

Chapter 231 Shifting Early

Moana

I felt my eyes go wide at Kat's proposition.

"Really?" I asked quietly. "You could actually help me shift... today?"

Kat nodded with a smile on her face. "It's easy," she replied. "You could get it over with really quickly."

I could feel my wolf reacting strongly to this. It had felt as though Mina was coming close to shifting for a while, ever since Edrick and I marked each other, but it still hadn't happened. And maybe, just maybe... shifting could finally make all of this ambiguity stop.

"What do you think?" I asked Mina.

She seemed excited. "We should do it," she replied. "I've been feeling stuck, like I keep coming close to shifting but I just can't make it happen all the way. This could be what I need... And I trust Kat."

I agreed with Mina. With a smile, I nodded at Kat. More than anything, I was just excited to finally be able to shift. Maybe then, Edrick wouldn't think that I was so incapable of taking care of myself.

Maybe if I shifted, I could actually be my own person again, and not a damsel in distress who needed a man to protect me.

"Let's do it," I finally said.

Kat grinned, then glanced over her shoulder at the house. We were still within sight of the house itself despite being in the forest a little ways. Suddenly, she took my hand and began to lead me deeper into the forest.

“Where are we going?” I asked. The deeper into the forest we walked, the more quickly the air temperature lowered. Soon, I let out a little shiver just from the chill in the pine-filled air.

“There are herbs that grow in the forest that can help induce the shifting process. We need wolfsbane and valerian roots. It shouldn’t be too hard to find either of those around here...” Kat looked around as we walked, occasionally pausing to check by tree stumps or around mossy rocks.

I watched as she occasionally bent down to small patches of weeds. She rifled through them, inspecting the leaves and flowers as she looked for the right plants that we needed. However, pretty soon the gap in the trees where we could see the house was becoming smaller, and the house was turning into a small speck in the distance. I started to get worried that we would eventually lose our way in the woods, especially since it was getting much darker out because of the oncoming storm.

I felt a bit clueless about all of this, but Kat seemed to know where she was going, and so I decided not to cause a fuss. As we kept walking further into the forest, I felt my anxiety starting to rise. The sky was darkening and I could feel the damp sensation in the air of oncoming rain.

There was almost a sort of static electricity to the air, like a thunderstorm could happen at any moment.

“Are you sure we have time?” I asked, looking up at the sky as Kat let go of my hand for a moment to stoop down behind a log and pick at some weeds. “It looks like it’s about to storm.”

As I spoke, the wind started to whip my hair around me even through the trees, which only solidified my concerns.

But Kat simply shook her head and stood again. She was holding a few small flowers in her hand. They were a dark purple color, and she held them up to me with a smile.

“Don’t worry,” she reassured me. “I already found some wolfsbane. Valerian might be a little more difficult to find, but we should be able to find some if we go just a little deeper into the forest.”

“Oh... Okay,” I replied. I felt reassured by my bodyguard’s warm smile, and followed her once again as she started walking down a gradual slope with the wolfsbane in her hand. She kept swiveling her head from left to right, searching.

“What happens when we find the valerian?” I asked. “Do we make it into a tea, or...?”

Kat shook her head. “You can simply ingest them, so long as you do it at the same time.”

“What happens after that, though?”

My bodyguard stopped, then crouched down to look into a hollow tree trunk. She muttered something to herself, then stood and started walking again.

“After that, it should only be five to ten minutes before you shift,” she said. “It’ll be easier if you shift out here. I’ll keep an eye on you, so if it gets to be too much and you lose control, you won’t get lost or anything.”

I had to admit to myself that I felt a little nervous about all of this; I wanted Edrick by my side when I shifted for the first time. It was scary to know that he wouldn’t be next to me when I shifted, and when I looked up, I realized that the house was no longer in sight.

By now, the rain had begun to fall. It was just a drizzle now, but I could tell from the wind in the air that it would soon get much worse.

“I-I think we should go back, Kat,” I finally said, stopping. “Maybe we can get the valerian tomorrow. This oncoming storm is making me uneasy, and besides... I don’t want to shift without Edrick here.”

Suddenly, Kat turned toward me with a concerned look on her face.

“Edrick wouldn’t let you shift,” she said, sounding somewhat stern. “He’ll just make up an excuse or tell you that it’s too dangerous for the baby—which it isn’t, I promise.”

I stared at the bodyguard for a moment. She seemed genuine. Something felt amiss, but maybe it was just my nerves getting to me. Maybe she was right; maybe Edrick wouldn’t let me shift, and it would only make things even worse.

“Come on, Moana,” Kat said with a warm smile. “You can trust me. I’ll be right by your side the whole time, and it’ll be over before you know it. Besides, I think the valerian shouldn’t be too much farther now.”

I chewed my lip, thinking, then finally nodded. “Alright,” I said quietly. “Lead the way.”

Kat grinned again, then started off down the slope once more. We finally came to a small stream, and she helped me step over it, balancing on the slick, mossy rocks as we went. Once we were on the other side, she paused for a few moments and looked around, mumbling to herself.

“Let’s see... Hmm...”

“Is it close?” I asked. I almost had to shout now to be heard over the sound of the raging wind.

Suddenly, Kat’s smile widened. Without a word, she took off into the woods and disappeared through the trees.

My jaw dropped.

“Kat?!” I called, jogging after her. “Did you find it?!”

But there was no answer.

I stopped and looked around, turning in all directions. Maybe she spotted it and would be back soon... At least, that was what I told myself in order to feel better.

In all actuality, I had a very bad feeling about all of this.

Maybe I shouldn't have trusted Kat after all.

Chapter 232 Read Me A Story

Edrick

I watched as Moana's head of red hair slowly faded into the distance. She seemed to stop and look over her shoulder before stepping into the tree line, with Kat following secretly at a distance.

From where I was standing, I could still see her as she began to wander around the entrance to the forest.

Just one day ago, I wouldn't have let her go out like that. But I had a constant patrol keeping watch around the entire perimeter of the property where anyone could feasibly get in, I had patrolled the whole property myself just last night, and I sent Kat along with Moana to keep an eye on her.

If my father was going to try to get at Moana, it would certainly be near impossible for him to accomplish. And besides... keeping Moana cooped up would only make her more likely to be in danger.

"Daddy?"

I was suddenly snapped out of my deep thought by the sound of Ella's voice. I didn't realize it, but I must have been staring out the window for quite some time while I was stuck in my deep train of thought.

“Yes, Princess?” I asked, turning to face her. She had a book in her hands, and she held it out to me. Her hair was messed up and she was a bit out of breath, like she had just run inside after playing out on the lawn.

“Will you read me a story?”

Smiling, I took the book out of her hands. The cover was old and worn, with no text or design on it; I honestly had no recollection of ever seeing a book like it before and wondered where she found it, but I figured that children often had mysterious ways of exploring shelves and finding random things, so maybe it was just tucked away in a place where I forgot about it.

“Sure,” I said. It looked like it would rain soon, so I didn’t mind. Maybe by the time I finished reading to Ella, Moana would have returned from her walk and we could do something together as a family.

Ella grinned and grabbed my hand, leading me over to the armchair by the window. I sat down and let her crawl up into my lap, then wrapped my arm around her and cracked the old book open.

The inside was just as dusty as the outside.

“Are you sure you want this one, Ella?” I asked, making a face at all of the dust. “We have lots of books.”

Ella shook her head. “I want this one,” she insisted, pushing her lower lip out in an irresistible pout. “Please? Pretty please?”

I sighed and finally relented, although my fingers were already black from handling this seemingly ancient book. I flipped to the next page, where the story immediately began. There was no cover page, and no title to be seen anywhere.

“Once upon a time,” I read, deciding that it wasn’t worth arguing about and that I could make something up if the story got strange, “there was an old man who lived all by himself.”

A strange premise for a kids' book, I thought to myself, but kept reading.

“The old man didn't have any friends, and he didn't have any family. He never got married, and he never had children of his own. In fact, the children in the little village that he lived in were afraid of him, as they saw his worn-out old house at the end of the street as being a cursed place... Are you sure you want me to read this, Ella? Won't you have nightmares?”

Ella shook her head. “Keep reading, daddy.”

“Alright... The old man didn't mind being all alone, though, because he was working on something. You see, the old man was a skilled craftsman, and he was visited one night by a guardian spirit who told him that he had to make something very special: a golden knife... with a wolf's head on the handle...”

As I read the story, I felt my hands start to shake and my eyes widened. I nearly dropped the book as a lump grew in my throat.

That knife was the knife that Moana had dreamed of... The knife that would kill the Golden Wolf.

“Daddy?” Ella asked, tilting her head back to look up at me with her big eyes. “Why did you stop reading?”

I shook my head to snap out of it. It was just a story, and it was a somewhat common one. It was only a coincidence that Ella found it in our extensive library here at the mansion.

“Sorry,” I said. “I'll keep reading... The old man worked hard every day to make the knife. He didn't know why he was tasked with making it or what it would be used for, only that it was extremely important...”

Suddenly, I had a thought. “Ella?” I asked. “Where did you find this book?”

Ella paused for a moment, then tilted her head back again and looked up at me.

“I didn’t find it,” she said matter-of-factly.

I furrowed my brow. “What do you mean?” I asked. “You didn’t find it in the library here?”

Ella shook her head. “No.”

Now, I just felt confused. Surely this had to be a game that she was playing. “Where did you get it, then?” I asked quietly.

Ella simply shrugged. “Grandpa gave it to me.”

Suddenly, I snapped the book shut as my throat felt as though it would close up. “When did he give this book to you?” I asked. I didn’t recall my father giving Ella any gifts recently. He never gave her anything for her birthday or Christmas.

Ella seemed hesitant, but I urged her again, and she finally admitted the truth. “Just now, while I was playing outside. He was behind a tree. But he told me not to tell you, so promise that you won’t tell him that I didn’t listen.”

All of a sudden, I felt my heart leap out of my chest. My father was here? How? Our patrol was airtight... There was no way that he could have gotten through without being seen. I thought that surely Ella was playing a joke on me.

Without thinking, I suddenly threw the book to the floor and stood, setting Ella down on the ground. I grabbed her firmly by both shoulders and looked deep into her frightened eyes.

I didn’t see any hint of a joke or a prank behind her eyes. Just fear and confusion.

I knew, then, that this was all real. This book... It wasn’t just a coincidence.

It was a taunt.

“I’m sorry, daddy,” Ella whimpered, her lower lip quivering. “Please don’t tell grandpa that I didn’t keep my promise—”

“Ella, I’m so glad that you didn’t listen to him and you did a good job,” I said, feeling my voice shake. “Did you see where he went after that?”

Ella nodded slowly. What she did next horrified me to my core.

She pointed out toward the forest with her small finger, where I last saw Kat and Moana walking...

And when I painstakingly followed her finger and looked out into the pouring rain, my mate and her bodyguard were no longer anywhere to be seen.

Chapter 233 The Cliff

Moana

“Kat?” I called out.

My bodyguard was nowhere to be found. One minute she was right beside me, and the next she was just... gone. She just took off running and didn't look back.

Maybe she found the valerian roots, I thought to myself, although I think I knew deep down that it wasn't the case. She had left me; although I didn't know why.

“Hello?”

I started to jog in the direction that she ran off to. Over my head, the wind began howling more aggressively and the sky darkened as a horrible thunderstorm began to form in the sky. No matter which way I turned, I couldn't see the mansion anywhere.

And we had taken so many turns that I didn't even know where I should go to find it now.

“Okay...” I stopped and shut my eyes for a moment, thinking. We hadn't been walking for that long... Maybe if I just got my bearings, I could find my way back to the mansion. When I opened my eyes again, I resolved to

start off by heading upwards, since I remembered walking down a gradual slope.

But from here, I couldn't even see where the slope began. The only marker I had nearby was the stream that we crossed, but I didn't know where to go from there. If only I had been paying attention to all of the winding twists and turns that Kat took me on.

Suddenly, I heard a soft voice calling over the wind.

“Moana!” it called.

It was Kat.

I let out a sigh of relief. “Kat?! Where are you?!” I shouted, cupping my hands around my mouth in order to be heard better over the sound of the whistling wind.

There was a silence, and then the little voice rang out again.

“This way! Follow my voice!”

I felt immensely relieved as I began to jog in the direction of Kat's voice. I guessed that she really did find the valerian roots, or maybe she got a little lost herself when she ran off. I trusted Kat, and Edrick did a thorough background check on her; it was silly of me to think that she would just leave me in the woods like that.

“Kat?!” I called out again, still jogging. “Say something!”

Another silence.

“This way!”

I froze. Her voice was coming from the opposite direction now. Did I somehow run past her? I whirled around and strained my eyes to see in that direction, but I couldn't see anything through the thick mist that was beginning to settle in the forest around me.

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“Shit...” I whispered to myself. “Kat?! I can’t see anything!”

I waited again for a few moments, but heard nothing except for the sound of the wind. More rain began to fall, even harder than before, and I shivered in my thin coat as I started to get soaked.

“I have a bad feeling,” Mina suddenly said, her voice echoing in my mind. “I think we should just try to get home without her.”

I nodded to myself. Even if Kat wasn’t intentionally leading me on a wild goose chase, I needed to prioritize my baby’s safety. If I stayed out here for too long, anything could happen in this weather.

Sighing, I pulled my hood up and began to trudge forward.

But I only made it a few steps before I realized that I didn't know where I was. I cursed again under my breath as I looked around, but everything looked the same.

“Okay... I have to just decide on a direction,” I whispered, half to myself and half to my wolf. “At the very least, I'll wind up on a road and maybe someone driving past will find me.”

I swallowed and decided to go with my gut. I began walking, keeping my arms folded across my chest to hold my jacket tight against me. It was already almost entirely soaked through, though. At least I had the trees to cover me a bit, but the rain was so heavy that the trees weren't able to help much.

“Mina, can you pick up a scent to get us home?” I asked out loud.

My wolf fell silent for a few moments. I could sense that she was trying to pick up a trail to get home, but it wasn't working. Finally, she seemed to give up.

“No, I can't,” she replied. “I'm sorry, Moana. The rain is dampening my sense of smell, and since I haven't shifted yet it wasn't very strong to begin with.”

“It's alright.” I sighed, louder this time, and kept going.

I didn't know how long I was walking for, but eventually the trees seemed to be thinning out a bit, which was promising. Maybe I was reaching the edge of the forest. The mist was too heavy to see the mansion, but I figured that maybe it was lying ahead of me and I just couldn't see it until I got closer.

The trees thinned out a little more.

“Edrick?!” I called into the mist as loud as I could, just hoping that he was nearby and could hear me. But there was no answer.

I stopped then, and turned around in a full circle as I strained my eyes to see through the mist. I didn't see the mansion anywhere.

In fact...

Suddenly, I clapped my hand over my mouth and let out a terrified shriek as I realized where I was.

"I've seen this place!" I cried out loud, turning around more frantically now. The wind blew some of the mist away, revealing exactly what I feared.

A sheer drop below a cliff, just a few feet away from where I stood. If I hadn't stopped instinctively, I might have walked right over the edge.

This was the cliff from my dreams.

"How?" I whispered, my voice and my hands shaking. How did this happen? Kat was supposed to be my bodyguard; she was supposed to protect me, and yet for some reason, she led me straight to the spot where I died over and over again in my visions.

I didn't know what to do. "Edrick?!" I called out again, but my voice was drowned out by the wind. No matter how many times I screamed his name, even until my throat became hoarse, there was no answer.

And there wouldn't be any answer, because somehow I knew that no one was nearby. I was all alone.

"Mina, we have to do something," I said, whirling around frantically as I expected the horrifying visage of Michael to come floating out of the mist with that goddamn golden knife in his hand. "Isn't there anything you can do?!"

"I can release my scent," Mina replied, sounding just as panicked as I felt. "But I'll need to use some of the baby's strength. Are you willing to take that risk?"

At my wolf's words, I felt my heart drop into the pits of my stomach. But I had no choice; it was either allow Mina to release her scent and potentially hurt the baby, or don't let her release her scent and potentially kill both of us.

Finally, I nodded.

"The baby's strength has proven to be incredible before," I finally said, clenching my fists tightly next to my sides. "Try it now."

Chapter 234 The Hunt

Edrick

Ella slowly pointed her little finger in the direction where I last saw Moana and Kat walking over by the edge of the forest.

Only now, no one was there.

I felt my heart drop as I quickly scanned the tree line. I couldn't see a flash of red hair anywhere I looked, no matter how hard I strained my eyes through the light drizzle of rain and the darkening sky.

Maybe she came back in without me realizing, I thought to myself.

“What’s wrong, daddy?” Ella asked, c*****g her head.

I shook my head and stood, forcing a weak smile so as not to cause Ella to panic. “Nothing, baby. Why don’t you go up to your room and play? Ask one of the maids to stay with you.”

Ella gave me a puzzled look, but didn’t protest. I watched in horror as she ran off to play, and then I bolted into the kitchen to look for Selina.

“Have you seen Moana?” I asked once I found Selina bent over the sink, washing dishes. She made a face and shook her head as she wiped her hands off on her apron.

“I haven’t seen her since she went on her walk with her bodyguard,” she said, turning to face me with a frown on her face. “Why? Is everything alright?”

I felt as though I would be sick. “Call the security guards,” I demanded as I grabbed my coat off of the hook. “I’m going to look for her. Tell them that... my father was seen on the grounds.”

Selina’s eyes went wide, but I didn’t have time to explain. Like a flash, I took off through the door and burst outside. It had begun to rain a bit by now, and the sky was rapidly darkening while howling wind roared overhead. Even if my father didn’t get to Moana before I did, I still had to worry about her getting lost or hurt in the storm.

As I ran up to the edge of the forest, I felt as though my heart was falling into the very depths of my stomach. Moana was still nowhere in sight.

“Moana?!” I called into the dark forest, peering in and using my night vision to look around. “Are you there?!”

There was no answer. I cursed under my breath as I pushed forward into the woods, hoping that I could at least pick up some sort of trail. The rain and wind already wiped away any traces of footprints in the dirt, though, which only made it more difficult.

God dammit, I thought to myself as I hurriedly walked further into the forest, keeping my head on a constant swivel in case Moana — or someone else — suddenly appeared. I never should have let her go on that walk.

Suddenly, my wolf spoke up for the first time in a while

“Something is wrong,” he said. “I can sense it.”

I stopped in my tracks. My heart was racing a mile a minute. “What do you sense, exactly?” I asked out loud. “Tell me.”

“I’m not sure, exactly,” Eddy replied. “But I can tell that she’s alive, and she’s afraid. Maybe she got lost, or...”

My wolf stopped speaking. I knew what he was going to suggest: that something even worse happened to her than simply getting lost. Of course

I already knew that that would be a risk. The moment that Ella said that the book she had came from my father, I knew that Moana might have been in danger.

But at the very least, if Eddy could sense her fear, then at least we knew that she was alive.

Now, I just had to get to her first, before my dad got to her.

I quickened my pace, and started to run further into the forest. Up ahead, I scanned the forest with my night vision and smelled the air for anything; any scent, any broken twig, any footprint in the dirt.

Suddenly, something caught my eye: a fallen tree with moss growing on top of it. Some of the moss was broken on one spot, and it looked fresh, like someone stepped over it and tripped on it just a little bit. It was faint, but as I ran up to it and looked more closely, I could tell that it was exactly that.

“She’s been this way,” I said out loud, jumping over the log. I ran further past the log, cursing her bodyguard under my breath.

Where was Kat? I gave her strict orders not to let Moana out of her sight. Unless something happened to Kat, there would be no reason for her to let Moana wander and get lost or hurt. I hated to think that something else may have happened... What if Kat wasn’t as good as we thought? What if she was up to something?

“No,” I said to myself, thinking deeply as I continued to run. “It can’t be...”

I ran for a little while longer, and finally caught something else in the path: a faint footprint in the dirt. I ran up to it and came to a skidding halt, then crouched down and touched the outline of it in the soil. It was a small footprint... It was definitely from either Moana’s or Kat’s boot.

I stood, feeling as though I was getting closer. “Moana!” I called out as I continued to run again, this time faster. “Kat!”

My voice was nearly drowned out by the sound of the wind and the rain, but I just kept yelling more and more in the hopes that they would be around somewhere. By now, the forest was almost pitch black from the darkening sky. Even though it was still only late morning, the storm was casting such dark clouds ahead that it didn't even feel like daytime.

I couldn't help but imagine Moana laying motionless at the bottom of a hill, having hit her head on a rock or something after falling in this darkness. She didn't have night vision like me...

I had to stop imagining such dark things. I pushed myself harder, running even faster through the woods until I came to a small stream running across the path. I stopped there, inspecting the rocks for any signs of the stream being crossed...

But then, all of a sudden as I crouched down by the stream, I picked up a scent.

It was faint... but I recognized that sweet scent immediately. In an instant, I was transported back to that day at the maze, when I was searching for Moana with my blindfold on. The first time that I experienced that sweet, tantalizing scent, I didn't think much of it... but now, it was a lifeline.

"Moana," I whispered. As I stood, I felt my eyes begin to glow in the darkness, and her faint scent outlined a path for me that led straight to her.

Without a second thought, I let Eddy take over and I shifted. I leaped across the stream and began to follow the trail, not thinking about anything else except for one thing.

I had to get to Moana now, before my father did. And if I found him with her, especially if he did anything to hurt her or our baby...

I was going to kill him without a second thought.

Chapter 235 All Alone on the Cliff

Moana

“The baby’s strength has proven to be incredible before,” I finally said, clenching my fists tightly next to my sides. “Try it now.”

After a moment of waiting, I felt my wolf’s power surge ever so slightly as she released a large amount of her scent.

“There,” she said, sounding somewhat satisfied with herself. “I released a lot of scent. Even more than before, when you were in the Rogue district. If Edrick is anywhere nearby, he’ll certainly smell you.”

I felt a bit relieved, but not completely. There was still the threat of Michael coming out of that mist, just like in my dreams. And now the rain and the wind were only getting even more intense as time went on.

“Kat?!” I called out into the mist, hoping for a response. “Edrick?!”

There was no answer. My quivering, scared voice was almost completely drowned out by the sound of the wind and the rain anyway.

I felt so stupid for following Kat into the woods. I should have stayed up at the mansion, where it was safe. If Michael was somehow out there, at least I could be close to Edrick and the other security guards; now, I didn’t

even know where I was because of the thick mist that was settling around me.

And yet, at the same time, all of this almost felt like fate. Like it was all some sort of grand plan to get me out here where Michael could kill me.

Was this my fate as the Golden Wolf? To die at the hands of an evil man? Was this what happened to all of the Golden Wolves that came before me?

I shivered, feeling the cold of the rain starting to seep through my clothes. My hair and my face were soaked, and I protectively rubbed my protruding belly, just hoping that if nothing else bad happened, that this cold wouldn't harm the baby.

Tears started to well up in my eyes as I stared at the mist. Thankfully, not far off to the side, there was a tree standing all alone next to the cliff. I shakily made my way over to it, taking care not to slip or lose my footing, and sat down beneath the tree where the leaves at least kept me somewhat protected from the elements.

As I sat there, shivering in the cold and the rain and the wind, I thought back on my vision from the night before with Dr. Rhodes. My vision wasn't particularly any different from the others, but there was something new that I sensed.

I sensed someone else in the mist, as though they were working alongside Michael.

Was that Kat that I sensed? All along, was she secretly working with Michael? Was drawing me away from the mansion and lying to me, and thus getting me lost in the woods, all part of her plan?

Even just thinking about it made me sick. To think that I had trusted her... And now the last image I had of her flashing through my mind was the eerie smile she gave me before she bolted off into the woods without a trace, leaving me alone and scared.

I didn't know exactly how long I waited there beneath the tree, but it felt like a long time. The wind and the rain whipped at my hair and my clothes, and I shivered violently as I pulled my light jacket closer around my shoulders and drew my knees up to my chest.

All the while, I felt as though I couldn't tear my eyes away from the mist.

At any moment, I expected one of three people to come out of the mist: Kat, Edrick, or Michael. I hoped that it was Edrick, but if my visions were telling me the truth about what was to happen here, then it would likely be Michael. And I had no way to protect myself, nowhere to go, and no one could hear my screams.

"Can you sense him yet?" I asked my wolf.

"No." She sounded grim. "The rain is dampening my senses too much. It's the perfect storm."

My wolf's words made me feel even more sick to my stomach than I already was. The perfect storm... Kat had to have lured me out here on purpose. This was their plan all along — to get me isolated in a dangerous place with no way to get help or to help myself.

And now, I was probably just playing into their plan by releasing my scent so that I could be easily found.

I opened my mouth to tell my wolf to retract my scent out of fear that it would draw Michael to me.

"Mina, I think we should—" I began, but my voice faltered as I suddenly saw a dark figure materializing in the mist.

My heart practically leaped out of my chest. I scrambled to my feet, holding onto the tree with one hand to steady myself as I strained my eyes to see into the mist.

"Edrick...?" I whispered. Oh, how I hoped that it was Edrick.

The figure inched a little closer, like they were testing their own footing. As the figure came closer, I could see that it was a man. My spirits raised a little; it had to be Edrick. The figure's frame looked too similar to Edrick, and the way that the figure was walking so carefully made me think that it couldn't be Michael.

"Edrick!" I shouted, waving my arm. "Over here!"

"Moana, I don't think that's a good idea..." My wolf started to get agitated, and bristled as the figure continued to approach.

The figure froze as my voice carried across the mist. I felt my heart stop, caught in my throat. Time seemed to stand still as my fight or flight kicked in, quickly followed by the feeling of dread caused by knowing that I couldn't fight or flee, and I had just made a grave mistake.

The figure, after standing there for a moment, finally started to approach once again. I saw the figure's body become more solid, and I clapped my hand over my mouth in terror, my eyes widening as I realized that it wasn't Edrick at all.

It was Michael.

"Hello, Moana." His voice echoed in my mind, grating against my ears as it rang too loudly in my skull. I felt myself wince, and I started to get dizzy. All I could do was continue to clutch the tree as my eyes scanned the mist behind Michael's figure in the hopes that Edrick would be behind him, waiting to attack him and rescue me.

Michael fully stepped out of the mist and stopped just a few yards in front of me. There was that same cold, twisted smile on his face from my nightmares.

The way that his hair clung to his forehead from the rain... The way that his glowing eyes stared at me unblinkingly...

It was all exactly like my visions.

As my breath shook and my heart pounded out of my chest, my eyes slowly made their way down Michael's arm, down to his hand that hung at his side.

And it wasn't empty; something gold glinted in the light, held tightly in his hand.

He had the Golden Knife.