

Chapter 161 New Friends, New Experiences

Moana

After Ella, Edrick and I went to the outdoor painting class together, it started to become more and more apparent to me that Ella was deeply craving more interactions with other children her age. With each passing day, she begged me more and more to bring her to the orphanage to play with the other children, and began to grow a little defiant when Edrick told her that she couldn't be going out all of the time.

My years of working with children and my career in early childhood education taught me that one of the most important things for any child to experience was socializing with other children. Ella had been mostly cooped up her entire life, and I even began to honestly wonder if she even had any interactions with other children before I came into the picture. Maybe she ran into children at training or saw her little cousins once or twice a year during family gatherings, but she didn't have consistent chances to socialize with other kids. I saw the toll it was taking on her, and as the days ticked closer to the beginning of the school year, I could tell that Ella was deeply upset.

Finally, I decided to talk to Edrick about the possibility of sending Ella to school.

I knew that he would likely be hesitant about the idea, so I decided to prepare first. I began to do some research on local private schools, and

even spent a few days just spending all of my free time compiling a list of the best local private schools for Edrick to look at. I made sure to find schools with plenty of extracurriculars for Ella to get involved in, and also made sure to find schools that offered pre-kindergarten through high school so that she could stay with her friends, as I was certain that she was bound to make a lot of friends.

After several days of searching, I finally compiled a list of schools that I was certain would pique Edrick's interest. How could he say no to sending his little girl to such nice schools? Surely he would at least go on some tours and think about it. In fact, there was even one school that was within walking distance of the penthouse; it was an all-girls school that had been around for a long time, and judging from the pictures that I found online, it looked beautiful.

Later that evening, after I had the list and an entire little speech ready for Edrick, I waited patiently for Edrick to come home. When I heard the elevator doors open, I immediately jumped up from the armchair in the living room and scurried over to Edrick.

"Let me take your coat," I said, quickly taking his suit jacket off of his arm. I took his briefcase next, and set everything aside with a smile.

Edrick shot me a strange, confused look as I hung up his coat and let out a low chuckle. "What's all this for?" he asked lightheartedly. "Are you trying to butter me up or something?"

I shook my head at first, and guided him over to the dining room table. I pulled a chair out for him, then ran into the kitchen and returned with a covered tray of food that I had kept hot, knowing that he would be at work late that evening. When I set it down in front of him, he laughed again and made my face go red.

"Moana, this is very nice, but what on earth is going on?" Edrick asked. "Did someone die? Are you finally trying to poison me?"

“N-No,” I replied sheepishly, feeling my face get even more hot as I fiddled nervously with the front of my dress. “Well... Maybe I am trying to butter you up a little.”

Edrick raised an eyebrow, but uncovered his plate regardless and began to stab the steaming pasta with his fork. He seemed to be in good humor that evening, which gave me more confidence about bringing up such a sensitive topic. “What is it?”

I cleared my throat, then produced the pamphlet of potential schools that I had folded up in my pocket. “I think Ella really needs to start socializing more with other children,” I said. “She’s getting older, and she’s hardly had any opportunities to meet other kids. It’s taking an obvious toll on her, as I’m sure you’ve noticed lately.”

Edrick, who was about to put a forkful of pasta in his mouth, froze and looked up at me with somewhat wide eyes. “Are you suggesting...” He set his fork down.

I nodded. “Ella needs to go to school.”

Edrick’s face went cold and he said nothing. Seeing him react like this was a bit disheartening, but it wasn’t unexpected; I had spent days preparing for this. I set the pamphlet down on the table in front of him and sat down at the table.

“I know you’re unsure about sending her to school, but I’ve been doing a lot of research and I found quite a few nice private schools in the area,” I said, trying my best to come across as compassionate and gentle. I understood why sending his little girl away to school after she lived cooped up in the penthouse for the past eight years was difficult, but at the same time I knew that he knew that I was at least half right. I slid the pamphlet closer to him, and although he just stared down at it silently, I kept talking. “I really think you should at least just take a look,” I said. “Please.”

Edrick was silent for several moments. He seemed stiff, and almost seemed as though he would get up and walk away at any moment, but then he finally picked up the pamphlet and slightly flipped through it.

“I’ll consider it,” he said. His voice was cold and he stood abruptly without eating his dinner. Without another word, he started off toward his study. Panicking and worrying that I had put him off somehow, I jumped up and called after him.

“Edrick, I know it’s scary to send her out into the world, and I know that you’re worried about her getting hurt or the paparazzi scaring her, but she needs this more than you realize,” I said. Edrick paused, his back still turned to me, but he did seem to be listening. “Think about everything that Ella is missing out on. She needs friends, new experiences. She needs to learn things that she wouldn’t otherwise be able to learn about while being homeschooled, and she needs more than a one-on-one experience in life if you want her to be successful when she grows up.”

Edrick stood there for a few moments. I could tell that he was thinking about it, and that he wasn’t just ignoring me or waiting for me to be quiet. And although he still walked into his office without saying anything, I couldn’t help but smile.

I was pretty certain that my words struck a chord with him. Above all else, I knew that he cared deeply about Ella’s future and her happiness, and I knew that he wouldn’t want her to live her life being cooped up and separated from society.

At least, that was assuming that what Olivia told me wasn’t true.

Chapter 162 A Parent's Fear

Edrick

When Moana brought up the idea of sending Ella to school all of a sudden, I felt my blood run cold. The thought of sending Ella away every day, where anything horrible could have happened to her, made me feel sick. Throughout the entire eight years so far of her existence, I had done such a good job of keeping her safe and away from the public eye. Even when I announced her existence to the news, I knew that I would eventually have to start bringing her to public events along with Moana, but I still didn't think that I would ever send her to school. I had plenty of money to hire the best tutors for her, and her education so far was excellent.

But, at the same time, I knew that Moana was right to an extent. School wasn't just about learning; it was also about children being given the chance to socialize, form bonds with other children, and get exposed to different types of people and different environments.

Even then, I still wasn't sure if I could bring myself to let her go. Between my father, Ella's mother, and the paparazzi, I was terrified about the idea of sending her to school.

I initially tossed Moana's pamphlet down on my desk and chose to ignore it. And I did a good job of ignoring it at first as I got some work done on my computer, but after a while it was almost as though the pamphlet was

inching its way closer into my field of vision, taunting me, begging me to look at it. And finally, with a sigh, I decided to flip through it. What was the harm in that, right?

As I flipped through it, it immediately became apparent that Moana had put quite a lot of work into her research. She had pictures of each school, their locations, the names of their principals, reviews taken from the internet, and a lot of other information. That alone was what kept me flipping, and soon enough I looked up at the clock to realize that I had spent almost half an hour thoroughly reading through information on fifteen different schools without even noticing how much time had passed.

However, none of the schools piqued my interest. They were all either too far, not good enough for my daughter, or didn't have the right extracurriculars. Maybe I was just being too harsh, and I was just looking for reasons to hate the schools. Either way, I decided not to choose any of them. Moana and Ella would be understandably upset, but I could make up for it. I could take Ella to a summer club with other children, or find her some friends who could come over for playdates...

But that wouldn't be good enough. I knew that, and I only ever wanted Ella to be happy and healthy and to have plenty of opportunities in her life. I didn't want to be the reason that she felt cooped up all her life, and I especially didn't want her feeling bitter toward me about it when she grew up. So, biting my lip, I decided to give the pamphlet yet another look.

As I scoured the pamphlet for a second time, it turned out that there was actually one school that piqued my interest after all.

It was an all-girls private school. When I looked at the address, I realized that I recognized the street it was on; it was only a few blocks away, so it was within walking distance and was still in the nice part of town. In fact, I recalled having passed it quite a few times since living here, and I knew how nice it was. It was an old building with tall windows and plenty of

space outside. I remembered walking past on multiple occasions and seeing the children playing on a fenced-in playground while teachers watched them. Not only that, but it offered pre-kindergarten all the way through high school, which meant that Ella would never need to switch schools so long as we continued living at the penthouse.

Honestly, it was the perfect school.

But I still didn't want my daughter to go.

Suddenly, as I sat there with my head in my hands as I tried and failed to come up with an alternative to sending Ella to school, I heard a knock on the door. Before I could even answer, the door cracked open and Selina's head popped in.

"You didn't eat your dinner."

I glanced up at the clock; it was after nine o'clock at night. I simply shrugged. "I wasn't hungry."

Selina frowned and came in, revealing a tray of food in her hands. It was a cup of tea and a slice of toast with jam, and as she came closer, I realized that I was actually hungry now. I thanked her when she set the tray down and expected her to leave after that, but, to no surprise, the old housekeeper looked down at my desk and made a hmph sound.

"Schools?" she asked, picking up the pamphlet before I could snatch it away. The old housekeeper was always like this; she was more like a mother to me, or maybe an aunt, than an actual housekeeper. Not that I ever would have admitted that to her.

"Uh, sort of," I replied with a shrug as I took a bite of my toast, trying to act nonchalant. "I doubt I'll pick one."

Selina's frown deepened as she looked up at me. "Why not? Ella would love to go to school."

I froze for a moment, unsure of what to say. Selina looked back down at the pamphlet with the page open to the school that was down the street, and suddenly smiled.

“I went to this school!” she exclaimed. “I loved it here. Oh, I wonder if the headmistress is still there. She’d be too old by now, I suppose.”

I hated to admit it, but the housekeeper’s excitement made my heart beat a little faster. Hearing that she went to that school, and that she loved it, relieved some of my anxiety and softened me toward the concept of Ella going. I chewed and swallowed my toast, then looked up at her and watched as she set the pamphlet back down and made her way back toward the door.

“Do you think she’d like it there, too?” I asked.

Selina stopped, thinking for a moment, then turned back to look at me with a smile on her aging face. She nodded. “She would love it,” she said. “And I would love to see her finally going to school. Every child deserves to go.”

Without another word, Selina walked out of the room after that and left me alone. I felt awful now for not giving Ella the chance earlier to go to school, and that made me come to a conclusion. Moana and Selina were right; Ella did deserve to go to school if she wanted to go. Maybe it wouldn’t hurt just to go and take a look, I thought to myself.

And so, the following morning, I found Moana and Ella sitting at the breakfast table.

“Get dressed, both of you,” I said. “We’re going to look at a school today.”

Chapter 163

Moana

Both Ella's and my eyes widened when Edrick came out into the dining room early the next morning and announced his plans.

"Get dressed, both of you," he said. "We're going to look at a school today."

Ella's jaw dropped. "A school?!" she shrieked, jumping up from her chair excitedly. "Really?"

Edrick nodded with a slight smile. "Yep. We're gonna look into sending you to school like all of the other kids. Would you like that?"

With a wide, ecstatic grin, Ella nodded vehemently and ran over to her father. She threw her little arms around his legs and hugged him tightly. "Yes, daddy!" she shouted. "I really want to go to school!"

Ella's excitement made me smile, and I could tell that Edrick was trying — and failing — to hide a smile of his own. "Go get dressed, then," he said. "We don't have a lot of time. I told the headmistress we'd be there soon."

Ella took off at a full sprint toward her room. I thought I heard the sound of her tripping, falling, and skidding across the floor on her way, but she seemed fine. I stood, smiling, and placed my hands on my hips.

“So you really did think about it, huh?” I asked.

Edrick shrugged. “You were right. Ella does belong in school, and she deserves to socialize with other kids. Besides... With the baby coming, having her at school during the day will be a good thing for you.”

I didn’t necessarily agree with that last point — I was confident that I could easily handle both a baby and Ella on my own, so long as I had just a little help — but I wasn’t about to argue with Edrick. I was just glad that he had decided to send Ella to school after all. It was about time that she had a chance to make friends, try new experiences, and learn new things in a classroom setting.

After quickly getting dressed and helping Ella get ready, the three of us headed downstairs. It turned out that Edrick chose the school that was within walking distance, which made me happy, and so we walked to meet the headmistress. Ella walked between us, holding one of each of our hands, and it really did feel like we were a little family. The walk was nice, too, and I imagined that I would enjoy walking Ella to school every morning.

When we arrived, the school was just as lovely as the pictures. It was an old building with tall windows, stone facades, and arched wooden doors. There was a playground out front with lots of shade from trees and plenty of playground equipment, and there was even a garden on the other side with planter boxes for fruit and vegetables. As we walked up the long pebble pathway to the front door, an elderly woman stepped out onto the front stoop and waved to us. She had long white hair that was piled into a neat bun on top of her head, and wore an elegant suit jacket with a matching pencil skirt. As we approached, I saw that she had the school emblem — a golden crown — embroidered onto the lapel of her jacket.

“Good morning!” the old woman said with a bright smile. “You must be Mr. Morgan, Miss Ella, and...” she turned toward me, pausing and waiting for me to introduce myself.

“Moana,” I replied, holding out my hand. The old woman shook it with a smile.

“I’m Headmistress Hawkins,” she replied, then turned and held open the heavy wooden door for us. “Come on in. Let’s start your tour.”

Headmistress Hawkins was a spry woman for her age, and scurried around the school with ease as she showed us everything. The inside of the school was even more lovely, with tile floors, high ceilings, and a lot of natural light. There was a gymnasium, auditorium, countless classrooms, a cafeteria, a beautiful inner courtyard with a fountain, and plenty of recreation spaces. She showed us the music room, the science lab, the daycare room, and the library, and before we knew it we had spent well over an hour just touring the entire school.

“And this is the art room,” the headmistress said, gesturing to a closed and rather dusty looking door. “Well... It was the art room.”

I furrowed my brow and peered in through the window on the door to see a large, dark room with all of the furniture covered by white sheets. The curtains were closed and there were boxes everywhere, as though it was being used for storage.

“Is it not being used?” I asked, turning to face the headmistress.

She sighed and nodded. “I’m afraid our art program isn’t what it used to be,” she replied. “And by that I mean that it’s nonexistent right now.”

I frowned. “What happened?”

Headmistress Hawkins let out another sigh and lowered her voice a bit. “Our beloved art teacher passed away a couple of years ago,” she said. “She was getting on in age. We haven’t found a good enough replacement, so unfortunately our art department is currently on hold.”

Hearing that the art department was nonexistent now put a bit of a damper on my opinion of the school. Of course it was out of the headmistress’s

control, but I wanted to make sure that Ella went to a school with a good art program, and now I wasn't so sure if this would be the right fit.

Suddenly, however, Ella spoke up.

“Moana is a really good art teacher!” she exclaimed, causing my face to go red.

Headmistress Hawkins raised her eyebrows. “Oh?” she asked, looking at me. “You're a teacher?”

I shook my head and blushed an even deeper shade of red. “No. Well, not really. I do have my degree in childhood education, but I only really teach art at an orphanage downtown. I don't know if I would really call it teaching experience...”

Ella frowned and folded her little arms across her chest. Sometimes she really did look like a little adult, and right now was one of those times. “But you're the best teacher ever,” she said. “She even taught my daddy how to paint, and he's a terrible artist!”

I stifled a laugh and looked up at Edrick. He was still silent, but when he looked down at me, I could tell from the look in his eyes that we were thinking the same thing. I wondered at that moment if I should apply for the position of the art teacher here. I didn't have any “real” teaching experience, but I did go to school for it, and if it had been years since they had found a teacher who was a good fit for the role, then what was the harm in applying?

“Well, do let me know if you'd like to apply,” Headmistress Hawkins said with a smile as we continued the tour. “I'd love to look at your resume. If you're interested, of course.”

As we continued the tour, I couldn't help but wonder if it would be good for me to apply. I had always wanted to be an art teacher, after all, and this would be the perfect place. I could be there for Ella all day if anything

happened, and Edrick wouldn't have to worry anymore. Every day, I could walk with her to school and walk home with her.

And as I looked up at Edrick, and he met my gaze, I knew that he was having the same thoughts.

Chapter 164 New Horizons

Moana

When we were finished with the tour, we stopped in the downstairs foyer. Headmistress Hawkins smiled at us, her brown eyes radiating with kindness.

“Well?” she asked. “What do you think?”

I looked over at Edrick expectantly. He was fairly quiet throughout the entire tour, only occasionally asking questions. I was a bit worried that he wouldn't like it and that he would make up some excuse to say no, but much to my surprise, he looked down at Ella with a gentle smile.

“It's up to you, Ella,” he said. “Do you like this school?”

Ella nodded excitedly. “I really like it here!” she said, squeezing Edrick's hand tightly. “I really want to go to school here!”

Edrick smiled and looked up at the headmistress. “Well, I guess that's that,” he said with a bit of a chuckle.

Headmistress Hawkins grinned. “Perfect,” she replied. “Let's get you enrolled.”

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That day, we got Ella enrolled in school. The school year would begin in just a few short weeks, which was fairly short notice, but I knew that Edrick would make sure that Ella was prepared.

Later that evening, as I was getting ready for bed I simply couldn't stop beaming over the fact that Edrick was going to let Ella start going to school. Ella hadn't stopped talking about it all day, and even getting her to sleep was a battle because she was so excited. It made me feel warm inside to see her get so excited over school, and I was glad that Edrick had made the right decision after all. Even though I knew that this would be difficult for him, I was certain that it would be the best thing for everybody in the long run.

However, that wasn't the only thing that was on my mind.

I couldn't stop thinking about that empty art classroom. It was important for any child to have access to a good art program in school, and it made me sad to think that the children at that school had been without a proper art program for years since the last art teacher passed away. Ella loved that school and wanted to go there so badly, and it was the perfect place for her to go, but it made me uneasy to think that she would be without a proper art class for the foreseeable future. Sure, I could give her some art lessons and make sure that she had time to be creative when she was home, but it wasn't fair for the other students to not have that luxury.

And when I came out of the bathroom after my shower, drying my hair with a towel, I could tell instantly from the thoughtful look on Edrick's face that he was dealing with an internal dilemma as well. He was leaning on the balcony railing and looking out over the city, and when I came out, he looked over his shoulder at me with a strange expression on his face.

"You're thinking about something," I said, walking up to him. "What is it?"

Edrick shrugged and didn't answer for a few moments. But I knew what he was thinking about: he was worried about Ella. He didn't like the idea of sending her to school every day.

"You're worried about her."

Edrick nodded hesitantly. "I guess so," he replied, almost as though he didn't want to admit that he actually had a soft side.

I sighed and leaned on the balcony railing next to him. The city was bustling as always, and it would never stop. Even though the walk to Ella's new school wasn't very far and was a nice walk in a safe neighborhood, it was still the city, after all. Anything could happen, and I understood why Edrick was scared. Even the paparazzi alone were bad enough, not including the danger of cars and people with bad intentions.

Ella was still little, and she would of course need to be chaperoned both to and from school until she was at least a few years older. But I also knew that having her away from the penthouse during the day, when anything could happen, was terrifying for a father who had always kept his daughter cooped up.

"She's smart," I said gently. "You don't need to worry so much. And it's in a safe neighborhood, and she'll be surrounded by teachers and staff all day."

Edrick was silent for a few moments before licking his lips and answering. "Teachers and staff can be dangerous, too," he replied. His words made my heart sink; he wasn't wrong. Bad things happened in schools all of the time, but it didn't mean that he should spend the rest of his life worrying. For all we knew, someone could have walked into the penthouse right then and there and killed all of us.

I thought back to the open art teacher position once more. I did, after all, have a degree in early childhood education with a concentration in art therapy. I did also have some teaching experience thanks to the orphanage.

“Maybe I should apply,” I said. “Then I can be with Ella all day in case something happens. You won’t need to worry anymore.”

Edrick froze, then slowly turned to look at me. I knew that he had been thinking the same thing when we were touring the school together earlier that day, but it seemed as though he didn’t think that I would actually be serious about applying.

“Are you sure?” he asked, gesturing lightly toward my growing belly. “Won’t it be too much for you, especially later on in the pregnancy?”

I shrugged. “The baby is strong,” I replied, thinking back to everything that happened with the Rogues. “I’m not worried. I might need a little extra help at home since I’ll be working every day, but it’s not like taking care of Ella is a chore in the slightest. Besides... With Ella at school, I won’t have much to do during the day anymore. I’ve always wanted to be an art teacher.”

“What about when the baby comes?” he asked. “Won’t it be stressful to start working and then have to take maternity leave just a few months later?”

I shook my head. “I’m not worried. I have Selina, and the maids, and I have you. And don’t forget that they do have a daycare center.”

Edrick chewed his lip for a moment. “I guess you’re right. I’m... sorry if it seems like I’m trying to talk you out of it. I’m just worried about... you.”

Without thinking, I reached over on the railing and touched Edrick’s hand. He didn’t pull away, and instead wrapped his fingers around mine gently. I couldn’t tell if it was intentional on his part or not, but it made my heart race a bit either way.

“If it would make you happy, I think you should do it,” Edrick said quietly, his steely blue eyes meeting mine.

I slept on it that night, thinking that I should take my time to make my decision before I jumped into anything. But when I woke up the next morning, I simply couldn't get it off of my mind. Edrick went to work, and finally I couldn't contain it anymore.

So, after asking Selina to keep an eye on Ella for a while, I printed out a copy of my resume and marched down to the school. I swallowed the nervous knot in my throat as I knocked on the door to Headmistress Hawkins' office.

“Oh! Moana!” she said with a beaming smile when she saw me. “Is that...” She pointed at the resume in my hand.

I nodded and held it out for her. “I'd like to apply for the position after all,” I said with a smile.

Headmistress Hawkins took the papers. I felt my heart start to race as she looked over it, the inner voice in my head telling me that she wouldn't hire me because she thought that I was a human...

But, much to my surprise, she looked up at me and grinned.

“I'll call your reference today,” she said. “I'm so glad you decided to apply.”

That day, I went home with a big smile on my face.

Chapter 165 Overexcited

Moana

After I handed the headmistress of Ella's new school my resume, I went home with a big smile on my face.

Even if I didn't wind up getting the job due to my lack of teaching experience, this was still a step in the right direction. After spending years being unable to get decent jobs due to my low status as a human, it seemed as though potential employers might start actually taking me seriously. I knew that most of it had to do with the fact that I was now publicly Edrick's "fiancée", but I didn't care. To me, it was still a win.

As the day went on, however, I went from excited to downright nervous. Every time I started to think about it, knowing that the headmistress may have been talking to Sophia for my reference at any moment, I felt my heart start to race. I tried to stay calm, but this combination of excitement and nervousness made it incredibly difficult to focus on anything else that day.

By the evening, I still hadn't heard back. I didn't expect to hear back for at least another day, but it still made me feel even more worried. What if the headmistress simply never responded to my application? It was a terribly common practice for employers to never respond to applications, and despite the fact that Ella would be a student at that school in just a

few weeks, I supposed that I wasn't immune to that. I just hoped that wouldn't be the case.

Eventually, Edrick came home from work. I was sitting on the sofa in the living room and trying to read when I heard the whir of the elevator doors opening.

"Daddy!" Ella yelled, jumping up and running over to him excitedly. I heard the sound of her kissing him on the cheek, followed by Edrick's voice as he asked her how her day was. Ella seemed to be whispering something to him, and a few moments later, the Alpha billionaire walked into the living room with Ella in his arms.

"Ella told me that you're waiting for something special news," Edrick said to me, raising an eyebrow. "What is it?"

I felt my face go red. I hadn't planned on saying anything unless I got the job, but I should have known that Ella would spill the news as soon as possible. She was only eight, after all, and it was a bit naive of me to think that she was capable of keeping a secret for more than five minutes.

"Um..." I swallowed and set down my book, then nervously fiddled with my braid. "I applied for the art teacher position this morning. The headmistress said that she would call Sophia, my reference."

Edrick's face went from stoic to surprised, but I couldn't help but notice that there was a bit of a smile tugging at the corners of his lips.

"Oh? Did you?" he said, setting Ella down.

"I can't wait for Moana to be my real teacher!" Ella exclaimed. "Then we can go to school together every day!"

Edrick smiled a bit, and despite my nervousness, even I couldn't help but smile at Ella's excitement. Edrick then sent Ella to her room to get ready for dinner, and when he turned back to me, I could sense a bit of worry in his eyes. I couldn't tell if he was hoping that I would get the job or hoping that I wouldn't get the job.

“Have you heard back yet?” he asked once we were alone again.

I shook my head and bit my lip. “No. Probably not until tomorrow at least—”

Suddenly, as if on cue, my phone began to buzz on the coffee table. I fell silent, my eyes widening when I saw the unsaved number on my phone. No one except for Sophia ever called me, and I had her name saved in my phone. Unless this was a scam call, it had to be the headmistress.

“Well?” Edrick asked, noticing my hesitation. “Aren’t you going to answer it?”

I nodded sheepishly. My hand shook as I picked up my phone and tapped on the screen to answer it, and it took all of my strength not to sound nervous.

“Hello?” I answered.

“Is this Moana? It’s Headmistress Hawkins.”

My eyes widened even further and I stood involuntarily. “Yes,” I replied, eyeing Edrick as he watched me expectantly.

“Moana, I called your reference,” the headmistress said. “She was lovely, and had a lot of nice things to say about you. I’d like to offer you the position.”

I felt my heart leap into my throat. I almost let out a wild whoop of excitement, but I clamped my hand over my mouth and just stared at Edrick with wide eyes. He was leaning on the doorframe with his arms folded across his chest. Even Selina and the maids were poking their heads curiously out of the kitchen.

“U-Um... Thank you so much,” I said, hardly able to contain my excitement. “I accept. I can’t wait to start.”

As I spoke, I saw the maids begin to dance around excitedly in the background while Selina stared at me with disbelief. Edrick, however, just smiled. It seemed as though he had been confident in me getting the job.

“Good,” the headmistress replied. “You can come by anytime within the next week and sign your paperwork. Once that’s done, you can have your keys. I’ll have the custodians clear out anything that’s been stored in your room.”

“T-Thank you,” I said, unable to come up with anything else amidst my shock. “I-I’ll see you soon.”

Finally, I hung up and continued to stare at Edrick in shock.

“I knew you would get it,” he said with a smile.

I didn’t know what to say. It felt as though my body was taken over with excitement, and what I did next almost felt out of my control.

Without thinking, I ran over to Edrick, cupped his face in my hands and pulled him down to my level, and kissed him.

His lips were soft and sweet, and he didn’t pull away.

When I finally pulled away, my face was red and my eyes were wide. The room was silent, and I could see Selina quietly shoving the two curious maids back into the kitchen to give Edrick and I some privacy.

“I... I... S-Sorry—”

I tried to stammer out an apology for kissing him so suddenly, but I was too embarrassed for anything coherent to come out. Part of me expected Edrick to simply storm off, just as he always did when he realized that we had gotten too close.

But he didn’t.

Instead, he just smiled down at me. His eyes were warm and bright, and he didn’t seem embarrassed by the kiss at all.

“I guess we’ll have to go school supply shopping for two now,” he said, causing me to smile.

Between the good news, my kiss with Edrick, and his kind words, that smile didn’t leave my face until I finally drifted off to sleep that night. It felt as though things were really beginning to look up now, and I couldn’t have been more excited.

In fact, my worrisome conversation with Olivia had slipped my mind entirely by that point.