

The Incident at Saint Mariah's
Part 2: First Contact
3/28-3/29/2014

(the next day)

...

Allison let out a soft sigh as she buttoned the top of her nurse's scrubs.

"So it begins...my first real day here...in this icebox..." the gazelle mumbled softly.

She closed the locker door...and sighed.

And I meet my main patient today too. First thing.

The gazelle straightened a rumple in her top...then sighed.

Maybe I can begin to get to the bottom of all this, she thought.

...

Allison walked the halls of Saint Mariah's, her ears swiveling to try to pick up every sob, every wail, every maniacal rant...

...and silently trying to drown them all out as she walked down the halls.

Then, oddly...silence greeted her ears.

Puzzled, she stopped...and looked.

Standing near her was the same metal door from yesterday, its three locks all engaged.

The gazelle looked around the hall that this patient was in.

Dead, ominous silence greeted her. Every patient

was silent...the nurse's station was silent...even the buzzing of the lights was dulled considerably.

"Ah, Nurse Cousins...good to see you came back."

The gazelle jumped, a hand going to her chest on reflex...and she let out an embarrassed chuckle.

"Doctor Michelsen...you startled me," she admitted.

The short grey coyote chuckled...then eyed the door...and Allison sensed a bit of apprehension in the doctor's gaze.

"Well...I suppose we had better get you two introduced," the coyote said, his voice regaining some warmth. "You should spend your first couple of days working with her exclusively..." He rummaged through the pockets of his lab coat. "Now, where are those keys...ah, there they are."

Allison watched...as the coyote pulled out a very old keyring, one you would expect to see with a school custodian, not the director of a mental hospital...

...then the coyote slipped the first key into the top lock.

"You will, of course, get your own set of these keys," Doctor Michelsen stated, turning the key in the lock.

Allison nodded, hearing a soft click as the lock opened.

"However, they will be kept at the nurse's station," the coyote went on, slipping a more solid key into the second lock...and straining a bit as he turned the key.

"Doctor..."

The coyote looked up, his paw still on the key in the lock.

"I spoke with Corey...about the incident..." Allison began...then chuckled. "Actually, it was more like HE spoke with ME...and..."

The coyote sighed...then looked up at her.

"Do not mention that, or anything about that incident, to her, understood?" Doctor Michelsen asked. "I don't want to risk triggering her."

"Wait..." Allison began.

The coyote looked up, still holding the key in the lock.

"Corey seems convinced that she is some sort of monster," the gazelle stated softly.

To her utter shock, Doctor Michelsen smiled.

"Well, of course she is, Nurse Cousins," the coyote admitted. "Why else would she be here? For her health?"

The coyote chuckled...then sighed.

"Nurse Cousins...unlike a lot of our patients here, Miss Bastille IS aware of her condition..." he resumed. "Thus, she is actually trying her best to help us help her. She is analyzing every aspect of her condition...taking precautions against any lapses in her mental faculties..." He tapped the locks on the door. "She is aware that something is wrong with her...which places her in very exclusive company here."

"But how is all of this helping her?" Allison asked. "Isn't it just fueling her belief that she was..."

Allison fell silent...as Doctor Michelsen glared at her.

"Fueling her belief...that she was attacked by a vampire?" Doctor Michelsen stated calmly.

Slowly, the gazelle nodded.

The coyote nodded...then pulled the key out of the second lock, slipping the third key into its matching lock.

"Tell you what...you spend the rest of the day with her...look over all of her research...talk with her...then, you tell me your professional opinion of her "belief", Nurse Cousins," the coyote said coolly.

He turned the key in the lock, causing an audible click to echo in the now-silent hallway.

Allison stared at the lock...then at the doctor...and regained her composure.

"All right...I will do exactly that," the gazelle stated.

Doctor Michelsen nodded...then rested a paw on the door-handle.

"Time for you to meet your patient, Nurse," he stated...and pushed the door open.

Allison tensed, holding her breath, expecting any number of disgusting odors and scents to come out through the door...

...so the complete lack of any scent was a surprise to her.

She sniffed the air...and then, her ears picked up a very faint sound.

The clacking of computer keys...followed by the sound of a pen skittering across paper.

Slowly, Doctor Michelsen opened the door all the way...and Allison looked around the room.

There was a small basin, filled with some sort of fluid that glistened in the muted light from the single window

in the room, its ivory shades fully-closed, blocking as much light as possible.

She looked around the room...then froze.

Sitting with its back to her, barely lit by the glow of a computer monitor and a small desk lamp...was the red vixen. There was also a small microscope off to the left of the vixen, its silvery shape reflecting some of the light from the monitor.

Allison stared...as the vixen appeared to write something down on a notepad...then went back to the computer, her fingers making soft clicking sounds as she typed rapidly on the keyboard.

"Miss Bastille?" she heard Doctor Michelsen say, jarring her from her thoughts.

"One moment, Doctor," came a soft reply, the typing speeding up its pace.

Allison simply watched, amazed at the rapid pace of the vixen's typing, the keyboard clicking like raindrops falling on sheet metal...

...then her gaze turned away from the vixen...and she spotted the vixen's bed.

It was a standard hospital bed...but what caused her eyes to widen were the heavy restraint cuffs attached to the bed, four in all...one for each limb.

She somehow managed to repress a shudder...but her mind immediately went to an image of that vixen, locked in those restraints...

"Miss Bastille?" Doctor Michelsen called, a bit more forcefully.

Allison shook the image from her thoughts...and

watched...

...as the vixen made two clicks with the mouse, shutting down the computer...then turned around.

The first thing that struck the gazelle was the composed appearance of the vixen. Her fur was neatly brushed...not rumpled or disheveled in any manner...her hospital garb was spotless and looked freshly laundered...her manner was relaxed, if slightly annoyed.

And then, the vixen looked up...

...and Allison felt those piercing green eyes studying her...almost dissecting her...

...peering into her soul...

"This is Nurse Cousins," Doctor Michelsen stated, his voice seeming far away and distant as she lost herself in those eyes.

The vixen's gaze lingered on her a bit longer...then she turned to look at the doctor...

...and Allison exhaled, feeling drained and deflated.

What...what just happened?

"I take it she is new?" the vixen asked, politely...almost casually.

Allison swallowed, feeling her body slowly regain some energy...but yet, also feeling confused.

"Yes," Doctor Michelsen stated. "She will be looking after you going forward."

The gazelle looked up at the vixen, who simply gave a slight nod.

"Doctor...when will those blackout blinds be arriving?" the vixen asked, again in a casual tone.

"Blackout...oh yes, the blinds," the coyote stated. "The tracking information says those should be arriving tomorrow."

Blackout blinds? Allison asked herself.

She watched as the vixen nodded slightly. "Good. Sooner those get here, the better."

The gazelle heard Doctor Michelsen clear his throat.

"Now, since Nurse Cousins will be looking after you...I felt it would be a good idea for the two of you to get to know each other a little better..."

She glanced over at the coyote, who had a slight smile on his muzzle. "Assuming you can be pulled from your research, that is."

She turned back to the vixen...who sighed, rubbing her eyes with the fingers on her right paw, a jet-black furred paw.

"I doubt I have much say in the matter..." the vixen began...then chuckled softly. "Thankfully, I have decided to take a bit of a break."

"How long were you working this time?" Doctor Michelsen queried.

Allison watched...as the vixen let out a soft sigh, still rubbing her eyes.

"I think...thirteen straight days..." the vixen replied.

Allison felt her muzzle fall open. *Thirteen STRAIGHT days? That's not possible!*

Then she watched...as the vixen let out a soft chuckle. "Lucky number thirteen," she stated...then looked up...

...and Allison met the vixen's gaze, staring into those green eyes again...this time seeing warmth and curiosity in them.

"Well, I will leave you two alone then," Doctor Michelsen stated. "Make sure you close the door when you leave, Nurse Cousins."

Allison turned...just in time to see the coyote slip out of the room, almost closing the door behind him.

The gazelle stepped toward the door, solely on instinct...then stopped.

No...I'm supposed to interview this patient...try to work on curing her...

The gazelle took a deep breath...let it out slowly...then turned around.

The red vixen was still sitting in the chair, its paws now folded in its lap...the ends of the navy blue scarf dangling along the front of her hospital garb.

"So...I suppose the doctor decided to farm me out, eh?" the vixen asked, a smile crossing her muzzle.

Allison let out a soft chuckle.

"Well, he wants to provide the best care possible for you," the gazelle stated. "So, he brought someone in to look after you primarily..."

"Mmm-hmm..." the vixen replied, coolly.

"Please...have a seat."

She watched as the vixen gestured to the bed...and Allison felt her body twitch a bit as she sat down, her mind immediately coming up with several exotic uses for the restraints.

Focus! You are here to help this patient, not make out with them! her brain chided.

"So...who do I have the honor of being tended to by?" the vixen asked, calmly.

Allison let out a soft cough, regaining her composure.

"I'm Nurse Cousins, Miss Bastille..." she began.

"Tara."

The gazelle blinked, puzzled.

"Miss Bastille is what the Doctor calls me," the vixen stated. "My name is Tara."

Allison smiled, a genuine smile.

"Allison," she replied.

The vixen nodded. "Pleased to meet you. So..."

Allison watched as the vixen leaned back in the chair, causing it to creak a tiny bit.

"...what do you know about me?" the vixen asked.

Allison let out a huff of air.

"I know what was in your file," the gazelle stated.

"The information about the attack...how you came to be here...the..." Allison paused, uncertain of how to proceed.

"The incident with that orderly," the vixen stated calmly.

Allison nodded...and watched as the vixen sighed.

"Yeah...that still bothers me," Tara stated.

"It shouldn't."

Allison watched...as the red vixen looked up, an ear twitching.

"He tried to rape you," Allison stated.

The red vixen nodded. "That part, oddly, doesn't bother me," Tara replied. "What bothers me is..." Now, Tara paused, her face showing some sort of internal debate going on.

"...the missing time," Allison finished.

The red vixen nodded, slowly.

"You saw the video," Tara stated.

Allison nodded.

"So...you've read my file...seen the video...and now, you're here," the vixen commented.

"I also..."

Allison paused, swallowing a bit.

"...I also, spoke with one of the other nurses," she continued.

"Let me guess...silver wolf, tall, usually looks like he should be modeling underwear?" Tara said, a smile crossing the vixen's face.

Allison chuckled. "That's the one. Think he'd be good at it?"

The vixen shook her head, chuckling. "No. He's way too stuffy to ever be one of those fashion models."

Allison laughed softly, feeling her unease fade away.

"So...the good doctor wants us to get to know each other better..." the vixen stated.

Allison nodded...and the vixen nodded as well.

"So...ask your questions then," Tara stated.

Allison sighed...then flipped open a notepad.

"Were you really attacked by a vampire?" the gazelle asked.

The red vixen chuckled. "Right to the heart of the matter...good."

She watched...as the red vixen smiled at her.

"I was walking home from work...I worked literally six blocks from home...when someone jumped me," the red vixen stated. "I thought it was just a regular mugger...until he bit me, hard, right here."

Allison watched as the vixen lightly tapped the left side of her neck.

"I felt him actually drinking my blood...sucking it down like someone sucks on a straw...then I somehow pushed away from him...broke for the street..."

The vixen paused...and Allison noted the vixen's facial fur furrow a bit.

"...he scratched at my head...I remember it being cut, but I was more focused on my neck, obviously," the vixen went on. "A mother and her child saw me...screamed louder than anything I'd ever heard before...called the cops."

The vixen sighed.

"The ER doctors said I lost several pints of blood...this is after I woke up, cause they said they had to sedate me pretty severely," the vixen continued. "Said that I told the police and the ER docs that I'd been attacked by a vampire...they thought I was hallucinating. Or to be a bit more clinical..."

Allison watched...as the vixen twirled a finger over the side of her head, smiling. "Nutsy-cuckoo."

The gazelle chuckled softly. "Yeah, that is a bit of a clinical term. I learned that in first-year residency."

The red vixen laughed, a soft laugh that sounded very warm and lively.

"So, yeah...I got bit by a vampire," Tara stated...then looked at her. "And no, I had no idea they were real either."

She watched...as the vixen sighed, leaning back in the chair.

"That is a big part of my research...separating the myth from the reality," Tara admitted. "Reading lots of books and forums, watching the old horror movies...and experiments..."

Allison watched...as the vixen's face became very downcast and sad.

"LOTS of experiments," Tara stated.

"What sorts of experiments...if you don't mind my asking?" Allison queried.

Tara chuckled. "Isn't that part of why you're here, my dear?" the vixen asked in a creepy voice...then laughed again.

Allison laughed as well, feeling very at ease.

"Well...I've done little tests to see how far along the quote-unquote progression toward full vampire I am," the red vixen stated.

"Does that include staying up for almost two full weeks straight?" Allison asked, smirking.

Tara chuckled...then sighed.

"Partly, yes," the vixen admitted. "I have noticed that I really don't get tired anymore...I get fatigued, yes...but not outright tired."

The red vixen smoothed out a rumple in her hospital garb.

"I've also found out some other things," the vixen went on...then looked at her. "Things the other staff here likely should not know about."

This caught Allison's attention.

"What sort of...things?" the gazelle asked quietly.

The red vixen looked at the door.

"Close the door...and I'll show you one," Tara stated.

Allison thought for a bit.

If I close the door...I'll have no help if something goes wrong, she thought. On the other hand...she's done nothing more hostile than make jokes.

So far, her brain countered. Remember...you are in a mental hospital with a vixen who claims she was attacked by a vampire. Not exactly a person you should trust.

Allison looked at the vixen...then nodded.

"Okay," she said, getting up out of the chair and heading for the door.

Slowly, she reached out...and pushed the door the rest of the way shut.

"Okay, it's shut," she said...then turned around...

...and blinked, puzzled.

The chair where the red vixen was sitting...was now empty.

"Over here."

Allison let out a squeak and jumped at the voice...causing the red vixen to chuckle as she stood near the window.

"Come on," Tara said, beckoning her over.

Allison felt an ear twitch...and took a small step

closer to the red vixen.

"Allison..."

She looked up at the red vixen, who smiled at her.

"If I had wanted to bite you, I would have done so well before now," the red vixen stated...then winked.

Allison felt her tail twitch...then sighed...

...and walked over to the red vixen, who was standing to the left of the window, close by the basin.

"Now...I need you to not scream or panic, okay?"

Tara stated.

"Panic?" Allison asked, suddenly very concerned.

Tara nodded. "This experiment...well, it can be a little startling...was the first time I did it...so, promise me you won't freak out too much, okay?"

Allison looked at the vixen...then glanced back at the door.

Then, slowly...she turned back to the vixen.

"I'll try," the gazelle stated.

Tara nodded...then took a breath.

"Now...have you ever seen any of those old movies about vampires?" she asked.

Slowly, Allison nodded.

"Remember what happened to them when they were exposed to direct sunlight?" Tara continued on.

Allison thought for a few seconds.

"Don't they..start burning?" Allison asked, carefully.

Tara nodded. "Right. Now...I need you to watch this, okay?"

Slowly, Allison nodded...

...then watched...as the red vixen slowly reached for a corner of the window-shade...

...and then the gazelle reached forward, grabbing onto the vixen's wrist.

"Wait..." Allison said softly.

Tara looked at her, confusion causing the vixen's fur to bunch.

"Let me," Allison said, slipping closer to the window...and closer to the vixen as well.

Slowly, Tara relaxed...and nodded.

"Okay. Just pull up the corner," Tara ordered.

Allison nodded...and eased up the near corner of the shade, letting a single shaft of sunlight into the room.

"Now...watch," Tara said...and rolled up her left sleeve.

"Wait, what are you..." Allison began...

...then stared, horrified...

...as the vixen put the underside of her wrist into the sunbeam...

...and the vixen's fur and flesh immediately caught on fire.

"OHMIGOD!" Allison screamed, letting go of the shade and batting at the vixen's burning fur...

...only to see the vixen turn away, followed by a soft splooshing sound and a hiss of steam.

"That...that was..." Allison stammered, shocked.

Then she watched...as the red vixen stood up, her left wrist and forearm still smoldering a bit...and saw the muscles inside the vixen's arm moving and flexing.

The gazelle felt her gorge rise...and coughed a bit.

"Trash can's by the desk," the red vixen said, matter-of-factly...obviously unfazed by both the smoldering remains of her arm and by Allison's reaction.

Allison scampered over to the trash can and immediately threw up her breakfast, making deep retching sounds.

After a few more heaves, the gazelle let out a soft moan...and pushed herself away from the trash can.

"Don't worry...I expected that."

Slowly, Allison looked up...

...as the vixen extended a clean towel to her...

...and Allison felt her eyes go wide.

The vixen was offering the towel with her left paw...which was now completely back to how it was before it was placed into the sunbeam.

She stared, completely shocked...

...as the vixen crouched down...and began to gently clean off the gazelle's muzzle with the towel.

"Thought YOU were supposed to be looking after ME," the vixen quipped, a smile on the vixen's muzzle.

Allison simply stared for a bit...then found the courage to speak.

"How?" she asked.

Tara sighed, tossing the towel into the trash can.

"Apparently, I heal pretty quickly now," the red vixen said. "First time I did that, I panicked...was almost to the door before I realized I'd stopped burning."

"First time?" Allison asked, still in shock.

Tara nodded. "Yeah. I test out the various myths and legends...and, thankfully, no one seems to mind so long as I heal up."

Allison watched...as the vixen chuckled again, plopping down in front of her.

"Crosses...they don't bug me. Don't burn me either," the vixen stated. "Garlic doesn't bug me either...I still have a reflection...but direct sunlight does a number on me."

"What..." Allison began, then caught a faint whiff of burnt fur and coughed. "What about blood?"

She watched...as the vixen sighed.

"Do I need it to live, you mean?" Tara asked.

Slowly, cautiously...Allison nodded.

"I don't know that yet," Tara said. "Mostly because I haven't had any."

Allison eased herself into a more comfortable position on the floor.

"Can you still eat regular food?" she asked, now much more curious.

"I can...but it tastes a bit bland to me," the vixen replied...then laid down on her side. "Which really sucks, cause I love spicy foods, y'know."

Slowly, Allison chuckled...then sighed.

"That was..." she began.

"...pretty extreme," Tara finished, then nodded as the gazelle looked up. "Yeah...but you had to see it for yourself."

Allison watched...as the vixen stared at her with those green eyes, the eyes now looking intently at her.

"See...you needed to know...that I am NOT crazy,"

Tara went on. "That I'm not making this all up, that it's not a cry for attention..."

She fixed the gazelle with a stern gaze.

"You needed to know that this shit is REAL, especially if you're going to be looking after me," Tara finished.

Allison swallowed, her pelt rippling as a chill shot down her spine.

"And...I needed to know if I could actually trust you," Tara added.

"Trust...me?" the gazelle asked, haltingly.

The red vixen nodded...then leaned a bit closer.

"Trust you enough to help me with more experiments on myself," the vixen went on. "Experiments that I can't do by myself."

She watched...as the red vixen slowly sat up, sighing.

"I have no idea how much time I have left as a...well, a non-vampire," the red vixen added. "I know that, once I consume blood from a person, that's it. Game over, put me to bed...but, until then, I am going to keep doing two things."

Allison watched...as the red vixen held up a finger.

"One, I am going to continue to research into myths and keep separating fact from fiction..."

She watched as the vixen raised a second finger.

"...and two, I am going to keep looking for a way to stop this decline into vampirism...or maybe, even find a way to outright cure it," the vixen concluded...then chuckled. "At least, not in a way that involves me dying."

Then, Allison watched...as the vixen's Face grew

very somber.

"...or a way that involves anyone else getting hurt..."
the vixen finished, her voice very soft and sad.

Allison looked at the vixen, unsure.

She...she is working to find a cure...a way to save herself...

...she came here, to work on this research...

...she set everything up so that she could be secured and kept away from people if she became a full vampire...

Allison sighed.

She's done everything a rational, sane person who was in this mess would do...

Slowly, Allison reached out...and placed one of her hands onto the vixen's right paw.

Tara looked up...

...and Allison smiled at her.

"How can I help?" the gazelle asked.

The vixen smiled warmly...and lightly patted the gazelle's hand with her other paw.

"Well, since you now know me a little better...isn't it only fair that I get to know you a little better?" Tara asked, a coy smile on her muzzle.

Allison chuckled softly...then straightened up.

"Okay...ask your questions," Allison said, smirking a bit.

Tara chuckled...then studied her a bit.

"Does any of this really bother you?" the vixen asked.

The gazelle felt an ear twitch in confusion. "What do

you mean?"

The vixen gestured around the room.

"Being in an enclosed space with someone who says they're a vampire?" Tara queried. "The burnt fur, the exposed muscle...the risk?"

Allison rubbed the underside of her muzzle for a bit.

"Well...aside from the burning...which was really freaky, to be honest...you don't seem any different than a regular person," Allison replied. "Granted, you are a bit more eccentric than a psychologically normal person...but then I'm not exactly convinced normal exists..."

Tara chuckled. "Yeah, I had doubts about that myself...even before I wound up here."

"That's something I don't understand," Allison mentioned. "Why here?"

Tara blinked, confusion crossing the vixen's face.

"I mean, I checked near where your old place was...and there were seven other institutions a LOT closer to your home than this place...so...why here?" Allison asked.

Tara sighed...then slid closer to the gazelle, leaning back against the desk...the lamp catching the edges of the vixen's muzzlefur, making it shine.

"Well...I was thinking that, in the event something went wrong...or I went full-on vampire...I needed to be somewhere that I could be completely contained," Tara stated. "Isolated from people...aka potential food sources."

Allison watched, as the vixen turned to look at her, the vixen's muzzle scant inches from the gazelle's body.

"How about you? Why did you come here to the ass

end of the universe?" Tara asked, smiling.

Allison chuckled. "Well, I needed a new job...the hospital I was working at had to close down...and this place had an opening..."

The red vixen nodded...then chuckled.

"We make quite the pair, eh?" Tara said, smiling.

"We?" Allison countered. "Hey now...I'm the sane one here."

Both women laughed a bit...then Tara sighed.

"You know...you probably should not tell anyone about what we're doing...the experiments and that," Tara stated, looking at the floor.

"Wait...shouldn't Doctor Michelsen.." Allison began.

"You mean the pencil-pusher?" Tara countered.

Allison blinked, as the vixen turned to look at her.

"Who do you think is paying for my internet access and the supplies I need?" the vixen stated. "He knows what I am...what I am doing...but he's really just a pencil-pusher."

The red vixen sighed.

"I'm more worried about that wolf you mentioned," Tara stated.

"Corey? He's a bit surly whenever he sees anything about you...but that's because..." Allison began...then fell silent, not sure if she should continue.

Tara shook her head.

"I get a very bad feeling off of him...and I was getting that vibe BEFORE the incident with Rilies," the red vixen said. "If anything, that vibration has gotten stronger since then...so he is definitely off-limits."

Allison stared at the vixen...then smiled.

"And...what sort of feeling do you get off of me?"
the gazelle asked.

The red vixen looked at her, those green eyes
studying her intently for a bit...

...and Allison met that gaze...

...and felt herself falling into those eyes, being
covered in their intense green color...

...then the vixen blinked, and sighed....

...and Allison felt the world come rushing back,
flooding all of her senses at once, causing her to shake her
head to clear it.

"I'm...still not sure," Tara admitted. "Part of me
wants to trust you...part of me isn't sure about you yet..."

Allison watched...as the vixen flashed a coy smile.

"And, of course, part of me wants to latch onto your
neck and not let go for a while," the vixen said, smiling. "I try
not to listen to that part though," she added with a wink.

Allison chuckled...then let out a soft laugh.

"You do know that, if things go bad..."

The gazelle looked up...at the vixen, whose face had
lost all of its previous impishness, the smile replaced with a
stern frown.

"...it'll likely be you who will have to...y'know..."

Allison watched...as the vixen slowly drew a finger
across her own throat, silently, staring at her the entire time...

...and the gazelle shuddered.

"Let's...hope it doesn't come to that," the gazelle
stated.

Tara nodded...then sighed.

"I suppose I should get some rest," the vixen said, and easily hopped back up to her feet. "You'd best tuck me in."

Allison felt herself blush a bit as she chuckled.

God, I'd love to do that, she thought...then eased herself up onto her feet.

She watched...as the red vixen laid down on the bed, resting on her back.

"Now, you need to make sure the restraints are on," Tara said. "I don't want to be wandering the halls while I'm asleep."

Allison padded over to the bed, examining the restraints...then picked one up, slipping the band over the vixen's right wrist and pulling the strap tight.

"Have you done that before?" Allison asked, making sure the right wrist restraint was secure before reaching across the vixen's body to grab the left wrist restraint.

"Yes...which is why I asked for the restraints to be installed...and the locks to be put on the door," Tara replied...then fell silent.

Allison paused...then glanced back, between her arms.

The gazelle's chest was scant inches from the vixen's muzzle...and the vixen's gaze seemed to be locked onto something there.

"I can hear it, you know," Tara said.

Allison blinked...then went back to adjusting the left wrist restraint, making sure it was secured tightly.

"Hear what?" Allison asked.

"Your heartbeat," came the vixen's reply.

Allison froze, her body locking into place briefly.

Oh crap...ohcrapohcrap...

"I think you should get it looked at," Tara said calmly. "It's skipped a few beats since you came in...plus, it was racing pretty fast when I was on fire."

Allison slowly moved down the bed, her gaze buried on securing the vixen's legs to the bed.

After securing each leg...Allison finally looked up at the vixen's face.

The vixen's eyes were closed...and her face looked so calm and serene...

"It did it again," Tara said calmly.

Allison blushed...then padded for the door.

"Make sure you lock it...and be back in about four hours," Tara said calmly. "Need to get back to work."

Allison nodded, opening the door and slipping out...
...then closing the door...

...and leaning against it, panting heavily.

Oh God...she could hear my HEART!

The gazelle shuddered, a chill shooting through her body.

She could hear my fucking HEART! THE ENTIRE TIME!

The gazelle took a few deep breaths...then eased herself away from the door...

...and swayed a bit as she walked down the hall toward the nurse's station.

Keys...need the keys...

She rounded the corner and stepped into the nurse's station, surprising the calico that was there.

"Jesus, girl! You about gave me a freaking heart attack!" the nurse exclaimed...then studied her rather intently. "You okay? You look a little shook up."

Allison nodded slightly, then took a breath to steady herself.

"I need the keys for the locks on Miss Bastille's door," the gazelle stated.

The calico chuckled, getting up from the chair at the station.

"You're her new handler, eh?" the calico asked, checking the key holder for a set of keys.

"Uh-huh," Allison replied, a bit distracted...

...as the image of the vixen, laying there in her hospital bed, secured in those restraints popped back into her head.

"Here you go."

Allison blinked, shaking her head...then took the offered keyring.

"Thanks...Nickie," Allison said, glancing at the nurse's ID badge as she examined the keyring.

"Welcome," Nickie stated...then the calico padded back to the chair, sitting down in it and checking the panel for any door breaches.

Allison turned to leave the station...then paused, glancing back...

...and her eyes went wide.

On a wall display were images of each patient's room...all but one showing a patient in them, acting out their individual illnesses.

"Umm...why is this one dark?" Allison asked, tapping the darkened screen.

"Huh?" Nickie grunted...then spun around in the chair. "Oh...that's your patient's room. She wound up removing that camera herself. Said she needed the parts for something else."

Nickie looked at the gazelle, a sly smile crossing the calico's muzzle.

"Why? Did you get necked by the vampire?" the calico asked, chuckling.

Allison chuckled as well. "I wish. Might be nice to live forever," the gazelle replied before turning away. "I'll bring these back once I'm done."

"Take your time," Nickie said. "Not like anyone really cares anyway."

Allison felt her ears twitch as she left the nurse's station...her thoughts very puzzled.

Not like anyone really cares? Is security that lax around here? Allison thought. I mean...you have patients who could easily kill the staff here...and yet, anyone can have access to their rooms with no checking of ID? No signing out of keys?

The gazelle walked down the hall to the door of the red vixen's room...then sighed.

"What kind of place is this?" Allison asked...then put the first key into the lock.

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Corey waited until the gazelle walked back down the hall, toward the red vixen's room...then approached the nurse's station.

"Hi, Nickie," the wolf said softly.

"Hi Corey," Nickie replied, not even looking up from her station.

"So...did she buy it?" the wolf asked.

Nickie looked up...then leaned back in the chair.

"Doubt she bought it completely...but she bought it enough not to press," Nickie commented...then smiled.

"Those two got really chummy in there."

"That doesn't concern me, as you well know," Corey stated...then leaned over the counter, locking his brown eyes onto the calico.

"I want a copy of that footage," the wolf whispered.

Nickie nodded. "You'll get it by the end of my shift, as always, Corey. Relax."

The wolf let out a soft huff of air...then turned and walked back down the hall...in the opposite direction of the red vixen's room.

"Relax...with a vampire in the place..." Corey stated coldly...then shook his head.

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