

Chapter 8 Sleeping Potion

Moana

After the entire debacle on my first night of employment, my first week went by smoothly and without a single hitch. Ella was a sweet little girl to take care of, and she caused very little trouble, if any at all. In fact, by the end of my first week, I started to feel a little guilty for accepting such a high salary for such an easy job and started helping Selina and the maids around the penthouse when I wasn't busy with Ella. Helping out with cleaning, cooking, laundry, and grocery shopping not only made me feel better about accepting the salary, but also made me feel less bored when I had nothing else to do. It didn't make Selina and the maids any more friendly toward me, but it certainly seemed to soften their demeanors a tiny bit as the days marched on.

I also kept a distant, but polite, relationship with Edrick. He wasn't around very often, usually only coming home late at night, so it was easy to keep a distance.

I started to notice a strange occurrence, though. There was a drawer in the kitchen that Selina would periodically open using a small key; I didn't pay it much mind, just assuming that it was something private, but I was helping out with peeling potatoes in the kitchen one afternoon while Ella was busy with her violin lesson when I noticed Selina come in with a paper pharmacy bag. I watched quietly as she discreetly opened the bag, unlocked the drawer, and dumped the contents of the bag into the drawer.

"Selina! Can you help me?" Amy suddenly called from the other room. She sounded like she was struggling to carry something heavy.

“Coming,” Selina replied. She left the empty paper bag on the counter and scurried away, inadvertently leaving the drawer open.

I tried to focus on peeling the potatoes, but I was nothing if not a curious person — probably a trait I picked up during my upbringing at the orphanage — and couldn’t help myself from quietly sneaking over to the mysterious drawer.

My brows knit together when I opened it to reveal bottles upon bottles of pills.

“Ambien...” I whispered to myself as I picked up one of the bottles and read the label. Why were there so many sleeping pills in this drawer?

“Ahem.”

I jumped when I heard Selina clear her throat from behind me, accidentally dropping the bottle of pills in my hand and watching in horror as it rolled across the floor, eventually coming to a stop in front of Selina’s feet.

“I’m so sorry,” I muttered.

Selina sighed and stooped to pick up the bottle. She brushed past me and tossed it back into the drawer, closing and locking it again.

“I didn’t mean to snoop,” I said in a rushed voice. “I just saw you left the drawer unlocked, and...”

“It’s alright,” Selina replied as she dropped the small key into her apron pocket. “I suppose it was only a matter of time before you got curious.”

I turned and watched as Selina walked over to the oven. She slipped a quilted oven mitt onto her hand and pulled out a steaming loaf of bread, then used the mitt to wave away some of the steam.

“May I ask who it’s for?” I asked. “The pills, I mean.”

“Mr. Morgan has been having trouble sleeping for years now,” she replied, her back still turned to me as she turned the loaf pan upside down and let the fresh loaf of bread inside plop down onto the cutting board. “His doses lately have been getting stronger. I’m not sure if the pills even help him at all at this point.”

“It’s not good for his body,” the maid, Lily, said as she shuffled into the kitchen with a basket of clean linens. “Those pills are too strong. And, they’re addictive. I blame it on that woman—”

“Lily!” Selina growled, whipping around to glare at Lily.

“Sorry,” Lily muttered before continuing her work.

I frowned, figuring I wasn’t going to find out who ‘that woman’ was, and returned to peeling the potatoes as I thought about Edrick. Every time I had talked to him since I met him, he never seemed overly tired — and, now that I thought of it, he had woken up at almost the exact same time as I did when we spent the night together in the hotel.

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I had the chance to witness Edrick’s sleep deprivation firsthand that very night.

I had just put Ella to bed. She insisted that I read her not one, not two, but three bedtime stories before she finally fell asleep halfway through the third story, so I was up much later than usual. Normally I would be tucked away in my bedroom by the time with my headphones on, listening to quiet music while I drew in my sketchbook on my balcony, which meant that I rarely bumped into Edrick at this time of night.

As I was walking back to my room, however, I heard the sound of glass breaking in the living room, followed by a muffled “Shit.”

I hurried toward the sound of the noise, worried that Edrick had hurt himself; when I emerged into the living room, I saw him standing in the middle of the room frowning down at the floor. He had his laptop

balancing in one hand and was staring down at the floor in front of him, where a wine glass had shattered on the wood and red wine pooled up around his bare feet.

When he heard me enter, he jerked his head up to look at me. His face looked sickly and pale. There was something else behind his eyes, too.

He was drunk.

“Do you need help?” I asked.

Edrick shook his head. “It’s alright. The maid will clean it up in the morning.”

I frowned and brushed past him to retrieve a towel and the broom from the kitchen. “Nonsense,” I said, ushering him out of the way when I returned. I bent down in front of him to wipe the wine up off of the floor, then swept the broken glass into the dustpan and dumped it in the trash. “See? It took five seconds.”

Edrick swayed slightly in his spot for a moment before turning on his heel toward the kitchen. “I need another glass,” he mumbled.

My frown deepened. I grabbed him by the shoulder, taking him by surprise, and guided him over to the sofa. “Sit here,” I said sternly, as though he was a child. “I’ll get it for you.”

He didn’t protest as I went into the kitchen to get him another glass — but as I got out the wine glass and lifted the half-empty bottle to pour, I decided against it and instead filled a glass with fresh, cold water. When I returned and handed the glass to Edrick, he frowned.

“This isn’t wine.”

“No, it’s not,” I replied. “You’re drunk enough as it is. Would you want your daughter to come out here and see you like this? Besides, alcohol won’t help you sleep. If anything, it’ll keep you up and leave you with a headache in the morning.”

Edrick was silent for several moments as he stared at the glass of water in his hand.

“You know about my sleeping troubles?” he asked, looking up at me with raised eyebrows.

I nodded. “I saw the pills,” I responded, pausing. “Is it like this every night?”

Edrick nodded hesitantly. “Every night. Except, there was one time recently...”

His voice faltered, and before I could tell him to continue, his face shifted back to its usual cold expression. He set the glass of water down on the coffee table and began typing on his laptop.

“Thank you for the water,” he said. “You can go now.”

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As I slept that night, I had a strange dream. I was standing on a cliff, looking out over the sea. There was a disembodied voice speaking to me.

“I am your wolf... My name is Mina...” the voice said slowly and softly, like the wind.

But when I looked for the source of the voice, there was no one there.

I awoke with a start in the morning, feeling uncomfortable after my strange dream. Had I already spent so much time living with werewolves that their customs were starting to work their way into my dreams?

Shuddering, I sat up and rubbed my eyes.

As my sleepy vision began to focus, I nearly screamed.

Someone was in my bed... And it was Edrick.