

Chapter 41 Good Memories

Moana

"I'm sure he'll visit soon," I said, quickly blinking away the tears that came to my eyes when Clara asked so innocently about Edrick coming to visit the orphanage.

Neither Clara nor Ella seemed to notice my emotional demeanor, and Clara burst out into cheers. I watched with a smile as they ran off to continue playing. Sophia chuckled behind me.

"The children really do like him," she said, taking a sip of her tea. "I honestly thought that he was just another emotionless drone, focused solely on business, but he's really much more than that. It seems that our cookie baking session might have softened him a bit."

I nodded thoughtfully, thinking back to the day that we all baked cookies in this very kitchen.

Edrick had begun that day so coldly and had been so distant from the children, but he eventually warmed up to them as we spent the day together. I realized that day that the Alpha billionaire actually did like children, although I wasn't certain if he would ever admit it. Secretly, I wished that he would be so warm toward me at home, despite the termination of our sleeping arrangement.

Finally, I was broken free from my thoughts by Sophia once again. She gave me a concerned look as she raised her cup of tea to her lips. "Are you sure you're alright?" she said. "Are you sick?"

I shook my head. "No, I'm really fine. Just a little tired today, that's all." I took the last sip of my tea then and stood. "Thank you for the tea. I'm going to play with the children for a while, if that's alright."

Sophia nodded and shot me a smile, although I could tell that she didn't entirely believe me when I said that I was fine. Before she could inquire further, however, I returned to the playroom and spent the afternoon with the children.

Ella and I, as well as the other children, had a wonderful afternoon that day. We spent the day playing hide and seek, having tea parties, and doing arts and crafts, and by the end of the day Ella had made quite a few friends. She couldn't stop chattering about Clara and all of her other friends for the entire ride home, and continued to chatter all the way up the elevator to the penthouse.

When the elevator doors opened and we walked into the dining room, Edrick was already home and was sitting at the dining table with a cup of coffee and a stack of what looked like financial reports.

"Daddy!" Ella exclaimed when she saw him. She bounced up to him with a surprising amount of energy after having spent the entire day playing. I watched from the doorway as Edrick smiled and scooped her up into his lap. "Guess where I went today?" she asked.

"Hm," Edrick said, his eyes flickering over to me only momentarily before returning to Ella. "I don't know. Where did you go today?"

"Moana took me to the orphanage!"

There was a moment of silence, and during that moment, I thought for sure that Edrick was going to say something to indicate dissatisfaction with the fact that I took Ella to the orphanage. While I did tell Selina where I was going, I didn't necessarily ask Edrick for permission, and so I braced myself for a scolding.

Much to my relief, however, Edrick only smiled at Ella.

"Did she, now?" Edrick asked. "And how was it? Did you make new friends?"

"Mhm!" Ella replied. "I made lots of friends, and we played games all day. I even made one new best friend named Clara. Look! We made friendship bracelets." Ella held out her tiny wrist to show off her new friendship bracelet that she made with Clara using colorful beads and string.

"Oh, wow," Edrick replied, feigning fascination with the simple little trinket. "I'm sure you'd like to see Clara again."

I couldn't help but smile as I watched Edrick with Ella. It was heartwarming to see him being so sweet and kind with Ella, and to see him being so open about her new friends. As far as I was aware, Ella had rarely spent time with other children outside of her training sessions and the occasional family gathering. It was important for any child to have plenty of opportunities to socialize and play with other kids.

As I watched Edrick and Ella together, however, I noticed that his eyes darted over to me one more time - and they were not nearly as warm and open as they were with Ella. They weren't angry or bitter, but simply rather cold and indifferent. It was both unsettling and painful to see him look at me in such a way after our history together.

Meanwhile, Ella only continued to prattle on about the orphanage, entirely oblivious to the energy between myself and her father right now. "Daddy? Clara said that she knows you," she said.

Edrick's gaze returned to her and warmed instantly. He nodded.

"Yes. I know all of the children there. In fact, I went there not long ago with Moana, and had a nice time baking cookies." As Edrick spoke, his face seemed to soften once again. It seemed as though the cold CEO was actually looking back on the day we spent there fondly, which was surprising, and when he finished speaking, his eyes landed on me once more. I could sense a hint of what almost seemed like melancholic nostalgia behind his gaze, which lingered on mine for a few aching moments, before he quickly looked away once more. Could he not look at me for five seconds without looking away?

"Can I go back to the orphanage, daddy?" Ella pleaded. "I really want to see my friends again."

Suddenly, I had an idea; maybe the Alpha billionaire just needed another nice day out with the children to calm his nerves. "I'm planning on going back next Sunday." I finally chimed in, stepping forward. "Maybe we could all go together."

Just then, Edrick's entire demeanor changed. He set Ella back on the floor, then pushed his chair back and stood. "That's alright," he said, shuffling his papers together and gathering them along with his coffee. "I'll go on my own time, when I'm free. There's no need for all of us to go at once, and besides: you don't need to wait around for me to have a day off in order to go and visit your friends."

Ella seemed somewhat satisfied with Edrick's response, but I was not; I knew that he wasn't telling the full truth. The Edrick who I had come to know on that day that we baked cookies would have gladly taken time off of work to visit the orphanage with his daughter so she would play with her friends. There was another reason why he was refusing to go as a trio with us, and I was entirely certain that reason was me.

I watched as he turned on his heel and began walking toward his office. In my mind, I already began to contemplate why he was acting like this with me. Hadn't we ended our sleeping arrangement amicably? Why, then, was he taking so much care to avoid me like the plague?

All I knew as I fed Ella dinner and got her ready for bed that night was that I had to test the waters and see if it truly was me that he was avoiding, or if it was something else.

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