

## Chapter 27 The Invitation

### Moana

The following morning, I woke up early to get Ella ready for training. She was tired after the party, but was cooperative, and her sweet disposition distracted me from the strange experiences I had at the Morgan residence.

While Ella ate breakfast, I sought Edrick out and found him in his study. Taking a deep breath, I quietly knocked on the door. He glanced up and gestured for me to come in before promptly looking back down at his work again.

“Did you need something?” he asked.

“Yes,” I replied, still feeling somewhat uncomfortable around the Alpha billionaire’s cold demeanor even though I thought I should be used to it by now.

“Well, spit it out.”

I swallowed. The last time I had done anything like I was about to ask permission for, it had ended horribly and completely stunted both Edrick’s and the servants’ confidence in me.

“I would like to take some time today to visit the orphanage while Ella is at her training session,” I said.

Edrick paused and slowly set his pen down, then looked up at me and leaned back in his chair. He folded his arms across his chest and looked down his nose at me, narrowing his eyes. I prepared myself for the inevitable.

“Are you planning on losing my daughter again?”

“Not at all,” I replied. “I was thinking, since the orphanage isn’t too far from there, I could get there and back before Ella even finishes her training. That’s how it would’ve worked last time, too, had I not gotten stuck in traffic.”

Edrick was silent again for a few agonizing moments. “Well... You can’t predict traffic in the city,” he said. “It could happen again.”

“So I’ll make sure the attendant knows that I’ll be leaving,” I replied, the words flying out of my mouth quickly this time as I became more desperate. “I promise, it won’t happen again. Really.”

After I spoke, I could see something flash through the Alpha CEO’s cold eyes. It looked like worry. “Alright,” he said finally, picking up his pen again. “Don’t let anything happen to Ella again.”

“I won’t,” I replied softly, backing out of his office. I often forgot that Edrick had feelings for anyone, but seeing such a strong emotion for his daughter flash across his face like that immediately reminded me that he wasn’t entirely cold to his core. Seeing the way that he interacted with his own father the night before also reminded me how sour behaviors like the one that Edrick often exhibited were frequently a product of nurture, not nature... And I knew that Ella would grow up to be a sweet young woman, because deep down, I think that Edrick knew that he had to break the cycle with her.

...

“Okay, Ella. Here’s your backpack. I’m just going to the orphanage to do some volunteer work, alright?” I said, crouching to Ella’s level as we stood outside the training facility. She nodded vehemently, and I ruffled her hair. “Okay. I’ll be here when you’re done. If I’m not, it’s just because of traffic, and I want you to go back inside and wait with the attendant until I do get here.”

Ella nodded vehemently again, her little face hilariously serious as though I had just given her marching orders to take to her grave.

I stood, watching as Ella ran to meet up with her werewolf friends. Once she was inside, I flagged down a taxi and headed to the orphanage.

I spent the next hour and a half playing with the children on the playground. While I always enjoyed every activity with the children, playing outside was one of my favorites; I always loved helping the kids cross the monkey bars, playing hide and seek with them, and participating in their games of kickball. By the time it was over, I was a bit sweaty from the summer heat, but it felt good to get some exercise.

I was just getting ready to flag down another taxi to get back to the training facility when an unfamiliar black car pulled up to me.

“Get in,” a familiar, friendly face said as he rolled down the window. It was Ethan. “I’ll give you a lift.”

I smiled and climbed into the passenger seat, buckling my seatbelt as Ethan pulled away from the curb.

“I’m headed to pick up Ella from the training facility,” I said. “You really didn’t have to do this. I appreciate it.”

“No worries,” Ethan said with a smile. “I heard about what happened last time, and I’m sure Edrick is all over you like a cheap suit because of it.”

“That would be putting it lightly,” I replied, looking out the window. “He’s like one big ball of stress.”

“That’s the truth,” Ethan replied. “You got a good dose of that last night. I’m sorry about that, by the way. I should’ve warned you that my relationship with my brother is... strained, to say the least.”

I was silent for a moment as I looked out the window at the city passing by around us.

“Do you mind if I ask why you don’t get along?” I asked finally.

Ethan shrugged. "I'm his half brother. I think he sees me as this great big symbol of a wrench being thrown into a so-called 'perfect' family dynamic, when really, it's not like the Morgan family has ever been even close to perfect to begin with. But, I think that the way I came into his life destroyed his hopes that his family might actually be okay."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't really wanna get too into it," Ethan replied as he drove around a corner. "I'll just say that... I came after Verona and Michael were married and had Edrick. And you already know that Verona is not my biological mother."

"Oh," I said, looking down at my lap. "I see."

There was another long silence as I processed what Ethan said, finally understanding why Edrick felt so bitter about him, before I spoke again.

"It's not your fault, you know," I said.

Ethan smiled. "It's neither my fault nor Edrick's fault," he said. "One day, I think he'll see that. I'm willing to wait."

Ethan's response made me smile. He seemed gentle and sweet, not at all like the way that Edrick painted him to be. Maybe I could help Edrick see that, but at the same time, I supposed that it was better if I stayed out of it for the sake of my job.

Just then, my phone rang: it was the driver who was supposed to take Ella and I home. He informed me that he got stuck in traffic and would be late. I cursed under my breath as I hung up the phone.

"What's wrong?" Ethan asked.

"The driver got stuck in traffic," I replied. "Edrick's probably going to make it my fault if Ella gets home late."

"I'll drive you," Ethan replied, holding his hand up as I tried to resist. "Don't say anything. I'm driving you home."

When we arrived back at the penthouse, I helped Ella get out before stooping down to look at Ethan through the window.

“Thank you for the ride,” I said. “I’ll see you around sometime.”

“Actually, we will see each other again soon,” Ethan replied, leaning to meet my gaze through the car window. “My exhibition is in a few days.”

“Oh, right,” I replied with a grin, remembering now that Ethan had invited me to his art exhibit the first time we met. “I’ll be there.”

As I stood and turned back toward the penthouse, however, I saw that Edrick was standing in the doorway... And he looked furious.