

The Price of Peace

Von chelle76

Kapitel 38: Vacation Part 1

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The Price of Peace
Chapter 37: Vacation

"Well, if I'm reading these directions correctly we're almost there, Love," Saber says as Amanda drives down a small country road. "I believe the town that we just passed through is the one just before the road we take up ahead on the left."

Amanda spots the side road and turns. After about ten minutes, they arrive at a small, but well-kept cottage with a lake behind it surrounded by woods. "It's gorgeous," Amanda says quietly as she pulls up close to the house and stops. They get out of the car and are met by a young man close to their age.

"Hello!" he calls as he walks up to them from the house. "Uncle said you'd be arriving today. I'm Jared, nice to meet you, Captain and Mrs. Rider."

"It is nice to meet you, Jared," Saber replies, not bothering to correct his rank. "I am grateful that you are willing to care for this cottage."

"It's no trouble, sir. My family lives just down the way, so I can keep an eye on it. Uncle Thomas pays me well for doin' it, which helps me out as I've got seven children and a wife to care for."

Saber chuckles, "I suppose that is a bit of help for you then." Saber heads around to the back of the car to grab the bags and Jared follows.

"I can take those in for you if you'd like, sir, so that you and your lady can look around," Jared says offering a hand.

Saber nods and passes the two bags to him. "Thank you. I would like to take a look around to become familiar with the layout of the area. Love, would you like to come along?" he asks turning to Amanda.

"Of course," she replies as she comes up beside him.

"Oh, 'fore I forget to tell you, you got three horses. They are with my horses, as it's easier to care for 'em all in one place. I'll take you over later if you wish to go riding to pick a couple o horses to keep while you're here," Jared says stopping at the entrance of the house.

"Thank you. I believe we would like to borrow a couple of horses. It has been a while since we've gone riding," Saber replies. Jared nods and then heads into the house.

"It would be nice to go riding again. It's been a long time since we have," Amanda says as they walk around the back of the house towards the lake.

"Aye, that it would. We could explore a bit more of the grounds that way. None of this even seems remotely familiar to me," Saber says as they walk. "I suppose we should have stopped for lunch on the way in, I didn't realize the time."

"It's not that late. We could easily drive back into town and get lunch and a few groceries for fixing things here and be back by mid to late afternoon. Once we check out the house," Amanda replies.

Saber nods. "That sounds like a plan. We could ask Jared what places are good to eat in town. I'm sure he'd have a suggestion or two." They gradually stroll back towards the house to find Jared waiting for them on the front porch, whittling a piece of wood..

"I'm sorry that we've kept you waiting, Jared," Amanda says apologetically.

Jared looks up and smiles kindly, placing his knife back in his pocket. "It's not a problem, ma'am. The kids are in school for a while yet, so I'm kinda enjoying the peace and quiet."

"We were going to ask you if there are any good places in town to eat. We plan on going in and getting groceries, but wanted to eat beforehand. Do you have any suggestions?" Saber asks.

"Well, if you want something fancy, there's Moore's Castle, they serve the nobility and upper classes. Went there once on your parent's invite as a weddin' gift. The food is divine. If you want somethin' a little more local, you can try Wedgewood's Tavern, it's a local pub, but not too bad at lunchtime. I'd avoid it in the evenin' though. After 'bout six, the lower-class and the 'riffs tend to hang there til late. Brawls are not uncommon after 'bout seven in the eve, once a few pints have been unloaded."

"Good to know, thank you for the information, Jared," Saber says.

"No worries. I'll come round again 'bout tea time with the horses if you'd like. I can return the ones you don't take to the stables at my place 'fore dinner time," Jared replies passing a set of keys to Saber.

Saber nods and takes the offered keys. "That'll be perfect. We shall see you then."

Jared nods and heads off towards his place on the scooter parked a bit back from the house. They watch him drive off then turn and enter the house, looking around. After some exploring they return to the car and head back towards town.

"So, do you care where we eat, Love?" Saber asks as they get closer to the town.

"Not particularly. I'd be fine with either of the suggestions. It's been years since I've eaten in a tavern. Of course that was because I refused to return to the one in the town I lived at, but I don't care to talk about that."

Saber gives her a curious look. "Oh? Did you get into a bit of trouble?" he asks amused.

"Not exactly," Amanda mutters, mentally kicking herself. "Can we leave it at young and stupid?" she asks hopefully.

"You know you're only making this story more appealing," he teases.

Amanda sighs, "I sort of got drunk and I wasn't quite of age," she mutters.

"That's it?" he asks.

"Um, yeah," she mutters silently praying that he'll stop asking her for more information.

He stares at her for a moment and laughs, "You're a horrible liar, Amanda," he says quietly. "If that was the worst of it, I don't want to hear what you'd say to the age I had my first drink. I was barely thirteen. Of course if you are speaking strictly of pubs, I was a little closer to proper age, about seventeen, but I don't think I did anything exuberant."

Amanda swallows hard and sighs. "Let's just say that had my friend not come in, I probably would have been in a bad situation. Luckily, she came in and drug me out of the room and gave me a spare top she had to wear," she finishes quietly.

Saber shakes his head, the amusement gone from his features. "How much older was he?" he asks quietly.

"Hell if I know. I honestly don't remember much about it, other than puking my guts out the next morning," she replies obviously embarrassed. They both fall silent for several minutes. "My friend later told me that I lost my shirt because I was trying to fight the guy off, but I still feel stupid for getting into such a situation," she mutters quietly. "It's why I rarely drink."

Saber takes her hand and squeezes it, "I don't think less of you, Love. Drinking can make your judgement less than ideal, to put it mildly. I'm just glad to know that your friend got you out of the situation. I won't bring it up again, all right?" he says quietly.

She nods slightly. "Thanks," she replies quietly. After a couple minutes, she sighs, "I

suppose since we're not dressed for the fancier places, we should just hit the tavern. What do you think?"

"Would you be all right with that?" Saber asks.

"I think so. So long as you don't harass me," she replies with a weak smile.

"I wouldn't, Amanda. I am sorry for pushing you earlier. Had I any clue-"

"Don't be," Amanda says cutting him off. "I should have told you a few years ago, but honestly, I had shoved it out of my memory."

"Can't say as I blame you, I would feel the same way," Saber replies honestly.

"So to the tavern?" Amanda asks. Saber nods and she drives down the road a little further and parks to the side of the tavern.

They approach the doors and slowly they enter, stepping inside to allow their eyes to readjust to the dimmer lighting of the place. Looking around, they see a few customers, but the place is mostly empty. They pick a table off to the side and sit down. After a few minutes, a young woman comes over to them. "May I have your order?" she asks, looking over the newcomers trying to assess them. "Our special today is the Ploughman's Lunch," she adds.

Saber looks to Amanda who nods approvingly. "We'll both have that, Miss," Saber replies.

"And your drink?" she asks.

"Your house special for me," Amanda replies.

The waitress nods and looks to Saber expectantly.

"Same," he replies.

They eat and chat for a while before going to buy provisions for a few days. Upon arriving back at the cottage, they find Jared and a young boy waiting for them with three horses. "Need some help with the groceries, sir?" Jared asks as he approaches them after they get out of the car.

"I think we've got it, it's not a lot," Saber replies as he grabs three of the four bags. Amanda grabs the other bag and they head inside. After unloading they return outside to see the horses. "They look well cared for," Saber says as he inspects the animals.

"I treat 'em all as if I own 'em, sir. I believe an animal is only as good as it's cared for," Jared replies.

"Which would you like, Love?" he asks Amanda who is quietly observing the animals.

"I like the black one. She seems calm and at ease," Amanda replies.

Saber nods and chooses his horse and they take them to the stable behind the house. Jared and his son leave on the third horse and they go inside and change for riding.

It is nearly dark when they return from riding and the temperature begins to drop. Amanda involuntarily shivers and Saber casts her a glance, "Are you all right?" he asks in a concerned tone.

"Aye, just had a chill. The temp seems to drop faster here than at home."

"We'll get a fire going once we put the horses away," he replies.

"It's fine. Are you hungry?" Amanda asks.

"Perhaps a little, but I can make a sandwich and be fine."

"I was thinking the same, actually. Perhaps with some tea," Amanda says as they head towards the house.

They go in and make a fire in the fireplace, and after eating, they are sitting back and finishing their tea when Saber notices Amanda just staring at the fire. He sets his cup down and places an arm across her shoulders, pulling her gently against him. "Are you sure you're all right?" he asks quietly.

Amanda looks up, startled from her reverie and nods. "Yeah, I just feel guilty for not being with the girls."

Saber chuckles and pulls her a little tighter to him and kisses her cheek, "That's perfectly normal, Love. Would it help to call and talk with Elaine to see how they're doing?"

"I'm sure they would just laugh at me calling," Amanda replies sullenly.

"I doubt it. They're probably surprised you haven't called yet," Saber replies with a hint of amusement.

"If I do, I can tell you'll tease me."

"I would not, Love. I understand. It's not the first time that I've been away from them, it is for you. It is hard, and you've had a stronger bond with them than I have," Saber replies. Amanda goes to object and he shakes his head. "It's natural that you would at this age, you've been their source of food," he says with a laugh.

Amanda blushes and grabs a nearby pillow and hits him with it. "So I'm just a food source, is that it?" she asks in a mocking tone.

Saber laughs as he half heartedly blocks the attack. "You're more than that to them,

Amanda," he says gasping for air from laughing. "And to me," he adds quietly, in a more serious tone.

Amanda stops her onslaught and leans against him in a half-embrace. "I think I will call, perhaps talking to Elaine will put me at ease enough that I can relax easier and not feel guilty for leaving them."

Saber reaches over and grabs his phone from off the couch the other side of him and hands it to her, "Use mine, that way you don't have to move yet," he offers.

Amanda takes it and calls home, Elaine answers the phone, "I was wondering how long it would take you, Lady Amanda," she says answering the line with a hint of amusement in her voice.

"H...How did you know it was me? I called from Saber's phone," Amanda stammers.

"I had a feeling it would be," Elaine replies simply. "I can assure you my lady, your wee ones are just fine. They have been fed and the boys are on the floor playing with them now. I think all four of them are having a fine time."

Amanda visibly relaxes at those words and Saber pulls her closer to him. She snuggles against him, talking for a few more minutes before reluctantly hanging up the phone and handing it back to Saber. "Everything seems to be fine," she says almost sounding disappointed.

Saber chuckles and kisses her cheek, "I'm sure they can manage a couple of days, Love. Call again in the morning if you wish."

"You find this amusing, don't you?" she asks a bit defensively.

"A little," he replies honestly. "But I'm glad that you are in a position of being able to call. I can see it helped," She goes to speak and he holds a finger to her mouth to stop her, "And no, I don't think you're out of line or over protective," he adds with a smile.

Amanda starts to say something else, but thinks better of it, suddenly feeling rather tired. "I know it's not really late, but would it be all right if I went on to sleep?" she asks obviously fatigued.

"Of course, why do you even need to ask? We have no schedule, no real plans. If you only want to laze around here tomorrow, I'm fine with that, Love."

Amanda nods and slowly gets up, heading to their room. He follows her and they change and turn in for the night.

Amanda awakes to the smells of breakfast cooking and daylight creeping in through the blinds, she rolls over slowly and wills herself out of bed. After taking a brief shower, she dresses and comes out into the living area, spotting Saber at the stove.

"Morning, sleep well?" he asks not bothering to look up from cooking.

"Yes, I slept rather well. First full night's sleep in nearly a year," Amanda replies coming over and kissing his cheek.

"You were rather comfortable. I was getting hungry, so I shifted enough to get out of bed and manage not to wake you. I thought I'd surprise you with breakfast. It's been awhile since I've had a chance to cook, I'm hoping it's edible," he says as he places the eggs and bacon onto two plates and carries them to the table. They sit down and eat and talk. Eventually deciding to go riding and packing a lunch to take with them.

Later in the afternoon, they are sitting on the far side of the lake, the horses resting nearby enjoying the lunch they packed. "Do you think we could bring the girls out here when they're a little older?" Amanda asks breaking the silence that had fallen between them.

Saber nods. "I would like to. I think it would be nice to do so. Perhaps then Thomas and Elaine would take a break," Saber replies. He places his arm around her and pulls her against him, "Of course coming out a few times without them could be nice too," he says quietly leaning close to her ear.

She looks up and smiles. "This is nice, isn't it? I am rather enjoying having you to myself."

"Aye, I am definitely glad they convinced us to come out here. I do still think they are all up to something, but I'm not complaining about it being just us for a few days," he replies as he lays back on the blanket and pulls her close.

She lays her head against him and sighs feeling her body relax. "I'm sure they are plotting too, but might as well enjoy the break. I'm not sure we will get one again for a while," she mumbles quietly.

"You think we're going to need to fight again?" he asks, shifting so that he is facing her, her head on his arm.

"I hope not, but given the history of the Outriders and us, do you really think they're gone?" Amanda asks.

"I suppose there is a bit of truth to that statement," he says with a sigh. "I just hope they have gone on to someplace else. I would much rather to spend my life enjoying you and the children, not fighting constantly to protect them and our way of life."

"So do I," Amanda says quietly.

"Well, we've finished painting, Elaine. What do ya think?" Colt asks as he leads her into the room.

Elaine looks around and nods satisfied at the room. "I think it looks good. It should do them for a while," she says obviously pleased. "Thank you both for doing it."

"No problem. I'm glad Fireball was here to help. It made it go faster."

"Perhaps tomorrow we can move their beds into this room. The paint should be dry and the room ready by then," Elaine states.

"What all do you have for the room, Elaine?" Robin asks curiously.

"I've got a dresser, it's white with six drawers, a changing table, and then the two cribs, and the rocker that is in their room presently. That should be a nice set up, don't you agree?"

"Yeah. I'm sure they will appreciate the effort once they see it benefits both them and the little ones," Robin replies.

April comes up carrying a medium-sized box with some items in it. "Do you think the paint will be dry enough after lunch that I can install this stuff?"

"What is it?" Colt and Fireball asks eyeing the box cautiously.

"A monitoring system," April replies as if it's perfectly obvious to anyone as she sets the box on the floor towards the center of the room. "It does sound and video, and I'm going to set it up where they can be anywhere in the house and see the girls when they are in their room." She pulls out two items that look like miniature computer pads and then sets one back in the box. "These two things are completely portable. You can take them anywhere on a good portion of the property and be able to keep an eye and an ear on the girls when they are in their room. I figure that you and Thomas can have one Elaine, and that Saber and Amanda can share the other one. Of course I can add as many as you wish, but to start with, I'll set up two," April explains.

"That's a brilliant Idea, Ms. April!" Elaine exclaims happily. "I'm sure once you have that in place, Lady Amanda and Saber won't be able to raise any objections."

"That is my hope. I was thinking that after we get the babies established in their room, I could keep the monitor with me for a trial run, and you can have the other one. We should have a couple more days before they come home, hopefully," April says.

The phone rings and Elaine looks at her watch and chuckles, "I'm surprised she manage to wait this long," she quips as she goes and picks up the phone. "I was wondering how long it would take you, Lady Amanda," she says answering the line with a hint of amusement in her voice.

"H...How did you know it was me? I called from Saber's phone," Amanda stammers on the other end of the line.

"I had a feeling it would be," Elaine replies simply. "I can assure you my lady, your wee ones are just fine. They have been fed and the boys are on the floor playing with them now. I think all four of them are having a fine time," she adds reassuringly.

"I am glad things seem to be going so well," Amanda replies with a hint of

disappointment.

Elaine smiles at her tone. "Lady Amanda, the whole point of your trip is to allow the both of you to relax. I promise to call you if anything should prove to be troublesome. Otherwise, take your time, we have enough milk for four more days, maybe a day more if they eat like they have been today and enjoying the solid foods."

"Thank you, Elaine. I'm sure I'll be calling again, but goodnight for now," Amanda says with a hint of both disappointment and relief.

"Goodnight, to you both. We'll talk to you soon," Elaine says and then hangs up the phone with a chuckle.

"Is everything all right?" Robin asks with concern.

"Aye, Lady Amanda just misses the wee ones," Elaine replies amused. "I'm sure she'll be fine. It's her first time away from them since they've been born. Lady Mary was much the same way with Saber, I suppose it's natural."

"She was away a lot, wasn't she?" April asks quietly.

"Aye, after the first year, he was pretty much left to my care," Elaine replies as she heads towards Saber and Amanda's room, April follows along after her. "She would call constantly, so I knew she loved him and was proud of all he has accomplished, but life as a senator's wife meant a lot of time away from here, and that meant a lot of time away from Saber. The things he was required to attend were not the type of places you could take a wee one along, and the senator wanted his wife by his side. I think that was one regret she had, that they didn't get to watch him grow up. They saw the man he became, missing so many of his milestones. Perhaps that is why she was secretly hoping to release him from the betrothal to Ms. Sincia," Elaine finishes quietly as she folds the children's clothes and places them in a box. "I think she felt that since he had done so well for himself, he deserved the right to choose his life mate. However, I think it was harder to sway the senator to see that. His family was rather staunch on such matters. To them, it was first the integrity of the line, then love. I suppose that is why they were so particular about who their legitimate children be from, not necessarily their lover's children."

"I thought Saber's father loved his mother," April says a bit shocked by the statements.

"Aye, he did. He was one of the few that actually loved the woman he was forced to marry. As far as I know, he was completely faithful to her; something that isn't common among the nobility, as you heard from Mr. McCully," Elaine states. "Most noblemen left their wives at home to rear their legitimate children while they went away on business. Senator Rider was not like most of those men, when Lady Mary became ill, he stayed at her side, and insisted on being kept up to date when he had to leave. I honestly think that had he lived to the end of the war, he would have allowed Saber to decide for himself who he wanted to marry. I think after all that Saber and the rest of you had been through his father had a new respect for him and his abilities."

He also knew it was what his mother wanted for him."

"But I thought he went away to school and such, didn't he?" April asks obviously intrigued. "His father and mother really didn't see him much because of it."

"Aye, he went to the finest schools the New Frontier could offer. He went away for a year, but was so bored that the teachers sent him home with extra work and allowed him to attend classes via video conference, so that he could pursue more than the basic classes that were offered on site. His parents paid for tutors to come here, so he could go through the more rigorous weapons training and learn the most advanced securities technology available. I suppose you know how things went after that," Elaine says.

April nods. "Yeah. He joined the academy at Cavalry Command at sixteen, a bit younger than most, but he had already completed his university work by then, so they allowed him to enter. He was instated as an officer after only eight months, a rather impressive feat for the academy. It was one of the reasons my father wanted him on the Bismarck project. I never thought we'd end up the way we are now," April says adding the last part as a quiet afterthought.

"You mean in general or as friends, Ms. April?" Elaine asks.

"Both, I guess," she replies with a shrug. "When I first met him, I thought he was too reserved, too serious and seemed devoid of emotion. But after living with him on the Bismarck, I realized that once he trusted me, I was allowed to see that he can be more human. I have especially seen that side of him these past couple of years."

"He has always been a rather serious person, especially when it came to a task he was entrusted with. I think that is why he did so well in school. His mind works differently than mine, and probably even yours," Elaine says, getting a quizzical look from April. "Don't get me wrong, you're bloody brilliant in your own right, Ms. April, but the way he thinks things through is different. I am constantly amazed at the types of solutions he can come up with for anything. It seems so logical once he says it, but he looks at situations from a viewpoint I never would have thought of."

"That is why he's a great securities specialist," April replies.

"And Lady Amanda seems to think things out in much the same way," Elaine adds.

"I don't think my father had any idea what he got into when he hired Amanda," April says with a grin. "At first I thought that hiring her to help Saber was a mistake, especially after the whole thing with Sean. But after they talked that day out in that barn, something changed between them and Saber seemed to get better. I don't mean his vision, he just seemed more confident, more comfortable with his situation. As things happened, it only seemed to make his resolve stronger, so I know now that it was a good thing she was the one hired, but I never would have thought that those years ago after the accident. Although knowing that the two of them think so much alike is a bit scary, don't you think?"

"Aye, I could see where it could be, Ms. April," Elaine replies amused. "Let's see about getting the guys to move the furniture into the room, shall we?" Elaine says pointedly ending the conversation. "The furniture is currently in the study."

"Okay," April replies as they head down the stairs to find everyone in the sitting area. "Hey Cowboy, Fireball, think you two could haul the dresser and changing table up to the room?"

"Sure thing, April," Colt replies as the two of them get up. "Where is at?"

"In the study, Mr. Wilcox," Elaine answers. "I'm going to see about finishing up dinner while you see to the furniture. Mr. Alex, would you and Ms. Sarah mind keeping an eye on the kids while we take care of things? Ms. Robin should be down soon."

"Of course, Elaine. It's no trouble at all," Alex replies.

Elaine nods and every heads off to work on their various tasks.

"Amanda, are you all right, Love?" Saber asks concern in his voice.

Amanda manages to open her eyes, only to shut them again quickly and cover them with her hand from the onslaught of light coming in the windows of the room, "Ugh. What time is it?" she asks obviously tired.

He climbs into bed and lays beside her. "It's nearly noon," Saber replies quietly next to her ear.

"Noon?" she asks hoping she misheard. "How long have you been up?" she asks quietly.

"Almost three hours. I was glad you were sleeping, so I was letting you sleep, but after so long, I became worried that you might be ill," he replies concerned.

"Perhaps I'm a little off, the sunlight seems a bit brighter than normal, but once my eyes adjust, I'll be fine," she says trying to convince herself as much as him.

He nods unconvinced, but gets up and closes the blinds to try and help her be more comfortable. "Would you like something to eat?" he asks as he sits down on the bed beside her.

Amanda slowly moves her hand away from her face and manages to look up at him, and feels a pang of guilt for his concern. "Sure, that might be good. Have you made anything?" she replies quietly.

"We have some soup I was heating up since I thought you might not be feeling well. Would you like some of that?"

Amanda nods her head slightly. "That would be good," she replies as she sits up and turns to get out of bed.

Saber places a hand on her arm to stop her. "Are you sure that's a good idea? I don't want you falling or passing out on me."

"I think I'll be okay. Would you mind staying close just in case?" she asks.

"Of course not, Love," he replies as he offers his arm.

She takes his arm, grateful for the support and manages to stand up. She is a little unsteady at first, but after a minute, she feels confident enough to let go of his arm. "Thank you. Could we eat outside, maybe?" she asks quietly.

"If you think you're up to it, I don't see why not," Saber replies.

"I think I'm going to change and then I'll join you," she states, feeling a little better as time passes.

"All right. Call for me if you need me. I'll come and see about you. Otherwise, I'll see you in a couple of minutes," he says and then heads out to gather everything for lunch outside. She heads towards the bathroom to change.

A couple of hours pass and Saber and Amanda are sitting on the shore of the lake enjoying a quiet day. They have just stood up and are packing everything up to take in when a sound from the other side of the house causes them to stop.

"What was that?" Amanda asks looking around.

"I'm not sure," Saber replies quietly. Out of instinct, he reaches for his sword. "Do you have your sword with you?" he asks quietly. Amanda nods and reaches for it. Saber holds a hand out to stop her, "Just be ready. It may be nothing but animals we're hearing," he says as he slowly approaches the side of the house, Amanda close behind him.

As they round the side, they spot several horses running loose in front of the house. "What the?" Amanda says quietly as she looks around only seeing horses. "I don't see anyone and they seemed spooked."

"Aye," Saber replies as he searches for possible attackers. "I don't see any signs of anyone else either," he replies as he sheaths his sword and slowly approaches one of the horses. He manages to calm it, as Amanda goes to another horse and helps to settle it, all the while listening and watching. After several minutes, most of the horses have settled and the pair take a closer look around.

"Saber, is that smoke over towards Jared's place?" Amanda asks pointing in the direction of the nearby farm.

Saber turns in the general direction and nods, "It appears so. Not a good sign, these could well be his horses."

"Let's call Thomas and then head over there," Amanda says.

"Let's be a little better prepared first. Do you have your blaster with you?"

Amanda nods. "It's inside. I keep the sword on me though," she replies.

"Well, we've got them calmed down, so let's go call home and get a little better armed before trying to find out what is happening. It very well could be nothing," Saber states.

They slip inside the house and head to the bedroom. Amanda gets her blaster from her travel bag and sits on the foot of the bed beside Saber, who is on the phone.

"Yes, okay we'll try and see if we can find out what is going on, Thomas. I'll call back as soon as we know something," Saber disconnects his phone and sighs, getting a concerned look from Amanda. "Thomas has been trying to raise Jared to the phone, but the call wouldn't connect. He was about to call me when I called there. I don't like it, Amanda," Saber says quietly.

"Neither do I," Amanda replies quietly. "How do you want to do this?" she asks.

"Let's take two horses. I think we could get there faster that way and with much less notice, just in case something is amiss," Saber replies.

"I think we should have a third horse. If something is wrong, we might need a way to transport people," Amanda says.

Saber nods. "Not a bad idea. Hopefully, we can keep three of them from getting spooked by whatever it is that is going on," he replies.

"Well, shall we go then?" Amanda asks as she turns towards the door.

"Aye, let's go," Saber says and they head out the back towards the stable. After rigging up the horses they are taking with them, they mount and he leads them through some of the thicker woods surround the cottage, heading in the general direction of Jared's house.

"Okay Elaine, I think we've got everything ready," April says as she gives the room one last glance.

Elaine nods looking around in approval. "Yes, I don't think they will be able to argue this point when they return. Shall we go and get the wee ones and see how they act in a new room?" Elaine asks.

April nods and the two head downstairs, where they find Sarah rocking Moria against her and Robin playing with Eryn. "How are things down here?" April asks as they come down to the sitting room.

"They're fine, April. Moria is just about asleep," Sarah replies.

"Well, then we have good timing," April replies. "The room is ready. Shall we go and lay them down and see how they do? We can try out the monitoring system too."

Sarah nods and she carefully stands up. "It's as good a time as any, I suppose," she replies.

Robin scoops up Eryn and nods. "Better to know now how they'll do rather than at night. That way, we're not all up all night with inconsolable children," Robin states as she stands up holding a squirming Eryn.

Elaine goes to speak when the phone rings. "Go on upstairs, I'll join you in a minute. I'm sure it's Lady Amanda calling again," Elaine says with a smile. April, Robin, and Sarah all head upstairs and Elaine heads to the kitchen where Thomas has already answered the phone.

"Yes, it was about half an hour ago, sir," Thomas says into the receiver. He is silent for a moment while the person on the other end of the line speaks. "I tried to call right back, but it rang once and went to a strange busy signal," he replies. Silence again and he sees Elaine and casts her a worried glance, holding up a hand for her to not question him yet. "Thank you sir, I appreciate you doing that. Call if you find out anything." Thomas hangs up the phone and looks to Elaine with a worried expression.

"What is wrong, Thomas?" Elaine asks concerned. "Has something happened?"

"I'm not sure. I was talking to Jared when he said his horses started acting strange. He asked me to hold for a moment, then came back and said that he thought someone was coming up towards the house. He started to say more, but the line cut off. I tried again to call him, but the line rang quickly, then went to a strange busy signal. I was about to call Saber, when he rang here. He and Lady Amanda are going to see if they can tell whether there is something amiss."

"So much for their vacation," Elaine says quietly, plopping down into a chair.

"So it seems. Perhaps it's nothing, Elaine," Thomas says coming and sitting beside her, placing his hand on hers.

"Let's hope so. They don't really have anyone that can back them up should something be wrong," Elaine says voicing the thoughts that are running through Thomas' head.

April comes into the room smiling brightly. "We got the girls in their room. They seem..." she stops, the smile fading once she sees the concerned look on the faces before her. "What has happened?" she asks as she takes one of the remaining empty seats at the table.

"It could be nothing, Ms. April," Thomas says. "But as a favor, Saber and Amanda are checking on my nephew, as they are close to where they are and I cannot reach him."

"Should some of us head out there to assist them? Neither one really should be

fighting," April says.

"I know, the thought had crossed my mind, but not being sure that it's anything, I am hesitant to send anyone from here towards them," Thomas replies.

April nods. "I understand. Why don't I at least talk with the others? We can discuss who will remain to help defend you and the children and who will go out should the need arise. Perhaps if we are over prepared, things will turn out to have a simple explanation."

"Thank you, Ms. April. I am glad to know that we are well protected and that some of you will go out if needed," Thomas says.

Elaine stands up and nods. "I think I shall start gathering supplies to be ready in the event we need to go to the basement once more," she says as she starts heading for the pantry.

April stands up, "I'll go and talk to the others. I'll come and see you after our discussion, please let me know if there are any updates." She turns and leaves the kitchen to look for Colt and Fireball and finds them talking in the sitting room. "Hey, have either of you seen Alex?" she asks trying to sound casual.

"I think he's upstairs," Colt replies, not looking up.

"Thanks," April replies grateful to not be asked anything yet. She heads up the stairs quickly and find him just exiting his bedroom. "Hey Alex, could you come downstairs for a few minutes?"

"Um sure," he replies hesitantly. "Is there something wrong?"

"Not sure, to be completely honest. It's more like we're setting up a plan just in case senario," April replies just as Robin and Sarah come out from the babies room. "Sarah, Robin, why don't you join us downstairs. We're having an impromptu meeting."

"Um, sure," Robin says hesitantly. "Is something wrong?" she asks.

"Let's talk downstairs, okay? I don't want to have to repeat myself several times over," April replies as she turns to head back down the stairs.

"Okay. I've got nothing else to do for the moment. Will is down for a nap and so are the girls, so lets go."