

Chapter 24 Pup Scuffle

Edrick

I returned to the party with Moana, trying to quell my anger over seeing Moana and Ethan together. I wasn't quite so much mad at her, although she should've been more professional, as I was mad at him. I knew that he was up to something... Always.

"There you are, darling," my mother said, reaching out and squeezing my hand as Moana and I approached.

"Edrick," my father suddenly said, pushing himself up from his chair. He didn't like to admit it, but he was getting older and was starting to have some difficulty with sitting and standing. "Come with me. I'd like to talk to you."

I knew where this was going, but I also knew that I didn't have a say with it as I watched my father walk away. My mother, who also knew what he was about to say, gave my hand another squeeze before I followed him.

We walked over to the bar, where he ordered us each a glass of whiskey.

"Here," he said, shoving the glass of whiskey in my hand.

"Thank you," I replied, swirling the brown liquid around a bit in my glass before taking a sip, steeling myself for what was about to come.

"Now... I'm sure you know why I wanted to speak with you," my father said, fixing his icy gray eyes on me.

I nodded. "I know, father. It's time to find a mate. You've been saying this for years."

“I only say it because I worry about you,” he said, stroking his white beard with his hand. “You’ve already had one illegitimate child. It’s only so long before you have another, given your track record.”

“I’m not worried,” I replied tersely. “Besides, marriage is a distraction.”

My father scoffed. “So is dealing with illegitimate children.”

I watched as he slowly turned his head to look at Ella and Moana. I had tried my best for the last eight years to keep Ella a secret from the public, and it had worked so far; but my father wasn’t entirely wrong. Not only was it taxing on such a little girl to be kept cooped up and hidden away, but it also became mentally taxing to work so hard to hide her. Many journalists and papa razzos had been paid off with hefty sums of money, not to mention her mother, who occasionally showed up demanding more. But despite all of that, Ella was mine, through and through. I didn’t consider her to be any less worthy than if I had a legitimate child with a future wife.

“You really don’t want to end up like me,” my father said then, gesturing with his glass as he referred to Ethan. “It’s too much of a bother, and it’s bad for the company’s image. Do something about your love life, and then you can claim that Ella is your wife’s child. Why not Kelly, after all? You know she’d keep your secret.”

I felt the anger start to bubble up inside of me, and I tried to quell it with another hefty swig of my whiskey.

“We’ve been over this,” I said, setting my glass down on the bar. “I’m not interested in Kelly like that. And the more you entertain that idea, the more you’ll stoke the fires of that fantasy in her head.”

“And?” my father said. “I don’t suppose you think you’d have a better chance with a human girl?” He nodded his head toward Moana, who was crouching in front of Ella and brushing a bit of hair out of her face.

I shook my head. “You don’t need to worry about that. She’s a human, and she’s just a nanny.”

Without another word, I stormed away from my father. Ella looked up as I approached, softening my demeanor, although I still felt the fires of rage inside of me from my conversation with my father.

“What’s wrong, Eddy?” Kelly asked.

I didn’t answer — and thankfully, I didn’t need to, because the orchestra suddenly began to play Vivaldi’s Winter. I glanced up to see a dreamy smile beginning to spread across Moana’s face; she appeared to know the song.

“Edrick, Moana has never had the pleasure of attending one of our banquets,” my mother suddenly said, looking over her shoulder at me from her seat. “I’ll watch Ella. Why don’t you two go and dance?”

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I was surprised to find that Moana seemed to have some experience with dancing. As our dance came to an end, however, I felt Kelly’s and my father’s eyes on me, and stepped away from Moana with a bow. She said she had to use the restroom, so I pointed her in the right direction and returned to my mother and Ella.

“Eddy,” Kelly suddenly said, staggering up to me. She appeared a bit too drunk, and her face was red from the alcohol. “Let’s dance. I haven’t danced with anyone all night.”

I shook my head. “Sorry, but I’m a little tired. Why don’t you ask one of my cousins? I heard that Karl has a bit of a crush on you.”

Kelly glanced over my shoulder at the gaggle of my young male cousins, who had all come tonight without dates, then shook her head and abruptly turned on her heel. “Nevermind,” she said brusquely. “I’m going to use the ladies’ room.” I watched as she stumbled off and disappeared through the door, before I let out a sigh of relief and sat down next to my mother.

“Moana is such a sweet girl, you know,” my mother said, watching with amusement as Ella wriggled off of her lap to run off and join the other children. “She’s a lovely dancer, too.”

I shrugged. “She’s a good nanny. Ella likes her.”

“But, do you like her?” she asked.

I stared down at the floor, unsure of how to respond. Of course I liked Moana, to a certain extent. She was a good nanny and helped out around the penthouse, and her presence helped me sleep, but she was also a bit of a thorn in my side.

Before I could answer, I was alerted by the sound of worried voices approaching me.

“Have you seen Lucas and Adam?” my older cousin, Maria, asked, stopping in front of me. She was referring to her two sons, who were often known for causing a bit of trouble. Her husband, Maurice, stood next to her looking equally as worried.

I shook my head. “I haven’t seen them. Why?”

“They’ve been fighting a lot lately,” Maurice said. “We’re worried that they’re off somewhere, probably in their wolf forms.”

I realized now that Moana still hadn’t returned from the bathroom.

Suddenly, I heard the sound of heels clicking on the marble, and looked up to see Kelly running toward us.

“It’s Moana!” she said, pointing. “I tried to stop her, but she insisted on wandering, and now she’s in the middle of a pup scuffle.”

Maria gasped. “Oh, no!” she cried. “We have to stop them before someone gets hurt!”

Of course. I should've known that Moana wouldn't listen to my requests. It was foolish of me to assume that a human wouldn't be so awestruck by my family's home that she would insist on wandering.

"Where is she?" I asked, letting out a heavy sigh and passing my hand over my face.

Kelly took my hand and began to pull me toward the corridor. "She's this way," she said, intertwining her slender fingers with mine. "I'll show you."

The worried parents and I followed Kelly through the corridors and out into one of the further gardens, where, just as she had described, Moana was standing behind the big oak tree while the two pups stalked around the garden, looking for her. She looked up when she saw me, and then, with a smile, raised her finger to her lips... And jumped out, spooking the pups.

Kelly, the pups' parents, and I all watched in awe as Moana played with the pups, rubbing their tummies and letting them chase her around the garden.

"I thought you said they were fighting," I said, turning to Kelly.

Her eyes were wide and fixed on Moana. "They were."

When the pups saw their parents, they both immediately shifted back into their human forms with sheepish looks on their faces. Maria rushed forward, inspecting each child for injuries before turning to Moana.

"My, you certainly have a knack with children, don't you?" Maria said, making Moana blush. "What was your name again?"

"Moana."

"Well, Moana," Maria continued, "I'd love to have your contact information, should you ever be interested in working as a nanny for my boys."

There was a bit of a silence. I felt somewhat appalled by Maria's attempt to steal my employee away from me and opened my mouth to protest, but before I could, Ella's tiny voice shouted from behind me. It seemed that she had followed us here.

"No way!" Ella shouted, running up to Moana and throwing her arms around Moana's legs territorially. "Moana is my nanny."

Ella's sudden burst of defensiveness made Moana and I both look at each other with shocked expressions.

"Sorry Madam, I am her nanny."