

Chapter 131 Under Pressure

Moana

Even though I was enjoying spending time at the mountain estate, it seemed that maybe it wasn't very safe here right now. Edrick didn't say much about it, but he seemed to be worried ever since that wolf came after Ella and myself, and I couldn't help but wonder if he knew something that I didn't. I trusted Edrick to make the right decisions, so when he told me that it was best for us to return to the penthouse for now, I agreed. My only regret was that I didn't have any time to paint while we were there, and I hoped that I would have another chance to paint soon.

When we finally arrived back at the penthouse, it was already late that night. Selina and the maids prepared a quick meal, but I was too tired and uneasy after what happened to have much of an appetite, and only wanted to go to sleep. Ella was hardly keeping her eyes open, too, so I put her to bed before heading over to Edrick's room to get some sleep myself.

I couldn't stop myself from feeling worried, though. Edrick had been extremely quiet ever since what happened in the forest; in fact, he had been quiet ever since his father called him that morning. I couldn't help but wonder if it was because of me, and if this would mean that he would distance himself from me again.

“Don’t worry,” Mina said, noticing my anxiety. “He’ll come around. He just needs a little time. But I know that he cares about you deeply, so you shouldn’t worry about it too much.”

Even though I wasn’t entirely sure if I believed Mina, I supposed that she had never been wrong about this sort of thing before. Maybe she was right; maybe Edrick just needed a little time to come around and sort some things out. He had already shown me so many times just how much he cared about me. The way he treated me at the mountain estate, even after the horrible things I said to him when he announced our “relationship” and after I put Ella and my baby in danger by being exposed to the paparazzi, he had still treated me lovingly, almost like his real wife. Even as I laid there now, waiting for him to come to bed, I could still feel his warm arms around me from that morning and I could still see the softness in his eyes.

However, as I laid there waiting for Edrick, he never came to bed. I found that it was becoming more and more difficult to sleep without him ever since the incident in the Rogue district, and so I stayed awake in bed, waiting for him with my eyes fixed on the canopy above the bed. It was well after midnight now, and I still hadn’t seen or heard him, so I began to get worried. I thought that maybe he fell asleep at his desk or got too absorbed in work to notice what time it was, so I quietly got out of bed and threw my robe on before walking out into the living room.

Just as I suspected, Edrick was still in his study. I could see a little bit of light pouring out from underneath the door, and I walked over to knock and see why he wasn’t coming to bed, but before I could I froze when I heard him talking to someone.

His voice was raised, and it sounded strained and frustrated.

“I know you sent that thing,” Edrick growled, sounding exasperated. “Just admit it. Were you just trying to scare them, or are you actually such a horrible person that you would try to hurt a pregnant woman and a child?”

Edrick paused, as though he was listening. Was he talking to his father? It sounded as though he was referring to the incident with the wolf earlier that day. I had thought that it was just a random wolf that happened to stumble upon us in the woods, but judging from the way that Edrick was talking about it, I realized that maybe it wasn't so simple as that. I froze as I heard what he said next.

“I knew it. You're not going to get your way. Not with me here to protect them. If you want to hurt them, you'll have to hurt me, first, dad.”

My eyes widened. So, he was talking to his father. Had his father really sent a wolf — a Rogue, possibly — to attack us?

I supposed that I should have expected that he wanted to hurt me. I was, after all, a threat to his family's image. But to put his granddaughter, as well as an unborn child, in harm's way... It made me sick. I instinctively put my hand over my belly protectively as though that would be any help if Michael were to try to harm us again, and wondered if he would only continue to be a threat even after my baby was born. As long as Michael was alive, would we ever feel completely safe if he was really so cruel as to put a child and a pregnant woman in harm's way?

Suddenly, I heard the unmistakable sound of Edrick slamming the phone down. I bit my lip as I stood there in the darkness outside his study door, wondering if I should go in there and talk to him. I knew that he needed someone to be there for him, and I understood his frustrations. If I could only show him that he could be open with me, then I knew he would feel better. He was putting too much pressure on himself by not talking about these things, and I needed him to understand that he didn't need to take his father on alone when he had me.

I decided then that I would go in there and talk to him.

But just as I was about to put my hand out to knock on the door, I heard him speak again.

“Olivia?” he said, sounding even more exasperated than before. “What do you want now? It’s almost one o’clock in the morning.”

I froze once more. This Olivia person... Again? Who was she, and why was she always calling Edrick in the middle of the night? I thought back to the night that we kissed in the kitchen, when he mentioned that someone from his past always called relentlessly around this time of year, and I knew that it was “Olivia”, but I still didn’t understand why. Was she an ex-girlfriend? A family member? An estranged friend?

“Not this again,” he growled. “I’ve given you enough. Stop calling me.”

Edrick suddenly hung up then. I felt my heart leap into my throat, and out of instinct I quickly ran out of the room and jumped back into Edrick’s bed before he could realize that I was eavesdropping.

But as I laid there, pretending to be asleep while Edrick quietly entered the room finally and got ready for bed, I couldn’t stop thinking about everything I had heard. Why was Edrick’s father so hell-bent on harming me, even going so far as to put his granddaughter and his second unborn grandchild in harm’s way? Would any of us be safe so long as he was in the picture?

And, secondly... Who was Olivia, and why was she calling Edrick so much?

Chapter 132 The Coincidence

Moana

I woke up the next morning with the memory of what I overheard still fresh on my mind. To not only hear that Michael had sent that wolf to attack us, but also to hear that “Olivia” called Edrick again, left me feeling both confused and scared. If my baby was going to be in danger of someone like Michael, I didn’t know what I would do. I could only trust that Edrick would handle it and keep us protected.

It was Saturday morning, which meant that it was also a training day for Ella. I woke up early to get her ready, and decided that I would go to the orphanage and volunteer while Ella was in training. The last time I was at the orphanage, I discovered that Sophia was in need of help, so I decided that I would spend every Saturday morning that I could helping her out. I just hoped that she wouldn’t be too upset with me for not telling her about the baby sooner, as I was certain that she likely saw the news by now.

“I’m going to the orphanage while Ella is in training today,” I told Edrick as we ate breakfast together. “I’ll be volunteering for Sophia on Saturdays now.”

Edrick furrowed his brow as he took a sip of his coffee. He seemed a bit concerned, which I understood; with everything that had happened recently between the Rogue district and the Rogue that came to attack us

in the woods, it was no wonder that he was worried about letting me spend time out of the house by myself.

“Well, at least bring a bodyguard with you,” he said, somewhat sternly. “I don’t want you going anywhere alone from now on.”

I agreed, only because I was constantly reminding myself of Edrick’s phone call with Michael the night before. But on the way to Ella’s training and then the orphanage after that, I couldn’t deny the fact that I felt a bit uncomfortable having a bodyguard follow me around. However, I knew that it was the safest thing to do, and the bodyguard that Edrick hired was very nice. In fact, as I sat down at the front desk and began my work for Sophia, I couldn’t help but smile when I heard the children pestering the bodyguard and making him play with them.

Sophia, just as I suspected, was a little sullen when she saw me.

“I do wish that you told me sooner,” she said, setting a cup of tea down on the desk in front of me. “I would have preferred to hear it from you instead of from the news.”

I felt myself blush a bit. “I know,” I replied. “I’m sorry. I didn’t know that Edrick was going to announce it like that.”

Sophia sighed, then shrugged. Finally, a bit of a smile spread across her face and she reached out from across the desk to squeeze my hand. “I’m happy for you. You’re going to make a wonderful mother.”

Sophia’s words made me smile. She didn’t mention my relationship with Edrick, however, which was a relief; I didn’t feel like I was in the mood to explain that entire mess to anyone, let alone Sophia — although I was certain that she already had a good idea as to what was really going on, anyway. After the past week, I felt even more confused about my relationship with Edrick than ever. I just hoped that Mina was right when she told me that I just needed to give Edrick time, and then he would want to have more than a fake relationship. If it was going to be confusing like

this forever, I wasn't so sure if I would be able to handle it, let alone how our future child would handle it. How could I explain to our son or daughter that their mommy and daddy weren't really married, but were instead only pretending to be? I couldn't imagine that going well.

Thankfully, however, I was able to stop thinking about these things and keep myself busy with work for a few hours. The phone rang almost nonstop; it seemed that Edrick's foundation was bringing a lot of attention to the orphanage, and there were a lot of couples who wanted to get started with the adoption process. Not only that, but there were a lot of potential donors who called to make appointments so they could tour the orphanage, as well as other people who wanted to volunteer. Between all of the phone calls and workers coming in to make repairs thanks to the money from the foundation, I was busy nonstop during the few hours that I was there. No wonder Sophia was having a hard time keeping up; working at the front desk was a full-time job in and of itself.

Everything went smoothly for the few hours that I was there. Or, at least, it did up until the very end.

It was only a few minutes before I had to leave to pick up Ella. The phone calls had died down a bit, so I was getting ready to leave. Just before I got up from the desk, however, the phone rang one last time and I answered.

"Bayside Orphanage," I answered politely. "How can I help you?"

"Hi!" a cheerful, female voice said on the other end. She sounded young — about my age. "I'd like to make an appointment. I'm interested in adopting."

I smiled, thrilled once more to hear that more people were interested in adopting. It made my heart swell to know that some of the children who were here would finally be going to homes with loving families.

"Sure," I replied, opening up the appointment book. "What's your name?"

"Olivia."

My blood suddenly ran cold. This couldn't possibly be the Olivia, could it? The same Olivia who called Edrick relentlessly in the middle of the night? It couldn't be... This woman sounded perfectly nice, not at all like the disturbance that Edrick made her out to be. I couldn't imagine that the lovely young woman on the other end of the phone was the same woman who pestered Edrick for money on an almost nightly basis. Surely it was just a coincidence.

Swallowing the lump in my throat, I decided that it was really just nothing but a coincidence — Olivia wasn't an uncommon name, after all — and that I was just being paranoid.

“Okay, Olivia,” I said as I looked through the appointment book. “Can you come in on Wednesday next week at ten o'clock in the morning?”

The young woman paused for a few moments before answering.

“Hm... Actually, can I come in on a Saturday? I work all week.”

“Uh, sure,” I replied. “I'll put you in for next Saturday at ten o'clock.”

Olivia thanked me and we hung up. I kept telling myself that it really was just a coincidence, but something in me felt as though there was something fishy about all of this. Was it possible that Olivia was an ex-girlfriend of Edrick's who found out about our “relationship” and wanted to confront me in person?

No, I thought to myself as I followed the bodyguard out to the car to go and pick up Ella. You're just being paranoid.

And so, I swallowed the odd feeling of dread in my throat and left to pick up Ella from training, deciding that the Olivia who just called the orphanage was simply nothing more than a coincidence.

Chapter 133 Pizza Party

Moana

By the time I picked up Ella and took her home, I had almost completely forgotten about the woman named Olivia who called the orphanage. Ella and I spent the remainder of the afternoon drawing and playing in the penthouse, and by the time that dinnertime came around, I was too tired and hungry after my long day to think about much of anything.

“Let’s get ready for dinner, Ella,” I said. I wasn’t sure what Selina and the maids planned on preparing for dinner that night, but I looked forward to sitting down and relaxing a bit. I helped Ella clean up her coloring books and toys, then had her wash her hands and clean herself up before we headed back out to the dining room to eat.

However, when we walked into the dining room, I was surprised to find that there was no dinner. In fact, when I poked my head into the kitchen, it didn’t seem that Selina and the maids were preparing anything at all. The three of them were seated around the kitchen island with tea and their own meals, but nothing else had been prepared.

I was about to open my mouth to ask if I should prepare something for myself and Ella — which I didn’t mind doing at all — when I suddenly heard the elevator doors open and Edrick’s voice came bellowing through the penthouse.

“I brought pizza!” he called. As he spoke, I could already smell it, and my mouth instantly began to water. I hadn’t had pizza in ages, but even more than that, I was surprised to hear that the Alpha billionaire actually bought take-out pizza for dinner.

“Yay! Pizza party!” Ella shouted. She took off running into her bedroom, leaving me standing in the middle of the dining room with a puzzled expression on my face.

Edrick came in then and set the pizza down on the table. “What are you doing still dressed?” he asked, eyeing me. “Put your pajamas on. It’s time for a pizza party.”

I was utterly shocked. Not only had the maids and Selina not mentioned that we were supposed to be having a “pizza party” tonight, but I was also shocked to find that Edrick wanted us to eat in our pajamas. But before I could ask why, Edrick walked out of the dining room and disappeared into his own bedroom.

I could only stare at Selina and the maids in shock. Selina chuckled when she saw the confused look on my face.

“He does this every so often,” she said. “It makes Ella happy.”

“Oh.” I was still taken aback, but it made sense that Edrick might want to make Ella happy after all of the stress she’d been through lately. I decided not to question it any further and went to my room to put on a set of pajamas that I felt comfortable wearing in front of everybody, then headed back out to the living room to see that Edrick and Ella were already seated on the floor in front of the television with plates of pizza in their hands.

“Come sit and grab some pizza,” Edrick said, nodding his head toward a cushion on the floor that he set out for me. “Ella, do you want to pick out a movie?”

As I sat down sheepishly and picked up a plate of cheesy, gooey pizza that made my mouth water even more, Ella puzzled over which movie to pick

until she finally landed on an animated children's movie with talking animals.

Together, the three of us sat on the floor and watched the movie while we ate pizza. Even though it felt a bit awkward at first to do something so casual with the Alpha billionaire, I couldn't deny the fact that it was a lot of fun. With my belly full of delicious pizza, there was a bit of a smile on my face as I occasionally glanced over at Ella and Edrick sitting together in the dark room with only the glow of the television to illuminate them. Eventually, we moved from the floor to the couch, and Edrick held Ella tightly in his arms while she watched the movie.

In an odd way, just in the same way that it felt when we hiked together in our casual close, it felt both strange and comforting to see this relaxed and playful side of Edrick. I had never seen him do anything so spontaneous like this, and during those moments, it really did feel like we were a normal little family enjoying quality time together. I couldn't help but rest my hand on my belly as we sat and watched the movie, thinking about how we would soon have another addition to our makeshift family for nights like this, no matter how rare they were. Besides, seeing how sweet and caring Edrick was with Ella warmed my heart, as I thought about how he would treat our child the same way. Even though our relationship was still complicated, it was a relief to know that I was bringing a child into a world with a man who cared so deeply about his children, even though he didn't seem like the type when I first met him.

I couldn't help but wonder, though, if he really was like this when I met him and that he just didn't show it, or if he relaxed more since I met him. Just a few months ago, he was a cold and ruthless Alpha billionaire who seemed to spend all of his time working and hardly paid any attention to Ella. But now, here he was, spontaneously bringing home pizza and watching children's movies on the couch in his pajamas. Not only that, but to think about how sweet he had been when he took us to the mountain estate, even though it wound up going wrong in the end, made me think

even more that the Alpha CEO was becoming more and more of a family man by the day. And in a lot of ways, it made me feel safe in knowing that I made the right decision to keep our baby and stay here with him and Ella.

At one point, I must have spent too much time looking over at Edrick in the darkness, watching how handsome his face looked even in the dim blue glow of the television, and he seemed to notice me looking. He glanced over at me, but I didn't look away at first, and we held our gaze for a long few moments.

During those moments, I felt Mina reacting strongly inside of me. I knew that she wanted me to get closer to Edrick, but at the same time, I still felt too confused by what our relationship had become to feel completely comfortable just yet — so I quickly looked away, hoping that he didn't see how red my face became during those moments.

By the time the movie ended, Ella was half asleep with her belly full of pizza. Edrick carried her to bed, and I couldn't help but follow behind when he disappeared into her room. Through the crack in the door, I watched as he laid her down in her bed and pulled the covers up to her chin.

“Daddy?” Ella asked, her tiny voice sleepy.

“Yes, Princess?” he asked.

Ella yawned. “Can we have more pizza parties?”

Edrick paused. I felt my heart flutter to see this interaction between father and daughter, and felt my heart flutter even more at his response.

“Sure, Princess,” he said gently, kissing her forehead. “We can have lots of pizza parties from now on. You, me, and Moana.

Chapter 134 Losing Control

Moana

Hearing how sweetly Edrick spoke to Ella made my heart swell. And to hear him mention me, too, made my heart swell even more. Was my wolf right when she said that Edrick would come around? These past few days, did his attitude toward our relationship begin to shift in the right direction?

I heard Edrick kiss Ella goodnight and approach the door, so I quickly scurried away before he realized that I was eavesdropping. I wasn't sure whether he actually saw me or not, but if he did, he didn't say anything about it.

When we climbed into bed that night, however, I still couldn't wipe the smile off of my face.

"What is it?" Edrick asked, watching me as I climbed into bed. "You've been smiling nonstop all night."

I shrugged and laid down next to him, not sure if I wanted to openly say that I was smiling because our little pizza party made me feel even more strongly about him, and that I wanted us to be a real family. I wasn't sure how he would take it.

It was a cool night out, and the balcony doors were wide open to let in the cool summer breeze. Outside, the city was noisy as always, and it felt even more noisy after our couple of days in the mountains.

“I just want to say thank you for everything you’ve done for me lately,” I finally said. “You’ve been giving me such a nice time.”

Edrick fell silent for a few moments. I thought for a second that he might make some sort of indifferent comment that would allude to his old self, but much to my surprise, he didn’t. It really did seem as though the Alpha billionaire was changing for the better lately — or maybe he was just more comfortable being open these days.

“I only want to make you happy,” he said finally. His voice was low and soft, and the way he spoke gave me instant butterflies in my stomach. “I’m glad you’re comfortable here.”

I didn’t know what to say. His words were so sweet and seemed so heartfelt that it made me blush, and I opened my mouth to respond, but nothing would come out.

However, it seemed that I didn’t need to say anything at all. I felt Mina react even more strongly than ever at Edrick’s words, as though the way he spoke almost made her go feral. And then, in that same instant...

Edrick suddenly rolled over to face me. He pushed himself up on his hand and cupped my cheek with the other, his steely gray eyes glowing a bright silver like I had never seen before. The air between us was electrified, and I felt somehow attracted to him and nervous at the same time.

I opened my mouth to ask him what he was doing so suddenly, but before anything could come out, he suddenly pressed his lips against mine with a fervence that I had never experienced before. His sweet lips parted gently and his tongue pressed its way into my mouth while his hand traveled down my neck, over my collarbone and my shoulder, down my waist and landed on my hip, where his fingers squeezed gently and dug into my flesh, causing tingling sensations to shoot through my body like lightning bolts.

I wanted him so badly. I couldn't explain it, but I wanted him more now than ever, as though he was the one thing I needed in life, like oxygen. I kissed him back with the same amount of passion, our lips never parting, and I pressed my hands into his chest. My fingers worked open the buttons on his shirt and slid beneath the fabric to feel his smooth skin, and at the same time, I felt his hand slide lower on my hip, onto my thigh.

So many emotions took over me then. Passion, heat, desire... but above all else, love. It was the same way that I felt when I saw his face in the alleyway, saving me from the Rogues. When he picked me up and all I saw was him looking down at me, his eyes fixed unwaveringly on me. I knew I loved him then, and I loved him now. I didn't want a fake relationship with Edrick; I wanted a real one. I wanted this all along, and now it was finally becoming a reality. I could tell from the way that he gently yet firmly touched me, and the way that his lips worked their way across my jaw and down my neck, that he felt the same way.

But then, it ended almost as quickly as it began.

Edrick suddenly sat up, ripping his hands away from me with wide eyes. I propped myself up on my elbows while I watched him quickly button his shirt back up, my own eyes wide with disbelief.

"Edrick, what's wrong?" I whispered, my throat choking up already.

Edrick only shook his head. "I'm sorry," he said, standing suddenly. "I got carried away. I shouldn't have done that."

My lower lip began to quiver as he stormed over to the door.

"But, Edrick—" I called after him, sitting up fully now; but he was already gone. I could only stare at the door in disbelief, wondering if I did something wrong. Even if I went after him, I knew that I wouldn't even get an answer. Was being intimate with me really such a mistake that he couldn't even look me in the eye afterwards? Even though he knew that I was a werewolf now, were our differences in social status and all of the

scandals surrounding us too much for him to want to be with me romantically?

Suddenly, as a sob caught in my throat, I heard my wolf's voice echo inside my head.

"I'm sorry," she said, sounding somewhat ashamed. "That was my fault."

I shook my head and wiped the tears out of my eyes with the back of my hand. "What happened?" I asked. "Everything seemed fine, and then..."

"Like I said, it was my fault. I... I think Edrick might be our mate. I know I should have asked you first, but I got too curious, and you two seemed so close, so I released my scent. It made him lose control."

My eyes widened as I processed what Mina had just said. Was it true? Edrick may have really been our mate?

But... If he was, why wouldn't he just be intimate with me instead of tearing himself away and running out of the room like that? Surely, if he was my mate, he would have felt the same way. Were the differences between us really so vast that he couldn't even bring himself to be with his own mate?

"He'll come around," Mina said comfortingly. "I promise. Just give him some time. I think I just released too much scent at once and it overwhelmed him."

I sighed and flopped back onto the mattress as I stared up at the ceiling.

"I hope you're right," I whispered out loud. "I really hope you're right."

But that night, Edrick didn't come back to bed.

Chapter 135 Public Debut

Moana

The next morning, I awoke with a pounding headache. I felt more confused now than ever with my relationship with Edrick; if my wolf really was right about Edrick being my mate, then it only made all of this even more complicated. I couldn't help but wonder, too, if Edrick also knew that I was his mate and that he wasn't telling me about it. But I couldn't imagine why he would want to keep something like that a secret from me.

I finally got out of bed and made my way out into the living room, expecting Edrick to be locked away in his study after what happened the night before.

But, much to my surprise, he wasn't. In fact, he was standing in the living room and looking out the window when I walked in. As I approached, he turned to face me directly without even a hint of remorse or embarrassment on his face.

"Sorry for the late notice," he said, glancing at his watch, "but I just found out that I'll need to go to a networking event tonight. You'll need to be there as my fiancée, of course. Selina will keep an eye on Ella tonight."

My eyes widened. "A... A public event?" I asked. The thought of going out into public with Edrick as his "fiancée" made me nervous, especially

after all of the media attention we were already receiving. As our debut as a couple, it would no doubt be even more chaotic.

“Yes,” Edrick replied. “Well... Sort of. There will be paparazzi outside, but once we get in, it won’t be so bad. It’ll only be other socialites and businesspeople.”

I wasn’t sure if Edrick thought that telling me that the event would only be other rich people was supposed to make me feel better, but it didn’t. My heart was already racing just thinking about how out of place I would feel as the only human there; of course, I was a werewolf like the rest of them, but they didn’t know that. To them, I was still just a lowly human... And I was sure that many of them agreed with the sentiment that I was a human plaything, too.

However, I knew that I didn’t have much of a choice. Edrick had already made it clear the other night that I would have to play the role of his fiancée, and that meant that I couldn’t always be hidden away. I would need to attend things like this with him for appearances, even though it freaked me out. At least now I had some hope that Edrick really was my mate, though, which would mean that maybe in the future these sorts of things wouldn’t need to be fake anymore.

“Um... Okay,” I choked out, my face going red as Edrick’s steely gaze stayed fixed on me, reminding me of the night before. “What time will I need to be ready?”

“The event starts at seven o’clock tonight,” Edrick replied. “I booked an appointment for you with Tyrus to do your hair and makeup at four.”

I nodded in understanding. Having my hair and makeup professionally done for public events like this would still take some getting used to, but I did like Tyrus and enjoyed talking to him. Besides, I couldn’t help but think that it was a bit sweet that Edrick hired his old college friend for this. I had never envisioned Edrick as someone who seemed to have many friends, and I never was sure if Edrick would be open to talking about his

past, so talking to Tyrus was like looking through a window into Edrick's old life.

Like clockwork, Tyrus came at exactly four o'clock to do my hair and makeup.

"You look stunning in green and gold," he said as he did my eyeshadow in front of my vanity mirror. "Or maybe I'm just biased because those are my favorite colors. Ha!"

I couldn't help but laugh. Tyrus was right, though; green and gold went perfectly with my hair and skin tone, and when he was finished, I was awed yet again by his work. He gave me a subtle sage green eyeshadow with flecks of gold in it, as well as subtle pinkish lipstick that looked natural. My hair was pulled back into a half bun with curls that came down on either side to frame my face, and he even took the extra effort to add tiny, delicate braids woven with green thread in my hair. With the simple black satin dress that I wore to the end of summer banquet — which had of course been carefully dry cleaned after my stint in the fountain — I felt like a wealthy socialite myself.

Once I was ready, Tyrus held out his hand for me and led me out to the living room, where Edrick waited for me.

"Ta-da!" Tyrus exclaimed, gesturing to me with a flourish. "The belle of the ball."

Edrick stood from the couch to look at me. It was only a brief second, but I swore that his eyes widened slightly, and I felt myself blush. Tyrus gestured with his finger for me to spin, and I did; and when I stopped, Edrick's face was a little red as well.

He kind of looked like a nervous, lovestruck schoolboy as he stared at me, which almost made me giggle.

Shortly before seven o'clock, Edrick and I took the car to the event. Both of us were silent for the ride — I was too nervous to speak and Edrick didn't seem to want to look at me for too long, although I thought I caught him glancing on occasion.

But when the driver pulled up to the event, I heard myself let out an accidental gasp.

The event was held at a huge theater with marble pillars out front, and a long red carpet that led up the pathway, up the steps, and to the front door.

There were other people walking up the red carpet, and I noticed instantly that many of them stopped to pose for the mobs of paparazzi. The women were dressed in extremely luxurious gowns with not a single hair out of place, and all of the men were dressed in perfectly pressed tuxedos of various colors. Even though I knew I was dressed well, I already felt out of place; and, not to mention the dozens — hundreds, even — of paparazzi crowding around on either side of the red carpet.

Edrick must have seen my expression, because he suddenly reached out and took my hand. "Don't worry," he said while the driver got out and came around to open our door. "Just stay with me."

I couldn't help but blush as I felt Edrick's warm hand around mine, but I nodded and took a deep breath, steeling myself for what was to come.

Edrick got out of the car first, then held out his arm for me and helped me out. The instant we set foot on the carpet, the paparazzi turned their attention to us, their bright lights flashing and their voices shouting.

"Moana! Look over here!" I heard them shout. "Mr. Morgan! Over here!"

"Just smile and walk with me," Edrick said through a fake smile as he waved politely at the paparazzi. I gulped and did as he said, but I was already stunned, and I imagined that I would look more terrified than anything when I eventually saw some of those photos of us.

I felt myself become dizzy as we slowly made our way up the red carpet, and I instinctively put my hand on my belly — which, of course, attracted even more attention.

“Moana! Show us the baby bump!” the paparazzi shouted as their flashing lights blinded me.

I felt myself begin to choke up, and my smile faded. The only thing that kept me from freezing on the spot was the feeling of Edrick’s arm wrapping protectively around my shoulders.