

## Chapter 201 A Close Eye

### Moana

By the end of the weekend, I was dying to get back to work. Since we decided not to leave the penthouse after all, I decided that it wouldn't hurt any to return to teaching. Besides, Ella needed to go back to school as well, and since she didn't remember the events of the night that we were kidnapped she was only getting more aggravated by the day. With each passing day, Ella was becoming more confused and agitated and I was feeling more stir crazy, which only led to increased flashbacks from the whole ordeal.

So, on Monday morning, I got dressed for work.

"Where are you going?" Edrick asked, looking up from his newspaper as I walked through the living room.

"I need to get back to work," I said. "I can't just use a substitute forever. Tomorrow, maybe Ella should go back to school as well."

Edrick's icy gray eyes widened. He threw his newspaper down and stood abruptly, shaking his head. "You can't go. It's dangerous."

"Edrick, I'll be in a school just a few blocks away in the middle of the afternoon," I said. "There's a security guard on the campus who watches everything. I'll tell them about the situation so they can keep an eye out for any trouble."

For a few moments, the Alpha billionaire stared wildly at me as he gritted his teeth. I held my head high to show that I wasn't going to back down; despite what had happened almost two weeks prior, I wasn't a damsel in distress, and I had a job to do.

Finally, Edrick seemed to see that I wasn't backing down and he let out a sigh, passing his hand over his face.

“Take one of the bodyguards with you, then,” he said quietly. “Take Darren. He'll protect you. Actually, I'll drive with you as well.” Before I could say anything, Edrick rushed over to the foyer and began to slip his shoes on. I watched as he pulled two surgical masks out of his pocket, then held one out to me along with my wide-brimmed sun hat. “Here. To protect your identity during the walk. We'll go out the back, and if you tuck in your hair, you'll be less likely to be noticed—”

“Edrick,” I said exasperatedly, “hold on. I'll walk with you and wear the disguise, but I can't bring a bodyguard to school. Darren is big and looks threatening. He'll scare the children, and I don't even think that the headmistress will allow it anyway. And also, I want to walk, not drive. I feel cooped up.”

Edrick stared at me for another few moments. I could tell right off the bat that he wouldn't give up on the bodyguard, nor was he likely to give up on most of his stipulations. I figured that it was worth a try, though.

Finally, after a long time of staring silently at each other, Edrick seemed to relent a little bit.

“I know that you feel safer with Ethan and Kelly in jail, but it's still dangerous for you out there,” he said firmly. “But how about this: can you just let one of the bodyguards drive you? They can just wait in the car and keep an eye on the school entrance while you're at work. If you'll just allow that, I promise I won't nag you about it any longer.”

I chewed my lip for a moment, thinking. Edrick was right; it was still dangerous, and even if no one knew that I was the Golden Wolf yet and I wasn't yet at risk of being hunted, the paparazzi were on another frenzy because of the news footage of what happened at the warehouse. Finally, I nodded and sighed.

“Okay,” I said. “I’ll let one of the bodyguards drive me.”

“Thank you.” Edrick let out a small sigh of relief, then walked up to me and kissed my forehead. I felt myself blush a bit; he had been a lot more physically affectionate ever since I marked him, and I had to admit that I was enjoying it quite a lot.

“And Ella can go back to school, too?” I asked, looking up at him.

Edrick nodded, although a bit hesitantly. “I’ll talk to her about it today,” he replied. Secretly, although I wasn’t going to pressure him, I hoped that he would also talk to her about what really happened, and what her mother was really like. I doubted that he would do it so soon, though. Part of me thought that he should set up counseling for her ahead of time, as that news would no doubt come as a major shock to her. She might even resent him for lying to her. Ella was a smart girl, not just an airheaded little kid who couldn’t comprehend such complicated topics. She deserved the truth, but the truth would come with unforeseen consequences.

As I thought about this, flashes of seeing Ella’s little sleeping body tied up to the chair in the warehouse suddenly and unexpectedly flashed through my mind, followed by images of Ethan holding the gun up to my face. I felt a pang in my chest, as though something was weighing me down and restricting my breathing. For the briefest of moments, I felt as though I was back there again... Back in the warehouse with the bright white spotlight beaming onto me.

“Moana?” Edrick’s voice pulled me out of my daze. “Moana, are you okay?”

When I came back to reality, I quickly blinked the tears out of my eyes and nodded, forcing a smile. Edrick was looking down at me with concern drawn across his face.

“Sorry,” I said, hoping that he hadn’t seen my tears. “Thank you for being so understanding.”

Edrick looked at me for a moment with a worried look in his eyes. I thought for sure that he had picked up on my flashback and that he would tell me not to go, but surprisingly, he didn’t say anything. He just nodded and stepped onto the elevator with me, then took me downstairs to get into the car. He saw me off with another kiss on my forehead, and then I watched his face fade into the distance as the bodyguard drove off.

Those flashbacks had been happening more and more frequently with each passing day. It was strange, but they almost seemed to get more vivid as time went on, as though the horrific experience of what happened in that warehouse was blocked out of my mind at first but was now returning. I thought that it was just from being cooped up in the penthouse... It had to be.

Surely, I would feel better after another few days at work.

But somehow, no matter how much I told myself that things would get better, there was a part of me that wasn’t so sure. And as the bodyguard drove me to work, I began to wonder if I would have a flashback while I was teaching. I knew that I would be able to handle a simple flashback if one were to happen at work, but lately, I had been feeling a sense of losing control during some of the worse flashbacks.

I hoped that it wouldn’t trigger me to shift involuntarily.

## Chapter 202 Under Supervision

### Moana

The bodyguard dropped me off in front of the school, and I got out of the car.

Already, as I walked up the pathway to the entrance of the school, I could see that some of the older students and even other teachers were giving me strange looks. I didn't think too much of it, however, as I had just gotten out of an unmarked vehicle with tinted windows and an intimidating-looking man in the driver's seat. I would have stared at me, too.

But as I headed inside, the staring continued. Even people who hadn't seen me get out of the car were giving me odd looks. I felt as though people were whispering about me; but, once again, I decided not to let it get to me and headed to my classroom.

Once I got to my classroom, I decided to head to the faculty lounge to make myself a cup of coffee and warm up a scone, just as I always did when I first got to school. When I entered the faculty lounge, a couple of other teachers were sitting at the table and chatting. As soon as I walked in, though, their conversation stopped abruptly.

"Good morning," I said with a warm smile as I walked over to the coffee machine, trying not to show how uncomfortable I felt. "How was everyone's weekend?"

One of the teachers, who was a high school math teacher that I had only ever exchanged pleasantries with before, sort of scoffed. Something about it made the hairs on the back of my neck raise, and I turned to face her.

“Is something wrong?” I asked, feeling anger beginning to bubble up inside of me as I was instantly reminded of what it felt like when those wealthy werewolf women were nasty to me at the networking event that I went to with Edrick.

“Oh, nothing, nothing,” the teacher said, waving her hand dismissively and throwing me a stiff smile.

I stared at them for a few moments longer. Finally, the male teacher who was sitting with her spoke up when he realized that I knew that something was going on.

“Sorry, Moana,” he said, sounding more polite than the other teacher. “It’s just... Well, we heard about what happened at the warehouse. It’s all over the news, and...”

“And...?” I asked, folding my arms across my chest.

The teacher’s face went red. “There are some rumors circulating that you’re not actually human, but a... a...”

“A late bloomer?” I finished for him. Behind me, the coffee machine began to spurt my coffee out into my cup. Other than that, the air in the room was thick and silent. The teacher slowly nodded as his face turned into an even deeper shade of red.

“Not that it’s a bad thing, necessarily,” he continued. “It’s just that... Well, late bloomers are very rare. Some people see it as a sign of bad luck. And with your baby on the way, people like to gossip.”

Before, I was angry enough that they were talking about me. But now, to hear that they were talking about my baby? “What about my baby?” I snarled, my voice spiking in a similar staccato to the coffee machine as it beeped behind me.

The male teacher fell silent. His mouth opened and closed a few times as he tried to come up with what to say, making him look like a fish gasping on land. Suddenly, the female teacher spoke up. “More often than not, the children of late bloomers come out with all sorts of... developmental problems,” she said. The female teacher was far nastier with her words, and didn’t beat around the bush. When she finished speaking, she just looked at me with a bit of a smirk on her face.

Now, I was beginning to feel the anger bubbling up even more. I whirled around and picked my coffee up, not caring that I sloshed it on the counter in my haste, then turned and stormed off toward the door. Just before I left, though, I turned back one last time and shot the two teachers an angry glare.

“I don’t care if you gossip about me, but don’t you dare gossip about my baby,” I growled. There was a lot more I wanted to say, but I chose not to. And with that, I left the two teachers alone with their mouths hanging open, and stormed out without even taking my scone with me.

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“Good job!” I said, clapping my hands together as I watched one of the children in my kindergarten class cut a perfectly straight line with her safety scissors. The little girl beamed up at me with rosy red cheeks and shot me a toothless grin. I moved on to the next student, and repeated the same drill. “Here you go...” I said, crouching down to the little boy’s level. “Like this...” I showed him how to use the scissors, and then held his hand while he cut. As he cut, he stuck his tongue out in intense concentration.

“Um... Miss Moana?” one of the children suddenly said.

“Just a moment, Jeremy,” I replied. “I’m helping Bobby.”

The little boy who just called my name fell silent, but only for a moment. “Um, Miss Moana, it’s important,” he nagged.

I let out a sigh. “Jeremy, if you need to use the potty, you can go by yourself,” I said while the little boy that I was helping struggled to cut around a circular shape on his paper. Once again, the little boy, Jeremy, fell silent for just a couple of moments before calling out again.

“Miss Moana, there’s a man looking in the window with b... bin...”

“It’s binoculars, Jeremy,” one of the little girls corrected with a snide tone of voice. As they spoke, however, I already had jerked my head up and pulled the scissors out of Bobby’s chubby little hands before running over to the window.

“Shit,” I whispered under my breath, then clamped my hand over my mouth in the hopes that none of the children heard me curse. Just as the children had said, someone was watching us through the window with binoculars. It was the bodyguard. He was sitting on the hood of the car, looking right in through our windows! When one of the children waved, he even waved back.

“What’s he doing, Miss Moana?” one of the children asked innocently.

I shook my head and instantly closed the blinds, feeling as though my privacy and the privacy of the children had been completely violated. Edrick had said that the bodyguard would wait in the car, not sit outside and watch us with binoculars like he was at the opera!

“Who wants to play duck, duck goose?” I asked, clapping my hands together to divert the kids’ attention, which worked. I had the children sit around in a circle on the carpet, and for the remainder of class, they played duck, duck goose.

However, I couldn’t stop feeling violated by the bodyguard’s actions. I decided that, later that day, I would have to give the bodyguard a piece of my mind. And later, I would have to give Edrick a piece of my mind as well.



## Chapter 203 The Watcher

### Moana

A little while after I caught the bodyguard that Edrick sent with me watching me through the window with binoculars, I calmed down a bit and didn't feel quite as mad about it. I decided against talking to Edrick about it later, and figured that I should just give it some time before I started any arguments. After all, Edrick was just trying to keep me safe by sending the bodyguard with me. The fact alone that he was even okay with me returning to work and with Ella returning to school was already a miracle. I didn't want to accidentally rock the boat and make Edrick change his mind, because I knew that the Alpha billionaire would be too stubborn if he suddenly decided that it was a bad idea for either of us to return to our normal lives.

However, on my lunch break I started to notice that something was off when one of the other teachers came in and knocked on my door with a somewhat angry expression on her face.

“Hi,” I said, setting down my sandwich with surprise, seeing as how no one ever came to my classroom during my break. “Can I help you with anything?”

The teacher, a young woman about my age who was one of the kindergarten teachers, stood in my doorway and folded her arms across her chest. Like me, she also had long red hair. “Some man has been staring through my window, and I know it has something to do with you,” she

growled. One of my kids said that he was staring through your window earlier, and she's very upset about it."

I felt my face go pale and my blood run cold. "I-I'm so sorry," I replied nervously, standing and wringing my hands. "He's not bad or anything of the sort, it's just that—"

"I don't care what your excuse is," the teacher interrupted, her voice sharp and grating. "You either need to take care of it, or I'm going to tell the headmistress. It's already bad enough that we have to deal with your bad luck, and now you're bringing strange, intimidating men on school property? What the hell is wrong with you?"

As the teacher spoke, I felt as though my body had officially drained itself of all blood, leaving me standing there as nothing but a cold, empty husk of the woman who I once was. I opened my mouth to speak, but before I could stammer anything out, she whirled around and stormed off.

I felt sick. The bodyguard must have mistaken her for me. He probably saw her red hair through the window and was watching her, not realizing that he was watching entirely the wrong person. She was right, though, despite the fact that she felt the need to get a little dig in about my supposed "bad luck" as a late bloomer; he needed to be taken care of. He was making children and teachers alike uncomfortable.

Grumbling to myself under my breath, I stormed out of my classroom with my fists clenched and ran down the hallway. I ran past teachers, students, and classrooms, past the confused elderly security guard, and stormed out of the building and into the sunshine.

Just as I suspected, the bodyguard was leaning against the side of his car with a pair of binoculars in his hand. As I stormed up to him, I saw him push a button on his headset and say something before he straightened himself and put the binoculars behind his back.

“Afternoon, Miss,” he said politely, his sharp jawline jutting out as he towered over me. “Is everything alright?”

“Alright?” I asked. “Alright? You’re practically terrorizing the students and the teachers at this school!”

The security guard furrowed his brow and looked down at me through his dark sunglasses. “Um... I’m not sure what you’re referring to, Miss,” he said. “I’m just doing my job.”

Suddenly, I lurched forward and reached around his back. I grabbed the binoculars that were in his hand and yanked them away before he had a chance to stop me, then waved them in his face. “Binoculars?” I growled. “For goodness’ sake, this is ridiculous! Your job was to drive me here, keep an eye on the property in case anyone suspicious shows up, and drive me home. That’s it. And now you’re acting like the suspicious one, looking through windows with bloody BINOCULARS!”

After I finished speaking, the air fell silent. Through his dark sunglasses, I could see that his eyes were wide. My own eyes were wide, too, because without realizing it I had raised my voice and was now shouting at him. Even passersby were giving us odd looks, and some of the children on the playground were standing by the fence and staring at us with open mouths while the recess attendants were trying — and failing — to usher them away.

“Miss, I’m just doing what Mr. Morgan—”

“You’re my employee, too,” I said, lowering my voice so as not to be heard. “And I’m telling you to tone it back, or... or... I’ll call the police and have you escorted off of the school’s property.”

The security guard looked at me for a moment in a state of shock before he finally nodded and hung his head slightly. “Yes, ma’am,” he said, sounding rather much like one of the children who I had to scold for being unruly in the classroom. “I’ll tone it back.”

“Thank you,” I muttered. I watched with my arms folded across my chest as he circled around the car and got into the driver’s seat. Then, whirling around, I stormed past the playground, ignoring the shocked students and recess attendants, and ran back inside. I walked past the still-confused security guard, past the classrooms and students and teachers, and back into my classroom. Once I was inside, I closed the door behind me as calmly as I could.

And once I was concealed inside of my classroom, I angrily chucked the binoculars as hard as I could into the trash can by my desk. I relished in the sound of the plastic and glass breaking for a moment before I dusted my hands off and sat back down to finish my sandwich.

Thankfully, the bodyguard wasn’t an issue for the remainder of the day. However, it seemed as though everyone saw my little display earlier, and by the end of the day I felt as though even more people were staring at me and whispering as I locked up my classroom and headed out.

I kept my head down, ignoring the nasty whispers from fellow teachers as I passed by their classrooms.

But when I passed by the headmistress’s office, I felt my face flush red as I saw her annoyed expression looking up at me from behind her desk through the open door. Swallowing, I bowed my head and scurried past.

Hopefully, I thought to myself as I rushed out and down the pathway, then climbed into the back of the car, tomorrow would be better.

And if not, Edrick was going to have to settle for an alternative to the bodyguard.

## Chapter 204 Curiosity Killed the Cat

Edrick

The thought of sending Moana back to work and Ella back to school made me incredibly nervous, but I knew that it needed to be done. It wasn't fair to keep them both cooped up, and as long as they both had the proper protection, I decided that it would be alright if it would make my girls happy.

On the first day, Moana went to work by herself while I talked to Ella. Ella was becoming increasingly aggravated lately, seeing as how she didn't remember anything from the night of the kidnapping. Eventually, however, she was bound to find out; surely her little friends at school had heard whisperings of what happened at the warehouse already, and although the details of what really happened weren't known by the public yet, I didn't want Ella to learn about it from anyone except for me.

So, while Moana was at work, I sat Ella down to talk to her. She was holding one of her dolls tightly in her hand and brushing its hair furiously, as though she was taking a bit of her frustration out on it.

"Princess, I need to talk to you," I said gently. "Can you please put your doll down?"

With a huff, Ella threw her doll down on the floor where we sat and folded her arms across her chest. I debated scolding her for that, but decided against it.

“Why can Moana go back to school, but I can’t?” she growled, her little pointed ears and sharp fangs showing as she shifted slightly from her anger. “It’s not fair!”

“I know, Princess,” I replied. “You’ll go back to school tomorrow, but I need to talk to you first about why all of this has been happening lately.”

Ella seemed intrigued by what I said, and her fangs withdrew slightly at the prospect of going back to school. She waited patiently and allowed me to talk. “The other night, when you woke up in the police car, I wasn’t entirely truthful with you,” I said. “I told you that there was nothing to worry about, which was the truth; but what I didn’t tell you was that...”

As I slowly and gently told Ella the entire story of what happened, her little eyes widened and her face went pale. When I was finished, she looked up at me incredulously.

“Uncle Ethan really did that...?” she whispered. I nodded.

“I’m sorry, Princess,” I said gently. “I hope you’re not mad at me for not telling you sooner.”

Ella looked up at me for a few moments longer before she quietly climbed into my lap. I held her there for a long time, gently rocking her back and forth. Now that the story was out, both of us felt much better. But there was something that I still didn’t tell her.

I didn’t tell her about her mom.

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Later that afternoon, I was working in my study when my phone began to ring. When I picked it up, it was the bodyguard. My blood ran cold as I heard his voice, expecting something bad to have happened to Moana. I wondered if she shifted at work, or if my father showed up. All of the worst outcomes immediately came to mind before I even heard what really happened.

“Yes?” I said, standing abruptly from my desk and immediately preparing to run down there myself. “Is everything alright? Is she hurt?”

“She’s fine,” the bodyguard, Darren, said. “Nothing happened. Don’t worry.”

“Oh.” I let out a sigh of relief and sat down as I ran a hand through my hair. “What is it, then?”

On the other side of the phone, I heard Darren let out an audible sigh. “She saw me watching,” he replied. “I guess other teachers complained, too. She came out here and made quite the scene. And she took my binoculars.”

As the bodyguard spoke, I felt myself sink in my chair. Of course Moana had made a scene; honestly, it was stupid of me to think that she wouldn’t. I wasn’t surprised that other teachers were complaining, either. Maybe I was a bit too aggressive with my orders when I secretly told Darren to watch her through the window and not let her out of his sight.

“Alright,” I said, sighing again as I leaned back in my chair and shut my eyes exasperatedly. “Tomorrow, just drop her off and act as though you’re coming home, but watch undercover,” I said. “I don’t care how you do it, so long as you don’t let Moana or Ella see you and you don’t alarm any of the teachers or students. Got it?”

“Yes, sir,” Darren replied. After that, I hung up.

That evening, I half expected Moana to give me a talking-to over what had happened. But surprisingly, she didn’t say a word. The next morning, she simply woke up and got Ella ready for school. I saw both of them off at the lobby door downstairs, then watched as they drove away before I headed back up to the penthouse.

However, by that afternoon, I had received yet another call from the bodyguard. This time, Moana had caught him watching from a park bench across the street, gave him the middle finger through her classroom

window, and then held up a sign that said that she was going to call the police. It took her holding up her phone in the window and dialing the numbers for him to finally walk away and call me again.

Even though Moana's fiery attitude made me want to laugh, I knew that this was serious. Clearly, this bodyguard wasn't meshing well with her. She obviously didn't feel comfortable or trust him, so after dismissing him from the job, I decided that it was time to take a different approach.

Moana and Ella needed to be allowed to go to work and school. However, it was still dangerous. Besides, if she suddenly began to shift in her classroom, having a bodyguard sitting outside wouldn't be much help. She needed someone specialized, someone who she was comfortable with having close by... Maybe she needed someone who she saw as more of a friend than an intimidating bodyguard.

If I could just find someone who could get comfortable with Moana enough to stay inside the classroom with her, someone who could be easily passed as a teacher's aide so that the other teachers wouldn't be too suspicious, it would be perfect. I would feel better knowing that she had someone right by her side in case something happened, and maybe she would be less resentful if she felt less intimidated by this new bodyguard.

But who could I give this task to? All of the bodyguards that I hired were large, intimidating men with combat training who I had initially hired with the intention of patrolling the mountain estate. They were extremely talented and valuable, and I felt safe having them on my security team. But I needed someone who Moana could relate to, and someone who also had specialized experience with being a personal bodyguard for a young woman...

Suddenly, I had an idea. With a sigh, I picked up my phone to call my chief security officer.



## Chapter 205 But Satisfaction Brought it Back

Edrick

With an exasperated sigh, I picked up my phone to call my chief security officer.

“Afternoon, Mr. Morgan,” he said when he answered. “Everything alright?”

“Yes,” I replied. “But I need a favor. Do you have any female bodyguards you could send over for an interview?”

The chief security officer paused for a moment, thinking. “I do,” he replied. “I can send them over tomorrow. Is there anything you need them for specifically?”

I sighed again, thinking back on the incident with Moana and the male bodyguard that I had assigned to her. She clearly felt uncomfortable with him, and it was obvious that the other teachers and students were uncomfortable as well. All I wanted was for Moana to be protected, but it wasn’t going to help any if she kept pushing away the bodyguards.

“I need someone who can work closely with my... fiancée,” I replied, still feeling strange about referring to Moana as that. Even though we had marked each other and had become a lot more affectionate since it had happened, we were still technically not in any sort of official relationship. At least, we hadn’t talked about it yet. “She needs someone who can be

helpful with kids, and someone who's easy to get along with but who will also provide good protection. Do you have anyone like that?"

For a few more moments, the security officer paused. I could hear him typing on a keyboard on the other end, like he was looking something up. After a little while longer, he finally said, "Aha! I found someone."

"Who is it?" I asked.

"Her name is Katherine," he replied. "She's twenty-eight, has experience working on one-on-one jobs in family settings, and it looks like she performed excellently on all of her physical and intellectual exams."

I nodded, letting out a small sigh of relief. "Send her over to the penthouse tomorrow," I replied. "I'd like to have an interview with her."

I felt infinitely relieved by the time I hung up with the security officer. Perhaps having a female bodyguard who was good with kids might lift Moana's mood and make her feel a bit more comfortable. Not only that, but maybe I could finally rest easy during the day knowing that Moana had an experienced bodyguard by her side in case of an emergency... Although part of me felt as though I would never really rest easy. Not as long as I still had to worry that Moana could shift at any point out of nowhere.

For the rest of that day, I prepared what I would say to Moana. She hadn't exactly been out of line with how she handled her first bodyguard, per se, but I needed her to understand why it was so important for her to be more open to this new bodyguard. When she came home that afternoon, however, judging from the angry expression on her face and the way that she stormed toward me it seemed as though my pre-planned speech might fall on deaf ears.

As Moana stormed into the apartment, she immediately sent Ella off to her room to play before grabbing me by the arm and pulling me

unceremoniously into my study. When the door was shut behind us, she folded her arms across her chest and shot me an angry glare.

“He can’t keep stalking me like this,” she growled. “The agreement was that he would drive me to work and wait in the car, not that he would sneak around with binoculars and spy on my every move. Yesterday, he mistook another red-haired teacher for me. Today, one of my students started crying because she was scared of the enormous man on the park bench who kept staring into the classroom window! Do you want me to lose my job?”

I sighed and shook my head. “No, Moana,” I replied. “Look... I’m sorry, but you need a bodyguard. I don’t feel comfortable with you and Ella returning to school with someone just sitting outside. Someone could sneak in. You could shift during class and wreak havoc if no one is equipped to handle it.”

“I won’t shift,” she insisted. “I think that I would know if I was going to shift.”

“It’s not that simple,” I replied exasperatedly. “When someone shifts for the first time, they can’t always recognize the warning signs. Many people can lose consciousness during their first time shifting, and their wolf can cause a lot of damage. Normally, people shift for the first time as children, in a safe environment with teachers. But as a late bloomer such as yourself, things are different. I understand that you’re entitled to your independence, but do you want to potentially destroy your classroom and terrify your students if you shift suddenly? What if you injured someone?”

Moana fell silent for a few moments while she chewed the inside of her cheek. “Fine,” she finally said quietly. “I get it... I get that I’m just a late bloomer who could cause all sorts of problems.”

I raised my eyebrows, shocked at this sudden use of words. “What are you talking about?” I asked. “Where did that come from?”

“Everyone keeps saying that I’m bad luck as a late bloomer,” Moana said, her voice quiet and almost timid. “My colleagues keep whispering about me. No one wants to be near me, and with this whole security guard nonsense, it’s even worse. I’m not only there for a job, you know. I was hoping that maybe, just maybe, I could... I don’t know. I thought that I could—”

“Make some friends?” I asked. Moana nodded and I sighed, running my hand through my hair. “Would you want to be friends with superstitious people who spread nasty rumors like that anyway?”

For a long time, Moana stared blankly at the floor in front of her. Her jaw shifted from side to side as she seemed to be thinking deeply, before she finally dropped her arms to her sides and shrugged. “I guess not,” she said. “But either way, this bodyguard business is causing problems, and I do have a job to do. Besides, people know that Ella is my ‘daughter’, and I don’t want anything bad to rub off on her.”

“Well...” I smiled slightly. “You’ll be happy to know that I found an alternative. A new bodyguard that you can have in the classroom with you. Wouldn’t that be better?”

I expected Moana to feel better, but for some reason, this only seemed to make her even angrier. Her cheeks turned a shade of red that almost matched her hair, and she folded her arms across her chest again and shook her head vigorously.

“Did you not just listen to what I said?” she asked. “I won’t allow a bodyguard in my classroom! And if you try, I’ll... I’ll send them away again!”

“No.” Now, I finally felt the need to put my foot down, and I narrowed my eyes at Moana. “No,” I said. “You won’t send them away. You’re going to just have to deal with this new reality, Moana, or I’m going to have to take us to the mountain estate for real this time.”