

Chapter 29 The Unexpected Alpha Philanthropist

Moana

My trance with the TV was broken by the sound of Selina's voice coming from beside me.

"Interesting," she said, wiping her hands on her apron. "That's more than I expected."

I turned to face her, still surprised by Edrick's sudden act of generosity. "He doesn't do things like this often, does he?" I asked.

Selina shrugged. "Every so often. It's usually once a year or so these past few years, but it's never made public, and it's rarely this much. I wonder what changed to make him donate such a large amount and for him to allow it to be televised."

"And to an orphanage, no less," Lily chimed in from behind me.

Shrugging again, Selina turned around and started to head back to the kitchen. I followed her, still curious about the situation. "You said it's been happening just for the past few years?" I asked.

"Listen, I don't know all of the specifics," Selina replied curtly. She had her back turned to me as she scrubbed so hard at the stovetop with a damp sponge that it was making the metal racks on the inside of the oven rattle. "If you're really all that interested, you can look online. I'm sure there are some websites that will tell you everything."

Maybe Selina was right. I was still intrigued, so I turned on my heel and picked up my phone off of the coffee table. The interview with Sophia

ended on the TV while I was in the kitchen, so now Ella was flipping absentmindedly through the channels as she searched for cartoons. I searched WereCorp's most recent public relations campaigns, and lo and behold: there was a list of articles with vague information on Edrick's donations over the past few years. It seemed, starting just four years prior, that WereCorp was trying to improve their public image.

"See? My daddy is so nice," Ella said suddenly from behind me. I hadn't realized it, but she must have grown bored of flipping through the television channels and was now hanging over the back of the couch, watching as I scrolled through my phone.

"Hey!" I yelled playfully, tossing down my phone and grabbing her, pulling her onto my lap and beginning to tickle her. "It's not very nice to look over people's shoulders!"

The room became filled with the sweet sounds of the little girl's giggles, but I couldn't quite shake the feeling in my mind that Edrick's newfound "compassion" was all just an act.

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Edrick didn't return home until much later that night. I was laying in my own bed; I wondered if he was coming back to the penthouse at all, and if he did, I wondered if he wouldn't want to sleep together after our argument. Eventually, however, I heard the sound of footsteps outside my door, followed by a series of quiet knocks.

I didn't answer before he opened the door and came in. He was already in his pajamas, and stormed over to the other side of the bed without a word. I could tell that he was still mad at me.

"I saw an interesting interview on the television today," I said, glancing up from my sketchbook to look at Edrick as he sat on the edge of the bed. "Something about a billionaire CEO donating a hefty sum of money to a local orphanage."

“What about it?” Edrick asked. His tone of voice was cold and indifferent. I shrugged. “Nothing, really. I just think it’s interesting that just yesterday you thought that compassion was pointless, and now...”

“Compassion and philanthropy are two different things,” Edrick interrupted. “I have to do certain things sometimes to uphold the image of my company.”

Edrick’s words made me curious. “Why is that?” I asked as I looked back down at my sketchbook and continued working on my most recent drawing: a picture of the city at night, using the view from my balcony as reference. “Is something threatening the image of your company?”

The Alpha billionaire was silent for several minutes — so long, in fact, that I wondered if he was even going to answer at all. He laid down on the other side of the bed on his side, with his back turned to me. The only sounds in the room were the sounds of the city below, which was nothing but white noise to me after growing up in the city. Aside from the sounds of the city, there was the sound of my pencil scratching on the paper as I shaded in some of the buildings in my drawing.

All of a sudden, he spoke.

“It seems that some... human... workers in the factories think that they’re not treated as equally as their werewolf counterparts,” he said. “It’s absurd, really. I’ve always tried my best to be fair to everyone in my company. And now the media is trying to contact my PR department in order to weasel payroll reports from us.”

I paused, looking up from my sketchbook to look over at Edrick. “Why do they say that they’re being treated unfairly?”

Edrick shrugged. “It’s the pay.”

I frowned. “So... You don’t pay the humans the same as the werewolves, even for equal work?”

Edrick was silent for some time before finally admitting to it... in his own way, which I had already become all too familiar with over the past few weeks since I had been working for him. “I do the best I can, given the circumstances,” he said, still facing away from me. “I can’t risk being looked down upon by my colleagues for being too fair. It would make me look... weak.”

My frown deepened. I snapped my sketchbook shut and set it down on my bedside table, folding my arms across my chest.

“So... You think that money will cover up the fact that you don’t treat people fairly and with equity,” I responded. “You think that donating money to a single orphanage will make up for that?”

Edrick sighed and sat up, but still didn’t look at me. In the dim light of my bedroom, I could see that his sharp jaw was clenching and unclenching, as it always did when he was trying to find the right words.

“Money fixes everything,” he said finally after thinking for a few moments. “It’s practical, and it’s better than spending an hour a week teaching kids how to finger paint—”

I scoffed incredulously. “So, once again, this is really about Ethan,” I said. “As soon as you found out that he volunteers at the orphanage, you have to go and donate a huge sum of money. You’re trying to outshine him.”

Edrick shook his head, finally turning to glare at me with his steely gray eyes — when he was angry like this, they were so much like his father’s that it was almost frightening. “How dare you,” he growled. “This has nothing to do with Ethan. You should apologize.”

Between Edrick’s hard glare and the fact that I didn’t want to lose my job, I decided to shut my mouth. “Sorry,” I muttered, laying down and turning my back to him.

I wasn't sorry in the slightest, though. In fact, as I fell asleep that night, all I could think about was how disappointed I was that even a donation was just a way to cover up his own selfishness and to upstage his brother.