

Chapter 39 The Safest Route

Edrick

Being around Moana, especially while I was as drunk as I was that night, made it almost impossible to resist her. Why did I feel so attracted to this ordinary human nanny? It was as if there was a spell on me that night, and for the briefest of moments as our tongues explored each other's mouths and our bodies became pressed up against one another, I swore I was able to pick up the faintest scent... The same scent that I picked up on the night that we played the maze game.

Just as quickly as it began, however, it was over. There was a knock on the door, followed by my daughter's frightened, shaky voice. When Moana opened the door, there were tears streaked down Ella's little face. Seeing those tears sobered me and made me realize that I was putting my daughter at risk by being so foolish and getting so emotionally involved with the nanny.

As I stood in the middle of Moana's dark room and watched her disappear with Ella, I started to realize that I had to do what was right.

I hardly slept at all that night.

Eventually, the effects of the alcohol wore off. By the time the sun started to rise, I felt mostly sober; after a hot shower and several cups of coffee, there was at least some semblance of normalcy in my body. Although being put under the spell of sleep in Moana's presence would have been

preferable, I knew that I couldn't do it anymore. I was getting too attached already, and I had already sworn to myself after Ella was born that I would never love anyone except for my daughter.

Growing up, I had spent the first five years — only the first five years — believing that love was beautiful, enduring, and kind.

But when I saw the way my mother's face looked that day, and I saw how the light left her eyes for what felt like an eternity, that image that I had in my head started to cr*ck. Behind the facade of love, there was nothing but ugliness and pain.

My father had been unfaithful. It had been going on for quite some time, apparently, because one day he came home with a new baby.

“This is your new brother,” my mother had said, but I knew that the tiny bundle of sn*t and tears wasn't my brother. Not really.

My mother took care of him like he was her own. She loved him just as much as she loved me, which made me even more angry. As I grew older, I also grew more bitter; how could my father claim to love my mother, only to ultimately take advantage of her enduring kindness? He knew she would stay. He knew she would take care of Ethan and that she would love him dearly, so he didn't even care. He didn't care that he was breaking the heart of someone who was supposed to be his fated mate. And he especially didn't care that he had completely destroyed the idea in my mind that mates were supposed to be faithful, and that children were supposed to be born from love, not lust and greed.

Ethan was a perfect example of that lust and greed. My mother lovingly indulged his fantasies of becoming a famous artist, and he took advantage of that in the same way that my father took advantage of her kind heart. He greedily took every check she handed him. He acted as though he became famous off of his skills in art, but it was really because of my mother. She completely funded his schooling, his housing, his new gallery. She was the “mystery donor” at all of his charity galas, the one

who always somehow made him meet his donation goal — and then some — by the end of the night.

I was determined not to be like my father or Ethan. I was also determined not to be like my mother, who was too open, too loving, too generous. If people wanted my money, sure; if they wanted my heart, they would never have it.

But then, I met Ella's mother. She reeled me in with her beauty and her seduction, and I fell victim to lust. I thought that I might actually be able to love her. When she told me she was pregnant, I was over the moon...

Until Ella was born.

During a time in which a new family was supposed to be elated about their new child, Ella's mother would disappear for days at a time. She would come home in the mornings, reeking of whiskey and mens' cologne. She never held Ella once. To her, Ella was just a tool to keep me bound to her, so she could have access to my money.

When I finally came to my senses, I kept Ella and kicked her mother out. I told Ella that her mother was dead. I gave her a large sum of money and bought her a nice apartment, but I did those things with the sole goal of making sure that she would never, ever, tarnish my daughter with her greed.

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Why, then, was this human nanny making me forget my values? There wasn't anything particularly special about her, aside from her skills with children and her strange ability to help me sleep. She was pretty, but I

hardly ever noticed those sorts of things. And somehow, I couldn't resist her.

By the time she woke up and came out that morning to greet me, I had decided that I knew what I needed to do. Ella was too attached for me to fire Moana, but I could still find a way to distance myself. This sleeping arrangement was making me too attached. If I ended it, I was sure that I would lose whatever attachment I had developed, and things could go back to normal. By ending the arrangement, I would regain control over my life.

Moana didn't object when I tore up the contract and threw it in the trash, but I could tell that she was a bit disappointed. Admittedly, I was a bit disappointed, too — but I knew that it would be better this way.

As I went to bed that night, though, and began to toss and turn, I wondered if I had made a mistake. It was as though Moana's presence beside me was a magic spell that instantly lulled me to sleep, and that spell had been broken. For the second night in a row, I found myself unable to sleep.

I stood and walked to the bathroom, where I kept the sleeping pills in my medicine cabinet. My reflection stared back at me, almost disappointedly, as I retrieved the orange bottle and poured two pills out into my hand. I pretended not to notice my wolf inside of me; he was angry with me for what I was doing, because the pills rarely even worked, and when they did, they made him feel weak and groggy.

"This is for the best," I told him. He didn't answer.

As I popped the pills into my mouth and stared into my own eyes in the mirror, all I felt was disappointment.