook her head in disagreement, but she couldn't find the words to comfort me.

"Thank you for everything you have done for me. I'll never forget it, Vicky."

"Hey-" She gave a small sob as she pulled back. "You're acting like this is goodbye. We'll get through this, Rosalie. We still have time. We have a few months to change his mind. We're getting there."

I looked her in the eye. "Maybe you're right."

Vicky turned and fixed herself in a nearby mirror. "Now I have to go down to this stupid dinner with Georgia. Someone has to keep her in line, after all." She chuckled.

"Yeah, don't allow her to make a mess of things," I replied softly as I watched her leave my room.

At a little before 7:00. I got up and started getting ready. I was fairly certain that no one was going to be checking on me that close to the beginning of the party.

I put on the convertible dress that Madalynn and Damian had brought me. It was floor length, so I could wear sneakers under it – no one would notice, so long as I was careful.

I couldn't pack much. After all, I was allegedly going to a party, not leaving the building. Besides, like Damian said, I wouldn't need much, anyway.

Once I was dressed, I did my makeup and put my hair up. The beautiful necklace Ethan had gifted me was still on my neck

I sighed, grief overcoming me as I thought about how close I'd thought I'd come to changing his mind. But it wasn't meant to be.

I put on the luxury accessories Madalynn and Damian had brought me, as well. Those could be exchanged for money later. The handbag they'd selected to match my gown was a little larger than the typical clutch one might carry for such an occasion, and it also had a strap on the inside, which would come in handy down the line.

I placed the ultrasound pictures I'd gotten from Estrella inside of a plastic bag so that they wouldn't get wet, and added some medications, including my sleeping pills. Finally, I added a bottle of water and a small fruit knife.

With my bag packed and my gown on, I was technically ready to go, but there were a couple more things | wanted to do.

Crossing the room to my desk, I took out a pad of paper and a pen. Thunder boomed outside of the window, making my hand shake slightly as I began to write.

The first note wasn't so difficult to compose. I couldn't just leave without saying anything to anyone.

"Vicky and Talon,

"I know that me being gone will come as a shock, but I have finally taken my life into my own hands. I will forever be grateful for everything that you both have done for me, and I will cherish every memory that we made together.

"I forgive you, Talon, for not telling me the truth. You did what you had to for your Alpha, and I respect your choice. So please don't hold on to any pain over my departure. Know that my future will be bright with the Moon Goddess and that I will forever be indebted to you."

I folded the letter in half, wrote their names on the outside, and set it aside.

The next letter would not be so easy to write.

I took a deep breath, my eyes focused on the storm raging outside again, my emotions mirroring the surging tempest.

It took me a few moments to complete the message for Ethan. Finally, with an air of finality, I rose from my seat, ready to get on with the next part of my life.

Whatever that might be.

The guards were surprised when I opened the door.

"Miss Rosalie?" Samuel questioned.

"I'm going to the engagement dinner." I replied with a smile, as if it made all of the sense in the world for me to be there.

Samuel's eyes widened slightly as he looked at the other guards.

"Samuel," I said with a sigh, "Madalynn is trying to be a friend to me. How selfish would I be to not even make an appearance at their engagement party?"

"But... Alpha Ethan didn't give us permission to let you go," Samuel reminded me.

I could tell by his tone that I had already convinced him I should be allowed to attend. He was only making the necessary objections to convince himself.

I waved a hand. "Ethan will be there. If he doesn't want me in attendance, I'm sure he'll make his wishes known."

I didn't wait for further approval. I knew I needed to get going if I was going to make it to the bathroom on the other side of the castle on time.

I headed down the hallway, with the guards trailing me, as usual. Because it wouldn't make much sense for me to have not used the restroom before I left my room, I whipped up some tears when we were almost to the bathroom.

"What's the matter, Rosalie?" Samuel asked, his hand on my shoulder.

I felt bad that he was probably going to get into really big trouble over this. He did seem to genuinely care about me, after all.

give me a

... I'm just emotional," I said, true tears streaming down my cheeks. "I'm so sorry. Could you moment to fix my makeup?" The bathroom I was looking for was just ahead on the right.

They exchanged glances again. "Uh... We aren't supposed to take our eyes off of you," the other guard said.

I raised an eyebrow and wiped at my cheeks. "I just need a couple minutes. Please? I can't go in there like this."

Samuel blew out a deep breath through his nose. "Okay," he said. "We'll be right here. Please be quick."

"Thank you," I said, and I wasn't just talking about being allowed to go into the restroom. Samuel was a good man.

He nodded, and I headed into the bathroom, wondering how I was going to get out the window before they figured out what I was up to.

Thankfully, Madalynn and Damian were a few steps ahead of me.

The window was already cracked open enough for me to slide through.

Of course, I'd need a chair to climb up on and there was one propped in the corner.

I quickly checked to make sure there was no one else in the bathroom. I took off the dress, converted it into the jumpsuit and put it back on. I then grabbed a nearby table and quietly set it in front of the door, sliding it under the handle, buying myself a little more time.

It was 7:43. Two more minutes.

Then, I took the chair, placed it under the window, and hoisted myself up and out of the bathroom.

It was a bit of a drop to the ground, but since it had been raining, the earth below the window was spongy. The sound of pouring rain covered the noise for my fall.

As I turned around, I saw a large, imposing, shadowy figure in the bushes.

"Come on, Rosalie," Damian whispered, "we need to go."

I turned my head to look at Damian. In the dark and stormy weather, I couldn't see his expression clearly.

Was I making the right choice? Should I really trust him?

The storm picked up again, and we took off running.

With one hand on my abdomen, I prayed for a future where both I and my child would be safe.

Chapter 53 She's Gone

**Ethan's POV

"This salmon is absolutely delicious," Madalynn said.

She sat next to me, her body pushing against mine as she laughed at what another noblewoman was saying as if it was the most amusing thing in the world.

Outside, thunder rumbled, and a flash of lightning cast eerie shadows on the walls of the dining hall, causing the candlelight by which we dined to take on a haunting glow.

It wasn't just the weather that was making me feel unsettled. Something wasn't right, and I simply couldn't place what it was.

Madalynn cleared her throat.

"Are you all right?" she asked, her breath warm on my face, making me frown. "You've hardly eaten a bite, and we're on the third course."

"I'm fine."

I couldn't help but think about Rosalie. I still didn't understand why she hadn't told me about the ultrasound. She had better explain herself to me later tonight.

For some reason, I felt a longing, deep down, to go to her, to make sure that she was well, that nothing was the matter with her or the baby.

But this was a dinner party in my honor. How the h* | | could I make an excuse and get up from the table? I was trapped there next to Madalynn.

Dinner seemed to drag on forever. Finally, the servants took away the plates, and people started to socialize. Laughter and music mixed with the thunder from the outside, making the night even more irritating.

I noticed Vicky and Georgia were talking in very low voices from a couple seats away. No one else would pay attention to them or be able to hear what they were discussing – except for me.

"... Rosalie... check. We can't just leave, Georgia," Vicky said in a hushed whisper.

"Sure we can watch."

I frowned at Georgia's reply.

Then she stood up, drawing attention to herself. "My dearest brother, as lovely as this dinner is, I feel as if the wine has gone to my head and would like to excuse myself. I would hate to embarrass you on your most special night."

James was in a good mood, and he chuckled at Georgia's words.

Normally, I would've scolded Georgia, but today, my instinct told me it would be best to have them go check on Rosalie. So I said, "Vicky, see that she gets there."

"Of course, Alpha." Vicky replied before looking back at Georgia, who kept a stoic face the entire time.

"Told you." I heard Georgia whisper to Vicky as they walked by me with a smirk.

"You are too much sometimes..." Vicky commented.

Madalynn wasn't paying attention, and didn't notice their departure until they were out of the dining hall.

"Where are they going?" she asked.

"To the bathroom," I said without expressing any additional emotions.

A perfectly sculpted eyebrow raised over one eye. She didn't believe me. I didn't care.

After a few minutes, the soft murmur of conversation resumed. Another crack of lightning illuminated the sky. The loudest clap of thunder we'd heard yet had several guests lurching in their seats.

Then Vicky rushed back to the dining hall with Rosalie's guards. Panic was all over her face.

In that one moment, I could feel my heart skip a beat.

Thad a sinking feeling in my stomach.

Something bad happened.

Vicky didn't bother to keep up appearances. Instead, she dropped down next to my ear. I could hear my heartbeat pounding against my eardrum.

"She's gone!"

I couldn't comprehend what she was telling me at first, so I just gaped at her. My mind ran over those two words a few times, trying to figure out what they could possibly mean.

They seemed simple enough, but it couldn't be so.

No. I must have misunderstood.

"What?" I finally asked.

Finally, the wide-eyed panic on Vicky's face broke through my denial. It said clearly, "Rosalie is gone!"

I pushed my chair back and stood, already heading for Rosalie's room.

I didn't f*cking caring what the rest of the guests might think.

In that moment, the whispered panic I'd been feeling for the last few hours gave way to an overwhelming feeling of dread within me.

I took off in a sprint toward Rosalie's room. I careened into corners and ran into a few servants, but I didn't care.

I needed to get there as quickly as possible. I needed to see for myself that Vicky was mistaken. Rosalie couldn't be gone. She had to be in her room, sitting there, waiting for me, her hand protectively folded over her stomach where our child slumbered.

"WHERE IS SHE!!" | roared as I burst into our suite. Talon and Vicky followed.

Rosalie was nowhere to be seen. Only Georgia was there, holding two pieces of paper in her shaking hand.

"She left these for us." Her voice trembled.

One of them had my name on it, but I couldn't bear to look at it- not at the moment.

The others followed me into the room. Vicky snatched the paper with her name on it from Georgia and opened it quickly.

Sinking onto the bed, Vicky read the letter, tears streaming down her cheeks. Talon sat next to her, wrapping his arm around her.

"Why?" Vicky said when she was done reading it. "Why would she...?"

I didn't even want to know what it said, but I had a horrible feeling in the pit of my stomach.

My breathing became rapid, and I found myself stumbling. Talon reached out to steady me.

"FIND HER!" I roared in the room, throwing Talon and the rest of my men into action. "D*mn it! Start searching immediately! Go get Samuel!"

"Yes, Alpha," they answered, heading off in all different directions.

"Rosalie, how dare you!!" I shouted, fury building up inside of me.

All I wanted to do at that moment was punch someone in the face, but there was no one there to take my anger out on. I turned to a picture on the wall and pulled it off of the nail, throwing it across the room. It hit the floor, and the glass shattered into a thousand pieces, startling the others in the room.

It did nothing to quell my rage.

"Alpha Ethan!"

I turned toward the door to see a guard standing there, breathing heavily.

"What is it?" I asked him, hope bubbling up inside of me.

“Someone said they saw Rosalie outside just a few minutes ago, near the garden over by the cliff!”

My heart began to thump in my chest as I thought about Vicky’s reaction to her letter.

There was no time to waste.

Without a word to anyone, I took off toward the door-only for my shoulder collided with Madalynn’s.

I paused.

“What are you doing?” she asked me. “Move.” I growled.

A look of disgust crossed her face. “Are you running to her?”

“I said F*CKING MOVE!!!” I yelled, and took off without wasting another second on her.

I ran as fast as I could, praying to the Moon Goddess that I reached Rosalie before she did something that couldn’t be undone.

The garden and cliffs in question were not too far from her chambers. I ran through the halls and out the closest door.

The storm outside was intense, and I was met with deadly pelting drops of rain that stung my skin as they struck me. But the raging storm was the least of my worries.

I could hear the others following me, but I didn’t slow down to wait for them. I needed to get to Rosalie.

I needed her to stay, and I wanted our baby to be safe.

And then I saw her. A bolt of lightning illuminated her silhouette where she stood on the cliffs. It was still dark,

but I could see her figure, wearing a long, blue dress. Her hair was up, and she was crying.

“Rosalie!” I shouted, reaching for her. She was several hundred yards away from me still, and the muddy ground made it difficult to run, but I wanted so desperately to grab her, to pull her close.

She lifted a hand to her cheek to wipe away her tears, and then her hand reached out toward me. For a moment, I thought she might take a step in my direction.

Thunder shook the earth, lightning crackled behind her, and then... she was gone.

I saw her hanging there for a moment, in the air, before she dipped down below the edge of the cliff. I stopped running the second that she disappeared.

My heart stopped beating.

I stopped breathing

Then.” as thunder tore through the sky, the world came crashing back down on me.

“ROSALIE-!!!” I screamed, knowing that no one could possibly survive that fall.

No longer able to function as a human, to process the emotions flooding my body, I let my wolf take over. With a crack of bones and a ripping of fabric, I shifted. Tossing my head back, I let out a howl that filled the night sky and overshadowed the cacophony of the thunder as every fiber of my being cried out in despair.

Rosalie was gone-and so was our child.

Chapter 54 He Had A Knife

****Rosalie’s POV**

The rain picked back up as Damian and I ran around the exterior of the capital. It was pouring so hard, I could hardly see where we were going, but I kept my eyes on him and forced my feet to keep moving forward.

Faltering at this point wasn’t an option. I had to keep moving for my baby’s sake and for my own.

According to the plan, we would need to get out of Mirage first.

“This way,” Damian said, and I realized he was ushering me through a small door in the ground that reminded me of the cellar we had back home. I wouldn’t have even known it was there if he hadn’t

tugged it open.

The door led down a flight of stairs to a narrow tunnel. Damian pulled a flashlight out of his pocket and illuminated the stone surface. At least it wasn't raining down here.

"Where are we going?" I asked him as we ran along.

"The tunnel ends right before the wall," he said. "We'll have to climb over it."

"And then what?" I asked, my heart pounding in my ears.

"Then... we'll have to run for a couple of hours through the woods to a cabin. I hope your wolf is fast."

I almost stopped running. "Wolf?" I said. "I can't shift, Damian. I'm not twenty-one yet."

He turned and looked at me, coming to a stop. "Sh*t," he muttered. Shaking his head, he quickly adjusted his plan based on the news. "It's fine. I'll carry you." Then he turned to face down the tunnel again.

Damian was running again, and I was struggling to keep up. "What about after we get to the cottage?" I asked him.

It took Damian a few moments to respond, as if he wasn't quite sure what the plan was after that. But he had to know, didn't he?

"After that," he said, "we'll head for the shore. There's a boat leaving tomorrow morning for Suntra. It leaves from the east port at 10:00, and we'll be on it."

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Suntra. I'd never been there before, but I'd heard it was a lovely place—a place where there were all kinds of people and it was easy to get lost. "Do we have money?" I asked.

Damian nodded. "Yes, I have money," he replied. "You don't need to worry about anything, Rosalie. I'll take care of you."

He turned and looked at me, slowing his pace slightly.

I met his eyes, and I wanted to believe him.

But what if this was all a ruse, and Madalynn was just trying to get rid of me—and my baby?

So far, Damian had proven himself to be on my side. If I was sincere and thankful to him, perhaps he'd see how much I wanted to live—how much I wanted my baby to live.

"Thank you, Damian," I told him.

He didn't say anything, only kept running.

I felt compelled to continue to reach out for him, to plead my case for my life and my child's.

I continued, "I can't express to you just how much this means to me. You've given me a hope I never expected to have. Not only will my baby be assured of a life with a mother that will love him or her no matter what, but I will also have a chance to live now, to spend time with my child."

Tears filled my eyes just thinking about it. I might've been intending to persuade him to spare me, but I meant what I was saying.

"You're a kind, brave soul, Damian. And I hope that, one day, I can repay your kindness."

He sighed and turned to look at me for a moment again before he said, "I promise to keep you safe, Rosalie, and to never hurt you."

"Thank you," I said quietly, brushing my wet hair back from my eyes.

We ran on for a few more minutes before the light from the flashlight landed on another flight of stairs.

"Come on," Damian shouted between ripples of thunder. "We're almost to the wall."

I knew that we couldn't possibly have more than a few minutes' head start on the guards. I followed Damian up a flight of stairs and through another door, back out into the pouring rain. By the time the wall came into view, my lungs were burning.

Damian reached the wall before me. It was made of uneven stone and should've been difficult for anyone to scale, but he pulled something out of his backpack and tossed it up and over the top of the wall.

It was a cargo net ladder. Damian went first, easily climbed the twenty-foot wall, then waited for me. With a deep breath, I grabbed hold of it and began to pull myself up as well. When I was near the top, Damian reached down. "Give me your hand, Rosalie!" he insisted. "I've got you!"

I reached up and took hold of his wrist, and he yanked me up so that I could reach the top of the wall. The rain continued to pummel me as I sucked in air, so glad to be this close to freedom.

"Great job, Rosalie," Damian said behind me. "Great job."

My lungs were still burning, and we weren't anywhere near done with our journey.

Damian pulled the ladder up and flipped it down over the other side. I watched him as he neared the ground, and his hands slipped about halfway down. His feet hit the ground, jarring him, but he was okay. Something fell from his pocket.

I couldn't quite make out what it was because it was so dark, and the rain was coming down in torrents, but as the lightning lit up the sky behind him, the light caught a glint of metal.

The object at his feet appeared to be a knife

A sharp one.

I turned my head away as Damian looked up at me, instinct telling me it was better if he didn't know that I had seen the weapon.

Why he had it, I couldn't say, but it made a cold chill pass down my spine.

I knew I was safe as long as we were inside of the capital walls. If I started crying for help, we would be surrounded by royal guards within seconds. There would be too much evidence pointing to Madalynn, and the investigation would delay their wedding.

But once we were far enough away from the capital...

"Rosalie, come on!" Damian shouted, and I realized I made a perfect target sitting on top of the wall, especially with the lightning illuminating my position.

I put the knife out of my mind for the moment-after all, it made sense that he might need a knife if we were planning on running through the woods. I grabbed hold of the rope ladder and moved my way down.

Worst-case scenario. he wasn't the only one who had a knife.

When I was more than halfway down, I felt Damian's strong hands on my sides, lowering me. My feet hit the soft, muddy ground, and I took a deep breath.

I was on the other side of the wall.

We were out of the capital.

Which probably meant I was in more danger than ever.

I needed to come up with a plan to protect myself against the man who'd just promised to keep me safe.

Damian pulled the rope down and said, "Let's go!"

He shifted into his wolf form, which would help us to go a lot faster than we could on foot. I gathered up his clothes and put them in my bag so he'd have them later.

Once he had changed into a large, dark-colored wolf, he gestured for me to climb onto his back. I nodded and did as he instructed. I had no other choice.

Glancing at my watch, I saw that it was 8:27. We'd be at the cabin in the woods by about 10:30.

As he ran through the rain, entering the forest, I reminded myself that I was doing this for my baby. I

needed my child to be safe, and I needed to know that I would be there to take care of this precious life.
“Oooowhooo-”

A desperate howl pierced through the stormy night. It was so painful that I felt like I was being stabbed through the heart.

I had a feeling that those in the capital city had already found out I was missing, but I couldn't bring myself to speculate whose howl that was. It didn't matter. Vicky, Talon, or.. Ethan. It didn't matter.

“They found out!” I exclaimed to Damian. He didn't respond, but I felt him speed up.

I rode on Damian's back as he flew between the trees. He was athletic, but in the storm, he occasionally tripped over an exposed root, and I found myself catching my hand on rough bark or grabbing hold of a branch to keep from falling. Mud splashed up to cover my pant legs, but at least the canopy of the trees gave us some shelter from the rain,

He ran for about an hour and a half before I finally insisted that he stop. “Damian,” I said. “You need to take a break. I have some water.” It was in my hand and had been for the last several minutes.

It didn't take much to persuade him. He stopped, and I slid off.

“Don't bother to shift,” I told him. “I'll pour it into your mouth.”

He looked thankful as I opened the bottle, careful not to reveal the seal had already been broken, and emptied all of the contents into his mouth.

Once he'd caught his breath, I climbed back on, and we continued our run towards the cabin.

Chapter 55 Ethan Again!

Almost exactly thirty minutes after our short break, I saw the cabin appear up ahead.

As we were approaching our first destination, I opened my bag to inspect Damian's clothing. Sure enough, I found a six inch switchblade in his pocket.

I took it out and tucked it in the bottom of my bag. I didn't want to have to use it, either, but I sure wasn't giving it to him.

We reached the cabin, and I leapt off of Damian's back. It wasn't raining hard here, but we were both drenched from earlier and were exhausted.

“Thank goodness we're here,” I said. “Are we going in?” I got Damian's clothes out of my bag and dropped them near him. I wasn't sure if he had shifted yet.

When I heard his voice, I knew he was getting dressed. “Yes. Let's get changed here,” he said. “We have a car nearby, and this was just a place to hide the vehicle, a place for us to aim fo

“I see.” I walked into the cabin and found a dry towel. I heard his footsteps following.

“Let me know when you're dressed,” I said.

I waited with my back to him for what seemed like too much time. I finally glanced over my shoulder and saw him rifling through his pockets.

My heart sank.

I didn't want to believe that Damian was capable of harming me or my baby, but he'd just confirmed it.

“What are you doing?” I asked him.

His eyes were wide when he realized I was looking at him. “1... uh.. dropped something. Maybe it's in your bag.”

I could tell that he was getting a little tired because his speech was slower than usual.

My eyebrows knit together. “What is it?” I asked him. “I can find it for you. I've got important women's things here.”

He looked a little leery of that, as I knew he would. Men don't like to think about feminine products.

Still, he couldn't let me find the knife and hand it over to him. “Just let me look.”

I studied his face for a moment.

He took a step toward me, and I retreated. He wasn't as big as Ethan, but he was definitely stronger than me. He could easily overpower me, find the knife, and kill me.

Damian cocked his head to the side. He knew then that I was suspicious.

"Rosalie. I told you that you're safe with me."

I nodded. "I know. But I wanted to ask you, Damian- why is Madalynn doing this?"

"What do you mean?" he asked me. I saw him blink a few times, as if trying to stay focused.

I tried to keep the conversation flowing casually. "You've got to be exhausted from that long run. Are you sure you don't want to take a few minutes to rest?"

He shook his head really fast, trying to wake up. "I'm fine. What do you mean, why is Madalynn doing this?"

"I mean, it doesn't make sense, does it? Why would she want to help me? She has no reason to."

"She doesn't want your baby around, like she told you," he said. "She needs your baby out of the picture so that her baby can be the heir, if she ever has one."

"So". why not just.. kill us?" I asked him, looking him straight in the eyes. "That seems more like something Madalynn would do." I emphasized her name so that he knew I wasn't accusing him of anything.

He opened his mouth and closed it.

Slowly, Damian shook his head again, as if to say he couldn't believe I figured them out.

I stared into his eyes as my emotions bubbled to the surface. "It's a baby, Damian. An unborn child. How could anyone ever even consider taking the life of a baby?"

"I can't answer that," he said firmly. "Rosalie, give me your bag."

"So". that's how it's going to be, then?" I asked him.

He shrugged. "I need to see your bag."

He took a few steps toward me, and I backed up, but even in his overly tired state, he was way faster than me. He was almost on top of me before I managed to reach into the bag and pull out the knife.

"Is this what you're looking for?"

Damian grabbed for the knife, his hand clasp around my wrist.

I backed up again, hitting the wall. My head thunked against it, and pain radiated through my skull, but I had to keep my focus.

"Rosalie," he said, "you're her biggest threat, the only one who could potentially take what she has." He looked me in the eyes. "The order I received was to end your life!"

My heart dropped, and I trembled in horror as he managed to snatch the weapon from me.

He was strong enough to control my arm as he bent the knife toward my neck. I stared into his eyes.

"Damian, please..." I pleaded outwardly. Inwardly, however, my eyes studied him coldly, and my brain was analyzing the best moment for my attack.

No one could hurt my child, even if that meant I needed to kill.

My fruit knife was under my long sleeve, and I was preparing myself for a fatal blow.

Just as I tensed to strike, however, his grip loosened, and he let go.

He folded his knife closed and looked at me sincerely. "But I never, ever wanted to hurt you. You know that, don't you?"

Everything had happened in a few seconds, and my brain was struggling to process it.

"You.you're not going to kill me?"

"No. Rosalie." I could tell his eyelids were getting heavier.

"But when Madalynn finds out..."

"She'll get the news that you're dead." He yawned again, struggling to stay awake. "Madalynn is just a spoiled kid. You don't need... don't need to wor..."

Then he took a few steps back before his eyes rolled back into his head, and he crumpled to the ground like a paper bag

I stood there against the wall, letting out a long breath.

A moment later, Damian started snoring lightly.

The water I had offered him earlier had quite a few sleeping pills dissolved in it.

I took a few minutes to make sure he was out cold, and then sprang into action.

I got the car keys out of his pocket and found an envelope full of cash. He hadn't lied about helping me escape otherwise he wouldn't need to bring that much money.

I laid Damian in a comfortable position and covered him with a blanket. After all, he hadn't hurt me, and without him, I would never have been able to escape from the capitol. This was the least I could do for him.

I went into the woods to locate the car. Luckily, it wasn't difficult to find.

As soon as I got on the road, I finally felt my pounding heartbeat calmed down and I could breathe freely again.

"Let's get out of here," I said to my baby.

I arrived at the port early in the morning using a different route than the one that Damian had mapped out.

After pulling into a large parking complex, I examined the trunk of the car and found a suitcase with clothes and other essentials for me. There were also men's items for Damian.

I sighed. Damian did plan everything out thoroughly.

However, I decided to leave all of that behind. I didn't want anyone to track me down, including him.

True, he had let me go, but I still wasn't convinced that he risked his life to help me purely out of the goodness of his heart.

The port city was busy and packed with travelers like me. It was a perfect place for me to blend in.

After a quick round of shopping, I changed into my new jeans and T-shirt. By the time I put on a wig and sunglasses, I could hardly recognize myself.

Great job, Rosalie! And I gave myself a smile.

Feeling confident about my disguise, I walked to the port to figure out my next destination.

The breeze coming in off of the sea smelled sweet and calming. The sun was already warm on my face. I lifted my head up and took a deep breath in, loosening the tension in my shoulders, which had been permanently up around my ears,

All of sudden, I had a feeling like someone was looking at me. Jolting myself out of my brief lapse, I glanced around angrily, but found nothing.

It was probably paranoia".

I tried to calm myself down by focusing on my next move,

Damian had been planning on taking a ship to Suntra, so I went to a different ticket office, one that would have boats leaving from a different dock going to a different island.

I needed a brand new place for a person like me, someone who needed to erase her past and start over.

“The boat to Avondale is boarding now!”

Thurried to the pier when I heard the announcement.

I’d never been on a boat like this before. It was a beautiful cruise ship.

I couldn’t help the huge grin that crossed my face. Every step I took towards the ship was a step closer to freedom.

“Good morning,” the man in a blue uniform said as I reached him. He was distracted as he took my ticket and looked it over. “Welcome aboard.”

“Thank you,” I said, not bothering to ask him where to go. I’d find my room on my own. How hard could it be? I’d gotten this far.

For now, I just wanted to breathe in the fresh ocean air.

I walked to the back of the boat and found a seat on a bench, placing the suitcase between my feet where I could keep track of it. Plenty of people were bustling around, but no one was paying me any mind.

However, I just couldn’t get rid of the feeling of someone watching me.

I glanced around, but again, no one was even looking in my direction.

‘Inhale, exhale, inhale, exhale...’

I convinced myself I was overreacting, and decided to sit down and stare out at the ocean. The peaceful waves and the light breeze gently soothed my mind.

In a few minutes, the boat would pull away from the dock, and I’d be leaving everything behind. I would finally be free, not just from my abusive family, but from Ethan and the oppression he’d imprisoned me under.

If I allowed myself to think about him, I’d start to cry.

My hands instinctively went to my abdomen. It was just the natural way for me to sit now. I wanted to keep my baby safe and loved, no matter what.

I took a deep breath and brushed my hair away from my face, not allowing myself to feel the raw emotion overwhelming me.

The exhaustion from a night of running was finally catching up with me. I considered whether I should go find my quarters and just go to sleep, but I wanted to make sure the ship was moving before I went anywhere.

It took forever, but finally, inch by inch, the boat pulled away from the dock.

A stuttered breath escaped my lungs.

I did it! I’d actually gotten away.

I couldn’t believe it.

Thugged myself even tighter and watched as the ship set out to sea, the rocking motion lulling me a bit, the same way I planned to rock my own baby one day.

Satisfied that I was safe and no one was going to be able to reach me now, I stood up, grabbed my suitcase, and was about to head toward the room I’d been assigned.

I turned around and gave one last glance toward the land I was leaving, and then, I saw him.

I stopped in my tracks, frozen.

How was this possible? How could he be here?

My breath caught in my throat, and my heart stopped beating.

On the dock, only a couple hundred feet away from my boat, was a tall, handsome man, looking in my direction with icy eyes.

Ethan.

Chapter 56: Ethan Or Not?

“Miss, did you get your room number yet?”

A young crew member pulled me out of my shock.

I took a deep breath to calm my racing heart, then put on a smile and turned to him. “Ah, yes, it’s on the ticket.”

No— that couldn’t have been Ethan. There was no way he was here.

Besides, it would be hard for anyone to recognize me with my disguise on, especially from so far away.

As the boat drifted further and further from the shore, I no longer was able to pick him out in the crowd.

The worry that had surged within me threatened to expose my fear, but I couldn’t allow it to. I had to get a grip of myself.

I turned my attention to the young man in front of me. He was holding a clipboard as he walked around the deck helping the passengers.

He gave me a friendly smile. “Follow me, and I will show you to your room. I just need your ticket.”

I handed my ticket to him, my eyes scanning my surroundings.

Everyone else was busy settling down on the ship, and no one paid attention to me. I was still safe.

I let out a sigh. I was probably just seeing things. Was it possible that my mind was playing tricks on me because, deep down, I had hoped it was him standing there?

“Room seven. This way.” The crew attendant returned the ticket to me and led me along the deck.

The mid-morning sun was approaching its peak in the sky, and with it came refreshing, cool wisps of sea air blowing against my skin, reminding me that this was a new beginning. I found peace with my surroundings again.

After walking down a few corridors, we came to a white ship door that looked just like all the others. Here we are.”

I admired the small room, which contained a bed and a table. It even had its own small bathroom area. It wasn’t anything lavish, but that excited me no less.

“Thank you!”

His face was bright with genuine compassion. “It’s my pleasure. Please get some rest, and welcome aboard your journey to Avondale.”

His smile was heartwarming. For the first time, I was being treated just like anyone else— an ordinary, free, and independent person.

As he turned away to help other passengers, I settled in to rest without worry.

There *was* no Ethan, no danger— just a small and quiet cabin for me and my baby.

Thad never imagined that I would get as far as I had. I was more than proud of myself for what I had accomplished.

“I can’t wait to get some sleep!” I whispered to myself with a grin.

After taking a nice, warm shower, I lay down on the small bed. The rhythm of the waves below was gentle, and the darkness slowly slid over me as I got comfortable— I welcomed it like an old friend.

**Ethan’s POV

Hues of pink and orange painted the sky behind the castle as it came into view in front of me.

The storms from the night before had finally blown away, but their departure had done nothing to calm the tempest that raged within me, threatening to tear my mind apart.

Even sprinting for hours through the woods in my wolf form hadn’t helped, I realized as soon as I shifted back.

I had hoped that it would change how I felt—or, at the very least, that running would distract me from the situation. But even then, I was not spared the tormented thoughts that filled my mind.

How could she do such a terrible thing?

I pushed the thoughts aside again and walked on two legs toward a tree with a hollow in it to retrieve some clothing I had stashed there.

Mud caked my legs and hands. I didn’t care.

I took a series of controlled breaths in and out, willing my mind to focus. I had meetings to get to, duties to attend to, things to do. The worst thing I could do was show up in an emotional wreck and sob like a baby.

I retrieved the pair of jeans and T-shirt I had tucked away deep within the tree, put them on quickly, and then headed back.

As I neared the castle, my eyes automatically drifted in the direction of the cliffs.

I wasn't standing in the exact same spot as I had been when I saw Rosalie leap to her death, but the image still filled my mind.

Another wave of anguish washed over me, and I felt myself shaking.

I was at a loss. How the hell could she do that? It just didn't make any sense.

The Rosalie I knew, the one that loved her baby so much and was constantly dreaming of her baby's future, always protective covering her abdomen with her arm, would never do anything to hurt our child – her child. So why would she jump over the cliff and fall to her death, knowing our baby would die, too?

“She wouldn't,” I whispered aloud. “She would never do that.”

But I had seen her do it. I had watched it with my *own* eyes.

“Son of...!”

I slammed my fist with all my might into a nearby tree and left a dent on the trunk. My hand was bleeding, but the pain felt good.

I shook my head, grinding my teeth, willing my breathing to steady again.

Something *wasn't* adding up. It wasn't computing in my brain, and when something didn't compute, it was best for me not to think about it at all until I had a chance to gather more information.

For now, I needed to focus on other priorities. My raw, *out-of-control* emotions threatened to take me over the

edge. I couldn't risk falling apart in front of others– friends or enemies.

I couldn't let them see me hurting.

I marched in through the castle gate and immediately saw the relief on the guards' faces– until they noticed my bleeding fist.

“Alpha Ethan! We'll call the doctor right away!”

“Back off!” I growled as I walked past them.

They stilled at the danger in my voice. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw them exchange a look, lower their heads, and go back to their positions without a word.

When I reached my suite, the emptiness reminded me again that she was gone. There wasn't anyone sitting by the window waiting for me any more.

For the first time ever, I noticed how big the room was.

The sound of her melodic voice filled my mind, and I imagined her singing...

I clenched my fists, and the motion made my cuts throb in pain.

Once again, I forcibly pushed that thought away and went to the dresser to grab a towel to wipe away the blood from my hand.

That was when I saw the letter with my name on it.

My stomach tightened into a knot, but I didn't reach for it. Then the knock at the door pulled me out of my thoughts.

"Alpha, it's us," Talon mindlinked me.

I went to open the door, and found him standing there with Georgia and Vicky behind him. They all looked at me quietly.

"What are you guys doing here?" I said, frowning. No one answered.

"*We're* worri..." Georgia started, but I interrupted her.

"Do you have nothing better to do?"

She just looked at me, wide-eyed.

Tignored her and turned to Talon. "How did last night go after I left?"

Talon was taken aback a bit, but he answered my question without delay. "I spent the rest of the night talking with Romero and the other alphas. Georgia reported the situation to James in private. Most guests were socializing and didn't notice you were gone. Samuel took a few of our men and conducted an extensive search for Rosalie..,"

"Still nothing?" I knew the answer, but I asked anyway.

"...No, Alpha."

Talon's confirmation was nothing unexpected, but I held my breath for a second. I felt frustration churning deep within me— but with it, relief.

I didn't want to see it. I didn't want to have to know.

I gave him a nod and looked around the room. "Alright, I've gotten the reports. You can go now."

But none of them moved.

Anger boiled up in my mind, and I raised my voice. "What the hell are you guys still doing here?!"

Finally, Vicky stepped forward. It was apparent that she'd been crying. Her eyes were red, and her face was swollen and puffy.

"Alpha, she I couldn't believe..." she murmured, but she broke down in tears again.

"Ethan..." Georgia walked over to the desk and held up the letter from Rosalie. "Are you really not going to read

it?"

I cleared my throat and turned away, walking past her. "Not now."

"But, Ethan—" Her hand shot out to grab my arm.

"D*mn it, Georgia!" I said, pulling my arm away from her, my tone much angrier and out of control than I intended. "I said not now!"

Her eyes widened in shock, and she withdrew her hand.

"What the f*ck is wrong with you! You're doing it again." She stomped her foot. "Whatever!"

I thought she would storm out of the room, but she didn't.

I sighed. This was hard on her. She had been excited about the baby. She was going to be an aunt.

I turned around to face Talon and Vicky, and tried to modulate my voice, though my tone still wasn't exactly nice. "What else do you guys want to say? Just spit it out."

"We're worried about you," Talon said, answering for all of them.

"I'm fine." I turned around again and headed for the bathroom. "I need to take a shower. I've got meetings scheduled for today."

Alpha!" Talon's voice was filled with disbelief, but I kept moving, closing the bathroom door between us. "Ethan!"

In the shower, I let the warm water wash off the dirt and grime, numbing my mind to everything.

wa

I wouldn't be able to wash the memories out of my mind— not the memories of the time I'd spent with Rosalie or the awful image of her falling

After my shower, I walked to my closet, intending to find some clothes.

I didn't *care* what people thought I should be doing. I knew what I had to do. And I didn't need Talon, or anyone else, telling me *how* to handle this situation.

My hand on a pair of slacks I had been about to pull off of a hanger, I paused, my mind flashing back to the letter.

It wasn't that I'd forgotten it— not exactly, anyway. But I had put it out of my mind.

The same way I needed to put Rosalie and the baby out of my mind. I needed to.

I walked back into the living room, hoping that they had better things to do than sit there and wait for me to finish my shower. Thankfully, Talon was the only one left; otherwise, I would have lost my sh*t.

“Why are you still there?” I asked my Beta.

He didn't answer— he didn't need to.

I shook my head and ran a hand through my hair. “I'm fine. You've been up all night. You can go get some sleep if you want.”

I checked my watch and saw that I had only ten minutes to get to my first meeting, which was on the other side of the castle. I headed out the door.

I started slightly at the sound of footsteps following me down the hall. Without turning around to look, I knew it was Talon. He normally accompanied me to these types of meetings anyway.

“I thought I told you to go get some sleep,” I said as I straightened my cufflinks.

“If you don't need sleep, then neither do I,” he replied. “Ethan... Can we talk about this?”

“What is there to talk about?”

I glanced over my shoulder at him and saw just how exhausted he was. I really wished he would take my advice and leave me alone.

“What's done is done, Talon. Did you get a chance to look over those reports for this meeting?”

His eyes widened as if he couldn't believe I'd changed the subject.

"Yes, I read them," he said. "But--"

"Good. I want to make sure we are on the same page."

Theaded into the meeting room, and Talon followed me.

Thad work to do. It didn't matter that I felt as if I had a gaping wound in my chest. It didn't matter that I couldn't understand why Rosalie would do this to me-- to herself, to our baby.

For now, I was the Alpha. We were at war, and I needed to concentrate on my people.

Everything else would have to wait until later.

Chapter 57 Making A New Friend

**Rosalie's POV

A small jolt woke me from my sleep.

When I sat up, I quickly realized the boat was swaying from side to side, leaving the most uncomfortable feeling in my stomach.

Thad known that I would most likely get seasickness, but I had hoped I would be one of the fortunate ones who didn't.

"Uhh..." | groaned, walking towards the bathroom.

Splashing some water on my face, I tried to sweep away the grime of my previous adventures, hoping it would draw the sickness away from me. But even though it disappeared for a moment, as soon as I stepped back out into the room, it was back in full force.

I tried with all my might to remember things I had read in one of my many books to help get through this, but no matter what I did, it wouldn't ease up.

Deciding on getting some fresh air, I tied my hair up into a ponytail and put on casual clothing, including a chunky knit sweater.

Before I headed to the deck, I also put on my dark sunglasses to try to hide my appearance more. I knew that I was safe, but there was no harm in being extra discrete about it all.

The sun was slowly rising again, and I quickly realized that I had slept for a very long time. Being pregnant, I was usually tired a lot regardless, but the escape must have taken a lot out of me for me to shut down like that.

As a series of particularly big waves rocked the ship, I stumbled and almost lost my balance.

As I swayed and desperately try to regain my footing, the people around me stepped back. I could fully understand not wanting to be near a pregnant woman who was likely to vomit, but at the same time, it was a clear reminder that I was on my own now.

Luckily, I was able to grab the nearby railing as I began dry heaving as the smell of sea air whipped me in the face.

“*Are* you okay, miss?” a soft voice called out from behind me. I felt warm hands on my arms and back, helping me regain my footing,

I turned around slowly, *trying* not to upset my stomach, and saw a middle-aged woman with jade green eyes and a soft smile. She *looked very* friendly. Maybe it was because of her smile, or maybe just because I was so dizzy—but I somehow almost mistook her for my long-dead mother.

“I *am*

sorry. I think I’m seasick...

As much as I tried *to* maintain a smile upon *my* face, it was short lived. I was spinning around once more and started dry heaving, I couldn’t control tears streaming down my face due to the emotional rush.

“Oh, dear, that isn’t good.” She *moved* closer with a concerned look. “Here, let me help you sit down.”

After a few moments, I *was* finally able to speak with a weak voice. “Thank you so much ***”

“You’re welcome! First time on a boat?”

I nodded. “Yes... and it doesn’t help that this child gives me nausea as well.”

Her eyes darted down to my stomach, and her mouth formed into an O. “That is wonderful. Congratulations on your coming arrival— but if that’s the case, it’s probably not the best to stay on the windy deck. Let me help you get inside.”

Nodding my head, I looked at her with appreciation and took her hand.

We walked through the double doors of the cabin together, and she quickly found me a quiet spot.

“Lie down, my dear.” She took two pillows and propped one under my head and another under my feet. “I will be right back.”

I nodded again and closed my eyes. I took small, slow breaths trying to steady my racing heart and also prevent myself from dry heaving again.

It didn't take long before she came back into view, holding a bag.

"I got you a few things to help. We have to get you calmed down so you can eat and feed that baby of yours," she said as she laid the cool cloth upon my head. "Keep those eyes closed and focus on your breathing."

"Thank you." I took her advice and kept my eyes closed. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to take up so much of your time or be a burden."

"Don't worry about it, my dear. It's not like we have tons to do on the boat, anyway. My life is about helping young mothers waiting on their unborn children. I am a midwife, after all."

I opened my eyes and met her soft gaze. She reminded me of Estrella—considerate, kind hearted, and very patient with those under their care.

That had only been away from the Drogomor pack for a couple days, but it felt like centuries.

"It is still very kind of you to help me," I said, inwardly thanking the Moon Goddess for bringing this wonderful woman to me. "You didn't have to do any of that."

"Think nothing more of it. You are the same age as my younger sister. She is also with child, and I hope that, if she were in your situation, someone would help her the way I am for you."

Smiling, she pulled out a green apple. "Try this. They're good for seasickness. Something to do with the sourness."

I watched her slice the apple into small pieces.

"It's an old wives tale that actually works. Here."

I didn't hesitate and took a piece from her. The tart and sweet taste was welcome upon my tongue, I chewed it a few times and swallowed it down.

"It's quite refreshing. Wow, it helps a lot." I pulled myself to sit up so I could carry on the conversation. "I'm Ro. It's so nice to meet you."

A chuckle left her lips as she handed me another piece. "My name is Seraphine."

"Thank you so much for being so kind, Seraphine."

She stared at me for *a moment*, her smile faltering slightly before nodding her head. "The real world can be quite troublesome at times. But it is us *women* that must stick together and take care of each other."

We both giggled at her words.

Now that I felt better, I tried to stand back up so that I could return to my room. As soon as I did so, my head spun again.

“Goodness,” I breathed.

“Easy dear. The apple helps, but it will take a day or so for everything to settle completely.”

She helped me to my feet. The good news was that the swaying motion was not as bad as it was earlier.

“So where are you from, Ro?”

**/...” Her sudden question caught me off guard. In a panic, I pretended to fumble as if my seasickness was back

again.

By the time I “regained” my balance, I came up with my answer. “I am from Mirage.”

She smiled, nodding her head. “The eastern capital. I’ve been there a few times. Have you ever seen King James?”

I paused and nodded my head. “Yes, I was fortunate enough to meet him once.”

Immediately, she seemed so uncomfortable. “Oh, I’m sorry my lady!”

“No, no, no! I am nobody, really. I just meant that I’ve seen him from far away in the monthly royal market event. I was able to steal a glimpse from far away.”

The lie came quite naturally; however, my mind immediately went back to Ethan. That precious day he spent with me in the market brought a smile to my face.

It seemed that the longer I was away from him, the more sweet moments that we shared came back to my mind.

But then I would remember that I was on a boat far away from him and likely would not see him again in my lifetime. *My* smile vanished and my heart ached.

Luckily, Sarephine quickly accepted my explanation. Knowing I had limited knowledge about Mirage, I quickly changed the subject and asked, “How about you?”

“I am from Papeno, but I travel quite a bit. I was on the East mainland, and now I’m on my way back to Papeno. But before that, I will check in with my younger sister in Avondale.”

“She lives in Avondale?”

“Yes, she does.”

We had arrived back at the door of my room. I turned to her.

“You are a remarkable person,” I said with a smile. “I am not sure I would’ve been able to manage this on my own.”

“Oh, my dear. Never think you aren’t capable. You are stronger than you give yourself credit for— that I am sure of.”

She followed me into the room and helped to settle me back into bed. The soft comfort of the blankets upon my mattress was a most welcome feeling after all the swaying and dry heaving I had done earlier.

“This feels amazing,” I mumbled softly. “I should have just stayed here.”

Seraphine laughed, placing a few items on the bedside table. “Yes, but you still need fresh air once in a while. It’s all about the right balance.”

“I cannot say thank you enough, Seraphine.” I snuggled further into my blankets.

“Don’t worry,” Seraphine whispered. “I will be back later to check on you and bring you something to eat. Take a nap, if you can. Believe it or not, once you get used to them, the waves actually help with sleep.”

The door slowly closed before darkness took me.

Thoped that, this time, Ethan would not be in my dreams.

Chapter 58 Saved By Ethan

Luckily, I didn’t have much time to think about Ethan in the next few days, as they flew by thanks to Seraphine’s company. She had been to all sorts of different places and had lots of fun stories to tell.

“You should have seen his face, dear.”

I leaned in. I was so drawn to her story that I put down my fork.

“Don’t stop eating, Ro. The food will do you well.”

She patted my hand, and when she saw me put food in my mouth again, she continued, “The big bad wolf thought of himself as a monster, but at the sight of his pup being born, he passed out upon the floor.”

Our laughter fluttered through the air. Seraphine concluded, “So no matter how tough men seem to be, you never know what to expect when they see their baby for the first time.”

Suddenly, the joy of the story dissipated, and I felt a pang in my heart.

I couldn’t help but wonder, what would Ethan’s reaction have been if he were there to witness the arrival of his own child?

“Seraphine” – I tried to distract myself from thinking about Ethan, so I changed the topic – “have you ever been to the West continent?”

“Only once. A large portion of it is covered by desert, but the coastal cities are quite prosperous. Why? Do you want to go there?”

“Yes, at least to visit.”

Maybe, the further *away* I was from Ethan, the better.

“Well, right now is probably not a good time, what with the war. The Isles are the best place to be for the moment. Speaking of that, we’ll be arriving at port this afternoon, thanks to the good weather.”

“Oh... Seraphine, I’m going to miss you.”

“Don’t be sad, dear.”

She thought for a moment, and then pulled out a piece of paper.

“Here, let me write down my sister’s address for you. When you get settled in, stop by. We’ll take a look at the baby and make sure you have everything you need. I’m planning to stay in Avondale for a little while.”

She placed the piece of paper with her address in the palm of my hand and closed my fingers around it. Her kindness *warmed* my heart, and I fought hard not to let my tears drop.

Thank you! I replied softly, “Perhaps I should head back to my room to get ready.”

My eyes scanned the horizon.

I was finding peace with where I was. The sea was beautiful, and with land in the distance, I knew that a new chapter of my life would start soon,

I inhaled deeply when my feet hit solid ground again.

The pier was busy with the flow of people coming and going. I wasn't sure what I had expected, but first things first, I needed to find a safe place to spend the night.

It was almost sunset, and everyone seemed to be in a rush, as if they all were eager to finish up the day and go home.

Letting my feet guide me to nowhere in particular, I ventured down the pier, letting my eyes take in the scenery around me. I was amazed with the busy and lively atmosphere and was excited to start over in a place like this.

Turning a corner, I halted suddenly, almost having run over a small, crying child.

As I bent down to see if she was all right, I saw that her face was stained with tears. Her sobs broke my heart.

"Are you alright?" I asked the little girl, kneeling down to her eye level.

"... I want my mommy..." she sobbed..

"Don't cry... I'm sure she's around here somewhere."

She nodded her head very slowly. She couldn't have been more than eight years old. Poor girl— I imagined she was terrified being separated from her mother.

She slowly took my hand and looked up into my eyes. "Will you help me find her?"

I was hesitant.

I didn't know this place or where anything was located. But I also couldn't just leave her all by herself on the street. Maybe someone who knew the area could be a better help.

"I'm not sure, sweetie. Maybe there's someone that works on the docks that can help you find her," I replied softly. "I don't really know the area, either."

The little girl quickly shook her head "no" at my words. "Those men that work the docks are scary. Please don't make me go with them. Would you please take me?"

I could tell that she was terrified, and I knew that, if she were my child, I would want someone to help her, too.

I stood up, nodding my head. "Of course."

The little girl didn't waste another moment as she slipped her little hand into mine and began to walk with me down the cobbled streets, looking for a woman whose description I didn't even know.

“I think she went this way,” the little girl said as she let go of my hand and ran off into the distance.

“Wait, where are you going? Please slow down!” I called after her, hurriedly following behind.

As I turned the corner, I came to an empty street. The girl was nowhere in sight.

“Little girl.. Where *are* you?” I called out again, hoping that she could hear me and that she hadn’t gotten herself into trouble

I searched the street with my eyes, but I was slowly realizing that I needed to turn back. I had no idea where I was, and I had detoured from my *own* path in order to help her. Maybe I could alert the authorities that she was missing.

As I walked back down the path and turned at the corner. I came face to face with a group of unruly looking *men*, their eyes gleaming with dark intentions.

Stepping backwards, I realized I made a mistake by helping that child.

“Well, well, well... what do we have here?” one of the men said as he approached me slowly. “You just happened to run down the wrong street, didn’t you, young lady?”

Fear rushed through me as my eyes scanned my surroundings. There was no one here but me and these men.

“Please don’t come any closer,” I pleaded. “I don’t have anything that you would want. Please just let me go.”

I trembled in fear as he continued to approach me, followed by the four other men. Their dirty, worn clothing was covered in stains, and there was a stench coming off of them. I pressed down the nausea as my brain raced, trying to figure out a way to keep myself safe from them.

My fingers fumbled over the bag at my side. All of the money that I took from Damian was in it, as well as the jewels from Madalynn.

Thad planned to use them to help me settle down, but if this stuff could save me. I would give it to them. I could always find another way to make a living. I didn’t mind working.

Taking the bag off my shoulder, I quickly held it out to the man. “Please, this is everything that I have. Take it and let me go.”

The man laughed, and his comrades joined in.

Snatching the bag from my hand, he tossed it to one of his men, who quickly began to go through it. He wasn’t paying attention to it, though. Instead, his eyes seemed to linger on my neck.

As my fingers quickly went up to it, I knew that he was eyeing the necklace that Ethan had given me.

It was the only thing left of him that I had.

“Hand it over,” the man growled, his eyes narrowing at me as he held out his hand.

“No, please. It’s the only thing I have. I’ve given you everything else. Just please let me keep this.” I was pleading with a man who didn’t care.

Before I could react, I felt a blow on the side of my face that knocked me to the ground.

I cried out in pain, wrapping my arms around my stomach protectively as the kicks and punches came one after the other.

“You dare speak back to me!” he roared as he hit my face again. A metallic taste filled my mouth and caused stars to dance before my eyes.

It had been a long while since I was last beaten, but the feeling was bitterly familiar.

Still -, I had hoped that people would perhaps be different here. At the end of the day, though, they all seemed to be the same

I couldn’t fight off the darkness that was threatening to envelop me.

But then, the pain stopped.

As if from *a* great distance, I heard yelling and the pounding of feet. Dimly, I realized that the men who had been hurting me ran off, and a new circle of people surrounded me. Their figures were blurry against the setting sun.

As the warriors drew *closer*, I blinked, and my eyes shot around warily, trying to figure out what was going on. It was then that I saw a familiar face among them.

An explosion of fear and a rush of relief rocked my already–foggy mind,

The face I had been so worried about seeing was staring down at me as the darkness began to pull me away.

Had he come to save me? But how could he be here?

“Ethan...”

The mumbled words left my lips as my consciousness slipped away.

Chapter 59 Shut the F*ck Up, Madalynn!

****Ethan's POV**

That two hours before I met with Talon later tonight. Walking into the bedroom I sank down on the bed, falling backward and staring up at the ceiling, willing my mind to go blank.

During the day, it was easy enough. There was plenty to do, especially with the conflicts heating up along the border. I could focus my rage on the enemy.

But now..

It had been more than three days. Despite all of my men's efforts, we had found no trace of Rosalie's body, not even a scrap of fabric.

The river rushed through the rocks there, and the cliffs were jagged and full of crags. There were a thousand places for evidence to hide.

The sun was setting and it was getting dark, but I didn't bother to turn on the light.

All of a sudden, I seemed to hear a sound from the living area.

I got up to check it out, but froze as soon as I entered the room.

In the dark sat a figure that I thought I would never see again. Someone I could not help but recognize instantly, no matter where, no matter when.

Her sweet scent surrounded me, and she was looking out at the window.

I felt as if my heart had stopped beating. Before I knew it, I was standing behind her.

"Rosalie?" I whispered hoarsely. "You... you're back!"

My heart swelled with overwhelming joy and relief as I reached for her hand.

But there was nothing for me to grab.

"Ethan..."

She turned around to face me. Her voice was sweet and gentle as usual, but her face was as pale as paper.

"I'm here to say goodbye..."

"What do you mean?" I started to panic, my heart pounding in my ears. "No, not again! Rosalie, come back!"

Suddenly, I couldn't see her. A roar ripped its way out of my chest. "NO—"

I snapped awake, panting heavily.

D*mn it!! How had I fallen asleep?!

My heart was still racing, and I closed my eyes, trying to slow it down.

At that moment, I felt something.

It was like a pull, a very gentle pull... like a thin thread tugging on me from a great distance, willing me to go in

that direction, and telling me that I was needed far, far away.

I felt like, at the end of that thread, I would find someone that I had never met before— someone I was meant to

meet.

It was such a strange thought, a mysterious sensation.

But I didn't spend a lot of time pondering it.

What was there to think about, anyway? I wasn't going to allow my stupid brain to sneak in another nightmare for me.

I made my way to the shower.

The ice cold water beat down on my skin and immediately cleared my mind. That was exactly what I needed to start my evening.

Stepping out of the shower, I was ready to concentrate on my work, when I realized all at once that my bedroom wasn't empty.

Someone was sitting on my bed.

My heart started racing again, even though I knew it was impossible, but what if...she was back?

My finger hovered over the light switch. I had to control it from trembling.

The lamp next to the bed was turned on.

It was. Madalynn.

She was sitting there, wearing a pink robe and a pouty expression on her face.

I could hardly believe what I was seeing. Yet, here she was... and it was no mystery what she was doing here or what she wanted.

I was infuriated, but I was also way too tired to deal with her tonight.

“Madalynn, what the h*ll are you doing?”

In a husky, seductive voice, she said, “Waiting for you.”

“Who gave you permission to come into my room?” I replied coldly.

“I’ve been so worried about you, dear. You haven’t been eating. You hardly sleep. You keep going over to the cliff, Why don’t you come here and let me take care of you?” She crooked her finger at me and licked her lips, batting her eyelids.

“Madalynn, this is my room! DO NOT ever come in here again without my permission!” I tried to press down my anger, but she was pushing her limits.

She took her robe off and set it beside her on the bed, revealing a matching, tiny pink nightgown.

“Please, Ethan. Let me show you how much I care about you. Let me hold you. Let me love you.”

In about four long strides, I crossed the room and picked up her robe that I saw on the end of the bed.

Itossed it at her, covering up her body. “Put that on, and go to your own room.”

The noise that Madalynn made was a bit like a dying goose.

“What?” she asked. “But Ethan! You’re my fiancé! You’ve been under a lot of stress lately. Why won’t you let me

help relieve some of that stress?”

I gritted my teeth, my hands at my sides. “Go to your own room. Now.”

Grumbling, she pushed her arms into the silk pink robe and tied it at her waist. “Everyone has been so worried about you, Ethan. Everyone! You need to process this. You need to at least acknowledge it.”

“What I do and do not do is none of your concern, Madalynn!”

What I needed at the moment was for her to get her f*cking a** out of my room before I did something I’d regret.

She stood and walked toward me, her eyes flaming.

“I will never understand you, Ethan! Look at me!” She spread her arms wide, as if putting her body on display again, although this time it was mostly covered by the robe. “I am a beautiful woman, and one of noble birth. I have perfect genes, high standing, and am more than acceptable to a man of your class!”

I knew what she was getting at, and I didn’t want to hear it. “Watch yourself, Madalynn.”

But she pressed on. “Any child you bear from me will be intelligent, well-bred, and gifted in any number of ways. You will never have to wonder whether or not there will be some sort of... defect in a child of mine.”

She was insulting my deceased child, and it lit a flame deep within me.

“Shut your mouth, Madalynn!” I ordered in a strained voice, every muscle in my body tense and coiled, ready to strike.

“But with her – that d*mn breeder – who knows what you would get? After all, you don’t really know her lineage, do you, Ethan? What if she comes from street rats? Chattel? Prostitutes? Who the h*ll knows? They could all be illiterate, backwoods, inbred–”

“Madalynn!”

Lifted my hand to strike her, but stopped. I would have to deal with James or Romero if I hit her and I had zero interest in that. But if she didn’t stop, I was afraid I would lose control of myself.

“That’s enough,” I hissed in a low, pained voice. “Do you understand who you’re talking about?”

“Of course I do! I am talking about your dead breeder, Ethan! I’m talking about that woman that you chose over me! I am trying to understand why in the world you would rather be with her than with me!”

She pointed at herself, jabbing herself in the chest with her fingers so hard, I thought it might leave a bruise.

“Please, explain to me how the hell you could possibly prefer her company to mine!”

I couldn’t—I couldn’t explain it to her.

Not because there *were*’t a million reasons why I would rather be with Rosalie than with Madalynn. No, that would be the easy part. But standing there and listing off all of the reasons why I would rather be with Rosalie would mean listing all of the reasons why I missed her.

And I wouldn’t allow *myself* to do that.

I couldn't allow *myself* to do it.

“What is it, Ethan?” she shouted at me, tears stinging her eyes now. “You won't do it, will you? You won't talk about her because you're afraid if you do, then you'll have to acknowledge that you have feelings, like every other human being that walks the earth.”

“Knock it off, Madalynn,” I turned around. I could hear my knuckles cracking as my fists clenched.

I couldn't even stand to look at her anymore. I wanted to grab the collar of her robe and haul her out of the room. Using the mind-link to call the guards to have her removed before I hurt her was a viable option, one I probably should've used from the get-go.

“Fine, Ethan. Keep pretending. Keep burying it all deep down inside! And the rest of us will keep walking on tip toe around you, pretending like we don't notice what a f*cking mess you are!”

“Shut up, Madalynn!” | spun around to face her. “Shut your f*cking mouth!”

“And then, one day, when you need me, when you realize your precious Rosalie is gone, and that if you really want to have an heir, you're going to need me to spread my legs—! You're going to have to come back to me, begging and pleading, and hoping that I have forgiven you for falling in love with that f*cking breeder when you were supposed to be in love with me!”

“GET OUT, Madalynn! GET OUT NOW!”

“I'll leave when you admit that you're willing to accept that stupid f*cking breeder Rosalie is dead!” she shouted.

I grabbed her by her arms, shaking her, one hand sliding up to squeeze her throat.

“Never, ever say her name again. Do you hear me?” My growl was more animal than human. “I never want to hear her name come out of your f*cking mouth again!”

Her face turned red and then pale. Realizing I was hurting her, I let go of her, tossing her aside.

“GET THE F*CK OUT!”

With her hands on her upper arms, she panted heavily. Then she rushed out of my room, murmuring under her breath about what a b*stard I was.

Maybe she was right. Maybe I was a b*stard.

With her gone, I sank down on the edge of my bed, the scent of Madalynn's floral perfume forming a cloud around me. It stung my nose and made it hard for me to breathe. I didn't want to smell it, but there was no place to go to avoid it.

I wanted to smell Rosalie's soft, sweet scent instead. But the longer she was gone, the more it faded from the room.

And the harder it became to remember what it was like to feel her.

To hear her voice as she sang, the melody filling the room like a beam of light that cleared the darkness.

With each passing day, it was a little harder to remember her beautiful, angelic face, the sound of her laughter, the way she made me feel like I was not a monster— or that I could choose not to be if I tried.

Madalynn was right about one thing. I hadn't let myself think about how I felt about Rosalie. And I wasn't about to start doing that now.

Pushing everything out of my mind— including the fight I'd just had with Madalynn—I headed into the bathroom *to* wash my *face*. I would rinse it all down the drain. Then, I'd go to bed like Talon suggested. I'd go to sleep for a couple hours, think about none of it, and in the morning, I'd wake up and completely focus on the war efforts.

Because it was much easier to be the b*stard who waged war on the enemy than it was to be the b*stard who couldn't even admit he cared about the person he missed.

Chapter 60 Why Is Ethan Everywhere?

**Ethan's POV

“Not only are these cities along the west coast being attacked, but we've also gotten requests for reinforcements from both the eastern and northern borders,” Talon said, reporting the latest news to me as we were walking back to my suite.

“On what scale?” I asked.

“Scattered. Doesn't seem to be military actions— more like rogues.”

“Any information on which group is behind it?”

“No, Alpha, It could be multiple groups. The roques all know most of our men are now at the West coast fighting against Alpha Kal's invasion. They're not going to miss this opportunity.”

We stopped at my door. “Ok, give me the map and the report. I'll take a look at it later tonight. You can let James know first thing in the morning.”

Talon stood there, but he didn't move.

“What else?” I didn’t lift my head as I flipped through the pages of the reports from the frontline and pictures of the most recently assaulted villages.

“Alpha, it’s already two in the morning. We have the steering committee at six, and –”

“Alright, see you in the morning, then.” I dismissed him for the rest of the night.

“Ethan, not me!” Talon urged. “It’s you! You’ve barely slept!”

“I’m fine.” I opened the door and closed it behind me before Talon had the chance to protest any further.

In the past couple days, I had managed to stay focused on my work. There was plenty to do, especially with the conflicts heating up along the border. War was something I was familiar with, something I knew. It was a good distraction from the other emotions that kept attempting to bubble to the surface.

Thadn’t been in my room very long at all when there was a knock at the door.

I considered ignoring it, but then it opened and my sister, Georgia, walked in.

I stifled a groan, “Georgia? It’s two in the morning. What do you want?”

She just looked at me for a moment before she said, “I’m leaving.”

I put down the documents and looked at her. “Where are you going? And why?”

Talon followed her into my room, his brow furrowed with worry and regret.

“Georgia,” he said quietly and urgently, and I realized he was already aware of my sister’s proclamation, “You need to calm down.”

I didn’t understand why this *was* affecting him the way that it was. She was my sister, and I knew that he cared about her, but *he* was acting a bit more emotional about Georgia leaving than I would’ve expected.

“I don’t need to calm down.” Georgia stepped away from him, pivoting on her heels as she came toward me. “I can’t stand to be here one more f*cking minute!”

I rarely had this much patience with her, but I tried not to escalate the situation into a fight.

“Georgia, with everything that’s happened, we’re all upset. But things are uncertain beyond the capital right now. If you’re here, I know you’re safe.”

“I’ll be safe at home,” she said, her hands on her hips. “I cannot stay here one more d*mn minute, Ethan! Every time I see that woman’s f*cking face... over dinner, in the hallway. I want to smack her smirky little smile right off! That haughty b*tch...”

I knew she was talking about Madalynn, and I understood why she felt that way, but I was already dealing with that situation, even if she didn’t know the details.

“Enough,” I said. I didn’t have time for this right now.

“Enough?” my sister chirped. “Believe me, Ethan, I’ve had enough! I was supposed to be on my way back to Drogomor days ago when Rosalie first... when this first happened!”

She’d said Rosalie’s name, and I felt my stomach twist at the sound of it.

I’d forbidden just about everyone from even speaking it aloud, but Georgia wouldn’t pay any mind to my command, anyway.

She always did what she wanted.

Maybe it was best if she did leave.

“Georgia, come with me,” Talon was saying, his hand looping through her arm and pulling on her.

Georgia jerked away from him, but he was able to calm her a bit and guide her out of the room.

Absently, I wondered if I would see my sister later, or if she would just depart overnight without another word.

I didn’t want to think about that at the moment, either.

That a few hours before I was expected back in the war room. A declaration of war was inevitable. From that point on, my time would be consumed with planning our attacks.

I was happy about it. Anything that took my mind off of Rosalie and our baby was a good thing.

Right now, though, it wasn’t working as well as I’d hoped. “Why did Georgia have to mention her name?” | mumbled to myself.

Every time I heard it, fresh emotion bubbled to the surface again, and the image from that night flashed before *my eyes*. It was as if I was watching her fall all over again.

All of the emotions rolled over *me* in waves—shock, rage, denial... and another one I didn’t want to acknowledge

Sadness,

It wasn't just sadness, though. It was a heaviness that had settled deep into my soul and weighed me down, pulling on *my* heart and threatening to drag me under.

I couldn't acknowledge it, though, I had to continue to ignore it all of it.

Tran my hands down my face and shifted my thoughts toward the war again. I knew how to be a leader and a

warrior. I was good at that

And thinking about that was safer.

****Rosalie's POV**

My head was pounding. Pretty much every part of my body ached as my eyelids fluttered a few times.

I didn't want to open them. I didn't want to be awake. Being awake meant the pain would be back.

I didn't even know where I was. The last memory I had was of fists and feet pummeling me. All I'd been able to think about was protecting the baby, this little life.

The baby!

The thought of my child had my eyes opening and looking down.

I wasn't in a ditch at all. I was in a bedroom, and I couldn't see my stomach because there was a nice, soft, white bedspread thrown across me.

I was confused, but it didn't stop me from throwing the covers back and inspecting my abdomen.

While I could see bruises on my exposed arms and what I could see of my legs, when I pulled my shirt up and my pants down to look at my belly, everything appeared to be fine. I wanted to go into the bathroom and make sure wasn't bleeding, but I honestly felt like everything was all right.

Even though my body ached, a sense of peace settled over me. I knew instinctively that there was no reason for me to be scared, because my child was going to be okay.

I replaced my clothing and put the blanket down, wondering where I was. A part of me was tempted to think that, maybe, I was back home and everything that had happened was all a dream, if I wasn't aching and if the room wasn't so different.

It was a really nice room, with mahogany furniture and large windows. The curtains were white like the bedspread, and the rug on the floor looked plush and expensive.

A large dresser sat across the room, with a wide mirror. I couldn't see my reflection in it from where I was, and I figured that was a good thing. The way my face hurt, I had to assume it didn't look too good, either.

Next to the bed was a nightstand with a glass of water. My throat was parched, and I wanted to take a drink, but I didn't trust it. I had no idea who had brought me here.

The bed itself had a nice, soft mattress and plenty of pillows. It was large enough for at least two people, and the blankets *were* so comfortable.

It wasn't the same as my *room* in the castle, but it was no dump.

So *where* was I— and how had I gotten here?

The door opened, and a man stuck his head inside of the room.

Instinctively, *I crawled back toward* the headboard, pulling my knees to my chest and wrapping my arms around them— my veins filling with icy shock as I stared into that familiar face,

Ethan!

So after everything I had been through, I still wasn't able to escape from him?

But as the man came further into the room, I realized it wasn't Ethan after all.

Suddenly, I remembered what had happened when I just got on the boat.

Why did I keep thinking I saw him everywhere? What was wrong with me? Why did I think that everyone looked like him?!

Still, as this man came closer to me, I couldn't help but notice a strong resemblance between him and Ethan. So maybe I wasn't crazy.

He closed the door behind him. In a soft, caring voice, he said, "I'm so glad to find you awake this time. Please, don't be scared of me. I would never, ever hurt you."

No, this man was most definitely not Ethan.