

Chapter 226 Patrol

Edrick

“Moana... Just... Go inside.”

Moana’s eyes widened. She glared at me for a long moment before she took off like a bolt of lightning into the house.

Maybe I was being a little too harsh when she was only trying to at least help me carry the bags inside, but the property wasn’t fully secured yet and I didn’t want her standing out in the open if someone was trying to hunt her down. Maybe tomorrow, when the property was deemed safe, she could go outside with her bodyguard. But for now, she needed to be inside where it was safe.

“Should I go after her, Mr. Morgan?” Kat asked.

I nodded. “You don’t have to be right next to her if she doesn’t want it. But at the very least, keep an eye on her whereabouts.”

Moana’s bodyguard nodded understandingly, then took off after Moana. I sighed as I heard the echoes of Kat calling Moana’s name.

Of course I felt bad for suddenly ripping her away and not being specific about why we were leaving so frantically, but I had no choice. There wasn’t enough time to explain everything, and I didn’t even know how I would say it yet.

Last night, I was almost one hundred percent certain that my mother was forced off of the phone with my father. I didn’t know if my mom knew

something before I mentioned it to her, or if she was only like me and just had her own suspicions before I confirmed it for her.

Either way, I took my mother's advice and got the hell out of town.

Moana was on the verge of shifting. I could sense it when she was sleeping last night; her wolf's power was starting to surge. Within a couple of days, she would certainly shift. And I was pretty sure that my dad knew that as well, and he would either come after her himself or send more Rogues to get the job done.

"You're being too harsh on her." Selina's voice suddenly caught my attention.

I let out a grunt as I pulled the bags out of the car, and only cast her a brief glance over my shoulder. "She'll understand eventually," I replied. "It's for the best."

Selina walked around to face me and suddenly grabbed my arm with more strength than I expected from a woman her age. "It won't be for the best if she resents you for keeping her in the dark," she insisted. "You need to talk to her."

I nodded. "I will talk to her. Just... Not right now. If I told her earlier, she might have put up more of a fuss and insisted on staying in the penthouse. Sometimes she thinks that she's capable of more than she really is, and I just wanted to make sure that she was somewhere safe before I told her the truth."

The old housekeeper didn't seem to like this. Her lips pressed themselves into a thin line, and she released her grip on my arm. I watched as she turned around to walk away, took a few steps, then stopped and turned back to face me.

"Moana is more capable than you realize."

That was all she said. Before I could say anything else, — not that I had anything else to say anyway — she stormed off and disappeared into the house.

Maybe Selina was right; maybe Moana was more capable than I realized. But that was a risk that I wasn't willing to take right now.

...

It was dark out when I slowly stepped out into the back garden. The moon was out, and it was well after dinnertime. Moana and Ella both refused to leave their rooms for the entire day, but I didn't really care.

I was just glad that we were safely out of the city and under the watch of nearly two dozen fully capable security guards, who had the entire estate surrounded by their patrol.

However, I wasn't fully satisfied. If I was going to be certain that Moana and my daughter were safe, then I needed to patrol as well to give myself some peace of mind.

That was why I decided to shift under the moonlight and walk the entire perimeter of the estate.

I let my wolf take over. Feeling myself shift was a relief, like an itch that needed to be scratched. As I took off into the woods and started making my way around the estate, I felt a sense of what almost felt like comfort taking over me.

First, I made my way through the woods behind the house. I checked every nook and cranny, behind every tree, inside every hollow log and behind every boulder. All I found were scared deer and squirrels, and the occasional raccoon. There were no Rogues in sight.

After that, I headed down and around to the front of the estate. I passed by a few guards on my way, also patrolling in their wolf forms, and we gave each other nods as we passed.

“See anything?” I asked one guard, Darren.

He shook his head. “Nothing. It’s all quiet.”

“Good.”

When we left the city, I made a point to keep a couple of body doubles in the penthouse. Moana wasn’t aware of this, but I had hired two people who looked similar to us when I hired our security guards; a girl with red hair and a tall guy with dark hair. I had them stay in the penthouse while we were gone to make it look like we were still there.

Of course, they also had some guards there of their own, and they were fully armed in case my dad or some Rogues tried to break in. But to me, it was a foolproof plan to keep people thinking that we never left the penthouse.

Maybe then no one would know where we really were.

A couple of hours later, I had fully walked the entire perimeter of the estate and found nothing. Satisfied now with my patrol, I decided to head back to the house to call it a night. Maybe, I thought to myself, Moana wouldn’t hate me so much by then. I couldn’t sleep without her, after all.

However, as I returned to the house, I realized that I was wrong in that assumption.

I stopped in the back yard as something caught my attention. The light was on in Moana’s room and her curtains were open.

Still in my wolf form, I sat on my haunches and looked up at the window, hoping to get a glimpse of her. Slowly she came into view, brushing her hair as she paced back and forth in her room. I couldn’t help but think how beautiful she looked now, and it made me wonder how much even more beautiful she would look when she finally shifted.

She must have sensed me watching, because she suddenly stopped and walked over to the window.

For a long time, our eyes stayed locked as she stared down at me and I stared back up at her.

I wanted to convey that I was sorry for being short with her earlier, but she only scowled down at me. And then, with an even deeper scowl, she yanked the curtains shut and disappeared from sight.

I sighed as I shifted back and walked up to the back porch with my hands in my pockets.

“Looks like I’m gonna be sleeping alone tonight,” I whispered to myself.

Chapter 227

Moana

I went to sleep that night with anger still in my heart for Edrick.

When I woke up, however, that anger turned into fear.

I found myself no longer in my bed, but I was now at the little desk that was in my room. And it wasn't just that, either. I had my sketchbook lying on the desk in front of me, and what was drawn on it...

Was the knife.

I gasped and quickly snapped the sketchbook shut. Why was this happening to me? I stood, knowing that I needed to tell someone, but I couldn't tell Edrick. If I told him, then he would likely only freak out even more, and I already felt like a prisoner.

These drawings had to be prophetic. And the only way that I could get to the bottom of what they really meant was by accessing whatever part of my brain that they were coming from. Maybe then, I could start to use them to my advantage before something really bad happened.

It was late, but Dr. Rhodes did mention that I could call him anytime I needed anything. I quickly pulled out my phone and dialed his number with shaking hands.

"Hello?" he answered a few rings later. "Is everything alright, Moana?"

I let out a sigh of relief. “Dr. Rhodes, I need your help. I’ve been having more dreams... I want to try hypnosis again.”

Dr. Rhodes paused for a few moments. “I could come to the penthouse tomorrow, if you want—”

“No!” I insisted. “It needs to be right now. Is there any way you can do it over the phone?”

The therapist was quiet for another few moments. I bit my lip as I listened to him sigh over the phone.

“It is possible, but it’s not easy. And if you see or feel something during hypnosis that frightens you or makes you feel bad, you might get hurt if I’m not there to help you. Are you sure you’re willing to take that risk?”

“Yes.” I knew the risks going into it, but I didn’t care. I needed to get to the bottom of this, and something in me was telling me that I needed to do it now. Time was ticking, and somehow I felt that figuring out the source of these visions might help figure out how to stop something horrible before it happened.

“Alright,” Dr. Rhodes said with a sigh. “Do you have a comfortable place to lie down? And can you dim the lights?”

“Yes.” I dimmed the lights, leaving only my bedside table lamp on, and then quickly laid down on my bed. “I’m ready.”

For the next twenty minutes, Dr. Rhodes slowly guided me into a state of hypnosis. I pushed my mind to open up to the idea, but for a long time nothing happened, just like the last time that we tried. In fact, I was about to call it quits again when I suddenly felt a change inside of me.

I no longer felt fully conscious. I felt as though I was half in a dream, half out of a dream. My mind felt foggy, but clearer than ever at the same time.

“How do you feel, Moana?” Dr. Rhodes’ voice floated across to me as though he was whispering into the wind across a pond. It felt light and airy and far away, but the words came to me all the same.

“I’m... Okay,” I replied, my tongue feeling heavy in my mouth.

“Good. I want you to try to picture a place. Any place. Just let the image come into your mind, and don’t force it.”

“Okay...” I did as Dr. Rhodes said. As my eyes were closed, everything was dark at first. But slowly, a landscape began to form around me; one that I had seen several times now.

The cliff.

“What do you see?” Dr. Rhodes asked.

I swallowed and looked around. “A cliff,” I said. “With pine trees on one side... It’s raining, and the sky is dark and cloudy. I’m cold.”

Dr. Rhodes paused. I looked around a little more, and turned fully around. My heart practically stopped as I saw a figure standing off in the distance, in the mist.

“There’s someone else here,” I said.

“Can you walk up to that person?” Dr. Rhodes asked.

I felt my heart sink at his question. I was scared to do it, but I also knew that this was just hypnosis, and it wasn’t real. Deep down, I knew that it was Michael; but maybe walking up to him, confronting him in my mind, could help me somehow.

Slowly, I began to walk up to the unmoving figure. The grass crunched underneath my feet and the wind blew so heavily. Even the rain soaked my clothes; it was all so real that it was deceptive. If I didn’t focus on the

fact that this was just a vision, I felt for sure as though I would suddenly get stuck in this vision and would never be able to come out.

However, no matter how far I walked, I didn't feel as though I was really getting any closer to the figure.

"It just keeps getting further away," I said.

Dr. Rhodes paused for a moment. "That's your mind not accepting the vision," he said gently. "Try to open yourself up to it."

I stopped, and took in a deep breath. Open my mind, I thought to myself. The figure wasn't moving toward me... It wasn't real. None of this was real, and maybe if I accomplished this, I could learn something that could make sure that it didn't need to be real to begin with. Maybe I could learn something valuable that could stop all of this before it even started.

Slowly, I began to walk again. This time, it didn't only feel as though I was just walking in place, and the gap between myself and the figure began to come into view. The outline of Michael's tall, slim body slowly solidified in the mist. I could see him better now... He was holding something.

Of course he was holding the knife. I could see the gold glint in the rain.

Upon seeing the knife, I felt my heart drop again. I stopped, unable to go any further.

"Can you describe what's happening, Moana?" Dr. Rhodes asked. "You've been quiet for a long time."

"Y-Yes," I said, swallowing. "Um... It's Michael. He has the knife, and he's just... Staring at me. And smiling. I'm afraid."

"You have two options, Moana." Dr. Rhodes' voice was calm and steady. "You can choose to stop the vision now if you're scared, or you can try to go a little further. It's up to you..."

I swallowed again. "I should go closer," I whispered. I started to walk again. I reached my hand out toward the knife that was in Michael's hand...

But then, Michael's hand shot out too, like a mirror image of me. His hand wrapped tightly around my wrist, and he held up the knife with his other hand. There was a gleam in his evil eyes, and then he brought the knife down toward me.

Chapter 228

Moana

I let out a yelp. I jolted, and then everything stopped. The rain, the wind, the grass... All of it turned back into the still, calm air of my bedroom. Michael's hand no longer gripped my wrist, and the golden glint of the knife in his hand turned into the soft amber glow of the lamp on my bedside table.

"Moana?" Dr. Rhodes said, sounding concerned. "Are you there?"

I quickly sat up and rubbed my eyes. "Y-Yes," I replied. "I'm okay. It's just..."

"What is it?"

I shook my head. "Nothing," I lied. "Dr. Rhodes... Will you be available to try again tomorrow?"

The therapist paused, then cleared his throat. "Sure. You can call me anytime if you want to try again, or even if you just need to talk. Are you sure you're okay, though?"

"I'm fine," I lied again, even though my hands were shaking. "Thanks, Dr. Rhodes. I'll call you tomorrow."

...

I didn't sleep very much at all for the rest of the night. I was too nervous to try to sleep in case I sleepwalked again or had another vision, but at the same time I also couldn't stop thinking about the vision I had during hypnosis.

It wasn't really any different than my other visions. But this time, something just felt... off. It almost felt as though there was something else in the mist behind Michael, another presence. Was there someone else working with him?

The next morning, I woke up after getting a couple hours of sleep and awoke to the smell of bacon rising up through the house. I was hungry, and my hypnosis session with Dr. Rhodes made me temporarily forget about my anger toward Edrick, so I quickly got dressed and headed downstairs to get something to eat.

When I walked into the dining room, Edrick and Ella were sitting at the table while Selina scurried around placing food down.

"Good morning," Selina said when she saw me. "Sit down. I made breakfast."

I felt Edrick's eyes on me, and instantly felt a little sheepish beneath his gaze. He looked at me with a stony stare in his eyes, but there was also something soft and apologetic behind it. Instantly, I started to wonder if I was too mean when I stormed off and wouldn't speak to him at all yesterday.

Ella, on the other hand, was picking at her eggs with her fork. She was leaning her cheek into her hand, and kept letting out loud, dramatic sighs every few seconds.

"I miss school," she said.

"Ella... It's Saturday," Edrick chided gently. "You wouldn't be at school anyway."

Ella looked up at him. He was looking down at his newspaper, as he usually did during breakfast time, and she took the opportunity to stick her tongue out at him.

“Put your tongue back in your mouth. That’s rude.”

Ella’s eyes widened at the fact that her father had seen her stick her tongue out without looking at her. I had to stifle a smirk.

“Well, it’s still not fair!” she whined. “I won’t be able to go to school on Monday!”

Edrick sighed and folded up his newspaper calmly, then set it down on the table and picked up his cup of coffee. “If you keep having an attitude, you wouldn’t be able to go back to school even if we were in the city,” he said, to which Ella scowled. “Besides...” He gestured toward the set of open French doors behind us that led out to the patio. “Isn’t it pretty here?”

Ella shrugged. “I guess,” she moaned. “But I still want—”

“Well, it’s not always about what you want.”

Edrick’s voice was short and stern. The table fell silent. Even Selina and I froze at Edrick’s sudden snap; it was extremely rare that he ever was so stern with her. I opened my mouth to say something, because I felt as though it was unfair for him to snap at her when he was the one who dragged her away from home to begin with, but he quickly spoke again.

“I’m sorry.” He sighed and set his coffee cup down. “That wasn’t very nice of me.”

“Darn right...” I heard Selina whisper as she walked away. Edrick glanced up at her, but said nothing. His eyes then wandered over to me, and his gaze locked on mine for the longest time.

Once again, I felt sheepish beneath the Alpha billionaire’s gaze. Part of me wondered if he had overheard my conversation with Dr. Rhodes the

night before. If he hadn't heard it, I almost wondered if I should say something to him about it... In private, of course.

But I couldn't bring myself to do it. I felt my palms start to itch with anxiety beneath the table, and I busied my hands with buttering my toast. It was also a way for me to break my gaze away from Edrick, but I could feel him still looking at me nonetheless.

"I miss school," she said.

"Ella... It's Saturday," Edrick chided gently. "You wouldn't be at school anyway."

"It's okay," Ella said with a sigh, breaking the silence. "I'm sorry too, daddy."

Once again, Ella was acting beyond her years. Sometimes I really did forget that she was only eight years old.

For a little while, the three of us ate in silence. The warmth of the coffee and the tasty breakfast food eased some of my worries, although I still couldn't get the image of my hypnosis session out of my mind. If my intuition was right, and if someone was working with Michael, then who could it be?

Ethan and Kelly were in jail. Verona was likely not a suspect, and I trusted Edrick at this point. There was no way that Selina or the maids were up to anything, either... There wasn't anyone who I could think of who could be working with Michael, and who could be an active threat anytime soon.

Unless it was someone who I didn't know very well...

But, no. Edrick hand-picked all of our security guards and had done extensive background checks on them. I trusted his judgment.

Maybe I was just being paranoid. Sometimes, maybe a feeling was just a feeling and nothing else... Right?

At the end of our meal, Amy and Lily came and cleared the plates away. I got up and helped them, if only to have a good excuse to not sit there in front of Edrick any longer.

But when I stood and walked to the kitchen with two plates in my hands, I heard Edrick clear his throat.

“Ella,” he said, his voice gentle, “can you come here, please?”

I heard Ella sigh, and the sound of her chair scraping against the floor as she pushed it back. I heard her footsteps and then I peered around the corner to see Edrick holding out his arms for her. She climbed into his lap, and I couldn’t help but smile.

Edrick then took in a deep breath, and looked up. He looked right at me and held my gaze for several long moments.

All I saw was love in his eyes.

Then, he looked back down at Ella.

“Ella, there’s something that I haven’t told you. And I think you deserve to know the truth.”

Chapter 229 The Truth

Edrick

I stayed up almost all night thinking about things.

Moana was right about Ella needing to know the truth about her mother. Especially if bad things were about to happen, I felt as though I needed to finally tell her everything. And besides, Moana was angry with me; maybe this would remind her that I wasn't all that bad, and that I was trying my best.

"Ella, can you come here, please?"

Ella sighed and pushed her chair back, causing it to scrape against the floor in an unpleasant way. She was upset with me, too, because she didn't understand why we had to leave the penthouse so suddenly. But nonetheless, she came over to me and sat in my lap.

I caught a glimpse of Moana standing in the kitchen. Her green eyes met mine, and as I held Ella, I saw them soften as they looked at the two of us.

"Ella, there's something that I haven't told you. And I think you deserve to know the truth."

"What is it?" Ella asked, looking up at me with a pout on her face.

I took a sharp breath. I wasn't mentally prepared to have this conversation, but it needed to be done.

“Ella...” I saw Moana lingering in the doorway. It seemed as though she didn’t want to make it too obvious that she was listening, but if I was being honest, I wanted her here by my side for this. I just hoped that Ella would understand why I kept the truth from her for so long... And I hoped that she wouldn’t resent me.

“Daddy? What is it?” Ella was getting impatient, and looked up at me with wide eyes.

I sighed. “I haven’t been telling you the truth,” I finally said. “Your mom... Your real mom... She isn’t dead. Actually, she’s alive. The reason why I told you all this time that your mom isn’t alive anymore is because she isn’t very nice. See, when you were born, she didn’t want you. Or me.”

Ella’s eyes widened. “Really?” she asked quietly.

I nodded. “It has nothing to do with you, Princess,” I said gently. “Your mom is someone who has a lot of problems in her life. She doesn’t feel things the way the rest of us do. When you were born, she only did it because she wanted the nice life that I could give her, and nothing else.”

At this time, I could not only see Moana out of the corner of my eye standing in the kitchen doorway, but I could see Selina and the maids, too.

But I kept going.

“When I realized that your mom was just using you and me to get money and a fancy life, I decided to send her away. That’s why it was always just you and me. I’m sorry I didn’t tell you sooner, but...”

“Is it because sometimes, adults don’t have things all figured out?”

I felt my eyes go a little wide at Ella’s wise words, and I nodded. “That’s exactly it. When you’re little, like you are, you think that you’ll have everything figured out when you grow up. But you never do, because that’s just not how life works. And that’s okay. I’m just sorry that I didn’t figure this out sooner.”

Ella was silent for a long time. She seemed to be processing. I heard a sniff from the doorway, and looked up to see Selina dabbing at her eyes with her apron and scurrying away. Moana, however, stood steadfast and just looked at me with what almost seemed like adoration on her face.

“Daddy?” Ella finally asked.

“Yes, Princess?”

Ella took in a deep breath. “I think I already sort of knew that my real mommy was alive all this time.”

I felt my eyes go even wider. “What are you talking about, sweetheart?” I asked.

Ella simply shrugged. “I don’t know. Sometimes, when I’m dreaming at night, I have dreams about what it was like when I was a baby, before I could remember things. And one time, I had a dream that you and my real mommy were fighting, and you told her to leave and not come back and hurt us anymore. That’s what you said. In my dream, at least.”

I was taken aback. That was exactly what I had said to Olivia years ago...

“Here! Just take this money, and get out! I don’t want you to hurt us anymore!”

Just hearing those words brought that whole memory rushing back like a train hitting me. I felt my heart practically stop, and all I could do was look in shock up at Moana, whose eyes were just as wide as mine.

I always knew that Ella would have stronger powers than the other kids. She was an Alpha, after all, and it seemed now that she had the ability of Hindsight, or being able to see into the past.

Since she was so young, it was probably only showing itself in sporadic dreams like that. But maybe, when she was older, it would manifest more solidly. Powers like that sometimes dissipated as kids got older, but I could at least hold out hope.

But I kept going.

“When I realized that your mom was just using you and me to get money and a fancy life, I decided to send her away. That’s why it was always just you and me. I’m sorry I didn’t tell you sooner, but...”

I couldn’t dwell on that right now, though. I just needed to know that Ella was okay with this, and that she wouldn’t resent me.

“Well?” I asked gently, brushing a strand of hair out of her eyes. “Is that okay with you? Is it okay that your real mom is alive? I’d understand if you want to meet her someday.”

Ella shrugged again. “Maybe,” she said. “I think I’m okay not meeting her, though. Moana is my real mommy now, and I’m happy... When I first saw Moana, my wolf said, That’s our mommy, and that’s why I’ve always loved her so much.”

I looked up at Moana again. This time, there were tears in her green eyes. But she was smiling, and I couldn’t help but smile, too.

Moana didn’t say a word. She just came over from the doorway. I stood, still holding Ella, and pulled Moana into my other arm.

“I love you too, Ella,” Moana said with a tearful laugh as she pinched Ella’s cheek. Ella giggled.

The three of us hugged for a long time. I buried my face in Moana’s red hair, and felt the stress melting away. During those moments, I felt as though no matter what was thrown at us next, we could handle it if we were all together. And that was comforting.

When we finally pulled away, I set Ella down on the floor and then crouched down to her level.

“I really am sorry for not telling you the truth,” I said. “I know I always tell you that you should always tell the truth. I guess I didn’t follow my own rules.”

Ella nodded matter-of-factly. “That’s okay. I forgive you. Just don’t do it again, okay? Promise?”

Ella stuck her pinky finger out. I smiled and intertwined mine with hers. “I promise. I’ll never lie to you again.”

After that, Ella ran off to play in the garden. I looked up at Moana, who was now standing by the window. The smile that was on her face before had faded, and she was looking outside with a wistful expression on her face.

I wanted to go to her, but I wasn’t sure if she was in the right mood yet. All I could do was watch her slender form as she touched her belly and sighed, looking out at the trees.

Chapter 230 A Promise

Moana

Seeing Edrick finally tell Ella about her real mother made me soften toward him.

I softened even more when Ella said those sweet things, and it made me feel as though we really were a little family despite everything that was going on. I couldn't help but hug both of them tightly, and I felt comforted when Edrick buried his face in my hair.

But when we pulled apart and I watched them reconcile Edrick's lies, I felt my smile fade because something just felt off.

I couldn't quite put my finger on it. It almost felt like some sort of sixth sense, but for what was still a mystery.

All I could do was stare wistfully out the window as I tried to rack my brain over it. Maybe I was just feeling cooped up...

"Do you feel strange?" I asked Mina.

"A little," she replied. I could tell that she was just as confused as I was. "Some fresh air could be nice."

I nodded to myself. Ella was playing outside, so why shouldn't I? I turned to Edrick then, who was sitting back down at the dining room table, and held my chin up.

"I'd like to go for a walk, if that's alright," I said. "Just by myself so I can think."

Edrick looked at me for a few moments. At first, I thought he would say no; but I also knew that he had the entire perimeter of the estate surrounded by a constant patrol, and I knew that he went out there himself last night to check. Besides, there would be no doubt that he would have Kat follow me.

"Alright," he said with a slight smile. "It looks like it might rain, though. Do you need an umbrella?"

I shook my head. "No. I'll be back soon."

"Okay." Edrick nodded and smiled again. His demeanor today was a far cry from the day before, but I wasn't complaining. Maybe a night of sleeping alone changed his attitude a bit, although I still wished that he would just tell me the exact reason behind why he suddenly dragged us up here.

Without another word, I headed outside into the fresh air and took in a deep breath, inhaling the fresh mountain breeze. The air smelled like pine trees, and it was cool and misty. It was comfortable and relaxing, and I made my way toward the far end of the lawn where the trees circled around the property.

First, I walked around the sprawling gardens for a while and took in the view of the freshly pruned hedges and mossy fountains. I sensed Kat's presence from afar, and decided to push my luck a bit to see how far I could go.

I decided to head closer to the trees. The air in the forest was cool and inviting, and with one last look over my shoulder, I stepped into the tree line and began to walk a little bit.

Of course, not even five minutes later, I heard the distinct sound of twigs crunching behind me. I smirked and spun around, but saw no one.

“Kat, just come out,” I said with a laugh, putting my hands on my hips. “I know you’re there.”

A few moments later, the short-haired tall girl stepped out from behind a tree and walked toward me.

“Sorry,” she said. “Edrick wants me to keep you in my sight.”

“If you’re nearby, can I at least enjoy the forest a little bit?” I asked. “It’s not often that I get to see this many trees in the city.”

Kat shrugged and nodded. I smiled, not at all bothered by her company, and the two of us walked a little further into the woods. The further we walked, the more I felt the air temperature drop, and soon I had to stick my hands into my pockets to keep my fingers warm.

“Do you have any idea why Edrick made us come here so suddenly?” I finally asked after a while. “He won’t tell me anything.”

My bodyguard shook her head. We stopped for a moment to look up at some birds overhead that were making a bit of a racket. “Not really,” she said. “As far as I know, he just gave me orders to keep watch over you, and he gave the other guards orders to keep a constant patrol going and not to let anyone onto the property. That’s it.”

I sighed and kept walking. “So I take it if you’ve been keeping such a close eye on me, you probably saw that I was up at one o’clock in the morning last night.”

Kat nodded. “Yeah. I won’t tell Edrick.”

I couldn't help but smile a bit. Even though things had been hectic and aggravating lately, I was at least happy to have someone nearby who I was beginning to see as a bit of a friend. Kat and I didn't know each other terribly well yet, but I liked her. She was sweet, and I didn't mind having her around. It was nice to have a woman my age to talk to.

First, I walked around the sprawling gardens for a while and took in the view of the freshly pruned hedges and mossy fountains. I sensed Kat's presence from afar, and decided to push my luck a bit to see how far I could go.

Kat and I walked for a little while longer. We stayed within the tree line, but usually kept the house in our sight as we circled the property. Eventually, the issue of my shifting came up.

"I just wish that I could shift already and get it over with," I said quietly as we walked. "It's frustrating, not feeling like I'm able to protect myself. And I think that Edrick sees me as weak right now, which is even more frustrating."

Kat was silent for a few moments.

"I've never been in your shoes, so I can't really imagine what it's like," she finally said after a bit. We paused to step over a large fallen tree. Kat gave me her hand, as my belly was getting fairly larger at this point and it was a bit more difficult now to keep my balance.

"Honestly, I never thought I was anything but human," I said with a laugh. "So much has changed over the course of just a few months. It's crazy. And honestly, maybe I'm crazy for wanting to shift so quickly if you consider just how fast things have changed."

Kat suddenly stopped and turned to face me. "It's not crazy," she said. She had a thoughtful expression on her face and a hint of a smile on her lips. "You know... I could help you shift sooner, if you want. You could do it today, actually. Then, there will be no more waiting."

The bodyguard's words took me by complete surprise.

I didn't know what to say; I didn't even know that it would be possible to shift any sooner. I just thought that it was something that came about naturally, and there was no real way to speed it up or slow it down once someone's wolf emerged. I thought that I was basically just a ticking time bomb at this point.

"Well?" Kat urged.

All I could do was stare at her with wide eyes.

Would it really be possible to shift early... Even today? Would that end all of this mess?