

Chapter 126 The Mountain Estate

Moana

I agreed to sleep with Edrick that night. Even though I was still a bit upset by what he had said the night before, I couldn't deny the fact that I missed him and wanted his company, especially after the fact that he saved Ella and myself from the paparazzi.

The next morning, I awoke to the sound of the shower water turning off. Edrick was already awake, and before my eyes were even fully open, he came out of the bathroom in his robe with his toothbrush in his mouth.

“Rise and shine,” he said, his mouth full of toothpaste as he rifled through his dresser drawers. “We’re leaving in an hour. You should go and pack.”

I sat up and furrowed my brow. It was still early; I knew that he had planned on leaving for the mountain estate today, but not this early. Nonetheless, I obliged and quickly rushed over to my bedroom to pack some clothes and toiletries for the upcoming few days. I packed my painting supplies and my small travel easel as well, just in case I did decide to do some painting after all.

Within the hour, all of us were packed and ready to go. Selina helped Ella pack while I got ready, so there was no lag in our preparation time. Soon enough, all of us — including Selina and the maids — were piled into the car and on our way out of the city.

“I love the mountain house!” Ella exclaimed, swinging her legs happily as Edrick drove. She had a little breakfast sandwich in her tiny hands from the bakery downstairs from the penthouse; Edrick had purchased all of us something to eat there, as we didn’t have time to eat breakfast and deal with cleaning up before we left. Once again, I was immensely grateful for the Alpha billionaire’s sudden kindness, and I was even more surprised that he still wasn’t even remotely bothered by the paparazzi incident the day before.

The ride to the mountain estate took a lot of winding and twisting roads that slowly led us up into the mountains. I could feel the air in the car begin to cool down the higher we got, which was refreshing.

But at the same time, I felt myself become motion sick from all of the twists and the turns.

When I had driven up to the mountain estate before, on the day of my interview, the road hadn’t bothered me at all. In fact, I loved the drive, and the view was amazing. However, now that I was pregnant and prone to nausea, I felt sick the entire way despite Edrick’s careful driving.

Finally, however, we reached the mountain estate before I threw up. I was relieved to finally get out of the car as quickly as possible and breathe in the sweet, chilly mountain air.

While the maids took our bags in, I took my time to walk up to the front door of the mansion. It was a huge and sprawling Tudor-style mansion that overlooked the mountain range, surrounded by tall pine trees on all sides. The pebbled walkway was lined with fountains and statues that were covered in moss, and I paused to look at one of them.

“I should have someone clean these off,” Edrick said suddenly, picking at a bit of the moss and looking at it between his fingers.

My eyes widened and I turned toward him, shaking my head vigorously. “No!” I said. “Don’t clean it off. The moss is beautiful.”

Edrick raised an eyebrow. “Really?” he said.

I nodded. “It makes everything look so lush and natural. Leave it alone. Please?”

Edrick paused, then shrugged. “I guess you’re right,” he replied thoughtfully. “Maybe I will leave it alone.”

When we walked into the mansion, Selina and the maids ran around in a frenzy opening up windows and curtains. Meanwhile, Ella ran about wildly, pounding her feet on the wooden floors. I called after her to slow down before she hurt herself, but it was too late; she was already long gone, exploring the mansion on her own. I couldn’t wait to explore the mansion, either.

Later that evening, I was finally settled into my own room. It was a sweet little room with a bay window overlooking the garden in the back, which was lit by little lights that were dotted around on the stone fence. The sun was on its way down, casting the mountains in a bluish glow. I couldn’t wait to get outside in the morning and paint the sunrise, but it had just begun to rain, and so I wouldn’t be going outside tonight.

Suddenly, I heard a knock on my door.

I looked up to see the door open and Selina’s head poke in. I waved for her to come in the rest of the way, and when she did, I saw that she was holding a long, wrapped gift box.

“Mr. Morgan wanted me to give this to you,” she said, setting the box down on the bed.

I furrowed my brow and stood from the chair I was sitting in by the window. “What is it?”

Selina merely shrugged. I tore open the wrapping paper, admittedly feeling a little excited, and my eyes widened when I saw what was inside.

It was a beautiful blue dress: soft satin with thin straps, and it came down to my ankles. I held it up to myself in the mirror, my eyes still wide. What was this sudden gift for? I almost felt a little spoiled if he really got it for me for no reason.

“What is it for?” I asked sheepishly.

“Mr. Morgan wants you to have dinner tonight,” she said. I swore I could see a hint of a smile on her lips. “And he wants you to wear that.”

Once again, I was taken aback by Edrick’s sudden kindness. Despite everything that happened with the paparazzi the day before, he continued to be nothing but kind and sweet to me. Not only that, but he was even kind and sweet even after I clearly hurt him the other night by mentioning that I might fall in love with someone else if we could only ever have a fake relationship.

Was this Edrick’s way of making me feel better for everything, or was he secretly apologizing? I couldn’t deny the fact, either, that I secretly hoped deep down that this was his way of showing that maybe he would want a real relationship someday.

And Mina seemed to feel the same way.

She reacted strongly as I held the dress up to myself in the mirror. She had been reacting strongly to Edrick’s presence ever since he saved me from the Rogues, but it was only getting more intense every day. I couldn’t help but wonder if she was beginning to think that Edrick might be my mate, but at the same time, I knew that she still wasn’t strong enough yet to realize something like that. But I did know that she liked Edrick a lot, and she wanted to get closer to him.

And I wanted to get closer to him, too.

Chapter 127 Dinner for Two

Moana

Selina helped me put on the dress. It fit like a glove, and even showed off my growing belly a bit. As I stood in the mirror while Selina fixed up my hair, I couldn't help but smile a bit while I looked at my belly in the dress.

Even though I didn't particularly like the concept of not being in a real relationship and only being in a fake one, I was relieved to finally not have to hide my pregnancy. Now that everything was out in the open, I could finally enjoy the early stages of pregnancy when my belly was beginning to show the little life that was growing inside of me. Before, I had been nervous about what would happen when my belly was too big to hide anymore, but now I couldn't wait. The thought of walking down the street with Ella's hand in mine and my other hand on my big pregnant belly — once the paparazzi calmed down and it was safer to go out, of course — made me smile.

When Selina was finished with my hair, I headed downstairs to meet Edrick.

He was sitting at a small table by the window in the dining room when I arrived. The room was dark, aside from the light emanating from little candles that were scattered around, and he stood up as soon as he saw me.

For a few moments, Edrick just stood there and stared at me. Even in the darkness, I could see his eyes wandering my body, admiring the dress. It made me blush, but I didn't mind. Having him look at me like that made me happy; I felt like the lady of the house, even though I wasn't really.

Finally, Edrick tore his eyes away from my dress and cleared his throat. "Do you like the dress?" he asked.

I nodded, feeling my hands tremble a bit with nerves as I approached the table. "It's perfect," I said sheepishly as he pulled the chair out for me so I could sit. "Thank you."

"Good," he said as he sat across from me. "I was worried you wouldn't like it."

There were two covered silver platters in front of us, and crystal glasses filled with what looked like wine. I was a bit confused at first as to why Edrick would give me wine knowing that I was pregnant, but he quickly explained when he saw the look on my face.

"Sparkling grape juice for you," he said. "Non-alcoholic. And wine for me."

I nodded and blushed a bit. Of course Edrick wouldn't try to give me alcohol when I was pregnant, and I felt a bit silly for thinking that. He then lifted the covers off of our plates to reveal two decadent meals of what looked like lamb, fresh vegetables, and garnished with little sprigs of rosemary. My eyes widened at the beautiful meals, and finally I couldn't contain my curiosity any longer.

"What's all of this for?" I asked. "This is so nice of you."

"What, a man can't simply want to take care of the mother of his child?" Edrick asked with a bit of a smile.

My face went red. I was taken aback by his caring nature, but something told me that it wasn't just him simply wanting to take care of me. All of this felt too romantic for that... The candles, the dress, the beautiful meal. It was different from all of the other times that he doted on me.

Edrick's smile faded then as he looked at me. He seemed to be struggling to say something, but it finally came out.

"I hope you won't want to leave," he said quietly. "Maybe... I don't want you to leave."

My eyes widened at Edrick's words. Was this true? Did he really want me to stay?

But then, as I opened my mouth to respond, he suddenly changed the subject.

We ate dinner together peacefully with light conversation after that. The rich, juicy flavor of the lamb combined with the taste of the vegetables, which almost tasted as though they had been pulled out of the ground on that very day, made me completely forget my nausea from before. And in fact, the longer we sat and ate together, the more comfortable I became. If I tried hard enough, I could almost convince myself that we really were husband and wife having a romantic dinner together. And even though it might not have been the healthiest thing to tell myself, I decided that it was okay to feel that way for just one night.

After dinner, Edrick stood and opened the set of French doors by the table, letting in the cool mountain air.

"Let's sit on the porch," he said, taking his glass of wine and the wine bottle in one hand, then my glass and the bottle of sparkling juice in the other.

I followed, still awed by our wonderful dinner together. Edrick led me around the huge wraparound porch to a small sitting area. There were two

chairs and a little side table there, which he set our drinks on and refilled our glasses. While he did that, I couldn't help but lean on the railing and let the light rain mist my face for a few moments.

Everything outside the porch was pitch black by now, but I didn't mind. The darkness and the sound of nothing but the crickets was a welcome reprieve from the noise and the lights of the city, and I hoped that we could spend more time here in the future. No matter how much I loved the city, I still felt tired of all of the noise sometimes, but I had never really had a chance to get away from it all. There was only one time in college where I managed to scrape together enough money from babysitting and waitressing to take a little weekend trip out of town, but it wasn't nearly as nice as this. Now, I felt like I was living in the lap of luxury in this gorgeous Tudor mansion.

When I finally turned back around, Edrick was already sitting in one of the chairs with his glass of wine in his hand. I thought I caught him looking at me again, but he quickly darted his eyes away and busied himself with drinking his wine while I sat down next to him.

Neither of us spoke much as we sat outside, aside from the occasional comment or question. But it was a comfortable quietness, and it felt natural, as though we had been doing this for years.

Eventually, Edrick finished his bottle of wine. When I looked over at him, his cheeks were a bit rosy from the alcohol and there was a slight smile twitching at the corners of his lips. He seemed a little drunk.

"It's getting late," he said then, standing. "We should go to bed."

I nodded and went to stand — but before I could, Edrick held out his hand for me to take.

I took his hand quietly, unsure as to what was happening. But when he led me up the stairs, past my room and over to his room instead, I couldn't

help myself from blushing an even deeper shade of red when I realized that he wanted me to stay with him again that night.

“D-Do you want to sign another contract?” I whispered, our bodies close in the dark hallway.

Edrick merely smiled and shook his head.

Chapter 128 A Child's Laughter

Moana

That night, I fell asleep next to Edrick with a full heart. I couldn't help but wonder if all of this meant that our relationship might go further than simply being a fake relationship, but I didn't want to spend too much time getting my hopes up in case things didn't work out as planned. All I knew was that my wolf was happy to be near him, and I was also happy to be near him. Edrick seemed happier than usual as well, and it made me think that maybe things would at least be just a little different after our mini vacation at the mountain estate.

The next morning, I awoke to the feeling of Edrick's warm arms around me. I was turned toward him with my face buried comfortably in his chest, so close I could feel his heartbeat. We had fallen asleep the night before with a respectable distance between us as we didn't want to get too close, but it seemed that we simply couldn't avoid getting close to one another in our sleep. However, I couldn't deny that feeling him this close to me gave me a sense of safety and comfort.

Edrick's eyes opened shortly after mine did; he rarely ever slept any longer after I woke up, as though he needed me to be asleep beside him in order for him to sleep as well. I felt my heart begin to race as his gray eyes looked down at me, expecting him to pull away.

But he didn't. For several long, quiet minutes we just looked at each other as the sun shined on us and the cool, fragrant mountain air wafted in through the open window. His arms stayed firmly wrapped around me, holding me close to his body and keeping me warm in the chilly morning air. He was so much bigger than me, but our bodies fit perfectly together like two puzzle pieces.

Neither of us pulled away, in fact, until we suddenly heard a knock on the door. I gasped and quickly moved away with the intention of jumping out of bed and hiding in the closet so as not to be seen, but Edrick's hand shot out and wrapped around my wrist, stopping me before I could.

"Daddy?" Ella's tiny voice called through the door. "Are you awake?"

My eyes widened, but Edrick stayed surprisingly calm.

"Come in, Princess," he said, releasing his grip on my wrist as my heart pounded even harder. How was he not panicking? We weren't together romantically — or at least, we weren't supposed to be — and therefore we shouldn't have been sleeping in the same bed. It would have been difficult enough already to admit our sleeping arrangement to the maids, let alone Ella. And yet, Edrick didn't seem concerned in the slightest. What changed?

The door cracked open then, and Ella shuffled in with her stuffed duck under her arm and her hair a mess from sleeping all night. Her tired eyes didn't catch me at first as she walked up to her father's side of the bed, but when they finally did, her jaw dropped.

"Moana?" Ella said, rubbing her eyes with one hand. "What are you doing in here?"

I opened my mouth to respond, but nothing would come out. However, Edrick seemed to have it handled already, and what he said next took me by complete surprise.

“Moana and I sleep in the same room now,” Edrick said matter-of-factly, as though it was only natural for the two of us to sleep together. I was completely taken aback by the fact that he so casually admitted our sleeping arrangement to his daughter, and my heart pounded even harder as I wondered how Ella would react. Would she get the wrong idea and wonder again why we weren’t married? Would she resent me and feel as though I was stealing her daddy away from her? Maybe they had a morning ritual of playing together sometimes and she thought that my presence would only get in the way of her bonding time with her father.

Ella was silent for a few moments. Her blue eyes flickered back and forth between Edrick and I as she looked at us both, processing what Edrick said. I feared the worst.

But, much to my surprise, Ella merely shrugged and clambered up onto the bed with her stuffed duck in tow. “Okay,” she said with a grunt as she hauled her tiny body up onto the tall bed without any help. She seemed just as nonchalant about the situation as her father; I couldn’t quite tell if Edrick’s own nonchalance made her feel at ease, or if she was simply expecting things like this to happen between Edrick and I at this point.

“I want to go on a walk today,” Ella said, nestling herself down between the two of us with her stuffed duck in her arms. “Can we go?”

Edrick chuckled. “Sure,” he said, “but you’ll have to pay the toll first.”

“The toll?” Ella asked, sitting up again and c*****g her head to the side.

I watched as Edrick grinned. In the morning sunlight, he looked even more handsome with a smile on his face. “Yep,” he said, “you have to pay a fee to the tickle monster!”

“No!” Ella shrieked, but it was already too late. Edrick grabbed her and began tickling her furiously, causing her to scream with laughter as she kicked her little legs and threw her stuffed duck in an attempt to get away. “Not the tickle monster!”

Edrick let out a comical, cartoonish laugh that sounded like an evil villain as he kept playfully terrorizing Ella. I couldn't help but grin and laugh along with them. A rush of emotion for both of them came over me at that moment, and I swore for the briefest of moments that I really did feel like Edrick's wife and Ella's mother as I watched them play together. Seeing Edrick act so openly and candidly with his daughter made my heart fill with warmth, and as he began tossing Ella in the air and causing her giggles to grow even louder, I couldn't stop smiling.

Seeing them like this together made me so happy, and I was glad that we had decided to get out of the city after all. It seemed that a bit of fresh air and a slower pace away from the hustle and bustle and noise of the city was something that we all needed, and I felt my own stress beginning to melt away, too.

And yet, at the same time, I couldn't deny the fact that there was a tiny pang of confusion deep within me still.

As I watched Ella and Edrick play together, I was smiling. I loved seeing them like this, and it warmed me to see the once-cold and indifferent Alpha billionaire acting in such a silly way with his daughter in front of me. But that feeling of confusion was relentless, and it put a bit of a damper on the moment.

I just wished that my relationship with Edrick didn't have to be so complicated. If only it could be simple, as simple and pure and natural as the love he had for his daughter.

Chapter 129 Wildflowers

Moana

Later that morning, after enjoying breakfast in the garden in the fresh air with Ella and Edrick, Ella reminded Edrick that she wanted to go for a hike. Edrick of course agreed, as it was nice outside.

“Go put your shoes on,” he said. “And pants, too. I don’t want you falling down in a dress.”

“Okay!” Ella exclaimed as she sprinted off to her room to get changed.

Edrick stood and stretched, accidentally revealing the lower portion of his abs as he did so. He was dressed casually in a simple polo shirt and trousers, which was strange to see as I had grown so accustomed to seeing him only dressed in business attire. He must have forgotten that he wasn’t wearing his shirt tucked in when he stretched, and seeing even just a small portion of his abs made me blush a deep shade of red.

“We won’t be out for too long,” Edrick said then. “Feel free to explore anywhere you want in the mansion or the gardens while we’re out.”

Although the thought of exploring the mansion sounded fun, I furrowed my brow. It was too beautiful outside, and I had been looking forward to going on a nice walk.

“I was thinking I would go with you, actually,” I said, standing from the table.

Edrick pursed his lips and looked at me. His eyes traveled down to my belly; he seemed hesitant.

“Are you sure it’s a good idea?” he asked. “I don’t want you to get sick or get hurt if it’s too much exertion.”

I put my hands on my hips and frowned. “I’m only a few months pregnant. I’m not a complete invalid just yet. Besides, it’s only a walk.”

Edrick paused and chewed the inside of his lower lip for a few moments before finally nodding. “Alright,” he replied. “I guess some exercise could be good for you and the baby.”

I couldn’t help but grin. I thought it was sweet that Edrick was so concerned about our baby, but I knew that he worried too much when it came to certain things. I had always been somewhat athletic, and never had any problems with exercising. Being a few months pregnant may have stopped me from doing crazy things like rock climbing or downhill skiing, but a nice hike through the forest was something that I knew I could handle. Besides, the doctor told me that exercise was extremely healthy for the baby, and I had done enough research of my own to learn that many women could do all sorts of athletic things, even while they were eight or nine months pregnant. Once, I even read about a woman who was a marathon runner and kept winning marathons up until her water broke!

Now that Edrick agreed to let me go with them, I quickly ran upstairs and changed out of my dress and into something more suitable for a hike. Once I was ready, I headed back downstairs with Ella’s hand in mine and met Edrick outside.

As we began to follow the path that led into the woods, I couldn’t help but notice that Edrick kept glancing at me on occasion while we walked. He seemed to be looking at my outfit, and I didn’t realize it until a while later that he had never seen me in anything that wasn’t purely professional. Now, I was wearing a simple t-shirt and jeans with boots and a zip-up hoodie on top, with my hair up in a bun, and he almost seemed fascinated

by it. Seeing the way he looked at me made me blush and feel a bit embarrassed until I realized that I had looked at him the same way earlier. In a strange way, seeing each other in casual clothing almost felt like another layer of the barrier between us being peeled away.

While we walked, I couldn't help but feel relaxed. The cool mountain air smelled sweetly of pine trees as we walked further into the forest, and the quiet sound of the forest around us was extremely relaxing. Every so often, Ella would run ahead with a flower or a cool rock or anything else that she would demand for Edrick to keep in his pocket, and soon enough his pockets were bursting with rocks and acorns.

Eventually, however, Edrick's phone rang. I tried not to look as he pulled it out of his back pocket, but I couldn't keep myself and took a quick peek, only to see that it was none other than his father.

As soon as Edrick saw his father's name on the screen, his face went dark. Before, he had been smiling and chatting happily, but now he was sullen and gloomy like the flick of a switch.

"I'll be right back," he growled. Before I could answer, he stormed off a ways into the woods to answer the phone.

Meanwhile, Ella ran in circles around me, picking little wildflowers. I stayed where I was and sat down on a large boulder to rest my feet, keeping an eye on Ella while Edrick was busy. I hoped that his father wasn't berating him for announcing our "relationship", but I knew that that was probably exactly what was happening.

"Here, Moana!" Ella said, running up to me. Her fist was full of wildflowers and she shoved it in my face to show me all of the delicate petals and muted colors. "It's for the baby!"

I couldn't help but tear up as I took the flowers from Ella. "Aww, love," I said, touching the flowers gently, "is it really?"

Ella nodded vigorously. “Mhm,” she said. “I picked lots of daisies, see? And Selina once told me that those flowers are called... Hmm...” She pointed thoughtfully at one of the flowers. It was a cluster of white flowers that were spread out on their stem in an umbrella-like shape, causing the petals to look almost like lace.

“Those are called Queen Anne’s Lace,” I said.

Ella’s eyes lit up. “Yes! Queen Anne’s Lace!” she exclaimed. “If the baby’s a girl, I think you should name her after the flowers... Daisy Anne!”

I smiled. It was a name that I hadn’t thought of yet, but it was sweet, and I knew that I wouldn’t forget it. Daisy Anne... I liked that name.

But then, suddenly, this sweet moment with Ella was suddenly broken when she gasped and pointed out at something in the distance, her eyes wide. “M-Moana,” she said, taking a few steps backwards. “W-Wolf!”

I quickly jumped up and stood in front of her, looking out toward where she was pointing.

Just as Ella said, there was a wolf out there... And it was stalking toward us. It was large and gray, with bright yellow eyes that were fixed directly on the both of us. I accidentally dropped the flowers as I quickly grabbed Ella’s hand and backed away, keeping her behind me.

“Stay behind me, Ella,” I said, feeling a knot form in my throat. The wolf was coming straight for us as though it had a mission to come for us.

And the closer the wolf got, the more I could hear its low, threatening growls rumbling in its throat.

If this wolf decided to attack us, Ella and I would be defenseless. As I opened my mouth, I only hoped that Edrick was still close enough to hear me when I called his name.

“Edrick! Help!”

Chapter 130 Too Many Scandals

Edrick

If I thought that Moana looked beautiful in her new dress the night before, then she looked even more stunning now dressed plainly in hiking clothes. I had never seen her dressed so casually before, and although I couldn't quite put my finger on why I felt this way, I felt even more attracted to her when she was dressed like this. Maybe it had something to do with the fact that for a moment, as the three of us walked together and enjoyed nature away from the noise and the chaos of the city, it almost felt as though we were a normal little family that was simply out for a hike on a nice summer's morning.

I had never told anyone this before, but I had never particularly enjoyed following in my father's footsteps. I always knew that it was expected of me from a very young age, but I had secretly always envied other boys who didn't have such high expectations. In college, as I watched my friends go on to follow their dreams and become artists or teachers or adventurers, I resented the fact that my path was set in stone that was laid down by someone else before me. I never even had a say in it; no matter how much I just wanted to play the piano and enjoy being young and free, I had no choice but to become the next WereCorp CEO.

And I got used to it, for the most part.

But ever since I met Moana, it was times like this that reminded me that I just wanted a quiet life. Sure, the money was nice, but I wanted to live here all of the time, not in the city; I only really lived there most of the time to be close to WereCorp. It was times like this, which were rare, when I realized just how much I hated being a CEO. And seeing Moana in jeans and a hoodie, with her curly red hair piled on top of her head and with Ella running ahead of us and collecting little rocks and things to line up on her windowsill, made me feel at peace. If only we didn't have to go back and return to the city.

That spell was quickly broken, however, by the feeling of my phone vibrating. When I saw my father's name on the screen, I almost considered declining the call... But I knew that it would only make things worse, and he was already too mad at me for everything. Even though it broke our peace, I knew that I needed to do some damage control.

I didn't want Moana or Ella to overhear my conversation with my father and ruin our walk, so I quickly excused myself and walked off out of earshot before I answered.

"Hello?" I answered.

Of course, just as I expected, my father didn't even bother to greet me before he started laying into me. "I can't believe that my own son would cause so much trouble," he growled, without so much as a hello. "You've done nothing but create scandal after scandal recently. Are you going to take control of yourself, or do I need to take control for you?"

I froze, feeling my blood run cold at my father's harsh words. And in that moment, maybe I was a bit disrespectful as well when I said the first thing that came to my mind. "You do have another son, you know," I replied, feeling myself fill with fire as I spoke. "Why don't you appoint him as WereCorp CEO?"

My father scoffed. “Don’t be ridiculous,” he snarled. “And control your temper; not just with me, but with others. At the very least, control your temper in public. I could care less what you do at home.”

I knew that he was talking about the incident where I punched the paparazzi the day before, but I didn’t care. If anything, that whole incident helped us teach the paparazzi a lesson, and I was only doing what any father would do to protect his daughter and the mother of his unborn child.

In fact, I opened my mouth to say that, but quickly stopped when I suddenly heard my name being called.

“Edrick! Help!”

Moana. Her voice sounded scared. I didn’t waste a moment before abruptly hanging up the phone and taking off at a sprint toward Moana and Ella, my mind racing with a million possibilities. Had Ella fallen and gotten hurt? Had Moana gotten hurt?

However, it was much different than that.

When I finally burst back out onto the trail and found Moana and Ella, they were both cowering behind a boulder, shaking and crying. Moana pointed to something that made my blood run cold.

It was a wolf.

And it wasn’t just any wolf; it was a Rogue in its wolf form. I could smell it.

Without a moment of hesitation, I jumped in front of Moana and Ella and did what any protective Alpha would do: I growled, deep and low. I could feel my eyes begin to glow, and I awakened my wolf in case I would need to shift and fight this thing off.

But, thankfully, the Rogue seemed to take the hint. In a cowardly fashion, as soon as it heard my growl it turned tail and took off into the woods like a bolt of lightning.

Once it was gone, I quickly turned around and ran over to Moana and Ella, reassuring them that it was okay; but we needed to leave. I picked up Ella and carried her while Moana followed alongside me, and I instinctively reached out and wrapped my free arm around Moana as well, occasionally glancing over my shoulder to make sure that the Rogue didn't decide to come back for more. Thankfully, my growl seemed to scare it off for good.

But regardless, I couldn't shake that feeling of impending danger. The mountain estate was secluded and it wasn't entirely unfeasible for strangers to accidentally stumble onto the vast property, but this seemed deliberate. When I found them, the wolf was stalking straight toward them as though it was on a mission — like someone sent it here.

Maybe I was just being paranoid, but the whole thing felt suspicious. The timing was too perfect; just moments after I walked away and left Ella and Moana alone in the woods, a Rogue suddenly appeared and seemed to have its sights set on them. I wondered for a moment if it had something to do with the fact that Moana was special, and that she was even possibly the Golden Wolf, but it didn't make any sense; she didn't have a continuous scent yet, and I would have noticed if she had suddenly released her scent. Not only that, but her scent would have repelled the Rogue. No... This felt different, but I couldn't quite explain why.

Either way, I didn't feel safe here anymore. And neither did Ella and Moana. Even though I wanted to stay here in the peace and quiet forever, I knew that staying in our urban penthouse would be safer until I got to the bottom of this and knew that Moana would be safe, so I decided to have everyone pack up early and head home that night.

At first, I thought Moana would be upset that we had to leave so early. But thankfully, she only agreed with me. I knew that she had an intuition that something was wrong, too.