

Chapter 7 Captive

Moana

“Hey! Stop!” the scar-faced man shouted.

I ran as fast as I could, willing my legs to pump harder, to push me further away from the imminent danger that I sensed. I could hear the sound of footsteps pounding on the sidewalk behind me; I was just a human, and these men were werewolves. I should’ve known I wouldn’t stand a chance trying to outrun them.

I screamed for help, but no one came — no one ever came when a woman screamed for help in the city, and I cursed them for that in that moment.

The sound of the men running behind me came closer. I felt as though my body didn’t belong to me, like I was watching from a third person perspective as I ran for my life.

The two men gained on me. They were so close now that I knew that one misstep on my part would allow them to catch me. I felt a hand brush my shoulder and I shrieked, pushing myself faster as I glanced over my shoulder to look...

Whack!

I ran into something hard and gritty: a corner of a brick building. As I stumbled backwards, my head reeling from the impact, all I could feel were hands grabbing me. My vision faded, and the last thing I saw was the scar-faced man...

I came to in the back of a car. My head was throbbing and I felt as though I would vomit, which kept me from being able to scream or fight. Where were these strange men taking me?

“She’s awake,” the gravelly voice that belonged to the scar-faced man said.

I groaned. I tried to speak, to tell them to let me go, but all that came out was garbled nonsense. They stopped the car and got out, opening the back door and lifting my limp body out of the seat.

As they half-carried me toward whatever fate that lay before me, my head lolled back on one of their shoulders. Above me towered the massive apartment building where I had just been earlier that day.

Edrick Morgan’s penthouse.

I felt myself go even weaker. The man in the leather jacket said something incoherent and picked me up fully, carrying me in through the brightly-lit lobby. I heard the sound of the scar-faced man saying something to the concierge, followed by the ding of the elevator.

I blacked out again.

When I woke up again, I was laying on something soft. The room was dim, lit only by the glow of a standing lamp.

I groaned and attempted to sit up; somehow, I managed to do it, although the dizziness got worse when I did.

“You hit your head pretty good there, huh?” a familiar male voice said. I winced as I felt a damp cloth touch my tender forehead, another hand supporting my back from underneath as I struggled to stay upright.

“Where am I...?”

“You’re back in the penthouse.”

I blinked several times. Finally, Edrick Morgan's devilishly handsome face came into focus. He was crouching in front of me with a concerned expression as he dabbed at my forehead with a damp cloth. I thought, as I slowly came back to consciousness, that I secretly caught him showing a bit of concern for me; under any other circumstances, I would've felt like we had chemistry between us.

"Why did you bring me back here?" I whispered, too weak to speak any more loudly.

"Why did you run?" he asked instead of answering me, his face turning cold again as soon as he saw me looking.

I didn't answer. Sighing, Edrick set down the washcloth and propped a couple of soft pillows under me to help me stay upright, then stood and walked over to the window to look out onto the city street.

"You already signed the contract," he said. "It's rude of you to run off like that. I'm only trying to help."

"Trying to help by sending two terrifying men to attack me on the street in the middle of the night?"

Edrick turned back to face me. His expression was, unsurprisingly, cold and emotionless.

"What did you expect me to do? They were never going to hurt you. From what I heard, you took off screaming before they could even talk to you."

I groaned again and shut my eyes, tenderly touching my fingers to my forehead as a wave of dizziness took over me. Through my closed eyelids I saw Edrick's tall form approaching me once more and crouching down in front of me. He picked up the washcloth again and held it to my forehead. As he did, I heard the door click open.

"Thank you, Selina," he said. I cracked my eyes open to see the housekeeper hand him a bottle of pills. He opened it and dumped two out into his palm, then held them out to me along with a glass of water. "It's

just Advil,” he said, noticing my hesitation to take the pills. “For the pain. Don’t worry, I wouldn’t drug you.”

I frowned, but gingerly took the pills and popped them into my mouth, washing them down with the glass of water. I heard Selina’s footsteps receding, followed by the sound of the door clicking shut again.

“You know, we did try to call you,” he said, sitting on the arm of a chair across from me and folding his arms across his chest. “Several times, actually. As it turns out, you left your phone here by accident.” He pulled my phone out of his pocket and tossed it onto my lap. The screen lit up as he did so, showing five missed calls.

“Thanks,” I said, slipping my phone into my own pocket. “But you should know that I don’t have any intention of continuing to work for you.”

“I figured you would say that,” he replied. “I suppose I could just as easily find someone else to fill your position, and would honestly prefer it myself at this point, but it seems Ella is quite taken with you.”

I furrowed my brow. “Ella seemed too upset by our... brief history... to want anything to do with me.”

Edrick merely shrugged, then called over his shoulder toward the door. “Come in, Ella. Tell Moana what you told me.”

I sat up fully and looked over my shoulder to see Ella sheepishly walk into the room. She was looking at the floor and fiddling with a bow on her dress, looking embarrassed.

“Go on, Ella,” Edrick said softly. “It’s okay.”

“I’m sorry I yelled at you,” she whispered. She looked up at me then, and her eyes widened when she saw me. “What happened?”

I reached up and touched my forehead, then shook my head and held my hand out for her to take. “I’m okay. Just bumped my head, that’s all.”

Ella tentatively shuffled up to me, placing her small hand in mine as she studied my face. “I thought you lied to me,” she said. “But then I remembered that you asked me about my parents, and daddy told me that you didn’t know who he was when you came to see me yesterday. So I forgive you.”

“Do you want Moana to stay?” Edrick asked.

Ella nodded vigorously. “Yes. We had so much fun today. I want to have fun with you every day.”

The little girl’s words made me smile and forget about everything else. How could I say no to her?

“Alright,” I said to Ella, glancing briefly at Edrick as he looked on with an icy stare. “I’ll stay. But only if you promise to talk to me next time you get mad at me. Okay?”

Ella nodded in agreement. “I promise.” Then, she pulled me closer and cupped her hands around my ear. “If my daddy is going to be with someone, then I suppose I’m okay with it being you.” She pulled away with a smile on her face, then patted me on the shoulder and skipped out of the room before I could respond.

What she had said was so adult-like... Children could be so strange sometimes!

“So, that settles it?” Edrick asked once she was gone. “Will you stay?”

His voice was flat, but I could sense a hint of pleading behind it. Somehow, I knew that Ella wasn’t the only one who wanted me to stay.

“Yes,” I said. “I’ll stay.”