

## Chapter 48 Dinner Invitation

### Moana

Edrick looked so peaceful as he slept in the armchair. His dark hair was illuminated by the soft glow of the city lights coming in through the window, and even from where I was laying on the couch I could see his chest gently rising and falling.

But almost as soon as I woke up, he woke up, too.

He awoke with a start, his icy gray eyes opening immediately as though he had never been sleeping to begin with. It really felt as though the only thing keeping him asleep was the fact that I was asleep; as soon as I awoke, it was as if a spell was broken for him and he was wide awake once more.

Our eyes locked for a long moment as he came to his senses.

“I’m sorry,” I whispered. “I didn’t mean to wake you.”

Edrick abruptly stood. “Since you seem well enough now, you should go sleep in your own bed. It’s hardly appropriate for you to sleep on the couch.”

I couldn’t hide my frown as I sat up and pushed the blanket off of myself — the blanket that Edrick had apparently so lovingly tucked me into while I slept. I watched as he turned on his heel and headed toward his own

bedroom, but his sudden harsh words had hurt me too much to let him go, and they hurt me even more now that I knew I was carrying his baby.

“Why do you have to be so cruel?” I asked, standing.

He stopped in his tracks, his back tense as he faced away from me.

I continued. “I know that we terminated our agreement, but I don’t see why we can’t be friendly with each other.”

Edrick was silent for several moments. Finally, he turned to face me. His eyes were narrowed and his jaw was clenched hard. “Friendly?” he said, his voice so low it was almost a growl. “What makes you think that we need to be friendly with each other? Have we not been over this enough times? I don’t need to be friendly with my employees; I just need to pay them.”

I blinked away the tears that began to form in my eyes before Edrick saw them. “I think it’s reasonable not to be too involved in each other’s personal business, but what’s not reasonable is for you to treat me like I’m worthless every time you’re around me. I’d still like to be friends, you know.”

Suddenly, Edrick spoke in a harsh, quick tone. “If I didn’t treat you like that, then I wouldn’t be able to control myself around you.”

I was taken aback by Edrick’s sudden choice of words. It seemed that he was, too, judging from the way his eyes widened momentarily after he said them. I opened my mouth to ask what he meant, but before I could, he abruptly turned on his heel and disappeared into his bedroom.

After he left, I stood motionless in the middle of the living room as I stared at his bedroom door. I wanted to know what he meant, but it was no use now. Finally, I returned to my room that night and fell asleep not with a pain in my stomach, but rather a pain in my heart.

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The next morning, I awoke slightly later than usual after such a tumultuous night, but it was still early. I slowly sat up in bed and rubbed my eyes, listening to the sound of a summer rain shower pattering against my window, before the blinking notification light on my phone caught my attention.

I had a missed call from Ethan. He had left a voicemail.

Furrowing my brow, I picked up my phone and opened the voicemail.

“Hey Moana,” he said, his sweet and warm voice such a stark contrast from Edrick’s cold and distant demeanor. “You can say no if you don’t want to or if you think that you-know-who might get too upset, but I’m going to be free this weekend and was wondering if you’d like to go out for dinner with me. I know a place that would be nice and private, so you wouldn’t have to worry about anything. Let me know what you think.”

The voicemail ended. I felt my face get hot and my heart start to race as I hung up my phone. I hadn’t seen Ethan since the night of his exhibit, when Edrick and I kissed and nearly slept together in the heat of an argument... And now, I was pregnant with Edrick’s baby; it surely wouldn’t be appropriate for me to go out for dinner with Ethan if I ever planned on keeping the baby.

At the same time, however, I was incredibly lonely. Terminating my sleeping arrangement with Edrick had admittedly left me feeling isolated, and this pregnancy — and the fact that I couldn’t confide in anyone about it — only added to that feeling. Right now, more than anything, I felt as though I needed the support of a good friend.

As I held my phone in my hand, wondering if I should call Ethan back, there was a sudden knock on the door.

“Come in,” I called.

The door cracked open and a small, blonde head of hair poked through to look at me. Ella's hair was still messy from sleep, but her eyes were bright and full of excitement.

"Are you feeling better today, Moana?" Ella asked.

I smiled and nodded, knowing fully well what she was getting at. The event in the park was still going on today, and I had promised her the day before that we would go back for the farmers' market.

"Yes," I replied, although my stomach was actually still a little woozy from the morning sickness. "Give me a little bit, and we can go to the farmers' market."

"Yay!" Ella exclaimed. I watched, stifling a laugh, as she spun around and sped off toward her room.

Once I was alone again, I crawled out of bed and headed to the bathroom, where I turned on the shower. The hot water washed away all of the negative feelings from the night before, but even as I got dressed, and even as the rain stopped and the sun came out, I couldn't shake Ethan's invitation out of my mind.

"I'm ready!" Ella said, coming out of her room and doing a twirl. She was wearing an adorable blue and white checkered sundress and sandals, and I couldn't hide my smile.

"I'll be ready in a minute," I said. "Go wait by the door. And get your sun hat."

I watched as Ella skipped off — then, once she was gone, I gave in to temptation and pulled out my phone. I dialed Ethan, biting my lip as the phone rang.

He picked up on the third ring.

"I take it you got my voicemail?" he said.

“Yes,” I replied, glancing over my shoulder as I stood in the middle of my bedroom. Even though I knew Edrick would be at work already, I admittedly felt a bit paranoid. I knew that speaking to Ethan was taboo.

“Well?” he asked. “What do you say? You and me, fancy dinner?”

At this point, I couldn’t help but smile again as Ethan’s kind and warm voice washed away all of my worries. “Yeah,” I replied. “I think I’d like that.”