

Chapter 16 A Sweet Scent

Edrick

I lifted my blindfold, as did she. The sweet scent that I smelled was definitely Moana...

Or so I thought. It faded so quickly that I was no longer sure if it was her who I smelled, or someone else. It couldn't be her, anyway; she was a human. She had no scent.

"It looks like we have our first winners!" the announcer called over the microphone.

As Ella squealed with delight on the platform above, I realized that I was holding Moana's hand. I saw her blushing and I quickly dropped her hand. When we re-emerged from the maze, Ella was standing at the entrance with one of the staff members — the same girl from before.

The staff member gave Moana and I a strange look, but still said nothing and instead handed Ella the grand prize; the rare doll that Ella had so desperately wanted.

As we walked back to the car, Ella couldn't stop chattering about how much she loved her doll, how amazing it was that she was able to make me find Moana so quickly, and how this was the best birthday she had ever had in her entire life.

The driver was waiting for us by the theme park entrance and looked a little relieved to finally be able to go home after waiting all day. Once we were in the car, I finally took my mask off, breathing deeply and rubbing the backs of my sore ears from wearing it all day. The driver pulled away

from the curb and started taking us in the direction of the penthouse, where, unbeknownst to both Ella and Moana, I had arranged for Selina and the maids to prepare a beautiful dinner with a special cake for Ella's birthday.

For the entire duration of the ride home, Ella sat next to Moana with her new doll clutched tightly to her chest, humming and wiggling happily in her seat. I couldn't help myself from sneaking a glance at Moana every so often, who didn't seem to notice me looking at her as she focused solely on Ella.

"You did just a good job, Miss Smartypants," Moana said, wrapping her arm around Ella's small shoulders. "What are you going to name your doll?"

"Hmm..." Ella thought to herself with furrowed brows for a few moments, tapping her chin with her index finger. "I think I'll name her... Momo! It's almost like Moana!"

I stifled a chuckle as Moana's face turned red, but as I watched them, my mind wandered back to the strange scent I had picked up in the maze. I decided to ask my wolf if he had any sort of explanation.

"Were you able to recognize where that scent came from?" I asked my wolf.

"No," he replied. "It was too quick and faint. Although, I think it might have been a potential mate..."

I furrowed my brow as I looked away from Moana and Ella and looked out the window instead at the city sights as they passed by. Was my mate at the theme park, and I somehow missed them?

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After dinner, Moana put Ella to bed. Moana came to my room a little while later due to our agreement — still bundled up in extra layers, of course,

as if I would touch her against her will — and shot me a wary look as she shut the door behind herself.

I was sitting on the bed, reading, when she entered.

“Sorry,” she said. “I can wait a while—”

“It’s fine,” I replied. “I’m ready to sleep.”

Even though we had only been sleeping together as part of our arrangement for a few days now, I was already feeling immensely better. I thought to myself that the insomnia was just caused by being lonely in bed, but then I would think about other one night stands I had before Moana came into the picture and would remember that, even then, I would never sleep without pills or alcohol.

What was it about Moana that helped me sleep? There wasn’t anything particularly out of the ordinary with her, and her demeanor was often cordial with me — she was even a little cold with me sometimes, whereas I had had previous one night stands with women who were head over heels for me. Maybe there was just something comforting about Moana. She was exceptionally good with children, after all, as I discovered from watching how naturally she handled Ella. She seemed like the nurturing sort; maybe nurturing was what I needed to fall asleep.

Moana slowly came around to the opposite side of the bed, pausing to glance at the window.

“Do you want the curtains closed?” she asked, pointing.

“Hm?” I said, looking at where she was pointing. “Oh. No, it’s fine.” I had completely forgotten about how she had opened the curtains after our second night of sleeping together. Normally I liked to keep the room as dark as possible to try and help me sleep, but it didn’t seem to be bothering me now. Besides, the fresh air coming through the window felt nice on the hot summer night.

Moana took out her earrings and placed them on the side table, then pulled the blankets back and climbed into bed next to me. She performed her usual ritual of stuffing a pillow between us and scooching all the way over to the edge of the king-sized mattress, leaving a space between us that was practically the size of the Atlantic Ocean, then promptly turned away and put her head on the pillow.

Sighing, I shut off the lamp and laid down myself. My eyes stayed open, however, slowly adjusting to the moonlit room, as I continued to wonder about the scent I had picked up earlier as well as Moana's strange ability to induce sleep for me.

I remembered then that Moana had gone to the orphanage the day before when Ella was nearly lost... Had she truly gone just to visit? When I had asked before, she seemed a bit pensive about it, like she wasn't telling me everything.

"You went to the orphanage yesterday, right?" I asked suddenly as I stared at the ceiling, unable to contain my curiosity.

Moana paused for a moment before replying with a simple "Mhm."

"Do you mind if I ask why?"

"I already told you," she answered. "I like to visit the children there sometimes."

My werewolf sixth sense told me that she was still not telling the whole truth, but I didn't pry anymore. Besides, Moana must have fallen asleep already, because I suddenly found myself slipping into sleep as well.

As sleep slowly pulled me into its clutches, I began to dream of mazes and a sweet, faint smell.