

Chapter 52 The Alpha's Gaze

Moana

“You’re not pregnant, are you?” I froze at Ethan’s words, my eyes wide as I stuttered to come up with a response. “I– I’m not–”

Ethan, seeing my uncomfortable struggle, lowered his glass and quickly shook his head to dispel the seriousness of the suggestion he had just made.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “I was only joking. Maybe that wasn’t a very appropriate thing to joke about. It’s fine if you don’t want to drink alcohol tonight.”

I tried to laugh off Ethan’s joke, but it was almost embarrassing how astute that joke actually was — if only he actually knew. Then, quickly, I fumbled in my mind to find the right excuse so as not to raise any more red flags about the reality of the situation. “I just... I need to be up early tomorrow, to take Ella to her training.”

Ethan nodded understandingly, but oddly looked a little disappointed at the same time. I watched as he silently took a sip of his wine, then set the glass down.

“I hope that’s okay,” I blurted out. “I suppose I should’ve said something before you spent the money on a bottle of wine.”

“No, no,” Ethan assured me. “It’s perfectly fine. Although, I must admit, I was secretly hoping for something.”

I raised my eyebrows. “Hoping for what?” Nothing could have prepared me for what Ethan said next.

“Well... I’m staying at my penthouse downtown for the weekend,” he said. “Admittedly, I was hoping to bring you there tonight, but I suppose you can’t come since you’ve got to be up early for Ella tomorrow.”

I felt a bit taken aback by Ethan’s admission, and a little uncomfortable. I had thought that we were just two friends going out for dinner; I never thought for even a moment that he brought me here tonight with the intention of taking me home to his penthouse for the night. I supposed, then, that it was silly of me to ever assume something like that, and it reminded me of how naive I had been on the night of my one night stand with Edrick, when I stupidly took a drink from a strange man.

“Ethan,” I said, frowning a little, “I thought we were just going out for dinner—”

Ethan’s face went a little red, and he nodded. “Yes. I’m sorry. I just... I guess I was hoping to have a little time to get to know you, without Edrick looming over us.”

There were several long moments of palpable silence that hung so thickly in the air that I felt I could cut them with a knife. Just as it was becoming unbearable, the waiter finally returned with two plates of food.

“Filet mignon for the gentleman,” the waiter said, abruptly ending the awkward silence, “and penne alla vodka for the lady.”

The food smelled delightful, making us both momentarily forget our uncomfortable tension. For the first time in days, I actually wanted to eat. In fact, the food was so tantalizing, that as soon as I took the first bite, I knew that this very dish could perhaps become my first pregnancy food obsession.

“This is delicious,” I said, setting down my fork so as not to eat too fast, and savored the flavor in my mouth.

Ethan smiled and took a bite of his steak. For the remainder of the night, we didn’t bring up the awkwardness surrounding Ethan’s penthouse, and actually had a lovely time and many deep chats that made me temporarily forget about the looming issue at hand of the pregnancy.

Later that night, after enjoying a lovely dinner together, Ethan took me back to the spot where we initially met just outside the subway station.

“I really had a wonderful night,” I said. “Thank you for everything.”

Ethan smiled. “I’m glad. And... I really am sorry about that misunderstanding earlier. I know that it was inappropriate of me to assume that you would want to spend the night with me on our first real date. Can I be honest with you?”

I nodded.

“I think I’m a little jealous that you sleep with Edrick every night,” he said. “I know it’s just to help him sleep, and he’s paying you for it, but—”

“We actually terminated our agreement,” I interrupted. “On the night of the exhibition.”

Ethan appeared to be taken aback. “I’m sorry. I hope that I didn’t somehow cause that.”

I shook my head. “No. It’s alright — it was a weird arrangement anyway, so I’m glad that it’s over.” I realized, as I finished talking, that my hand was on my belly. I quickly pulled it away and got out of the car as I pushed the memories of that night after the exhibition out of my head.

“Oh,” he said, looking a little relieved.

I bit my lip, thinking for a moment, before speaking again. “Ethan,” I said, taking a deep breath, “I really value your friendship. I’d like us to just stay friends, if that’s alright.”

Ethan stared down at his lap for a moment. He looked sad, but finally nodded understandingly after a few moments and shot me a soft smile. “That’s alright with me,” he said.

“Thank you,” I said, feeling a little relieved that he wasn’t too upset by it as men often could be when a woman told them that she just wanted to be friends. “I would love to spend more time together, though.”

Ethan nodded. “Sure. I’ll see you soon, okay?”

After that, he kissed my hand and I began my walk home.

The streets were quiet, filled only by the sound of my heels clicking on the pavement. My belly felt full and satisfied after the wonderful meal, and I felt relaxed after chatting with a good friend, despite the temporary discomfort of Ethan’s proposition to return to his penthouse together.

As I entered through the lobby of the apartment building and took the elevator up, however, I began to feel mounting anxiety as I wondered if Edrick would be awake. I hoped that he wouldn’t question me any further about my dinner. If he found out that I secretly went out to dinner with his brother, who he insisted that I stay away from for whatever reason, it would only end in an argument.

When I arrived back at the penthouse, everything was dark — except for a single lamp in the living room. I stepped into the room and crossed over to the lamp to shut it off, not realizing that Edrick was sitting in the large armchair by the couch until I passed by him.

I stopped in my tracks, my heart racing already as I locked eyes with the Alpha billionaire. There was a whiskey glass in his hand and a hint of sadness behind his steely gray eyes as his gaze slid over my hair, my face,

and eventually down to my new blue dress. His face contained a mixture of pain and attraction; the alcohol made him display his emotions plainly, as opposed to how closed off he had been earlier.

“Hello,” I said, clearing my throat to break the awkward silence. “You’re up late.”

He didn’t answer. With a last look at my dress, he turned on his heel and retreated to his room.