

## Chapter 14 Family Event

Moana

“I’ll pay.”

Ella and I were both shocked when we turned around to see Edrick standing there, credit card in hand, his face covered by sunglasses and a surgical mask.

“Daddy!” Ella exclaimed.

Edrick handed the ice cream salesman his credit card and ruffled Ella’s hair. “Eat your ice cream before it melts,” he said, guiding us away from the stand and the people behind us who were getting quickly annoyed at us for holding up the line to get ice cream.

“I thought you had to work,” Ella said.

“I decided to come home early so I could spend your birthday with you after all,” Edrick replied. “But you weren’t home. Selina told me that you went on an outing...” I couldn’t see his eyes through his sunglasses, but the way his head slowly turned toward me told me everything I needed to know.

I felt my shoulders droop and looked embarrassingly down at my rapidly-melting ice cream. We approached a bench and Edrick instructed Ella to sit while she finished her ice cream, then he stood next to me and lowered his voice while she happily swung her legs and got ice cream all over her face.

“Why did you take her out if you had no money?” he asked, his voice sounding cold and annoyed.

“It was an honest mistake,” I replied. “I haven’t had to take out money in a while. And besides, the driver is close; it would’ve only taken a minute for him to pass me the money.”

Edrick shook his head and said nothing else. Ella, who had been listening the entire time, suddenly jumped up from her bench. “This is the best birthday ever!” she said very quickly. “Please, I want to stay.”

It seemed that Ella was afraid that her father would make her go home, and Edrick’s next words made my heart sink.

“I don’t know, sweetheart,” he said. “It’s really not safe for us to be out in public.”

Ella stuck her lower lip out in a pout. “But it’s my birthday,” she whined. “You never want to go anywhere, and I’m having fun here with Moana!”

“She’s a little girl, Edrick,” I said quietly. “Let her enjoy her birthday. And please... Join us.”

Edrick was silent for a few moments before letting out a deep sigh and crouching to wipe the ice cream off of Ella’s face with a napkin. “Alright,” he said. “We’ll stay.”

Ella squealed in delight and, taking both of our hands, began to drag us around the theme park with just as much — if not more — fervor as she had when it was just the two of us. As we spent the afternoon walking around the theme park, I couldn’t help but take out my phone to secretly snap some sweet pictures of Ella and Edrick together. It was so sweet watching them play games together, and seeing Ella sitting on Edrick’s shoulders while we walked that I couldn’t help myself. Edrick didn’t seem to mind the photos, either, although I wondered why he was so adamant

on keeping his mask on; would he really want to look back at photos with his daughter and see that his face was covered for all of them?

As the sun started to get down, Edrick and I began to feel tired. Ella, however, still had just as much energy, and insisted on one more ride before we went home. I suggested the ferris wheel because it was slow and relaxing, and both of them agreed.

We climbed into the basket on the ferris wheel. Edrick sat across from me with Ella on his lap. As we started to go up, now that we were safe from prying eyes, Edrick took off his sunglasses to reveal steely gray eyes that appeared surprisingly happy for the first time since I had met him.

Maybe the Alpha billionaire needed a fun outing just as much as his daughter did.

As we rose up above the theme park under the setting sun, an involuntary gasp came out of my mouth. The way that the last rays of sunlight refracted across the treetops as they swayed in the hot summer breeze, and the way that the string lights lit up the park below us, made the city feel even more dazzling than before. Not only that, but the breeze ruffled through my hair and cooled the sweat on my hot skin.

I looked across from me to see Ella giggling and peering out over the crowd. And behind her, her father wasn't looking at the crowd...

He was looking at me.

His eyes darted away quickly, as though he had only glanced at me on accident. Soon, the ferris wheel began to roll us back downward, lowering us back into the crowd.

The ferris wheel went around a few times more. When it finally came to a stop at the bottom, the attendant let us out. Edrick put his mask back on then got out with Ella in one of his arms. Then, he turned around and held

out his other hand for me to help me out. My blush deepened as I felt his cool palm, but we both quickly pulled away when Ella looked at us.

“Alright, Princess,” Edrick said as we walked away from the ferris wheel. He set her down and crouched down to her level. “I think we’ve had enough fun for one day. Are you ready to go home?”

Ella nodded, although she looked a little disappointed. I remembered being that age still; I would’ve wanted to spend my entire life running around theme parks when I was a little girl.

We started to head back to where the driver was waiting.

As we did, one of the theme park staff — a teenage girl wearing a screen printed t-shirt that had the theme park logo on it, khaki shorts, and a long brown ponytail — came up to us with a smile and a flyer in her hands.

“Hi folks,” she said, holding the flyer out. “We’re hosting a special family event tonight with prizes. Would you like to participate?”

Ella quickly snatched the flyer away, her face lighting up at the concept of prizes. Edrick and I, shooting each other a tired glance, leaned down to look at the flyer over Ella’s shoulder. The prizes were limited-edition dolls — I remembered seeing a collection of some of those very same dolls in Ella’s room at the penthouse — but the catch was that two parents had to participate in the event, which meant that we were technically not supposed to play.

Edrick, seemingly noticing the same detail I did, stood and looked at the girl. “Is there any way to just purchase one of the dolls?” he asked.

The teenage girl shook her head, making her ponytail swing back and forth. “I’m sorry,” she said. “We’re not allowed to sell any prizes. If you want one of the dolls, you have to participate with two parents.”

Ella turned around and pouted, tugging on both of our heartstrings as she looked back and forth between the two of us. Edrick opened his mouth to say something, but before he could, a mischievous look came over the

little girl's face. She whipped back around to face the staff member and took both of our hands again, holding them up triumphantly.

“My parents and I will play!”