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Gavin's POV

By the time we returned to the villa, the sun was already setting. We had been running and hunting in wolf form for the last several hours. Judy's scent had faded long ago, so I knew she had left already. Matt was trailing behind me as we broke through the clearing; being in wolf form, I was able to speak with him through the mindlink. It was a lot easier considering we share the same blood.

At first, he was rattled about his first shift; the pain of the shift disappeared pretty quickly once he reached his full wolf form.

I slowed my pace and shifted by the large oak tree where I keep extra clothes. I wasn't sure where Judy put the clothes I took off earlier, and I wasn't about to walk around looking for them. One of the shirts in the chest was big enough to fit over Matt's small frame once he managed to shift back into human form.

He watched me curiously for a long while in wolf form as I shifted and quickly changed into the extra clothes. I then turned to him, expecting him to shift too, but when he didn't, I realized he didn't know how to. This kind of thing needed to be trained; it wasn't something that came naturally. Especially during a shift that wasn't expected, like this one.

I knelt to the ground, reaching my hand out for him to sniff. His wolf sees me as someone to respect because I am a powerful Lycan and his Alpha.

"Command your wolf, Matthew. Tell him to relinquish control and shift," I told him, keeping my voice low and firm as I looked into his wolf's eyes.

He continued to stare at me, and I could see the struggle in his eyes as he attempted to force his shift. With an exhausted huff, he lay on the ground, bowing his head in defeat.

"We are Landry's," I reminded him firmly. "We do not quit. I need you to shift back into your wolf form, Matthew."

I put my hand on his wolf's back, digging my fingers into his thick fur. I tried to channel my Lycan powers and force the shift, or at least urge his wolf to relent. "Shift," I commanded.

Listening to my command, his wolf whimpered as he struggled against my Lycan hold. He bowed his head again, only this time it was because of admission. I watched as the wolf's bones started to crack and break, the fur started to slide back into his body, leaving nothing but raw and exposed skin, still healing from the first shift. The first shift was never a pretty process; the shift back wasn't much easier. Our bodies are reformed and

each of our bones are broken and put back together; fur rips through out skin and then gets sucked back in. A wolf is being trained to listen and respect their human when all they really wants is to be set free and run wild, just like wild rogues.

Though typically we are of age and can handle such a traumatic change to our bodies. We are aware of what's about to happen and we have resources available to aid us during the shift. But with Matthew, he was underage and unprepared. It was more brutal for him than it's ever been for anyone else.

I hated seeing that this was happening to him, and I still wasn't sure what triggered it. But I knew I needed to get him to the pack doctor immediately.

The second Matt's human body was shifted, and he passed out from the pain and adrenaline that came crashing down around him.

I quickly put a long shirt on him, covering his naked body, before I lifted him into my arms. His skin was red and patchy from where his fur had broken through, and his heartbeat was rapid.

I didn't bother bringing him to the car and driving; I took off on foot. At this point, I was faster on foot than I would be in a car. I ran as fast as I could, which was pretty fast.

Thankfully, the clinic wasn't far from the villa. I was immediately greeted by the receptionist, but as soon as she saw Matt lying limp in my arms, she had Dr. Pierce on the phone, telling him there was an emergency.

Soon, Matt was rushed into the doctor's office for a checkup. I stayed by his side the entire time as the nurses poked and prodded him, hooking him up to various machines, drawing blood, taking his vitals, putting in an IV.

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Matt was out cold, completely oblivious of anything that was happening.

It didn't take long for the doctor to walk in and take over for the nurses.

"Alpha, I came as soon as I heard," Dr. Eliza Pierce, Taylor's mate, walked into the room with a worried expression on her face. "Is it true that he shifted into his wolf form? I was just talking to Taylor about it."

I had updated Taylor on our way to the clinic through a mindlink. He had already heard something about it when he took Judy home, though, so he was vaguely aware of the situation.

"Yes," I replied, my eyes glued to Matt's red and sweaty face. "It took a lot out of him."

She nodded as she checked his heartbeat and started to draw more blood for testing.

"I've never had anything like that happen before," she said in awe. "A shift at only 8 years old. Have you ever heard of such a thing?"

"No," I told her truthfully. "It's never happened before."

She nodded as she did a bit more testing and wrote information down in her notebook. She adjusted the IV and put a warm and damp cloth over his forehead to lower his fever.

"He just needs some fluids and to rest. The first shift took a lot out of him. I'll get him some medicine that can help with the healing process because if he were awake, he'd be in a lot of pain. This is kind of his body's way of protecting itself," she explained. "But he'll be okay."

I was too frozen to say much. I waited until she gave him the medication, and then she jotted a few more things in her notebook before leaving.

I leaned back in my seat, staring at Matt for a long time. It was late in the evening, and I thought about calling Judy to update her... but just as I swiped across my phone and saw her name, I stopped myself.

Judy wasn't his mother. She wasn't my wife... she wasn't even my girlfriend. There was no reason to update her on anything. Then again, she was there when it happened... maybe she would want to know...

I sat there for a long while, contemplating whether or not to call her. But before I could fully decide, there was a knock on the door, and before it opened.

I was surprised when Judy walked in, her face twisted with worry, and it was clear she'd been crying. My brows furrowed; Taylor must have told her that I was here... but my question was, why was she crying?

When she saw me staring at her across the room, she quickly made her way towards me, her arms wrapping around her body like she was trying to keep herself together.

"Why didn't you tell me he was here?" She asked in a whisper, not wanting to wake Matt, no doubt. "Is he okay?"

"He'll be fine," I told her, my eyes remaining on hers. "What are you doing here?"

"Did you not think I'd want to be here?" She asked, stopping only inches from me. "Of course I'd want to be here for him, Gavin. How could you not tell me he was in the clinic like this?"

Tears filled her eyes, and for a second, I felt guilty.

Without much thought, I wrapped her in my arms, pulling her into my chest. She sucked in a sharp breath at the sudden movement, but aft a second, she melted in my embrace, wrapping her own arms around my waist, burying her face in my chest.

"I didn't want to bother you with this," I admit, my lips brushing across her hairline.

"I should have called."

She nodded as tears soaked my shirt.

"Yes, you should have."

I furrowed my brows again; her reaction was odd.

"This isn't just about Matt being in the clinic. What else happened? What's wrong?" I asked her.

She was quiet for a moment, and I honestly didn't think she was going to respond,

but then she pulled back and looked up at me through her tear-streaked face.

"So much has happened," she whispered; her eyes were uncertain, and it pulled at my heart, I felt I

wasn't used to. "I think Sammyinet'

somehow working against me my family... I think she's working with Ethan."

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Judy's POV

"What do you mean she's working against your family? I know she's been talking to Ethan behind your back, but does that mean she's working with him?" Gavin asked, his voice being reasonable.

When Nan sent me that photo of Ethan and Sammy talking in the coffee shop, I showed it to Gavin around that same time.

"Tabby and some of the others are back at the mansion," I explained. "They came here to tell me that they suspect Sammy is some kind of spy."

"That's a serious accusation," he said, his tone darkening as his brows furrowed. He studied my face for a long while, trying to detect a hint of deception.

"Since she's been here, I've noticed that Sammy has been acting strangely. Secret phone calls, disappearing at all hours, sketchy behavior..."

"What kind of sketchy behavior?"

I nibbled on my lower lip.

"I caught her snooping through my things the other night," I told him. "Things like that..."

His eyes darkened at my words, and I could tell he was not only pondering this information but trying hard to control himself.

"I was so busy with the competition that I didn't notice those things a few weeks ago," I continued. "But Tabby had noticed. Her, Sherry, and Chuck are from the same pack, and they've grown closer since the competition. She's been confiding in Sherry about Sammy's strange behavior, and because Sherry works as an investigator for the pack, she agreed to help Tabby look more into it once the competition ended."

Gavin listened, nodding along with each word I said, his eyes growing darker by the second. He didn't like what he was hearing so far.

"Why is this being brought to my attention just now?" Gavin asked, his eyes searching mine.

"Because I'm just finding out about it now," I told him honestly. "Tabby hadn't mentioned any of this to me until today. It's why she's here. They agreed to look more into Sammy after the competition, and they were true to their word. They looked more into her."

"And what did they find out? That she's a spy?" Gavin asked.

I shook my head.

"It's a suspicion, and because she's having secret meetings with Ethan, I think she's one of his spies. I think he's trying to get my family into troubl@again... make me dependent on him or something. Using someone I thought was my friend to do that..." My voice cracked when I spoke that last sentence, tears welling in my eyes.

"You don't know that for sure, though?" Gavin asked, his hands coming up to my face; his thumb gently brushed across my cheekbone. Though his eyes were still dark and searching my face for answers, I could also see the worry and compassion in them, causing my heart to skip a beat.

"That's the thing... nobody really knows anything," I admit to him. "Her home life...... family, pack... friends... they couldn't find a thing on her. It's like all her personal information on the internet was wiped... deliberately."

Gavin was quiet as he processed that information; his thumb absentmindedly stroking my upper cheeks, sending a wave of tingling throughout my entire body. Goosebumps stood tall on my flesh, and for the first time since seeing that photo of Ethan and Sammy together, my wolf was completely at ease. It was a strange effect that Gavin had on my wolf, but I'll take it over her being anxious and hurt any day.

I hated that Ethan still affected her so much; I was glad that the pain of him being intimate with others no longer hurt her... but that didn't mean being near him or seeing images of him was easy.

Thinking that Sammy and Ethan were in cahoots together really scrambled her, but being back in Gavin's presence, having his attention on us and his arms around me, feeling his touch and warmth... it settled her in a way that I couldn't describe.

"Did they find out anything?" Gavin finally asked after a beat of silence. "Something useful?"

lonet

"When I met Sammy at the airport on our way to the competition, she mentioned that her boyfriend was competing, and she was going to support him. He was in a different group from me, so I never got to meet him. I was so focused on competing that I never noticed any strange behavior. But Tabby and Sherry found out that he didn't exist. She never had a boyfriend there. She was there for something else, and I don't think it was a coincidence that Ethan was also there, and now Sammy is here. I think she's working for him, Gavin..."

"Okay, calm down," Gavin said when he detected the panic in my voice. His voice was oddly calming, and his gaze softened. "Whatever she is after, I'm not going to

let it happen. I need you to trust me; can you do that?"

I nodded without hesitation.

"Yes, of course," I whispered. "I trust you."

A small smile tipped the corner of his lips, the tough and dangerous façade fading

only slightly before it was snapped back into place.

He released his hold on my face, making me feel cold for a moment. He grabbed

his phone and swiped across the screen before putting the phone to his ear.