

The Incident at Saint Mariah's
Part 4: Confrontations
4/4-5/28/2014

(ten days later)

...

Allison sighed, closing the door to her locker.

I wonder what Tara has found out, since she's here all day, the gazelle thought.

She leaned her head against the locker, her eyes closing.

I don't like the idea of someone spying on us...on her, she corrected.

No...I think you had it right, her brain chimed in. *You have fallen for her after all.*

The gazelle sighed again.

All right. Fine. I admit it, I HAVE fallen for her, the gazelle finally admitted. *I have fallen hard for her...*

She straightened up.

And, as a result, I don't want to see her get hurt, the gazelle declared to her brain, walking toward the door.

...

Allison smiled as she rounded the corner at the nurse's station, spotting the calico sitting in her perch, as always.

"Morning Nickie," Allison said, slipping over to the keys.

"Morning, Allison. No coffee today?" the calico asked, an ear twitching.

The gazelle shook her head.

"They were actually closed this morning," Allison replied, plucking the keys for the vixen's room off of the hooks by the fire hose.

"Aww..." Nickie mewled. "Why?"

"Something about renovations," the gazelle replied, turning away from the calico...

...and glancing at the wall of monitors, noticing the lone black screen on the wall.

As I expected...

"Well, time to go into the vampire's lair," Allison said, padding to the corner and glancing back. "Care to join me?"

"Uhk...no thanks," Nickie replied. "That thing gives me the creeps."

Allison turned away, a very happy smile on the gazelle's muzzle.

"Suit yourself," she stated.

...

Allison slipped inside the vixen's room, closing the door behind her.

"Good morning, Tar-"

The gazelle froze, startled.

The red vixen's room had changed. The desk was now situated in the corner near the window...and her bed had been turned and was against the wall where the desk originally was.

Allison looked around the room, puzzled.

The red vixen looked up from her computer screen

briefly...then went back to it.

"Good morning, Allison," Tara stated. "Like the changes?"

The gazelle wandered over to the desk, still a bit thrown.

"Umm...why did you..." she asked.

She watched...as the red vixen leaned back in her chair.

"What else is in this corner?" Tara asked.

Allison thought for a bit...then it hit her.

"You moved the desk...to keep people from spying," she stated.

Tara nodded. "Bingo. Hopefully, since our suspect or suspects can no longer see the research on the camera...they will try something."

The vixen went back to the screen.

"Thus confirming exactly who we need to look out for," the vixen finished, then stretched in her chair, letting out a loud yawn.

"Tired?" Allison asked.

The vixen nodded slightly. "A little fatigued, yes."

Allison rested a hand on the vixen's shoulder, causing her to look up at her with those green eyes.

"When is the last time you rested?" Allison asked.

The vixen sighed, looking back at the screen.

"Last week...so maybe ten days," the vixen stated.

"I'm not at a point where things start falling apart...but I am close."

"Falling apart?" Allison asked, sitting on the corner

of the desk.

She watched as the vixen rubbed at her eyes.

"Things like missing time...being unable to resist the darker urges...things like that," Tara replied.

The vixen looked away from the screen, rubbing her eyes a bit. "What's the news from outside? Did the world end yet?"

Allison chuckled a bit. "No, not yet." She leaned against the far edge of the vixen's desk. "So, any thoughts on our suspect?"

The vixen stretched a bit, her arms waving over her head as her bones popped softly.

"I still feel that that wolf...Corey...is likely going to be the more aggressive of the two suspects," Tara stated.

"Doctor Michelsen may be observing the tapes as well..."

"...but Corey seems like the one who is most likely to try to get the research for himself," Allison finished.

Slowly, Tara nodded...then smiled.

"You need to stop finishing my thoughts, Allison," she gently chided. "It's a bad habit."

The gazelle giggled a bit. "Sorry...but it's like...I dunno..." She sighed. "Almost like we're on the same wavelength or something. Like I know what you're going to say or where your thoughts are going."

The vixen nodded...then Allison saw Tara's ears perk up.

"I have an idea for an experiment...but I am going to need your consent for it, as it could be kind of risky to...well, to both of us," Tara stated.

Allison felt an ear twitch. "Risky...how?"

The vixen turned in the chair to look at her, her paws resting under her muzzle.

"Well, you know how vampires can sometimes communicate telepathically with their...um..." The vixen fidgeted. "Well, they can communicate telepathically with, certain people, shall we say?"

The gazelle frowned. "You mean, communicate with their thralls or slaves," she stated calmly.

The vixen sighed...then nodded slowly.

"Yes. I did not want to think of it in those terms...but yes," the vixen admitted...then looked up at her. "I wanted to see...if I could speak with you telepathically, with your permission."

Allison felt her body tense up...and she rubbed the underside of her own muzzle with a hand.

She wants to try to talk to me with her mind...would that mean she'd have access to my mind whenever she wants? Allison thought. *Also, would that means she could SEE my thoughts...see...my fantasies...about her...about us...?*

"I realize...this is asking a lot..."

The gazelle blinked...then looked at the vixen.

"I'm basically asking you to put a lot of trust in me...and I'm also asking a lot of myself too," the vixen stated...then seemed to blush a bit. "After all...this would be something very close...very intimate...and, I'm not sure...what the side-effects of such contact would be..."

The gazelle nodded.

She's not sure about this either...this is uncharted

territory for her...for BOTH of us...

Allison felt her ears twitch.

Still...I am the only person she really trusts around here, the gazelle ruminated. And she might see a refusal as a statement that I don't trust her as much as she trusts me...

She watched...as the vixen sighed.

"There's a lot of risk involved...and I don't know all of the variables..." Tara continued. "I don't know what the effects will be on you...on me...on us..."

She watched...as the vixen shut her eyes...and shook her head, her ears going flat against her skull.

"No...it's a bad idea," the vixen decided. "There are just far too many unknowns to try this...forget it. Bad idea."

"No..."

She saw Tara's eyes open...and saw those green eyes fix on her, the vixen's ears perking up.

"It's not a bad idea...we just need to set up some rules," the gazelle stated.

Tara's head tilted slightly to the left, her right ear twitching. "Rules?"

The gazelle nodded.

"Yeah...like, it's just for emergencies...like if one of us is in danger or something," Allison commented.

The vixen chuckled.

"Allison...I don't even know IF this is going to work...let alone HOW it works," Tara stated. "It was simply an idea I had that was based off the myths and films...and how we seem to be able to think a lot alike."

The vixen sank back in her chair.

"I don't even know IF it's going to work," Tara said calmly. "I also don't know if it's going to mess you up...or push me over the edge into full-on vampire..."

Allison felt a chill shoot up her spine.

There they are...the two biggest concerns right there, the gazelle thought. *The two biggest risks.*

"Well...how do we know unless we try?" Allison asked.

She watched...as the vixen frowned.

"If we try...and you end up a drooling vegetable...what then?" Tara asked. "Or if I end up latched onto your neck and drain you dry?"

Allison watched...as the vixen slowly shook her head.

"No...far too many risks for too little reward," Tara said conclusively. "It's a bad idea."

Allison stared at the vixen...

...then slowly nodded.

"Okay," the gazelle stated. "So, what now?"

The vixen sighed...then eased herself out of the chair.

"I think...I need to meditate some more...think on things a bit," Tara stated, slipping past the gazelle silently...

...and Allison reached out, catching onto the vixen's right arm with a hand, surprising the vixen...and herself.

"Tara...you know you can trust me, right?" Allison asked.

The vixen looked at her...and slowly nodded.

"As much as I can trust, yes," Tara replied.

The gazelle felt an ear twitch at the response, but let

it go.

"Well...I trust you too," she stated, smiling a bit at the vixen. "So, we'll try that when you're ready, okay?"

The vixen stared at her, her green eyes probing into her...

...and Allison felt a faint nudge in her head...

...then the vixen slowly smiled...and nodded, breaking her gaze.

"Okay...maybe," the vixen stated, then smiled.

"Think you can let go of me now."

The gazelle smiled...and let go of the vixen's arm.

"I'll peek back in on you in a few hours, okay?"

Allison commented.

The vixen chuckled as she sat in her lotus pose, facing the heavily-shaded window.

"Okay Mom," Tara chided gently, chuckling.

Allison let out a soft chuckle as she walked to the door, and slipped outside...

...then exhaled deeply, resting her head against the cool steel of the door.

What was that? Did she actually try to peek inside my mind just then? Or...

Allison took a deep breath...then let it out slowly.

...or was it...just a reflex...or just my imagination?

The gazelle slowly straightened up...and set about locking the door to the vixen's room.

Well, whatever it was...I had better let her know next time I see her, Allison thought, pocketing the keys as she went about her rounds.

...

(lunch time...2pm)

...

Allison nibbled on a bit of her salad, her face dour.

Something happened when she looked at me, the gazelle thought. Was she actually trying to peek inside my mind? Or...

She swallowed the bite of lettuce, shredded cheddar and tomato she had taken and been chewing for the past five minutes.

...or...is something else inside her doing this? she finished.

She stared at her salad, her mind wandering.

Every time she has looked at me intently, I felt something trying to get into my head, she mused internally. Like...something is trying to reach out to me...

...or infect you, her brain chimed in. Or invade you.

Allison sighed. *True.*

"...Allison? Yo, Allie!"

Allison squeaked and jumped, startled, a paw going to her chest on reflex...then she chuckled.

"Geez, Terry. Give me a damn heart attack, why don't you?" she chided the doberman, who slipped into the chair across from her, a smile on his face.

"I didn't mean to startle you," Terry admitted. "You were pretty lost in thought though..." He leaned forward.

"Something wrong?"

Allison sighed...then sank back in her chair.

"Maybe..." she stated softly.

The doberman's cheerful face suddenly grew somber...and he leaned in a bit further.

"Something wrong...with your patient?" he asked, his voice a bit softer.

Allison thought for a bit.

Yeah...she's being spied on, she thought...then looked at the doberman. *Can I tell him that though?*

"Just...Nickie," the gazelle admitted. "She keeps saying that Miss Bastille's camera is broken...but you confirmed it's working fine."

Slowly, Terry nodded...then sank back in his own chair.

"Allie...a lot of the staff here...they don't like your patient," he admitted.

Allison felt an ear twitch.

"A lot of them blame her for what happened to Rilies," the doberman continued. "Because of that, I think most of the staff would be happy to just weld her door shut and walk away."

Slowly, Allison leaned forward.

"Even if she did it in self-defense?" Allison asked.

Terry looked at her, a puzzled look on his face.

"Say what now?" the doberman asked.

Allison leaned in closer.

"The incident report...at least, Miss Bastille's version...claims that Rilies tried to rape her, in her room," the gazelle stated.

She watched as the doberman's eyes went wide.

"No way..." he breathed.

Allison nodded.

"And I'd almost be willing to bet...that somewhere, in this place...is the footage of that rape," the gazelle went on.

Terry shook his head.

"No...no fucking way, Allie," the doberman stated.

"You didn't know Rilies...he was before your time..."

"Doctor Michelsen believed her."

She watched...as the doberman looked at her...and she nodded.

"He believed her...even did a videotaped interview of her, not long after the attack," the gazelle went on.

Terry's eyes went wide...then he sighed.

"Damn...I always thought...Rilies was a good man..." the doberman stated somberly. "Corey always said she did something to him..."

"I think..."

Allison took a breath. *Dammit...time to find out for sure...*

"...I think Corey and Nickie are spying on my patient," Allison finished.

The doberman's eyes went wide.

"Wait...what?" he asked, stunned. "What for?"

"I don't know," Allison admitted, then leaned in close. "I DID overhear them talking about my patient...and I saw Corey receive a video tape from Nickie during that conversation."

She watched...as Terry leaned back, exhaling deeply.

"But...why?" the doberman asked after a minute. "I mean...why claim your patient's camera is broken, only to

pass the footage on to the head nurse here?"

"See, that I don't know," Allison admitted...then leaned back in her own chair. "I mean, I barely know either of them...all I do know is that Nickie is really afraid of my patient...and that Corey seems really cold whenever she's mentioned."

The gazelle looked up at Terry. "Do you have any idea why?"

The doberman rested his muzzle on top of his right paw, a finger stroking the underside of it.

"Well...I know Corey is really religious," Terry admitted. "I mean REALLY religious. Like "could run a church of his own" levels of religious...he might view your patient as some kind of abomination, just based on her file."

Allison watched...as the doberman frowned.

"I've also seen him watching your patient quite a bit, even before that incident with Rilies," Terry went on. "He's never asked for the keys to go in though...just watches her through the window..."

The gazelle watched...as the doberman sighed.

"Allie...if he's sneaking peeks at her footage...who authorized it?" Terry asked.

"That's just it," Allison stated. "I don't think anyone IS authorizing it."

The doberman's eyes went wide. "Oh shit...that is NOT good."

"Exactly," Allison stated...then leaned in close. "Can you do me a huge favor, Terry?"

The doberman studied her for a bit...then nodded

slightly.

"Can you keep an eye on my patient during your shifts?" the gazelle asked. "And notify me immediately if something happens to endanger her care here?"

Terry looked at her, shock crossing his face for a bit, making his ears stand upright...

...then, very slowly...he nodded.

"Sure, Allie..." he said...then sighed. "Man...if Corey is planning something against your girl...you might have to move her."

Allison blinked. *Crap...that actually did NOT occur to me.*

"Are there any open rooms?" the gazelle asked, her face showing concern.

Terry scratched behind his right ear for a few seconds.

"There are a few empty rooms...but those are on the third floor...the psychotics floor," the doberman stated. "She gets transferred up there, she's not getting out. They lock that place up tight."

The gazelle sighed.

"What about...changing the locks on the door?" Allison asked.

Terry nodded. "That would be a LOT easier...just take a bit longer to pull off. Doc Michelsen's gotta approve it...and I doubt he will without any real cause..."

Allison nodded, the beginnings of a plan germinating in her head.

"But it COULD be done?" the gazelle pressed.

Slowly, the doberman nodded. "Yeah...likely take a month, though...and..."

Allison watched...as the doberman glanced around the room...then looked back at her, leaning over the table.

"...if Corey notices what your fox did...you might not have that kind of time," he whispered. "So, I'll make the call to the Doc today...see if we can speed it through. Say you and your patient wanted another lock put on...for added security for the staff."

Allison watched...as the doberman winked at her. "I can fudge things somewhat."

The gazelle smiled. "Thanks, Terry. You're a real peach."

The doberman chuckled. "Nah. I'm just a rotten ol' apple," he commented, smiling.

Allison smiled back, sliding back into her chair.

"Oh...and please...don't tell Corey," the gazelle added.

"Allie...he doesn't need to know till after it's done," the doberman said with a wink.

She chuckled softly...then gathered up her leftover lunch.

"Well, speaking of need to know...I had better make sure my patient is really needing that new lock," Allison stated, winking at the doberman.

"Capital idea, milady," Terry said in a faux-British accent, causing them both to chuckle.

"Thanks again, Terry," Allison stated, easing herself out of the chair.

"Hey, don't sweat it," Terry said.

Allison looked at him...and he smiled.

"Remember...I think your fox has the best shot of any of our patients at getting out of here," he stated, still smiling.

Allison nodded, then slid her chair back into place.

"I hope she does," Allison said, then turned and left.

...

Corey frowned as he watched the gazelle leave the break room...and felt an ear twitch in frustration.

Wonder what that was about? he asked himself. *No matter...so long as it doesn't disrupt my arrangement with Nickie...*

...

Allison padded back toward the vixen's room...then paused, a hand slipping under her muzzle.

So...if we can get the new lock put on...and if things can be fudged so that only Doctor Michelsen and I have the keys...yes...that could buy us some time, Allison thought.

She rested a hand on the doorknob of the vixen's room...then eased the door open.

She smiled, relieved...

...spotting the vixen sitting on the floor, her back to the door...exactly as she always sits when she meditates.

The gazelle slipped in...and eased the door shut.

"Hello again, Allison," she heard a voice say softly.

The gazelle blinked...then smiled, recognizing the voice.

"Hi Tara...I thought I'd peek in again, see how you

are doing,” the gazelle stated, walking across the room and sitting down in front of the vixen.

“Nothing has really changed,” the red vixen admitted, her voice very soft. “Still trying to figure out the mysteries of the universe. You?”

Allison smiled.

“I think I have a way to delay someone trying to swipe your research,” the gazelle stated.

She watched...as the vixen's eyes slowly opened...
...then took a breath.

For the briefest of seconds, the vixen's eyes were blood red...

...then Tara blinked...and her eyes returned to their normal green color.

“How so?” Tara asked, her voice a little stronger.

Allison leaned forward a little bit, putting herself closer to the vixen.

“I talked to one of the other staff members here, and...” she began...then paused.

Tara was glaring at her...and she felt displeasure radiating from the vixen.

“Can you trust this person?” Tara asked coldly.

Allison nodded. “I do...which means you can too.”

She watched as the vixen studied her for a bit, the vixen's green eyes locked onto her...

...and again, she felt a little push in her head.

“Stop doing that, Tara,” Allison stated.

The vixen blinked...and Allison saw confusion register on the vixen's face.

“Doing what?” Tara asked, an ear flicking.
Allison looked at her patient, suddenly very concerned.

Uh-oh...she doesn't even know she's...I'd better tell her...

“Sometimes, when you stare at me,” Allison stated.
“I feel...like this little push in my head. Like something...”
She looked squarely into the vixen's green eyes. “...or some ONE is trying to get inside my head.”

Allison watched...

...as the vixen recoiled, her black paws immediately covering her muzzle, those green eyes going wide.

“You mean...I've been....oh shit. SHIT!” Tara declared, her voice slightly muffled from her paws.

Allison saw the vixen's tail begin to twitch...and she reached forward.

“Tara...” she began...

...only to have her head swatted away, hard enough to make her arm tingle.

“NO!” Tara declared, sliding back away from the gazelle.

Allison blinked...as the vixen slid next to her bed, back pressed against the wall...her body coiling in on itself.

She watched...as Tara's body began to shake a bit...

...then she heard the vixen take a deep, ragged breath...and slowly let it out...

...and she felt a wave of calmness break over her, just a bit.

“Okay...okay...” the vixen stated, her body slowly

uncoiling and her posture becoming a bit more relaxed...

...and she felt relaxed as well, like her anxiety at seeing Tara react that way was instantly removed...

...and she sank back a bit, her body sliding back against the cool wall under the window.

“How long...have I been doing this to you?” Tara asked, her voice sounding very weak and tired.

Allison thought for a bit.

“Well, you did it on the first day we met,” the gazelle replied. “Done it a few times since too...and twice today.”

She watched...as the vixen sighed, her posture shrinking in on itself a bit.

“Damn...that means...” the vixen began...then took a deep breath...

...and Allison saw that Tara's paws were digging into her thighs, the arms taut and tense.

“...that means...that things are worse than I thought,” the vixen finished. “That it's not safe...”

“Wait...what's not safe?” Allison asked, leaning forward a bit...

...only to freeze, as the vixen looked up at her, the green eyes suddenly seeming very sad.

“Me...I'm not safe,” she stated. “You can't be around me long-term anymore...and the door needs to be locked at all times...”

“Tara...” Allison began.

“...might even need to have you escorted in here by a guard, probably armed...”

The gazelle got up and walked closer to the vixen,

who seemed to be shaking a bit.

“...definitely need to limit your exposure...” Tara went on, her body shaking a little bit more, almost like an old percolator that was brewing coffee.

“Tara...” Allison began, reaching out and resting a hand on one of the vixen's paws.

“...might have to be restrained at all times...no idea if...”

She grabbed the vixen's shoulders and gave her a hard shake.

“Dammit Tara! CALM DOWN!” the gazelle snapped.

She looked...as the vixen looked up at her, ears flat, fur soaked with tears, eyes wide.

“Now listen to me...” Allison began. “...I am your nurse...so you ARE going to listen to me, understand?”

The vixen looked at her, eyes still wide and ears still flat.

“Now...we are not going to change anything about your care,” Allison stated.

“But...” Tara began, only to fall silent as Allison fixed a stern gaze on her.

“I have talked with Terry, the maintenance guy here...and he's going to get a new lock for your door,” the gazelle went on. “I'll push that only Doctor Michelsen and I have keys to that lock...and that those keys NOT be put on the keyring. That way, no one else can have access if that lock is engaged.”

She watched...as Tara slowly nodded, the vixen's

eyes slowly settling down.

“O...okay...” Tara said, very softly.

Allison took a breath.

All right...now for the big one...

The gazelle looked the vixen squarely in her eyes.

“And, per MY medical orders...you will open a link between us, at once,” Allison ordered.

The vixen shook her head, her eyes closing.

“No...no. Not safe. Too...” the vixen began.

Allison grabbed the vixen's head, forcing her to look squarely at her.

“Now you listen to me...I want you to CALM. DOWN. NOW!” the gazelle stated.

She stared into the vixen's eyes. “Deep breaths. In...and out....in...and out...”

The vixen took the deep breaths, Allison breathing along with her...feeling the tension ebb from both of their bodies.

“In...and out...” Allison stated calmly, making her breathing match the vixen's breaths.

Slowly, the vixen relaxed, her body unclenching and sinking against the wall.

Slowly, Allison let go of the vixen's head...and sat down across from her.

“Now...continue breathing slowly...and relax,” the gazelle stated, getting comfortable across from the vixen.

The vixen took a couple of deep, slow breaths...then leaned back against the wall.

“....are you sure...” Tara asked softly, her eyes closed

and the back of her head resting against the wall.

Allison smiled...and nodded slowly.

“I'm sure,” the gazelle stated calmly.

Tara let out another slow breath.

“Even if...it sends me...over the edge...” the vixen asked, her voice soft and distant.

“You won't go over the edge...” Allison stated, reaching out to gently grab one of the vixen's black-furred paws.

Slowly, the vixen opened her eyes, the green orbs seeming tired.

Allison smiled into those eyes, feeling no fear.

“You won't go over the edge...because I'll be there to pull you back,” the gazelle stated.

The vixen looked at her, the vixen's fur bristling a bit...

...then, very slowly...she nodded.

“Okay...let's try it,” the vixen said softly.

Allison nodded, leaning back and sitting across from the vixen. “Okay...what do I need to do?”

She watched as Tara rubbed at her eyes.

“First...we need to talk about the other times this happened,” the vixen stated. “What was I doing when these other attempts happened?”

“Just...looking into my eyes,” Allison stated, a little puzzled. “Why?”

The vixen adjusted her legs' positions, slowly settling into a cross-legged position.

“Trying to understand it,” Tara replied, sighing...and

wiggling a bit, getting comfortable. “Okay...now, I want you to get comfortable, okay?”

Allison nodded...and sat down, tucking her legs under her.

“Now...close your eyes,” Tara stated calmly.

“But...the other times, we were looking into each other's eyes...” Allison commented.

The vixen nodded, looking at her with those green eyes.

“Yes...and that...instinctual nudge is NOT a good thing. Not right now,” Tara commented. “What we're going to try to do is a bit more...delicate.”

“Delicate?” Allison asked.

The vixen nodded. “This connection...it needs to be built from the ground up. That way, we can do all we can to make sure no harm comes to either of us.”

Allison watched...as the vixen smiled slightly.

“Those instinctual nudges...those would have likely resulted in a one-way connection. From me...” She gestured at her chest...then moved her paws toward Allison, spreading them out a bit. “...to you. No communication back from you to me.”

Slowly, Allison nodded. “And this one...we both need to be able to communicate on, right?”

Tara nodded. “Hopefully, we won't need it...but, if we do, it needs to be an open line. Two-way traffic.” The vixen smiled slightly. “So, let's lay that line down, hmm?”

Allison chuckled...then shut her eyes.

“All right...let's take a few deep breaths...get our

breathing into sync..." she heard Tara say.

Allison took a deep breath...and slowly let it out, feeling her body relax and sink down.

She heard Tara let out a breath...and felt even more relaxed.

"Now...picture a door...preferably a nice, heavy door," Tara commented.

Allison thought for a bit...then created the image of the front doors of Saint Mariah's. Big, heavy, metal doors, shaped like odd triangles.

"Do you have the door?" Tara asked softly, her voice barely above a whisper.

Slowly, Allison nodded. "Yes," she replied, her voice equally soft.

"Good...now, let that door open, just a crack," Tara said softly.

Allison took a breath...and slowly eased the doors open, just a tiny little bit...

...then, she felt a very gentle touch in her head, like a soft touch on her shoulder or hand.

"I feel...something..." Allison said.

"Good, I think," Tara stated very softly. "Now...I'm going to try to send an image...and you tell me what it is, okay?"

Allison nodded, the gazelle's eyes still closed.

An image? Why not just talk mind-to-mind? Allison thought...

...then saw an image in her head, one that made her giggle.

“A hot-fudge sundae? Seriously?” Allison asked, giggling.

She heard Tara laugh. “Seriously. I've been craving one for about a week now...and it looks like things work on my end.” The vixen took a breath...and let it out slowly. “Now, it's your turn. Create an image and try to send it to me.”

Allison thought for a bit...then an image simply popped into her head.

“A...fire alarm? Is that it?” Tara asked tentatively.

Allison's eyes flew open...and she saw that the vixen had her eyes closed, her head resting against the wall of her room.

“Yeah...yeah, that was it,” Allison breathed.

“Wow...it really worked?”

Slowly, the vixen nodded...

...and Allison frowned, noticing that the vixen's top was soaked with sweat.

“Are you okay?” the gazelle asked.

The vixen nodded, letting out a soft breath.

“Just...trying hard to...NOT go any further than necessary...”

Allison felt an ear twitch. “What do you...” she began...then fell silent...

...as an image flashed into her head...of the red vixen, going through a bunch of file cabinets flared into life in her head...followed by a red circle with a diagonal line through it.

Why did...

Then it hit her.

“You're holding back...because you don't want to

invade my privacy..." Allison stated.

Slowly, the vixen nodded. "That's part of it, yes."

"Part of..." Allison began to ask...then fell silent...

...as another image popped into her head, that of the red vixen manipulating a marionette.

One that looked a lot like her.

".....oh...." Allison stated, the gazelle's mood darkening a bit.

"Also..."

Allison glanced back up...as the vixen slowly sat more upright.

"...you also...need to be careful what you think too," Tara said softly. "I'm far better at receiving things than I am sending them...so I'd likely pick up on thoughts pretty easily."

Allison slid next to the vixen, leaning against the wall. "Why?"

The vixen sighed, looking away from Allison.

"I have...trust issues," Tara admitted. "Even before I got bitten. Burned by friends...family...coworkers...people I tried to date..."

Allison nodded...and rested a hand on the vixen's right paw.

"I want you...to be able to trust me, Tara," she stated.

The vixen sighed...then gave her hand a very gentle squeeze.

"I think...I'm really tired, Allison," the red vixen admitted. "Could you help me into bed?"

Allison giggled...then helped the vixen up, sliding her body under the vixen's right arm.

“All right...easy now...” Allison stated, helping the vixen sit down on the bed...then gently helping her lie down. “Did you need the restraints?”

Slowly, the vixen shook her head. “No...setting that up took a lot out of me. I should sleep like the dead today.”

Allison chuckled. “Well, don't sleep too deeply...and try not to broadcast anything, okay?”

The vixen chuckled softly. “No promises,” came a soft reply...

...then Allison watched...as the vixen's eyes closed, her breathing becoming very slow.

Allison slid the sheet up the vixen's body...then gently brushed a stray tuft of fur back into place.

“Pleasant dreams, Tara,” she said softly...then padded to the door.

...

(That night)

...

Doctor Michelsen frowned as he watched the footage of the vixen redesigning her room.

“Patient Bastille has apparently noticed the camera...and has taken steps to limit monitoring of her research,” the coyote said to the recorder. “I will have to talk with her about that...”

The coyote sighed, fast-forwarding past the parts where the vixen meditated...

...then his eyes narrowed...as he saw the vixen interacting with the gazelle on the screen.

“It would appear...that Patient Bastille has bonded

with Nurse Cousins. Seems like I made the right choice in placing the two of them together,” the coyote stated calmly into the recorder.

He watched the two of them interact...then saw the gazelle help the vixen into bed and leave...

...and smiled.

“I will need to have a talk with Patient Bastille regarding her research,” the coyote stated...then turned off the recorder.

...

Corey scowled as the tape played...showing the vixen renovating her room, placing the computer out of view of the camera.

“Damn...” the wolf muttered, watching the footage play...and fast-forwarding through most of it...

...then tapping pause, spotting the gazelle sitting across from the vixen.

“What the...” he asked the room...and hit “play”...

...and watched as the two figures on the screen interacted with each other.

The vixen scuttling away from the gazelle...

...the gazelle following the vixen, sitting down across from her...

...the gazelle shaking the vixen...

...then both of them sitting still, across from each other for an extended period of time.

Corey paused the video...then stared at the screen, his muzzle resting on his folded paws.

“What are you two doing...” he asked the footage.

She hasn't been bitten, that would've shown up on the video...so what is going...

Then, the wolf's eyes went wide.

“No...” he breathed...then slid to his computer, opening his e-mail program.

“Urgent! Believe Vampire has established a mental link with one of the staff at Saint Mariah's. Vampire has also taken measures to prevent viewing of its research. Please advise!

C.”

Corey hit send...then glanced back at the video screen, his thumb tapping “rewind”, then “play”.

He watched...as the two figures on the screen sat across from each other...then the gazelle helped the vixen into bed...over and over again.

“Ding!”

The wolf spun back to the computer screen, clicking on the new e-mail.

“Attempt to secure vampire's research. Find confirmation of connection with staff member. Caution is strongly advised.

L”

Corey let out a breath...then nodded.

“God's Will be done,” he stated softly.

...

Allison slipped under her covers, her bed making soft creaking sounds as the gazelle got comfortable under the covers.

So...Tara and I can talk, mind-to-mind now...she thought. Kinda creepy...but also...

The gazelle sighed.

...I'll just need to be careful what I think, she added.

She wiggled a bit under the covers, getting comfortable...

...then smiled, a very pleasant image of her and the vixen sharing the bed popping into view.

...