

Chapter 43 Blurred Lines

Moana

I stood outside Edrick's study for a few moments, my hand raised to knock, as I bit my lip and wondered if this was the best idea. Would attempting to talk to Edrick even accomplish anything?

I almost turned around and left, but as I thought of Ella's sad face when her father wouldn't play with her after work simply because of my presence. I mustered up my courage and knocked.

"Come in." Edrick's muffled voice called after a few moments. I took a deep breath and entered, standing in the doorway. Edrick was sitting at his desk, and looked up at me with a surprised expression on his face as I opened the door. "Oh, Moana. Did you need something?"

"I want to talk to you." I said, doing my best to keep my shoulders back and my chin held high for fear of breaking down right in front of him over such a small thing. I really had been so much more emotional than usual lately, but I didn't want to let Edrick see me break down over something like this.

"Come in, then," he said, clearing his throat. I took a few steps in and shut the door behind me, then stood to face him. "Well? What is it?" he asked.

I took a deep breath before speaking. "Did I do something wrong?" I asked.

Edrick furrowed his brow. "What makes you say that?"

"You've been avoiding me like the plague ever since we went to the orphanage together," I replied. "I want to know if I did something or said something to upset you."

"I'm not sure what you're referring to." Edrick pushed his chair back a little from his desk and leaned back a bit. "I haven't been avoiding you."

I scoffed. "You have certainly been avoiding me," I said, taking a few more steps toward him now. "You can hardly be in the same room with me for more than five minutes "

"Well, it's not like I need to spend time with you," he replied. "You're my employee. There's no reason for us to be any closer than what is absolutely necessary."

"I understand that, but you can't bring Ella into it," I said. "She deserves to spend time with her father. You come home from work and go straight to your office, as though breathing the same air as me is poison. You've even been breaking your own rule of no children in the study by bringing her in here to play whenever I'm around, and if it weren't for her begging tonight, you wouldn't have even eaten the dinner we spent all evening preparing for you. What sort of a message do you think that sends to your daughter?"

Now, it was Edrick who scoffed. "Whose idea was dinner, anyway? Yours or hers?" His voice began to cut like ice, but I tried my best not to let it get to me.

"What does that have to do with anything?" I replied, folding my arms across my chest.

Edrick stood then, the dim amber light of the lamp on his desk making his tall height appear even taller as his long, thin shadow loomed on the wall behind him. Then, he gestured to my dress. "Did you really dress up to have dinner at home with me?" he asked. "Did you really just want to do something nice, or are you trying to push us to cross the line with each other again like we did before? It's like you think you're going to find a connection that simply doesn't exist."

I felt my face get hot as he pointed out my appearance, but then found myself confused at his last statement.

"A connection that doesn't exist?" I asked. "What do you mean by that?"

Edrick sighed, seemingly annoyed at this point. "We're entirely different, Moana," he said. "I appreciate your work as a nanny, but that's just it you're the nanny. You're hardly someone that I should be mingling with unnecessarily."

As he spoke, I felt my emotions starting to bubble up to the surface once again and began to blink a few tears back. I didn't know what to say; I had thought, after our time at the orphanage together, that maybe Edrick was starting to see me as more of an equal and not just a lowly servant, undeserving of respect. His arrogance clearly got in the way of that, because he was just as cold and demeaning as before, and it made my chest ache.

"Fine," was all I could choke out. "Thank you for clarifying." There was so much more I wanted to say, but I couldn't speak around the lump in my throat. It wouldn't have made a difference anyway.

Before Edrick could say anything else -- although I was certain that he wouldn't have, anyway - I spun around and stormed out. Once the door was closed behind me. I took another deep breath and pulled my shoulders back, then made my way toward my bedroom. But as I walked down the hallway, I felt myself begin to falter, and leaned against the wall. A quiet sob escaped my lips.

Suddenly, a voice spoke up behind me. "What just went on in there?"

I blinked back my tears once again and turned to face Selina, who was standing in the hallway behind me. She was wearing her dressing gown and had her gray hair in a long braid. Her lips were pressed into a thin line, but I had become used to that as being her neutral expression at this point.

"It's nothing," I said, straightening myself and smoothing down my skirt.

Selina frowned "I heard raised voices in Edrick's study," she insisted. "If it's nothing, then why are you crying in the hallway?"

I sighed, lowering my eyes to the floor. "I just keep earning that I will never be an equal to Edrick. To him, I'm just the nanny and am undeserving of respect."

A slight chuckle came out of Selina's mouth.

"What?" I asked, annoyed now at her flippant demeanor along with Edrick's.

"Do you really expect anyone from the Morgan family to see you as an equal?" she asked.

"So his social status would really keep him from treating people with respect? That's simply bizarre," I said.

Selina merely shrugged. "You knew the nature of your agreement when you signed the contract to be Ella's nanny. Don't expect anyone from a family so privileged as the Morgans to treat an employee like a friend, or anything else, for that matter."

I nodded solemnly. She was right; although it made me immensely sad, the Morgans were an extremely wealthy and powerful werewolf family. It felt silly of me now to think that my relationship with Edrick was anything other than pure business to him, despite our history.

"I'll keep that in mind. Good night, Selina," I said, before opening my bedroom door and stepping inside without another word.

That night, I got ready for bed, but found myself unable to sleep after the brutal reality that I had come to understand. It hurt me in ways that I didn't fully understand, and above all else, it made me feel incredibly sad. Even though my sleeping arrangement with Edrick and any romantic ties we had had been cut off, there was still a part of me that felt attached to him in some way, and Mina felt it, too. Ever since our arrangement ended, she had been quiet and weak, as though his presence before made her stronger.

Eventually, I finally fell asleep - but I had too many dreams that night.

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