

Chapter 17: The Guests

Moana

When I woke up the morning after Ella's birthday, I was shocked to discover that it was already eleven o'clock; three hours past my usual time to wake up in the morning. If it hadn't been for my phone buzzing on the bedside table, I likely would have slept in for even longer.

As I awoke, squinting against the bright sunlight coming in through the large window, I also discovered something else: Edrick and I were cuddling again.

Feeling my face flush hot, I quickly climbed out of bed, taking care not to wake Edrick, and picked up my phone to see Selina's name on my screen.

"Selina?" I said quietly, walking away from the bed so as not to wake the still-sleeping Edrick.

"Where on earth are you?" she asked angrily, her voice quivering with rage. "You should've been up hours ago, and you haven't answered even though I've been knocking on your door all morning."

I gulped, feeling a wave of embarrassment wash over me. "I'm so sorry," I stammered, trying to come up with an excuse as the housekeeper was still oblivious to my new sleeping arrangement with Edrick, and she certainly wouldn't understand it if I tried to explain it to her myself. "I-I was taking a shower just now. I'll be out soon."

Selina grumbled on the other end of the phone. "Well, hurry up. We have guests who are expecting you, Ella, and Mr. Morgan downstairs in the lobby as soon as possible."

Before I could answer, Selina abruptly hung up the phone. It was at this point as well that Edrick sat up in bed, wide awake. Had I been talking so loudly that I woke him up? It always seemed that he fell asleep as soon as I did, and woke up as soon as I woke up, which was strange, but I didn't have time to think about it.

“Did I hear something about guests?” Edrick said confusedly as I slid my feet into my slippers and shuffled off toward the door.

“Yes,” I replied, quickly opening the door and poking my head out to make sure no one was around. “I'm not sure who, though.”

Seeing that no one was around, I quickly ran out of Edrick's bedroom and scurried off to my room, somehow managing to slip inside without being seen. I washed myself up, still groggy and sore from spending my entire day yesterday at the theme park — with a sunburn across my nose to prove it — and then got dressed in clean clothes. I pulled my hair back into a low bun and, once I was satisfied with my appearance, I opened the door to my bedroom and quickly got Ella ready for our visitors.

By the time I was finished getting Ella ready, Edrick was already waiting for us in the foyer. We took the elevator down to the lobby to greet these mystery guests. I hid my bashfulness around Edrick in the silent elevator as best I could and avoided eye contact at all costs, as it seemed that we would wake up cuddling every morning despite our agreement to not get romantically involved, and I didn't want him to think that I was trying to break the clauses in my contract; nor did I want to alert Ella, Selina, or the maids to our arrangement.

The elevator slowly ticked down the floors of the high rise building, finally opening with a ding at the ground floor.

“Grandma!” Ella called when we saw our guests standing in the lobby. I was taken by surprise as Ella ran away excitedly to greet them.

As we approached, the two guests came into focus. One was an older woman with silver hair wearing an expensive-looking dress and a large sun hat, while the other was much younger with an equally expensive-looking satin dress and perfectly curled blonde hair that fell down her back, her eyes covered by large sunglasses.

“Oh, hello, darling,” the older woman said, bending down to kiss Ella on both cheeks. “Happy belated birthday! Grandma has lots of presents for you.”

Ella squealed delightedly. Both women looked up as Edrick and I approached, eyeing me up and down suspiciously.

“Say hello to Kelly, Ella,” Edrick said.

Ella reluctantly turned toward the younger woman, who pushed her sunglasses up onto her forehead to reveal dark brown eyes that stared at me icily for a split second before looking down at Ella. “Hello, Kelly,” Ella said, sounding much less enthusiastic than she did when she greeted her grandmother. Kelly bent down and kissed Ella on both cheeks, who stiffened at the young woman’s touch and stepped back toward me once Kelly stood again.

The two women continued to eye me, so I decided to end the awkward silence and introduce myself.

“I’m Moana,” I said with a slight, polite bow of my head. “I’m Ella’s nanny.”

“Ah, the au pair,” Verona said coldly. “I didn’t expect a human, so I was unsure.”

“Mother,” Edrick said, stepping forward to kiss her on both cheeks. He then turned toward Kelly, who beamed widely at him, but she glared at me coldly over his shoulder as they kissed each other on the cheek.

Edrick took the two women's bags and carried them to the elevator. We all stood quietly in the elevator as it slowly carried us up to the penthouse. Suddenly, Kelly turned toward me, looking down her nose at me.

"So... Do you have the right qualifications to be Ella's au pair?"

"Pardon me?" I asked, feeling as though Kelly was being rude.

"I only ask because I care deeply about Ella," she said with a stiff smile. "Sometimes I feel as though Ella is my own daughter."

"Ella is the best nanny ever," Ella chimed in. When I looked down at her, she was frowning up at Kelly with an angry glint in her eyes. Kelly merely nodded, not saying anything else; thankfully, the doors opened and the two women became too distracted by the penthouse and ordering the servants around to disturb me any longer, which was a relief.

Edrick led Verona and Kelly to the dining room, with Ella trailing behind miserably. Selina beckoned for me to help her in the kitchen. Just before I lost sight of the group, I noticed Kelly attempting to talk to Ella, who was acting aloof and disinterested.

"Is Kelly Edrick's sister?" I asked Amy quietly as we worked side-by-side to prepare lunch.

Amy shook her head. "No," she replied. I saw movement from the corner of my eye and looked over my shoulder to see Edrick passing by the doorway with Kelly on his heels. She appeared to be following him, chattering away about something. They looked to be headed in the direction of Edrick's bedroom.

"A friend, then?" I asked.

Amy smirked. "I think if Ella wasn't around, Kelly would already be Edrick's wife by now."

Selina shot Amy a disapproving look, abruptly ending the conversation.

Even though I knew that I wasn't supposed to have any sort of feelings toward Edrick, there was no denying the pit in my stomach as Amy told me this. Was Kelly Edrick's girlfriend or fiancée?