

## Chapter 40 Too Many Dreams

### Moana

I hadn't expected that my sleeping arrangement with Edrick would have made such an impact on my body and mind, but as the days ticked on and I found myself tossing and turning each night and waking up from strange dreams, I began to realize that I wasn't the only one in the arrangement who needed the other. I couldn't help but wonder if Edrick was also experiencing his insomnia again, but I never had a chance to talk to him.

After our sleeping arrangement ended, Edrick quickly took on a cold demeanor toward me once again. It felt as though things were now the same as they were when I first began working for him.

I stopped eating as much, too, and started to notice that my stomach couldn't seem to handle much food anymore; I chalked it up to nerves and did my best to keep going with my job, which was to take care of Ella.

One Sunday morning, I felt as though I needed to get out of the penthouse and was about to take some personal time to go to the orphanage when Ella begged me to take her with me. I finally agreed after her begging continued.

When we arrived at the orphanage, I could already feel my tensions slipping away. Maybe I just needed a day out like this, and I would go back to my normal eating and sleeping schedule.

“Is this where you grew up?” Ella asked as we walked toward the front door together. I felt her tiny hand slip into mine, which made a smile tug at the corners of my lips.

“Yes,” I replied. I looked up at the orphanage, taking in its appearance. It was a large Victorian house that was once beautiful, but had fallen into a slowly worsening state of disarray some years ago when the government cut funding for human-centric social programs. Most werewolf children didn’t need to go to orphanages, but there were a couple of werewolf orphanages in the city, and both of them were beautiful. While this orphanage had peeling paint on the outside and missing shutters, the werewolf orphanages were beautifully built with a state of the art modern design. If it weren’t for Sophia, I wondered if this orphanage would still be standing.

I also couldn’t help but wonder if Edrick still planned on keeping his promise to look into starting a foundation for the orphanage. He hadn’t mentioned it once since our visit here, and it had been weeks.

“Wow,” Ella continued, looking up at the old house. “I wouldn’t want to grow up here.”

I stopped. Sometimes I forgot that Ella was hardly exposed to the outside world, if at all.

“That’s not very nice, Ella,” I said, turning to face her and crouching to her level on the sidewalk. “Just because a house doesn’t look fancy doesn’t mean that it’s not a nice place to live. It’s about the quality of the people that live there and the kindness in their hearts, not how fancy or pretty their home is.”

Ella dropped her chin to her chest and pouted as she looked at the ground. “Sorry, Moana.” Her voice was barely a mumble.

“It’s okay, sweetie,” I said, pulling her into a hug. “Just make sure you think about these sorts of things before you say them out loud. It’s okay

to feel a certain way, but you don't want to hurt anyone's feelings. Now... Are you ready to meet your new friends?"

Ella perked up at the mention of new friends and nodded vigorously. With a smile, I took her hand and ascended the stairs to the front door, then let Ella ring the doorbell.

Sophia opened the door a couple of minutes later.

"Moana!" she exclaimed with a hug, then called over her shoulder. "Children, Moana is here! Come say hello!"

Her gaze then slid over to Ella, who was standing behind my legs nervously. Sophia smiled gently and bent down to her level.

"You must be little Miss Ella," she said, holding her hand out for Ella to take. "I've heard a lot about you. My name is Sophia."

"Are you Moana's mommy?" Ella asked, c\*\*\*\*\*g her head.

Sophia and I both stifled a chuckle. "Not quite," Sophia replied, "but something like that."

We headed inside then, where the children had begun to gather in the large foyer. They were all looking at Ella with curious looks on their faces. I thought for a moment that I should have dressed her a bit more inconspicuously so that she wouldn't stand out amongst them so much, as she was wearing a nice sundress with bows on it. It stood in stark contrast to the other childrens' somewhat drab outfits.

Suddenly, little Clara came forward and stood in front of Ella.

"Hi," she said, sticking out her hand. "My name is Clara. What's your name?"

"E-Ella," Ella replied.

"Do you want to play with us?"

Ella looked up at me with a look that was both sheepish and inquisitive. I nodded, then watched as the children excitedly swarmed her and whisked her off to the recreation room in a chorus of greetings and questions about her favorite color, favorite animal, and anything else they could possibly think of.

Chuckling, Sophia turned toward me then and looked me up and down. Her smile faded. “Moana, are you alright?” she asked, placing her hand on my back and guiding me toward the kitchen. “You don’t look well. Have you lost weight?”

I sat down at the round table in the kitchen and shook my head.

“I’ve been having some trouble sleeping and eating lately,” I said. “I think it’s just a bit of stress, though. I’ll be fine.”

Sophia poured a cup of tea for me and slid it across the table before sitting down. I took a sip, and the warm chamomile flavor soothed my stomach a bit.

“Promise you’ll go to the doctor soon if it doesn’t improve,” she said, reaching across the table and squeezing my hand. “You can’t be a caretaker of children if you’re weak and starved.”

I nodded, but then Sophia’s words got me thinking about Edrick’s promise.

“Sophia,” I said as I looked around, “did Edrick ever contact you again about starting the foundation?”

Much to my surprise, Sophia nodded vigorously. “Oh, yes!” she said. My eyes widened. “He actually came by the other day to have a chat about starting the foundation. He said that he still needs to work out the logistics, but he’s holding true to his promise.”

I was utterly shocked. Sophia must have noticed, because she stopped just as she was lifting her teacup to her lips and c\*\*\*\*d her head. “Why? Did he not tell you about this?”

I shook my head. “No. I hardly have a moment to talk to him, since we’re both busy... I’m glad, though.”

“He’s very kind,” Sophia said, taking a sip of her tea. “I’m not sure if this generosity is something that he always secretly possessed, and maybe he just publicly comes across as being cold and unempathetic, or if it’s a new development.”

I took another sip of my own tea as I thought about Edrick’s generosity. Had I touched the heart of the Alpha billionaire somehow, or had he always secretly been this way? Somehow, I didn’t think that it was the latter case.

Just then, Ella came into the kitchen with Clara and a few of the other children. Sophia glanced up from her tea.

“What do you need, children?” she asked kindly. “The adults are having a conversation.”

“Um... I have a question for Miss Moana,” Clara said as she fiddled with the hem of her shirt bashfully.

“What is it, love?” I asked.

“Um... When will Mr. Morgan be coming back?”

Suddenly, hearing little Clara ask about Edrick so innocently made a tear come to my eyes for reasons unknown to me. “He’ll... I’m sure he’ll visit soon,” I said as I quickly blinked the tear away and hoped that Ella or the other children didn’t see it.

For some reason, I was being far too emotional lately.