

## Chapter 51 The dinner

Moana

Friday evening came much more quickly than I expected.

I was nervous for my dinner with Ethan, more so because of the constant looming threat of Edrick finding out and getting upset than anything.

I found Selina in the kitchen that morning and decided to tell her about my plans, since we had an understanding between us now and I knew I could trust her.

“Selina,” I said, walking up to her.

“I hope it’s alright if I go out for dinner tonight. Will you be able to check on Ella while I’m gone?”

“That’s fine,” Selina said, not prying about who I would be dining with.

She had been much more open toward me since she had learned about the pregnancy, and it was a comfort.

“I’ll make sure Ella gets to bed, but just be back by ten o’clock. Don’t forget that Ella has training in the morning.”

I nodded, just relieved to have an upcoming dinner that could possibly take my mind off of the baby for a little while and help me relax.

The support of a good friend was all I really needed — I was sure of it.

As I emerged from my room wearing my new blue dress with my hair curled and styled and a bit of minimal makeup on, however, I could tell from the wide-eyed look on Edrick's face that he was a bit shocked by my appearance.

He was still holding his briefcase with his suit jacket slung over his forearm, having just come home from work.

For a moment, I stared at him with wide eyes, too.

His tie was loosened, and the first few buttons of his shirt were undone.

He had his sleeves rolled up to his elbows, exposing his veiny forearms, and his hair was a bit tousled.

He must have taken a pit stop at his bar before coming home.

Admittedly, seeing him like this made me feel aroused, although I couldn't be sure if it was because of the pregnancy hormones or not.

"You look..." His voice faltered, and he quickly looked away.

I knew that he wanted to say more, but he decided not to.

"Where are you going?"

I felt my face get a little red and my heart skipped a beat.

I had been hoping to leave without seeing him, but I couldn't not tell him anything, and I certainly couldn't tell him that I was having dinner with his brother.

"I'm having dinner with a friend," I said.

The look on Edrick's face seemed to imply that he thought I was going on a date, not just dinner with a friend — but I was just having dinner with a friend.

I had decided weeks ago that being anything more than friends with Ethan was not the best idea.

“Oh,” he said, clearing his throat and brushing past me, returning to his cold and indifferent demeanor once more.

“Well... Try not to be back too late. Don’t forget that Ella has training in the morning.”

I nodded, averting my gaze, and gathered my purse before taking a deep breath and stepping onto the elevator.

Even though Ethan offered to pick me up in front of the penthouse, I decided that it wasn’t the best idea for Edrick to know who exactly I was going out with, so I walked a few blocks away toward the nearest subway station where Ethan was pulled over, waiting for me.

A wide grin spread across Ethan’s face as he got out of the car and came around to open my door for me.

“You look stunning,” he said.

“That dress...”

“Ella actually picked it out,” I said with a chuckle as I climbed into the car.

His smile widening, Ethan closed the door and climbed back into the driver’s seat.

The next thing I knew, we were pulling up to a fancy restaurant down by the waterfront.

Ethan held his arm out for me to take as we entered.

I felt my face get hot and red as I hooked my arm with his, but that shyness turned to astonishment when I saw how beautiful the inside of the restaurant was.

And it was empty, too.

“Did you...” I began, looking around at the empty restaurant with its high ceilings and large windows overlooking the ocean below.

Ethan nodded. "I rented the whole place out. For privacy, of course."

A waiter came up to us then and showed us to a table.

It was located not inside the restaurant, but rather on an intimate, covered balcony on the second floor.

"We'll have a bottle of wine to start," Ethan said to the waiter, who nodded and scurried away before I had a chance to protest.

How was I supposed to explain to Ethan that I couldn't drink alcohol because I was pregnant with his brother's baby?

"So..." Ethan said, leaning on the railing of the balcony and looking out over the ocean.

"How is everything going? With... you-know-who. If you don't mind me asking, of course."

I shrugged. "Edrick is Edrick," I replied, not wanting to get into too much detail. "I can't tell sometimes if he hates me or not."

"He's always been like that." Ethan lifted his gaze from the ocean to look at me. "Don't let it get to you, though. You're lovely. Whatever issues he has are issues with himself, not you."

His kind words made me smile a bit, but also made me feel a bit curious.

Ethan and Edrick had grown up together, after all.

"If you don't mind me asking," I said, "what was it like growing up in the Morgan household?"

Ethan chuckled. "Not as painless as one would expect, despite all of the luxuries provided for me," he replied.

"You're aware that my mother isn't Verona, correct? Edrick is my half-brother."

I nodded, averting my gaze.

“I’ve gathered that.

”Ethan shrugged nonchalantly.

“Yeah. I know it seems a bit inappropriate for the offspring of a mistress to be raised in the home, but Verona was a good mother and treated me like her own. She always made sure to tell me that it wasn’t my fault that her husband was unfaithful. Edrick, on the other hand...”

“He never accepted it, did he?” I asked.

Ethan shook his head.

There was a moment of silence, followed by the waiter returning with a bottle of wine and two glasses.

Ethan gestured for me to sit as the waiter poured our wine and prattled off his spiel about where the wine was from, how long it had been aged, and the flavor notes.

When he was finished, he left us alone once more.

I was about to mention that I would only be having water to drink when Ethan picked up his glass and raised it for a toast.

“A toast to the lovely Moana,” he said. “I’m glad to have met you. Here’s to not getting scolded by Edrick.”

I chuckled nervously, trying my best to hide the fact that my heart quickened its pace and my nerves raised as I picked up my own glass of water instead, raising that for a toast.

“I hope you don’t mind if I don’t drink tonight, actually,” I said.

“Oh.” Ethan cocked his head.

“Is everything alright?” Then, jokingly: “You’re not pregnant, are you?”