

## Chapter 42 Avoidance

### Moana

When I went to bed that night, I made sure to set my alarm a little earlier than normal. I was so intrigued by Edrick's strange behavior that I wanted to test him a little, so I woke up as soon as my alarm went off and made an effort to run into him first thing in the morning, when he would often sit in the dining room or in his study with the door open to look over financial reports.

I left my room quietly and noticed that there was a soft light emanating from the dining room already, which meant that Edrick was there. Smirking to myself, I walked over to the kitchen.

“Good morning,” I said as I passed him. “Coffee?”

He was silent for a moment before slowly raising his eyes to me from his paperwork, then shook his head. “No, thanks. I've already made my own.”

I narrowed my eyes as I studied him. There was no coffee on the table in front of him.

“Drank it all already?” I asked, gesturing to the empty table.

Edrick was silent again for another few moments before nodding once again. “Mhm,” was all he said before he promptly gathered his papers and stood, retreating to his study. I watched his back as he left, then let my

emotions get the best of me and stuck my tongue out at his closed door before heading to the kitchen to make my own coffee.

I went about my usual day with Ella. But that evening, as Ella and I were playing in the living room after dinner, Edrick walked past with hardly more than a kiss on the top of his daughter's head before he retreated to his study once again.

"Where are you going, Daddy?" Ella called after him. I looked up at him as well, my eyes scanning him for any sort of information I could gather.

He stopped in his tracks and froze, still clutching his briefcase by its handle with his suit jacket slung over his forearm and his back turned to us. I could see his hand shifting on the briefcase handle, as though his own daughter asking why he wasn't giving her any attention was an egregious sin.

"Daddy?" Ella called again.

Finally, Edrick turned around — but only halfway. "I have some work to do, Ella," he said.

"But..." Ella pushed out her lower lip in a pout, as she often did when she wasn't getting her way. "You just got home. You always play with me when you come home."

Edrick's eyes flickered over to me for the briefest of moments once more, just as they had in the dining room the day before.

"Yes," I said, holding his eye contact. "You just got home. Why don't you rest for a while?"

Edrick shot me a look that almost seemed as though my words had burned through his very flesh like fire before he spoke. "I'm really sorry, Princess," he said, averting his gaze and looking back at his daughter. "I just have a lot of work to do. I'll play with you tomorrow, alright?"

Ella let out a small whimper, but nodded in solemn agreement. “Alright. Promise?”

“Promise.”

I couldn't hide my glare as Edrick turned around and retreated to his office once more. The fact that he was so unwilling to be around me that he wouldn't even spend five minutes with his daughter after work was simply unfair to her. If this went on for much longer, I would have no choice but to confront him about it; he could be as distant with me as he wanted to, but it wasn't right for him to mix Ella up in our drama.

In fact, over the next few days, it became increasingly obvious to me that Edrick was avoiding me. He never played with Ella in the living room anymore, and always seemed to go out of his way to leave any room that I was in within five to ten minutes of being there. He even began to let Ella into his study to play with him, which was incredibly uncharacteristic considering the fact that he had declared his study a child-free zone — unless it was absolutely necessary for Ella to enter — on my second day of working for him.

On the third day, I had begun to have enough of the Alpha CEO's strange behavior. Was I really so awful that he couldn't stand my presence for more than five minutes at a time?

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It was the evening of the third day of this nonsense. Ella and I had just spent the last hour preparing a nice meal, not just for ourselves, but for Edrick to share with us. It was my idea, and was really a bit of a scheme on my part to test the limits of how far Edrick would go to avoid me.

Ella was elated to show him all of her hard work when he came home, and had even gone so far as to put on one of her favorite dresses to mark the

occasion. She insisted that I dress up as well, so I complied and put on a nice dress and a small amount of makeup. Admittedly, I wanted to look nice as well, and found myself subconsciously putting more effort into my appearance than I had planned.

We took special care to set out the table settings, then sat down at the table and waited patiently while quiet music played on the record player in the corner.

Not long after we sat down, we heard the elevator doors open with a ding in the foyer. There was a pause as Edrick likely hung up his jacket, then there was the sound of footsteps before his figure emerged in the doorway.

He hardly even looked at us. In fact, if it weren't for Ella running over to him, he would have crossed through the dining room without even noticing that we were there.

“Surprise, Daddy!” Ella said, jumping up from her chair and skipping over to him. She grabbed his hand, then gestured over to the table with her other hand. “Moana and I made you a nice dinner.”

Edrick paused, studying the table silently.

“What’s all this for?” he asked.

Now, I stood. Edrick’s eyes seemed to widen slightly as he took in the appearance of my slim-fitting dress and neatly curled hair, but he quickly hid his look of shock. “We wanted to do something nice for you,” I said, walking over to his chair and pulling it out for him. “You’ve been working so hard, and haven’t had any time to spend with us.”

Edrick seemed taken aback. “Oh, I don’t know—” he began, but Ella stopped him by stamping her foot and folding her arms across her chest angrily.

“Eat dinner with us!” she demanded, exhaling sharply through her nose. “Moana let me stir the soup and everything.”

Finally, with a reluctant nod, Edrick sat down in his chair. Ella sat next to him, and I sat on the other side. We enjoyed the nice dinner together, but he seemed to be keeping his focus solely on Ella throughout the entire meal. While it hurt me deeply, I was at least happy that he was spending time with Ella.

That spell quickly dissipated, however, when he retreated to his study once more almost as soon as the dinner was over. I put on a smile and helped with the dishes, then put Ella to bed... But I couldn't sleep without talking to him.

So, I returned to his study after Ella was asleep, still wearing my dinner dress, and knocked on the door.