

Chapter 86 Midnight Mistakes

Edrick

I made a mistake that night kissing Moana. As I rushed back to my room and shut the door behind myself, I leaned my head back against the door and cursed at myself under my breath.

How could I be so stupid? I was a fool for not controlling myself around her, and now things were going to be even more confusing between us. Her curves beneath her thin nightgown were too tempting and I couldn't control the urge to touch her. Even now, I could still feel her belly beneath my hands and the taste of her lips on my tongue. I shook my head to dispel the thoughts, telling myself over and over again that I got too close.

As I got ready for bed and laid down, I kept having to erase the inappropriate thoughts from my mind, but I couldn't. Would I have to buy Moana a penthouse and keep a distance from her, just like I did with Ella's mother, Olivia? At the same time, however, it pained my soul to even imagine doing something like that; over the course of just a couple of short months, I already couldn't imagine a life without Moana here, and I knew it would only scar Ella emotionally after she became so attached to Moana. Not only that, but it would hurt Ella to see her new sibling be sent away like that.

No... I couldn't send Moana away. I was just tired, and my tiredness caused me to make a mistake. If I could just sleep, it would all be better in the morning and I could deal with it then.

But I couldn't sleep. Every time I closed my eyes, I kept picturing how beautiful Moana's body looked on the night of our one night stand, and how sensual she had been. Admittedly, it even made me too aroused to sleep, and eventually I couldn't take it anymore. I couldn't go to her room, but I also couldn't be in this house — so I decided to get dressed again and go out to the bar for a drink. I quickly texted my nighttime driver, who was on call for nights like this, and told him that I would be down shortly.

Within half an hour, I was at my bar — the same bar that I took Moana to on the night we met. As I made my way inside the quiet bar, I shoved the images of how she'd looked that night out of my mind and headed up the stairs.

There were only a few people in the bar. Some businessmen who were regular patrons, as well as a few others. I kept my head down and sat at the bar.

“Good evening, Mr. Morgan,” the bartender said, sounding a bit surprised. “What can I get for you?”

“The usual,” I said gruffly. “Whiskey. Neat.”

The bartender nodded and poured my whiskey, then set it down in front of me and walked away to give me some space.

As I drank, I stared down at the wood of the bar and cursed myself inwardly for being such a fool tonight. I should have told Moana that I was going to bed to begin with; I never should have agreed to have tea with her. I'd gotten too comfortable after our day at the mall, and her beauty in that final dress she tried on blinded my senses. Not only that, but the incident with the creep who was trying to hit on her made me feel

too protective and filled me with a sense of deep emotion for the human nanny.

Maybe it was just because it had been so long since I had been intimate with anyone else, I thought to myself. Moana was the first after a long dry spell, and I hadn't even looked in another woman's direction since then. Maybe, if I distracted myself, I wouldn't think so much about her anymore...

And it seemed that the universe sent me that perfect opportunity, because as I sat there stewing in my own juices, I heard the unmistakable sound of high heels clicking toward me. I looked up to see a gorgeous, sultry woman with dark eyes and dark hair approaching me. She was wearing a slinky black dress and incredibly high heels, and her breasts bounced lightly beneath her dress. I could see her n****s through the thin fabric of her dress, and it instantly made me hard.

She shot me a sultry smile as she sauntered up to me, then leaned on the bar next to me with her back arched and waved the bartender over.

"Gin and tonic, please, bartender," she said, her voice low and thick; she sounded as though she'd already had a few drinks.

"Put it on my tab," I said to the bartender over my shoulder as I looked her up and down.

The woman turned to face me and shot me another smile. "So forward," she said. "It's almost like you want something from me."

I shrugged and finished off the rest of the whiskey in my glass, tapping the glass twice on the bar for a refill. "Maybe I do," I said, "if you're willing."

The woman's smile stretched further across her thin face. She batted her eyelashes and gestured to the bathrooms with a simple nod of her head.

Within a couple of minutes, before she even had her drink, we were in the bathroom together with her sitting on the sinks as I bit into her neck and

ran my hands up her thighs. Her skin was smooth and soft, and when I ran my hand up her skirt, I could feel that she already wasn't wearing panties. This realization only made me more aroused, and I didn't stop her when she reached down to fumble with my belt. A sly smile stretched across her face as she reached down my pants and felt my erection, eliciting a soft moan from my lips.

I closed my eyes, tilting my head back...

And Moana's soft face flashed through my mind, from the night we slept together. The way her full lips were parted, her back arched beneath me. She was beautiful, more beautiful than this strange woman from the bar.

I suddenly opened my eyes again and stumbled backwards, shaking my head.

"What's the matter?" the woman said, c*****g her head and pouting. I only kept shaking my head and dug into my wallet, pulling out a wad of cash and tossing it in her lap. The woman rolled her eyes, but took the cash and shoved it into her cleavage before hopping down off of the sinks and strutting off without a word.

I stood there, panting for a moment, as I buckled my belt again and cursed under my breath.

That human nanny would get the best of me, somehow. Why couldn't I stop thinking about her for just one night?

I returned to my driver without having my second drink and ordered him to take me home. As we passed by the city lights, I could only think about how everything that happened tonight was nothing but a huge mistake.

Chapter 87 Another Woman

Moana

Somehow, I managed to fall asleep that night. In the morning, I woke up with a headache after the night spent in emotional distress.

Edrick and I had kissed last night in the darkness of the kitchen. Even now, I could still feel his hands on my waist and could feel his body pressed up against mine. Even now, I could still taste his lips and his tongue, and I had spent the night dreaming about him. The sun was shining through my bedroom window, but I just wanted to go back to the darkness of the night before and be with Edrick; I hadn't realized it before, but I was admittedly lonely, and his touch was welcome. I hadn't been with anyone since our one night stand and didn't realize how starved I was for intimacy with another adult.

To add insult to injury, I felt like an i***t for thinking for even one moment that Edrick was beginning to fall for me. The way he doted on me while we went shopping together despite the tabloid incident... The way that he scared away the creepy man at the mall and put his arm around me protectively, genuinely worried for my health and safety... The way that he kissed me so gently in the kitchen. Was any of that even real, or was it just a moment of weakness on his part? Was he lonely, too, and just looking for intimacy?

As I laid there, I remembered that Edrick and I promised to take Ella to the orphanage today so she could play with her friends. Even though I didn't particularly want to see Edrick after our kiss in the kitchen the night before, I knew that I would have to see him eventually, so I groaned and got up and headed to the kitchen to make a cup of coffee and ease my headache.

When I walked through the living room, however, the soft sound of snoring caught my attention. I furrowed my brow and peered over the couch to see Edrick sprawled out; he was dressed up with his shoes on as though he'd gone out, and there was an empty bottle of whiskey sitting on the floor next to him.

I was astonished. Ella couldn't see him like this; it would confuse her too much to see her father passed out drunk on the couch, so without taking a second thought, I snatched the empty alcohol bottle up off of the floor and abruptly shook Edrick's shoulder.

Edrick's eyes snapped open and he groaned as he came to his senses. Before he even had a chance to say anything, I shoved the bottle in his face and frowned deeply.

"I know that you got upset last night, but this is unacceptable," I said, gesturing to his appearance. "Your daughter will be awake soon. It's a good thing I found you before she came out here."

Edrick's eyes widened momentarily as he looked at the bottle. He slowly sat up and swung his legs over the side of the couch, then stood after pausing for a moment. He didn't seem to want to look at me.

"I'm sorry," he said, taking the bottle out of my hands. "It's really not as bad as it looks; the bottle was almost empty, and I just got too tired. I wasn't drunk."

As he reached for the bottle and leaned closer to me, however, I suddenly got a whiff of something other than alcohol: something sickly sweet and flowery. Perfume. Women's perfume, to be exact.

Did Edrick have a one night stand last night, right after our kiss in the kitchen?

The smell of the cheap perfume made my head reel, and I instantly became nauseous. I quickly covered my nose and mouth with my hand and stumbled backwards, shaking my head vigorously as tears welled up in my eyes.

“What's wrong?” Edrick asked, taking a step toward me. As he did, the smell of the perfume hit my nose again, and I covered up a gag with my hand. The smell was too strong, and I could only imagine the father of my baby sleeping with a strange woman at the bar, or even a prostitute. I couldn't tell what made me more sick: the smell or the thought of him being with someone else.

To think that Edrick not only went out drinking right after our kiss in the kitchen, but also had a one night stand on top of it... It made my heart hurt. Inside of me, Mina became stronger, but not out of love this time; rather, she became stronger with rage, like a lion pacing in its cage at the zoo. I could tell that she felt just as betrayed as I did right now.

But I had to hold my head high for Ella, and despite Edrick's confused look as I stepped away from him, I lowered my hand and tilted my chin up confidently.

“Don't forget that we promised Ella we'd take her to the orphanage today,” I said. My voice shook a little as I spoke, but I tried to hide it. After everything, I couldn't let Edrick see me get emotional over his one night stand with another woman, even though Mina was reacting strongly to the cheap scent as well.

Edrick only sighed and walked over to the kitchen, where he tossed the empty bottle in the trash. I followed him, waiting to see what he would say about his promise to poor little Ella.

And, to no surprise, he said exactly what I expected.

“Maybe we should go another day,” he said quietly, running a hand through his hair and straightening his shirt.

My jaw dropped. For Ella’s sake, even more than my own, I was furious. How could he really be so willing to drop his plans with his daughter because he irresponsibly went out, had a one night stand, and got too drunk to even make it to his bedroom?

By this point, I forgot all about how this supposed one night stand even made me feel, and I felt the need to argue for Ella’s sake. She needed to spend time with her father; clearly she was beginning to feel abandoned.

“Just because you got too drunk last night doesn’t mean that you get to just disappoint your daughter like that,” I said. Without thinking and without caring about the smell that made me sick, I stormed up to him and grabbed his tie, taking him by surprise. “You should be ashamed of yourself. What will Ella think?”

Edrick stared down at me with shock written plainly across his face. “I told you I wasn’t drunk,” he said. “What’s gotten into you?”

I realized what I was doing and quickly released my grip on his tie, then turned on my heel and walked a few paces away. I paused then, clenching and unclenching my fists as I blinked away the tears in my eyes.

Finally, I turned back to face him.

“I really can’t believe you,” I whispered. “To have a one night stand like that, not only right after you came onto me, but also on the night before you’re supposed to have a wholesome day with your daughter... It makes me sick.”

Chapter 88 Broken Promises

Moana

“To have a one night stand like that, not only right after you came onto me, but also on the night before you’re supposed to have a wholesome day with your daughter... It makes me sick.”

Edrick’s eyes widened at my words.

“Moana, I think you’ve got the wrong idea,” he said abruptly, taking a few steps toward me and folding his arms across his chest with a huff. “I didn’t sleep with anyone last night.”

I scoffed and shook my head. “I can smell the cheap perfume all over you,” I replied. “It stinks.”

Now, it was Edrick who scoffed. “It’s not like that... But honestly, Moana, you and I are not together. It’s not really up to you who I see in my free time.”

As Edrick spoke, I felt my eyes begin to well up with tears — but I had to stay strong for Ella, just like I told myself earlier. I couldn’t let Edrick or Ella see me cry today. Blinking rapidly to dispel the tears, I quickly turned on my heel and headed for the door. “Well, I’m taking Ella to the orphanage just like I promised,” I said coldly. “Whether or not you want to go is up to you, but we’ll go without you if we have to.”

Edrick let out a sound that came across as disbelieving as I walked away from him. “I won’t be going, then,” Edrick called after me, running over to the kitchen doorway, as I stormed off. “Really, Moana, I’m tired of your insolence.”

I didn’t answer. Blinking back more tears, I retreated to my room.

Later, just as I promised, I took Ella to the orphanage. We got dressed and headed down to the lobby; Edrick was nowhere to be found, just as I expected. As I put Ella into her car seat, she swung her legs and looked at me with a confused expression on her little face.

“Moana, where’s daddy?” she asked.

“He’s... Busy,” I lied as I imagined him sulking in his study more than anything. I secretly hoped that he felt badly for what he did, but I also was beginning to doubt that the Alpha billionaire felt much of anything at this point.

“But...” Ella pushed out her lower lip in a pout. “He promised we would go together. As a family.”

“I know, sweetheart,” I said softly as I got into the car with her. “We’ll go as a family another time. You like just going with me, right?”

Ella paused, sniffing as tears began to well up in her eyes, but she nodded nonetheless and held my hand for the entire car ride.

Thankfully, by the time we arrived at the orphanage, Ella was too excited about seeing her friends to pout anymore about her father’s broken promise. Almost as soon as we stepped through the front doors, she ran off to play with her friends. I grinned as I heard a chorus of other children

yelling Ella's name excitedly as she disappeared into the recreation room, and made my way over to the kitchen to find Sophia.

Sophia wasn't in the kitchen, so I made my way upstairs to her office and found her rifling through her filing cabinets and muttering to herself. I quietly knocked on the door as I entered.

"Hm... Just a moment," she said absentmindedly. Her back was turned to me, so I figured that she thought I was one of the children.

"Busy?" I asked.

Sophia immediately perked up and spun around to face me. A smile spread across her tired face and she scurried over to me, pulling me into a tight hug. "Moana!" she said. "I'm so glad to see you." Thankfully, I was wearing a loose outfit, so she didn't notice my slightly protruding belly as she hugged me; I was relieved because I didn't feel like addressing it today. Not after what happened with Edrick. Once again, I wondered to myself if I should save my money and try to start a new life with my baby at the first opportunity... But Ella was quickly becoming like a daughter to me, and I wasn't sure if I could leave her behind.

"I'm glad to see you as well," I said, managing a smile. "What are you doing? You seem busy."

Sophia turned back to look at her filing cabinets and let out a deep sigh. "I'm afraid I'm stretched a little thin right now," she said. "I really need a secretary, but it's just so darn expensive these days and I want to make sure that I can pay someone well for the job... I couldn't live with myself if I didn't give someone the pay they deserve."

I nodded, smiling at the older woman's kindhearted nature. Although the foundation for the orphanage seemed to be doing well at the gala, I was certain that a lot of the money went toward repairing the orphanage, purchasing supplies and clothing for the children, and putting money away in savings for the children when they grew up, so it made sense that

Sophia wouldn't have the extra cash to pay a receptionist. Now, more than ever, she was probably neck deep in paperwork because of the foundation.

"You know, I can always help you on my days off," I said. "I'll volunteer. Want me to help you today?"

Sophia's shoulders drooped a little and she shook her head. "No, I couldn't possibly let you do paperwork on your day off," she said. "But maybe... Would you mind watching the children for a little while?"

"Sure," I said. "I'll give them an art lesson."

With a smile, Sophia hugged me again. "Thank you so much," she said warmly. "You have no idea how much that helps."

If I was being honest, I was really only glad to just have a good distraction for the day. I let Sophia return to her paperwork and headed back downstairs, where I found the kids still playing in the recreation room. At the mention of an art lesson, they all jumped up from their game excitedly.

I couldn't help but smile at the children, and as I put on mine and the children's smocks and prepared the painting supplies, I was already feeling better. Maybe this was exactly what I needed — and maybe volunteering regularly on my days off would be helpful with everything going on at home.

"Okay, everyone," I said, clapping my hands to get the excited children's attention. "We're going to paint flowers today."

I started the lesson by painting a simple demonstration for the kids, then walked around the room and guided them as they sloppily painted their flowers. Eventually, the lesson devolved into finger painting and making a mess and the children seemed to be intent on painting anything but flowers, from pictures of dogs to stick figures, but I didn't mind; the children's happiness was all I needed to feel better and forget about Edrick.

However, halfway through the lesson, I heard the floorboard creak from the doorway. Thinking it was Sophia, I looked up with a smile — but that smile faded as I saw that Edrick was standing there.

Chapter 89 Art Lessons

Moana

As I walked around the room and helped the children with their art, I suddenly heard the sound of the floorboards creaking in the doorway. Thinking that it was Sophia coming to check on how everything was going, I looked up with a smile.

That smile quickly faded, however, when I realized it wasn't Sophia, but was in fact Edrick who was standing there. He had an indiscernible expression on his face and stood as still as a statue in the doorway with his hands in his pockets, his eyes locked on mine for several long, palpable moments.

Was I seeing things, or had the cold Alpha billionaire finally realized the fault in breaking his promise to his daughter?

But before I could even process the fact that he apparently seemed to have changed his mind for whatever reason, Ella snapped her head up and gasped loudly.

“Daddy!” she exclaimed, jumping up out of her chair and running up to him. “You came!”

Edrick put on a smile and scooped Ella up, hugging her tightly and planting a kiss on her cheek while the other children also threw down their paint brushes and ran up to him. “Mr. Morgan!” they shouted excitedly,

jumping up and down on their toes as they swarmed around him. Much to my surprise, Edrick set Ella down and then proceeded to greet each and every child... By name, no less.

“Hello, Clara,” he said, pinching the little girl’s cheek. “Hello, Matthew. Nice shirt you’ve got on today. Joshua...”

While all of this went on, I just stood there in a state of abject shock with wide eyes and an open mouth. It seemed that the Alpha billionaire changed his mind after all and wound up keeping his promise to his daughter; that didn’t mean that I wasn’t still furious with him, not only for initially breaking his promise but also for reeking of women’s perfume and being passed out drunkenly on the couch, but my attitude softened toward him a little bit as I watched him being so kind with the children.

Finally, Edrick stood and looked straight at me. “Am I interrupting an art lesson?” he asked.

“Um... Well—” I stuttered, still taken off guard.

Before I could get my words out, thankfully Ella stepped in. “We’re painting flowers, daddy,” she said, grabbing his hand and leading him over to her work station while the other children returned to their paintings.

“Oooh.” Edrick stuck his hands in his pockets as he peered down at his daughter’s canvas, which contained anything but a flower at this point. “That’s very good, Ella,” he said.

Ella grinned. “Are you gonna paint with us?”

“Oh, honey, I don’t know...”

“Pleeease?” Ella begged, clasping her hands together.

Edrick finally shrugged and nodded, letting out a sigh. “Alright,” he said. “I’ll paint with you.”

Even though I was supposed to be mad at Edrick right now, the fact that he agreed to join the lesson made my attitude toward him soften even

more. Without a word, I walked over to the supply cabinet and grabbed a spare apron for him to wear, then handed it to him along with a small canvas and a paintbrush. “There are paints on the tables,” I said, gesturing around.

Edrick silently took the apron and hesitantly put it on, then made his way over to one of the tables and sat down. He looked comically large in the chair that was meant for a child, causing the other children to giggle and point. But, much to my surprise, he only smiled and began to spread paint on his canvas.

Soon, we had all returned to our lesson. The children seemed to be having even more fun now with the Alpha billionaire, who painted rather sloppily and wound up splattering quite a bit of paint on his sleeves. The children pointed and poked fun at him, but he didn’t seem to mind the paint getting on his nice white shirt and only laughed along with them, poking fun at himself as well.

The lesson went on for much longer than expected because of this, but I didn’t mind. Soon, I’d almost entirely forgotten about the perfume and our subsequent argument and only found myself smiling and laughing along with Edrick and the children. The Alpha billionaire was a surprisingly bad artist, and almost seemed as though he’d never even picked up a paintbrush before in his entire life. Watching him struggle was endearing, and at one point I watched with a tear in my eye as one of the children walked up to him and put her little hand around his while he painted, guiding his hand along the canvas.

Finally, however, the lesson had to come to an end. I clapped my hands to get the children’s — and Edrick’s — attention, then instructed them to get up and walk around to look at everyone else’s artwork.

“Remember, no touching,” I said, watching as the children milled around and looked at their peers’ artwork. Edrick stood as well and joined them; he almost looked like a big kid on his own, wandering around with his

hands clasped behind his back. It admittedly made me smile a bit, and I didn't even mind that he seemed to be avoiding eye contact with me.

Finally, the group stopped at Edrick's station last. There was a long silence as the children stared down at his artwork, which was a sloppy mess that didn't even remotely resemble a flower.

Just then, Clara pointed her stubby little finger and giggled. "Mr. Morgan," she said, "don't you know what a flower looks like?"

"Yeah," Joshua added, "that looks like a... hm..."

"It looks like a hot dog! With hair!" Ella yelled, causing the children to erupt in a chorus of giggles. I finally walked over and looked down at the painting; it did, in fact, look like a hot dog with hair. The 'stem' of the flower was thick and red, and the 'petals' were just big brown swirls that resembled a mop of curly hair. If he'd added a bun and a smiley face, and maybe some arms and legs, it easily could have been a children's cartoon character.

Stifling a laugh, I opened my mouth to tell the children to be nice... But before I could, the Alpha billionaire threw his head back and laughed loudly, slapping his paint-covered hand on his apron. His laughter caused the children to laugh even more, and even brought a smile to my face; I wasn't sure if I was smiling more because it was funny, however, or if I was smiling because it made me happy to see the cold werewolf CEO so full of joy.

"I guess you're right, now that I look at it," he said finally, wiping away the tears that formed in his eyes from laughing so hard. "I guess I'm not an artist, am I?"

Edrick then turned to look at me. His steely gray eyes, which had just been full of mirth, softened as we looked at each other. I could sense an apologetic air about his expression, and it made my heart flutter a bit.

“Well,” I said finally, clearing my throat, “everyone can be an artist with plenty of practice.”

Edrick nodded. “Maybe my skills will get better with more of your lessons, Miss Moana,” he said.

Chapter 90 Field Trip

Moana

My head was still reeling from Edrick's sudden change of heart and change of attitude when one of the children, Clara, suddenly spoke up.

"Moana..." she whined, "can we have ice cream? Pleeease? It's so hot out!"

The little girl's request tore me away from my thoughts, and I nodded in agreement as all of the other children began to join in and beg for a frozen treat. It was hot out today, and the mention of something cold and refreshing to eat got me a little excited as well. "Okay," I said. "Let's have some ice cream."

The children cheered excitedly as they followed me to the kitchen. Edrick followed at the back of the group, but only because Ella grabbed his hand and yanked him along unceremoniously. When I got to the kitchen and opened the freezer, however, I was disappointed to see that there was no ice cream or any sort of frozen treat.

"Sorry, guys," I said with a sigh, turning to face the disappointed children. "Looks like there isn't any." The children all began to pout dramatically; I was just about to send them off to play and get their minds off of the subject when Sophia suddenly appeared in the doorway, looking confused.

“What’s wrong?” she asked, breaking the silence as she looked around at all of the sad little faces.

“There’s no ice cream,” Clara said. The little girl had her lower lip pushed out into a distinct pout and even somehow managed to muster up a few tears in her big blue eyes. “It’s so hot out...”

Sophia sighed. “Yes. Sorry, I need to do some shopping. I’ve been so busy—”

“I’ll take everyone out for ice cream.”

Everyone turned to face Edrick, shocked by the Alpha billionaire’s sudden, and generous, offer.

“Oh, you don’t have to—” Sophia began, but Edrick stopped her.

“Really. It’ll be fun. It’s on me.”

My eyes were wide as I looked back and forth between Edrick and the equally shocked Sophia. Before either of us could say anything, however, the children suddenly erupted into a grating chorus of excited shrieks and cheers, making my ears ring. I couldn’t help but smile, though, and neither could Sophia.

“Alright, alright,” she said as Clara and a couple of the other children began pleading and tugging on her skirt frantically. “Everyone, go to the closet and get your shoes and your sun hats. Hurry up!”

With one final cheer, the children all took off in one big stampede to get ready for the walk, leaving only Edrick, Sophia and I standing alone in the kitchen.

“This is very kind of you, Edrick,” Sophia said with a tired smile. “I’ll pay you back as soon as I can—”

“Nonsense,” Edrick interrupted. “It will be a cold day in hell when I ask you to repay me for ice cream.”

Sophia’s face went a little red. “Well... Thank you. I’ll go and get the children ready.” With that, she scurried off. I swore I could see a bit of a tear in her eye just before she left, but I couldn’t be entirely sure.

Now, Edrick and I were alone. I didn’t know what to say; I was speechless. His attitude that morning had been so indifferent and cold, and now here he was, joining us for art lessons, laughing and joking with the children, and taking everyone out for ice cream. If I wasn’t still so hurt by his apparent one night stand with a mystery woman, I would have been softened by his kind behavior... but admittedly, I was still having a difficult time getting over that.

Suddenly, Edrick turned to look at me. He opened his mouth to speak, and for a fleeting moment I thought that maybe he would apologize for his behavior that morning... But he didn’t. Instead, he reached into his pocket and retrieved two blue surgical masks. He quickly walked up to me and handed it to me with a somber look on his face.

“Make sure you wear this,” he said. “It’s still risky.”

I was dumbfounded by his request. I took the mask, but felt taken aback that that was really all he had to say to me; no apology? Nothing?

It didn’t matter, anyhow; with nothing but one more single, lingering look at me, Edrick suddenly turned on his heel and walked out to meet Sophia and the children in the foyer. I stared after him for a few moments, still in a state of disbelief, before letting out a deep sigh and following him.

When I walked out into the foyer, the place was filled with the chaos of a dozen excited little children getting ready to go get ice cream. Seeing the children so excited temporarily made me forget about my annoyance with Edrick, so I helped Sophia get the children ready. Finally, after everyone

was ready and I had my own mask on, we filed out of the orphanage and began the walk to a nearby ice cream parlor. Edrick walked at the front while Sophia and I walked at the back, instructing the children to hold hands and stay in a single-file line as we walked.

We walked through a little park on the way. The shade from the trees and the cool spray of water coming off of the fountains was a welcome relief from the dry heat of the afternoon, and the sound of the birds singing and the children chattering happily made a smile come to my face beneath my mask.

Meanwhile, Edrick walked in solitude at the front of the group. Sophia hung back with me and we talked as we watched the Alpha billionaire walk ahead of us.

“What’s up with the mask, if you don’t mind me asking?” Sophia asked quietly. “I mean, I understand why he’s wearing one, but you...”

I shook my head. “Tabloids are just starting to get the wrong idea,” I said, still not mentioning the pregnancy to her. “That’s all.”

“Ah...” Sophia nodded, mulling over my words for a few minutes before speaking again. “You know, he really seems so much different now. It’s like he’s not even the same WereCorp CEO that I met that first day at the orphanage... He’s really changed for the better, don’t you think?”

I stared ahead at Edrick’s back as he walked. He was holding Ella’s hand, who was holding the child’s hand behind her, and so on. Ella chattered happily about ice cream flavors, and although I couldn’t see Edrick’s face, I knew that he was probably happy to be out on a nice day with his daughter... But at the same time, I just couldn’t get over the smell of perfume on his clothes from that morning. At that point, I was more bothered by that than the fact that he drunkenly fell asleep on the couch, fully clothed with an empty whiskey bottle. If he wanted to go out for a

bit, then that was up to him — but to go out with another woman and use it as an excuse to disappoint his daughter earlier? Even if he did have a change of heart and wound up making up for it, I still found it to be deplorable.

“Honestly,” Sophia continued, breaking me out of my train of thought, “I think that you’ve had a positive impact on him.”

It was then that I shook my head, my eyes still fixed on the Alpha billionaire’s back.

“I’m not sure how much he’s changed,” I said quietly.