

## Chapter 151 Rue the Day

Edrick

When I finally came home from the library, I had intended on going straight to work despite how tired I was. I didn't realize it when I was in that dark basement, but it was well after sunrise by the time I came out, and I knew that Moana would be awake and wondering where I went. I didn't want to alarm her, so I planned on telling her that I had a work emergency; especially since I would have to cut a lock of her hair later to take to the Mother Witch. Right now, I really didn't need her getting suspicious and worried.

However, when I walked in the door and saw none other than my father sitting at the dining room table, I knew that my plans would be thrown out the window. My eyes widened as I saw him, and I instantly felt a pit of dread grow in my stomach. He was sipping a cup of tea, and Selina and Moana were nowhere to be found. I instantly became worried.

"Edrick," he said, standing abruptly from the table without so much as a hello. "Let's talk in your office."

"Um... Alright," I responded. I wanted to ask why he was here, but I knew that he would only get even more surly with me. As I followed him, I caught a glimpse of Moana and Selina in the kitchen, which made me feel more relaxed. But Moana looked like she was crying, and I instantly felt anger bubbling up inside of me as I wondered what my father did to her.

He felt the need to make a snide comment about the tea as we walked to my office, but I didn't care. I only cared if he had hurt Moana.

As soon as I shut the office door behind us, I gritted my teeth. I was about to snarl at him and ask what he did to Moana, but before I could get a word out, he immediately lit into me and began to berate me.

“You had a perfectly good chance to have a public relationship with Kelly,” he growled, pointing his finger at me with his eyebrows knitted together angrily, “but you chose that human instead? And to make matters worse, you create all sorts of bad press, you take off into the countryside, hang up my phone calls, and even use those bloody body guards against me. I had to practically fight my way in here, Edrick!”

I sighed and passed a hand over my face. Part of me wanted to firstly correct my father about Moana's status before anything else and tell him that she wasn't even a human, but I decided against it. I knew it should be her choice when or if she told anyone, and besides; if he found out that she was the Golden Wolf, there would be no telling what he would do to her. My father was not one of the people who wanted the Golden Wolf to return. He had always said that he would kill the Golden Wolf himself if it ever existed. That, alone, was enough to add even more pressure to this whole ordeal. What would I do if my father eventually found out that Moana was the Golden Wolf and tried to kill her? Even with her full power, my father still wouldn't rest until one of them was dead.

Therefore, instead of correcting my father, I decided to keep my mouth shut about the subject and address the other elephant in the room: the issue with Kelly.

“Why would I want to have any sort of relationship, even a fake one, with someone who willingly paid Rogues to attack the mother of my child? Why would I want to be even remotely involved, romantically or not, with a monster who happily put a pregnant woman in the arms of Rogues who wanted to kill her?”

My voice was raising, but I didn't care. If Moana and the others overheard this, then so be it. I wasn't on my father's side anymore, and I didn't care if the world knew.

My father opened his mouth to say something else, but I kept going and cut him off once more.

“That woman put the health of my baby and the mother of my baby in jeopardy,” I snarled. “I don't want to hear about her anymore. You'll just have to get over the fact that I'm never going to marry Kelly, and you need to stop putting such ridiculous ideas into her head because I—”

I suddenly stopped myself. I knew what I was going to say next. I was going to say that I loved Moana. But I couldn't say that; not just to my father, but not even out loud. It was too soon.

My father smirked. He knew what I was going to say.

“You'll rue the day that you decided to lower yourself enough to have s\*x with a human and put some freak half-breed in her belly,” my father growled.

My eyes widened. Was that a threat? Before I could even say anything, however, my father turned on his heel and stormed out. All I could do was stand in the doorway of my office as I watched him disappear, followed by the sound of the elevator. Then, he was gone.

I was still standing there in shock when Moana and Selina stepped out of the kitchen. Moana's eyes were red from crying. I wanted to go to her, but at the same time, my father had made me so angry... And now, I couldn't help but wonder if it was time for me to distance myself from her for her own safety.

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I stayed in my office for the remainder of the day. Just as I suspected from my first glance at my father sitting at my dining room table, he ruined my day after all. I made sure to tell the security guards not to let anyone in

without my prior consent from now on. I couldn't trust anyone after what my father said... Not even my mother.

That night, I finally emerged from my office long after midnight. My eyelids felt heavy, and I knew I needed to sleep.

But there was something else I needed to do, too: I needed to get a lock of Moana's hair to bring to the Mother Witch.

As I quietly entered my room to find her asleep and retrieved a pair of scissors from the medicine cabinet, I realized that I didn't know exactly what I would do if the Mother Witch confirmed that Moana was the Golden Wolf. I could only hope that the Mother Witch could offer some wisdom, or maybe a protection charm to keep Moana safe. I hated to consider it, too, but... I wondered if the Mother Witch would help me get rid of my father. A curse, maybe. Or even poison.

But was I really willing to kill my own father?

I wasn't sure. All I was sure of, as I stood over Moana's sleeping body with a small lock of her vibrant red hair in my hand, was that I needed to protect her regardless of whether she was the Golden Wolf or not.

## Chapter 152 Crepe Date

### Moana

I didn't know what Edrick and Michael were exactly talking about, but I had a pretty good idea of it. It was clearly because of his fake relationship with me, and when I heard raised voices and saw Michael storm out, followed by Edrick giving me a strange look and slamming the door, it only solidified my suspicions.

Edrick stayed in his study and didn't come out for the remainder of the day; not even for dinner. In fact, I didn't see or hear him ever come to bed, and he was gone again when I woke up the next morning as well.

To wake up without him sleeping beside me for the second morning in a row was not only a bit odd, but also a little heartbreaking. I had quickly grown used to feeling his presence beside me, whether his arms were wrapped warmly around me or not. Not only that, but it was Saturday morning; he rarely worked on Saturdays, and when he did, it was never this early. But maybe it was just because he needed to do extra work to mitigate the falling stock prices due to our fake relationship. However, I couldn't deny the fact that there was a small part of me that wondered if he simply didn't want to be around me. I hoped that that wasn't the case.

Either way, Ella had training this morning and I needed to get her ready. So, swallowing my anxiety, I crawled out of bed and slipped on my robe and slippers, but as I did, something shiny caught my eye.

It was a little pair of scissors on Edrick's bedside table.

I furrowed my brow as I walked over to look at them. Why did Edrick leave the bathroom scissors out on his bedside table, of all places? He was usually careful with things like that, and it was important to keep sharp things out of Ella's reach in case she came in and accidentally hurt herself; but maybe he was just in a rush and had to cut a loose thread or something like that. Without another thought, I picked the scissors up and carried them over to the medicine cabinet.

After that, I made my way over to my bedroom, where I showered and got dressed for the day. I promised Sophia that I would also volunteer again at the orphanage, so I made sure to dress comfortably for a day of work and pack a small lunch.

Finally, I woke Ella up and got her ready for training.

"Moana?" she asked as I combed her hair and put it into two braids for her training.

"Yes, love?" I replied.

"Um... Can we have crepes for breakfast?" she asked, her voice sounding almost sheepish. "At the bakery downstairs. We haven't gone in so long..."

I pursed my lips. Of course I wanted to go, and we hadn't gone in weeks. But with the frenzy that the media was in recently, I didn't want to just go out with her without Edrick there. After what happened last time, I was scared that she would get hurt again. I didn't want to put her through that again, as it already scared her so much the first time.

"I'm sorry, sweetheart," I said gently. "I don't think we can go without your daddy. Remember what happened last time we went out with just the two of us?"

Ella let out a loud, long, almost dramatic sigh. "I suppose," she muttered. When I looked up at her in the mirror, I could see that she was hanging

her head and pushing her lower lip out in a pout. But what was I supposed to do? Without her father here, I couldn't even get permission from him if it was okay to go.

Suddenly, I heard Selena's voice call through the door. When I looked up, she was standing in the doorway. "You can bring one of the bodyguards," she said, causing Ella's head to jerk up excitedly. "It's just next door. It'll be fine."

I was shocked. "Really?" I asked. "You don't think Edrick will be worried?"

Selina shrugged. "He hired you both a bodyguard for a reason. And besides, you two can't stay cooped up here forever."

I couldn't help but smile. Maybe Selina was right; we couldn't spend the rest of our lives feeling terrified of the outside world after one bad experience with the paparazzi. With a trained bodyguard protecting us and our hats on to cover up our faces a little bit, it would be okay.

"Alright," I said, causing Ella to let out an excited gasp. "Let's go quick, though. You've got training today."

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Later, Ella and I were seated at one of the tables in the bakery with two plates of delicious crepes, fresh fruit, and whipped cream sitting in front of us. I ordered a fancy coffee for myself as well, and as I watched Ella happily eating with whipped cream all over her face, I couldn't help but smile even more. It made me happy to see Ella happy, and despite everything with the paparazzi and Michael lately, I knew that Edrick's public announcement was good for her. It was allowing her to get out of the house without having to hide her identity, and she could enjoy being a child. I kept thinking about how happy she was at the picnic the other day, when she spent the entire morning and afternoon playing tirelessly with other children. I wanted her to be able to enjoy things like that even more.

While we ate, Ella prattled on about all sorts of things. She was excited for training, just as she always was, and asked me to tell the other children at the orphanage that she said hello. She also couldn't stop talking about the picnic as well, which made me laugh.

But then, suddenly, she set down her fork and gave me a very serious look. "Moana," she said, sounding almost like a little adult all of a sudden, "I have a question."

"Okay," I replied. I set down my coffee and looked at her with the same amount of seriousness, expecting her to ask me something silly, such as whether she could finish my crepe if I wasn't going to eat all of it or if she could skip training to tag along to the orphanage. But what she said next took me by complete surprise.

"Do I always have to call you Moana?"

I furrowed my brow at this strange question. "What do you mean, love?" I asked, c\*\*\*\*g my head to the side. "That's my name."

Ella sighed. "Yes, but..." She paused. She seemed to be puzzling over how to word her thoughts properly, like it was extremely important to her. "You act like my mommy. Can't I call you mommy sometimes?"

My eyes widened at this. It wasn't anything that I had expected her to say, and while I had had moments in the past where I secretly thought that I felt as though Ella and I were a real mother and daughter, I never expected her to ask if she could refer to me as her mother.

"Um..." I stammered, trying to come up with the right response that wouldn't hurt her feelings or give her too much false hope. "Why don't we ask your dad about that later, hm? Let's see what he has to say about it."

Ella nodded understandingly. Sometimes, she seemed so mature for such a little girl that it took me by complete surprise. "Okay," she said, rather calmly. "It's okay if I can't call you mommy. I know that I had a real



mommy, and she died. But sometimes, I just feel like you're... Sort of like a mommy to me."

I couldn't help but smile. I reached across the table and took Ella's little hand in mine, blinking back the tears that formed in my eyes.

"I know, sweetheart," I said gently. "Sometimes I feel that way, too."

## Chapter 153 Olivia

### Moana

After Ella and I had our little breakfast date together, we headed out for training. I dropped her off at the training facility before heading over to the orphanage to spend a few hours volunteering and helping Sophia out.

Ever since Ella mentioned wanting to refer to me as her mother, my heart couldn't stop fluttering. I felt both anxious and ecstatic at the thought; I had considered this before, but never seriously. I had only ever thought of us occasionally as acting a bit like mother and daughter, but I knew that I could never really replace Ella's biological mother. I wasn't sure if it was really appropriate to even bring the subject up to Edrick, as he had never really brought up Ella's biological mother. All I knew was that Ella's biological mother died when Ella was very young, and no one ever really talked about her. There weren't even photographs or anything indicating her existence around the house. Edrick's family never mentioned her, and Edrick never really gave off the feeling of being a widower. But, then again, maybe that had something to do with his fear of commitment. Maybe he didn't talk about her because it was too painful, and part of me always wanted to see if he would be willing to tell me a bit more about her. If Ella really wanted to refer to me as her mother, then I wanted to be able to do it in a way that was respectful of her biological mother.

When the driver eventually pulled up to the orphanage, the hot summer sun was climbing higher in the sky. It was supposed to be very hot out today, but thankfully it was one of the last hot days of the summer. With autumn just around the corner, I was excited for the vibrant fall leaves, warm drinks, and the cool air. I loved summer the most out of all four of the seasons, but I still got tired of the heat by now; not to mention the fact that the pregnancy was making the heat take more of a toll on me. I was glad that I would be done with this pregnancy by the time the next summer rolled around.

I climbed out of the car and headed inside with the bodyguard on my heels. When I got inside, I could hear what sounded like Sophia giving the children a lesson from the classroom upstairs, so I decided to just sit down at the front desk like the last time I was there and take care of all of the secretarial duties. The front office felt a bit stuffy, but after opening the windows and watering the plants, letting some air and sunlight in, it felt comfortable.

The orphanage, especially this room, had been so dusty and unkempt for a long time. Thanks to Edrick's foundation, it seemed as though the entire orphanage was improving, and Sophia had hired builders with the extra money to fix things such as cracked window panes, creaky doors, and unpainted walls. Now, the orphanage felt much nicer than it ever did, and it made me happy that Edrick had taken the time to put together this foundation for the orphanage.

However, many of the children still had yet to be adopted. Most werewolves weren't interested in adopting human children, and most humans couldn't afford to take care of extra children. When I grew up here, I only saw a small handful of the other children go to live with families. The rest of us grew up here until we were old enough to move out, so Sophia was really more like our mother than anything. I knew that, even with Edrick's foundation, most of the children who were here now

would live the same way I did unless people changed their minds about human children.

As I thought about this, I couldn't help but remember the story that Ethan had told me ages ago at his art opening: the story of the Golden Wolf. He had said that the Golden Wolf would supposedly bring humans and werewolves into a new era. I didn't know exactly what that meant, and of course the Golden Wolf was just a fairy tale for children, but I wondered if it would mean that humans and werewolves could live as equals if the Golden Wolf was real. If I was the Golden Wolf, that would be something that I would have wanted to achieve.

Unfortunately, though, the Golden Wolf wasn't real. And I wasn't going to get my hopes up that it was.

Instead, all I could do was hope for the best, and do my best to help Sophia. Maybe, between that and the foundation, at least some of these children would eventually go on to live with families; and if not, then at the very least they would be able to experience a greater quality of life and more opportunities thanks to the foundation.

I worked for a while that morning, but the phone didn't ring too often. However, when I opened the appointment book, I was quickly reminded that there was one appointment this morning... And my eyes widened when I saw the name on the page and was reminded of it.

Olivia.

Surely it was just a coincidence. Olivia was a common enough name, and there was no way that this was the same Olivia who I had overheard Edrick arguing with before.

However, her appointment was in five minutes. And, like clockwork, she walked in the door at exactly ten o'clock.

She was beautiful. Not only that, but she looked oddly familiar.

In fact, she looked almost exactly like Ella. The face shape, the dirty blonde hair, the button nose... The resemblance was uncanny. She was wearing a pretty, yellow sundress and had a wide-brimmed hat in her hand. As she walked in the door, she took off her sunglasses and put them on top of her head, revealing almond-shaped eyes that were a different color from Ella's, as Ella had her father's gray eyes, but they were the same shape. Even just looking at this woman, it was almost like seeing Ella from the future, as an adult.

"Hello," she said, flashing me a warm smile as she approached the desk. "I'm Olivia. I'm here for my appointment."

My eyes were wide, but I blinked quickly and tried to hide my shock. She couldn't be related to Ella; Ella's mother was dead. Perhaps Olivia could be a different relative, though? A cousin or an aunt, perhaps?

"U-Um... Yes, hi," I stammered, trying not to show how confused I felt. "Um... Which of the children were you hoping to meet? They're in a lesson right now, but they should be done soon."

Olivia's smile widened, and she shook her head. "Actually, I didn't come today to meet any of the children," she admitted.

I co\*\*\*d my head in confusion. "Oh? Were you looking for a tour? Did you want to meet the headmistress?"

Once again, Olivia shook her head. What she said next made my heart race faster than I ever thought possible.

"I came to meet you, Moana. I'm Ella's biological mother."

## Chapter 154 The Mother

### Moana

My eyes were wide with disbelief. There was no way that Olivia was Ella's biological mother. Ella's biological mother was dead!

I didn't know what to say or do. All I could manage was to stare back at Olivia, unblinkingly, as I tried to figure out if she was telling the truth or that she was simply playing a joke on me. But at the same time, the resemblance was uncanny. She really did look just like an adult version of Ella, aside from the color of her eyes. Everything else was almost exactly the same. Her face shape, her nose, her hair... If no one had ever told me that Ella's biological mother was dead, I would have believed her instantly.

Olivia must have immediately noticed the confusion on my face, because she let out a sigh and ran a hand through her dirty blonde hair.

"I know it's hard to believe," she said. "I'm not sure what Edrick told you about me, but I am Ella's biological mother."

"H-He told me you were... dead," I replied, my voice shaking. "Even Ella said that you died when she was a baby."

Olivia shook her head and let out another, longer sigh. "I figured as much. Would you be interested in hearing my side of the story?"

I didn't know how to respond. Part of me still wondered if this was some kind of practical joke. Was Edrick secretly outside, giggling to himself as he pranked me? Or maybe Michael was trying to get under my skin and make me leave Edrick? And yet, when I glanced over her shoulder and out the window, I didn't see anyone else. There was only one other car pulled up out front, and I could see from here that it was empty. Even my bodyguard, who was leaning on the hood of the car and letting the sun hit his face while he folded his arms across his chest, seemed completely relaxed. I knew that he wouldn't be acting like that if someone else was there. Especially if Michael was there, he would have done something about it immediately.

Olivia followed my gaze for a moment, then turned back to face me and smiled again to flash a row of straight, perfect white teeth.

"No one sent me, you know," she said with a chuckle. "I decided to come because of everything I've seen on the news."

I swallowed, then nodded. If she really was Ella's biological mother and this wasn't some sort of mean-spirited prank, then I did want to hear her side of the story. Of course I wanted to know why everyone else only ever said that she was dead, and never brought her up again after that. And, aside from that, I also wanted to know why she and Edrick argued on the phone constantly.

It hit me then; Edrick had said that Olivia called him around this time every year.

Ella's birthday was only a couple of months ago. Olivia called him around this time of year because... It was around her daughter's birthday.

"Um... I'd like to hear your side of the story," I finally replied, swallowing the lump in my throat. "I'll get you some tea."

Olivia shook her head, causing her dirty blonde hair to fall in her face a bit; when it did, it reminded me of how Ella had looked the very first time

I met her, like a little feral child with her hair in her eyes. Olivia quickly tucked her hair back behind her ear, but the resemblance there was unmistakable.

“There’s no need,” she said, waving her hand dismissively. “I can only stay for a short while.”

I nodded, then gestured for her to sit at the chair across from the desk. I hadn’t realized it, but when she originally walked in I jumped up from my seat immediately, and so I sat back down now too.

“So... He told you I was dead,” she said, her voice sounding thoughtful. “Did he say anything else?”

I shook my head. “No. No one talks about you. Although, I have to admit that I think I might have overheard phone calls between the two of you before. I don’t know what else was said, but I heard him say your name.”

Olivia nodded thoughtfully. “Yes... I’ll admit I do call a lot around this time of year. Obviously, I want to know how my daughter is doing. I try to send her gifts for her birthday, but I don’t think that Edrick ever gives them to her.”

As Olivia spoke, I could see that tears were beginning to form in her eyes. I picked up the box of tissues on the desk and held it out to her, and she took one and dabbed at her eyes with it.

“Sorry...” she whimpered, blinking rapidly to dissipate her tears. “I just miss my baby so much.”

I felt a hard pang in my chest at Olivia’s words. The baby inside of me hadn’t been born yet, and I still couldn’t even imagine being separated from my child. Ella was eight years old now, and I imagined that it must have been incredibly difficult for Olivia to not see her daughter at all for eight years.



“Ella’s doing really well, if it makes you feel any better,” I said gently. “She’s a smart and sweet little girl. She plays the piano, and she’s very well behaved.”

Olivia smiled through her tears. “Good. I’m glad to hear it,” she said, then paused for a minute, chewing on her lower lip. “I was so worried when he kicked me out. Because of his status, there wasn’t even a custody battle. He spun all sorts of lies to make me appear as though I was a bad mother and a drug addict, when that couldn’t be further from the truth... Does he still drink heavily?”

My eyes widened. I had never imagined that Edrick would have been the type to do something like that to the mother of his child. He had never mentioned anything about that to me, but I couldn’t help but wonder if that was because he planned on doing the same thing to me when my baby was born.

“Um... He did drink a lot when I met him,” I replied somewhat sheepishly. “He doesn’t really drink much anymore.”

“Good,” Olivia replied. “Maybe you’re a good influence on him. I hope he doesn’t continue the pattern with you. But be careful... He’s a really good liar. It was how he swindled me.”

I felt the lump in my throat grow even more. Instinctively, I placed my hand over my belly. Olivia’s eyes flickered down to my belly, and she took a deep breath before speaking again.

“So you are pregnant after all.”

I nodded. “Three months,” I replied.

Olivia nodded solemnly. She lowered her gaze to the floor, as though she was thinking deeply, before she looked back up at me.

“There’s something you need to understand about Edrick,” she said. “The way that he views women isn’t as innocent as you’d think. He only has one goal in mind: producing the next Alpha heir for his company. Women

are nothing but reproductive tools for him, and once that baby is out of you, he'll lose all interest in you.”

My jaw dropped. I didn't know what to say or do. If Olivia was telling the truth, then that could mean my baby would be taken from me someday, and I didn't want that to happen.

But before I could say anything, Olivia suddenly stood.

“I have to go,” she said, rifling through her purse. She retrieved a small white business card and handed it to me. It had her name and her phone number on it. It looked as though she worked for a travel agency or something of the sorts. “Here's my number. If anything happens, please don't hesitate to call me.”

I nodded, hesitantly taking the card and slipping it into my pocket. I stood to watch Olivia go, but just as her hand touched the doorknob, she stopped and spoke without looking back at me.

“Please don't tell Edrick that I talked to you,” she said quietly. “And... Take good care of Ella for me.”

I opened my mouth to respond, but before I could, Olivia swung the door open and scurried out. For a long time, I just stood there in total shock before I finally sank back down into my chair.

And even as Sophia and the children came downstairs and swarmed me with love, I could only think about what I was going to do about all of this.

## Chapter 155

Edrick

While Moana slept, I secretly snipped off a small lock of her hair and stashed it away in my sock drawer. It was only a small piece, and I made sure to take it from a spot where it wouldn't be noticed easily. Once I stashed it away, I was so exhausted from two days of no sleep that I couldn't do anything else except climb into bed and pass out immediately.

The next morning, I woke up earlier than Moana. I made sure to quickly get dressed and slip out of the room without waking her up, her lock of hair in a little plastic baggie in my pocket. On second thought, I turned back around and cautiously took the Alpha tooth out of its box, hoping that I would be home in time to put it back before she ever noticed it was missing.

I didn't need Moana, or anyone else for that matter, asking where I was going; if they found out that I was going to see the Mother Witch, then they would soon discover that I was investigating Moana's lineage when they discovered that I had taken both the Alpha tooth and a lock of Moana's hair. Eventually, the truth would come out; but I needed to keep everything secret for now. If Moana really was the Golden Wolf, then no one could know until she had the baby; not even Moana. I felt bad keeping it from her, but it was the only way to keep her completely safe. If she found out that she was the Golden Wolf, then she might try to shift too

soon and would cause all sorts of people, like my father, to sense her presence and try to hunt her down. That was why I slipped out that morning before anyone else woke up. I couldn't be seen.

The Mother Witch lived directly at the center of the city. Her services were highly sought after, and her incredible age had allowed her to become a pillar in our society. People from all over flocked to see her, seeking her services from placing blessings on their babies and their marriages to finding lost loved ones or even communicating with the dead.

I had always been somewhat of a skeptic when it came to magic. My mother hired all sorts of witches and fortune tellers when I was growing up in the hopes of having a happy marriage with my father, but it never worked. My father was still a bastard, and he treated my mother terribly. That alone was enough to make me not believe in magic.

However, there was no denying the Mother Witch's wisdom. She was over a hundred years old; if anyone knew about the Golden Wolf, it was her. And right now, I was willing to put aside my skepticism if it meant potentially protecting Moana.

I pulled up in front of the Mother Witch's home. Surprisingly, it wasn't as luxurious as people would imagine; it was a simple little house smack dab in the center of the city, with a pagoda roof and a tall fence all around. There was a sign on the gate telling visitors to just walk in, which was also surprising; but, I supposed that if she really was as wise and powerful as she claimed, then maybe she didn't need to be afraid of being attacked. Either that, or she assumed that no one would attack her out of the fear that she could easily fight back with her own abilities.

When I walked through the gate, I walked up a stone path lined on either side by perfectly manicured hedges and red maple trees, then ascended the steps to the porch. There was a bamboo wind chime on the porch that made a pleasant sound in the breeze, and I could hear the sound of

trickling water from the fountains in the yard. It was an incredibly relaxing atmosphere.

I raised my fist to knock on the door, but before I could, the door slid open.

My eyes widened. And incredibly old woman, her back hunched so much that she was practically bent at a ninety-degree angle, stood in front of me. She had white hair that was pulled back into a neat bun at the nape of her neck, and she wore traditional clothes. Despite her frail appearance as she leaned on a cane, she looked up at me with bright, youthful eyes.

“Hello, Edrick,” she said with a smile. “I was expecting you.”

“You were?” I asked. The Mother Witch simply nodded and pointed at my shoes. I hastily removed them, leaving them on the porch, and then stepped inside when she moved out of the way. The inside of her house was sparse and surprisingly small, but it smelled like patchouli and felt comfortable. At my tall height, however, I had to bend over a bit as I walked in.

“I made tea,” she said, hobbling over to a small kitchen. “Take a seat.” She gestured over to a little table that sat beneath a window. I hesitantly walked over and sat down, and within a few moments she was setting a tray of tea in the middle of the table. I realized that she barely even used her cane to walk as it swung loosely in her knotted old hand.

“Well?” she said, sitting down across from me. “You have the tooth, correct?”

I nodded. I was still too stunned to speak; how did she know that I was coming? How did she know that I would bring a tooth?

Either way, I pulled the tooth out of my pocket along with the lock of Moana’s hair and set them both down on the table. The Mother Witch sucked her teeth as she peered down at the two things over the top of her wire-rimmed glasses and nodded thoughtfully.

“Hmm...” She picked up the tooth first, holding it up to the light, and mumbled something incoherent under her breath. I sipped my tea politely as she then set down the tooth and picked up the lock of hair. She pulled the hair out of the bag and rubbed it between her fingers, then smelled it.

“Yep.” The Mother Witch nodded matter-of-factly and looked up at me with her bright, vibrant eyes. “The Golden Wolf is alive.”

My eyes widened. “You’re sure?” I asked.

The Mother Witch nodded again. “I’m positive. Has she shifted yet?”

I shook my head. “No, she hasn’t. Her wolf is emerging, but slowly.”

For a few long moments, the Mother Witch sipped her tea with a thoughtful expression on her face before setting the cup down a little too hard, causing tea to slosh out onto the table, but she didn’t seem to care.

“Bring her to me as soon as you can,” she said. “I want to teach her how to shift. This world sorely needs the Golden Wolf.” The Mother Witch looked excited, and as she spoke, she seemed to sit up straighter despite the hunch in her back.

But I shook my head.

“I want to wait,” I replied. “She’s pregnant. I don’t think it’s safe.”

The Mother Witch frowned and stared at me for a long time, but I wouldn’t budge. For both Moana’s and the baby’s safety, I didn’t want her to shift until the baby was born. In fact, now that I knew the truth, I wondered if I should send Moana and Ella away to stay in the mountain estate until she had the baby. I would send them with as much security as possible, of course. I wouldn’t let anyone come even close to the estate.

Finally, the Mother Witch nodded.

“Alright,” she said, sounding a little disappointed. “But I hope you know that if she does shift on her own by accident, it’ll be even harder on her and the baby.”

I nodded in response. “I know.”

The Mother Witch then stood. Without a word, she hobbled over to another room and disappeared for a few moments, leaving me wondering if I should stay where I was or follow her. I heard the sound of glasses clinking around before she finally returned with a vial of something in her hand. She walked over to me and placed it in front of me; it was a small glass vial of a clear liquid.

“Put a drop of this in her morning tea or coffee,” she said. “It will prevent her from shifting too early.”

“Will it harm her or her wolf?” I asked. “What about the baby?”

“They’ll all be fine,” she replied. “It’ll just make her wolf a little sleepy so she’ll be less likely to emerge fully. Once the baby is born, you can stop giving her the medicine and bring her to me.”

I nodded and took the vial and the tooth, then thanked the Mother Witch. After that, I left.

The entire way home, I was both excited and terrified. Moana was the Golden Wolf after all; that meant that she would be the one to bring this world into the next era, but it also meant that she truly was in grave danger.

I didn’t know exactly what I would do, but I did know one thing for sure: I had to keep Moana’s true nature a secret for now, even from her, for her safety.