

Chapter 30 PR Problems

Moana

When I woke up the following morning to the sun streaming in through my window, Edrick was already gone. Yawning, I sat up and threw the covers off of myself before swinging my legs over the edge of the bed and standing.

Ella was already wide awake when I left my room. In fact it seemed that the other servants were also wide awake, and all of them were standing in the living room with their wide eyes glued to the television. I furrowed my brow as I approached, finding this behavior strange - especially for Selina, who was nervously clutching her apron.

"What's going on?" I asked as I joined the group. Amy merely raised her finger to her lips, then pointed at the television screen. I followed her finger, my own eyes widening as I saw what was being broadcasted.

On the screen was a reporter standing in front of a crowd. Behind her, the crowd was marching back and forth with picket signs that depicted anti-werewolf sentiments, as well as images of both WereCorp's logo and Edrick's face with big, red X's painted over them.

"As of right now, WereCorp's youngest CEO, Edrick Morgan, has not made an official statement about the unequal pay between human and werewolf employees," the reporter said, holding her finger to her ear and shouting over the din of the protesters behind her as they chanted "Equal pay for equal work!"

The reporter continued: "According to recent speculation, there are reports that werewolves are' being paid ten percent more than their human counterparts, in both the offices and the factories, for the same work. Some even believed that the Alpha CEO deliberately made a large donation to a local orphanage just yesterday in an attempt to assuage these claims and create a positive image, for the company, but the footage from earlier this morning has completely turned that attempt on its head"

Just then, a video clip popped up on the screen. It showed Sophia and the children from the orphanage standing outside the WereCorp headquarters; Edrick walked past with his briefcase, completely ignoring them. One of the children tried to reach out and give him a handmade thank-you card, but he deliberately moved out of the way as though the child's display of appreciation disgusted him, then pulled a wad of cash out of his wallet and tossed it at the child's feet. The footage cut out just as a security guard stormed out the door and began to usher the children away from the door, with the video pausing for several moments on one of the children's scared, crying faces.

Suddenly, the TV screen went dark. I looked up to see Selina holding the remote, her lips pressed into a thin, hard line.

"Get back to work, you two," she said, addressing Amy and Lily. "No more of this nonsense. It's not even nine o'clock in the morning."

Selina was right; Ella didn't need to be seeing this sort of thing at her age, and especially not first thing in the morning.

"Come on, Ella," I said, reaching out to take the little girl's hand and leading her to her room. "Let's get you a bath. If you're good, we can have crepes for breakfast."

I led her to her room, where I closed the door tightly behind us and walked over to the adjoined bathroom to start running the bath. While the tub began to fill with steaming hot water, I returned to her room to open the curtains and the windows and to let some fresh air in

'Is my daddy gonna be okay?" Ella asked. Her voice sounded even tinier than usual. I could tell already that what she had seen on the television scared her.

"Yes, sweetheart," I replied, walking over to her and crouching to her level to take her into my arms. "He'll be fine. It's just business, the news always makes everything look worse than it really is."

Ella sniffled on my shoulder, and when I pulled away, I saw that she was crying. Her sweet little cherub-like face was twisted into a grimace, and her cheeks were red as apples. "I'll tell you what," I said, brushing a bit of hair out of her face, "after your bath, we'll call your daddy if you'd like. I'm sure hearing your voice would make him feel better, too."

I kept my promise; after Ella's bath, she called Edrick, who reassured her that everything would be fine. I even kept my promise to take her downstairs to the bakery for crepes, which seemed to lighten her mood, but as the hours ticked on and Edrick didn't come home at his usual time, we all started to grow worried. After I put Ella to bed with a glass of warm milk and a lullaby to soothe her nerves, even Selina shot me a concerned glance before disappearing into her bedroom for the night.

For some reason, I couldn't sleep. After tossing and turning for almost an hour in my bed, I finally gave up and decided to head to the kitchen for my own glass of warm milk. I crawled out of bed and slid my feet into my slippers before quietly retrieving my milk and settling into the big armchair in the living room with a book.

Just then, the elevator doors slid open and out stepped Edrick. His face appeared almost gaunt, and his eyes looked hollow; he was so tired, in fact, that he didn't even see me as he came in. I watched silently for a moment as he tossed his briefcase down on the floor and shuffled over to the bar to pour himself a drink before I jumped up and grabbed the whiskey bottle out of his hands, causing him to jump with surprise.

"Drinking will not help you right now," I said, keeping my voice low so as not to wake Ella and holding the bottle out of the way as he tried to take it back from me. "Your daughter was worried sick all day. So were the rest of us."

"I told her I was fine, didn't I?" Edrick asked, giving up on the whiskey bottle and reaching for a vodka bottle instead.

I frowned. "What would you do if she woke up and came out here to see her father stumbling around the apartment, drunk, after telling her that he was 'fine'?"

Edrick shrugged I could tell that he was struggling to come up with an answer, but his brain was too tired from stress to spit out the right words; in fact, as I watched him pour vodka into his glass and walk over to the couch before slumping down into the cushions, I actually started to feel a small amount of pity toward him. I sighed, setting the bottle of whiskey down, and grabbed my glass of warm milk before walking over to him.

"What are you doing?" he asked as I took the vodka out of his hand and replaced it with the warm milk. I got down on my knees in front of him then, not answering, and slipped off his shoes.

"You know," I said as I began to rub his feet, "if you're trying to create a good image for your company, scaring little children who are trying to show their gratitude won't help any," I said.

Edrick was silent for a few moments. I didn't look up, but I could feel the tension releasing in his feet as I rubbed them, followed by the sound of him swallowing a mouthful of warm milk.

"I know," he replied. His voice was low and gravelly from exhaustion. "I should've just taken the damn card. "

I nodded. "Yes, you should've; but you didn't. So, what are you going to do to make up for it?"

Edrick simply shrugged.

Sighing, I set his foot back down on the floor and looked up at him. I was surprised to see that he was looking at me, and his gaze didn't have its usual bitterness behind it.

"Here's what you're going to do," I said, standing. "You're going to go to the orphanage tomorrow in person - - and you're going to publicly apologize to those children. Then, you're going to take some nice photos to show that you might actually have the tiniest drop of compassion in your body."

Edrick's gaze widened for a moment, but then surprisingly, he nodded. "Alright," he said, then paused for a moment before speaking again. "You know the director, right?"

I nodded in response.

Edrick took another sip of his warm milk. "Then you have to come with me."

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