

Chapter 543 Moved

Even though Milton recognized the fire that burned within Elliana, his instinct was to shield her from every shadow, to promise she'd never face pain again.

He reached for her hand, voice steady but gentle. "Elliana, you don't have to walk this road by yourself anymore. From here on out, you've got a family that's not going anywhere. There's Dad, there's me—you're ours. And as long as we breathe, nothing and no one will ever hurt you again. Got it? Whatever you need, whenever you need it, just say the word. That's my responsibility. All I want is to see you happy, living like the princess you were always supposed to be."

Regret clung to him—the years they missed out weighed heavily, but he was determined to make every moment count now.

Most people had no idea, but what Milton had wanted his whole life was to play the part of the devoted older brother, fierce and unwavering.

That wish had taken root before Elliana ever drew her first breath. Back when their mother still carried Elliana, he'd imagined it all—perching her on his shoulders, introducing her to the wild freedom of horseback rides, chasing sunlight and laughter through open fields, and spoiling her with every good thing he could find.

However, his plan had been shattered the night their mother vanished, spiriting away before Elliana entered the world.

Twenty years he'd waited, and now that he'd finally found Elliana, he was ready to protect her like he always dreamed. He couldn't stomach the idea of her facing hardship alone, of her having to fight the jerks who had mistreated her. From now on, he promised, her world would overflow with joy and safety.

Meeting Milton's unflinching gaze, Elliana was floored by the depth of his care. For so long, she'd been forced to survive by her own wits, to outlast cruelty with cunning and resolve. Having someone so openly devoted to her happiness brought on a wave of joy so strong that she nearly

trembled.

Part of her wanted to cling to that feeling forever. Still, the thought of living passively, as someone sheltered and delicate, didn't sit right with her. She'd learned to stand her ground and fight back, to turn every challenge into a triumph. Power had never been a burden; it was her birthright.

"Thank you for wanting to keep me safe," she said, her tone matching his sincerity. "But I can't just sit back and be protected, Milton. I need to fight my own fights. I never wanted a glass slipper—I'd rather hold the sword. Being a warrior is who I am."

Every day since her mother's departure had been a struggle for survival. Letting her guard down, even once, could have ended her. The idea of trading that edge for comfort made her uneasy, like trading freedom for a gilded prison.

Milton listened closely, his attention unwavering. When her words faded, his smile was slow, understanding. He reached out, affectionately tousling her hair. He understood her completely. Wanting to shield her was his instinct, but he finally saw that true love meant letting her rise, not holding her back.

"Then be as fierce as you want," Milton answered, quiet but resolute. "I won't stand in your way. All I ask is that you remember—I'm here, always. You'll never have to face anything alone again, not as long as I'm around."

A quiet note of agreement slipped from her lips, and a real, unguarded smile lit up her face.

Discovering the feeling of having a brother was unlike anything she'd ever known. Loneliness used to be her only companion, and survival felt like a brutal war fought with no chance to retreat. She'd always pressed forward, teeth gritted, because stepping back even once spelled disaster.

But now, everything had shifted. She had a safety net beneath her. If she stumbled or faltered, she wouldn't crash to the ground. This time, she could let herself lean back, knowing someone would catch her.

As the truth of it settled in, her vision blurred with fresh tears. These weren't tears of pain—they were the warm, overwhelming kind that only true happiness brings.

Fifteen years had been spent crafting armor, forging protection from sheer will and bitter experience. Whenever the world cracked her shell, she'd always patched it back together herself. That old armor felt lighter now. She had gained something far sturdier: a father's embrace and a brother's unwavering strength. This new protection didn't need mending. It was unbreakable.

A calm contentment took hold as Elliana rested her head against Milton's shoulder, a silent gesture of gratitude and belonging.

Words hovered on her lips—she wanted to tell him how much she wished to meet their father at last. Before she could, Milton's phone rang sharply, breaking the stillness.

Her gaze drifted to the phone's screen. The caller ID said it all—Dad.

Elliana's breath hitched. For most of her life, the word "father" tasted of poison. She had blamed him for everything, for chasing her mother away, for the ache that had never left her chest. The thought of him had filled her with disgust, with fear, with anger too raw to name. But not anymore.

Now, that same word pulled at her like gravity, stirring something deep within. It felt as if she were a seed straining for sunlight, a river pulled homeward by the sea. The ache that filled her chest was sharp and urgent—a desperate longing for her father's arms.

As a little girl, she had watched Paige nestle into Darin's arms, envy twisting inside her. How she had yearned for that—a father's protection, a safe place to hide from the world. She'd tried, again and again, to win the tiniest bit of affection from Darin, only to be met with cold indifference or outright rejection.

Those moments had left scars that ran deep, convincing her she was too flawed for anyone, especially a father, to love. Even now, as the infamous Death Thorn, she still felt the chill of those childhood wounds. But clarity finally dawned. The fault was never hers. She wasn't unlovable. She just hadn't found her real father—until now.

Chapter 544 Nervous

Milton let the phone buzz a few more times, a slow grin curling his lips as he glanced at Elliana. "That's Dad again," he murmured, amused. "Dad's getting impatient. He's probably calling to nudge me faster—he can't wait to meet you."

With a quiet laugh, Milton finally tapped the screen. "Hey, Dad."

Right on cue, a flurry of concern poured through the speaker. "Milton, where are you? Why aren't you home yet? And your sister, is she with you?"

Leaning against Milton's shoulder, Elliana listened intently. Something tightened in her chest, tender and overwhelming, and tears pricked at the corners of her eyes. That voice! That was her father! Her real father!

The voice on the other end was thick with longing, brimming with a restless yearning meant only for her. In every syllable, she could feel the weight of twenty long years of searching, of hoping without proof, of never surrendering to silence.

"She is with me, Dad," Milton replied, his voice calm and sure. He glanced sideways at Elliana, his smile softening with quiet pride. "She's sitting in my car. We're on our way home now."

A gasp crackled through the speaker, and Arthur's voice broke with joy. "Really? Put me on video—I need to see her. Let me see my daughter, right now!"

But then, almost immediately, Arthur faltered. "No, wait. Don't. Maybe it's too much for her. And I need to shower and change my shirt. I probably look awful. What if she sees me and dislikes me?" His words dissolved into a long, ragged sigh. "I wasn't there when she was born. Not one day of her childhood was accompanied by me. And now... Now she's already grown..."

This was Arthur, the legendary tycoon of Sun Group, a man whose name stirred boardrooms and shook markets, the kind of man others whispered about with awe or fear. And yet, in this moment, his voice

trembled with the rawness of someone completely insecure. All because of love. A love so immense that it left him vulnerable. It unmade the armor he wore so effortlessly in every other part of his life. Because at the core of that love was the aching terror that he might not be enough for the daughter he'd spent decades to find.

Elliana listened in silence, her heart full. So, this was what a real father's love sounded like. Not stern commands or cold discipline. Not domination dressed up as protection. But this: a fumbling, worried tenderness. The desperate desire to be accepted. The panic over being too late.

Her thoughts drifted back to her childhood and Darin. His stony face. The disdain in his eyes. A man who had played the role of father but never once embodied the meaning of it. The contrast was immeasurable.

So this was what it truly meant to be a father, not a figure of authority towering above, but a man stripped bare by love, trembling under its weight. For the first time in her life, she'd understood what fatherly love meant.

"Milton, have you spoken to her yet?" Arthur's voice burst through the phone again, a breathless flurry of questions tumbling out in rapid succession. "Does she know about our family? Is she okay with coming home? What kind of father does she prefer? Should I wear a suit, or would that seem too stiff? Or maybe something more casual? And when I smile, should I show teeth? Like, eight teeth? Or is six more approachable?"

Milton couldn't help it. A laugh slipped out, warm and surprised. Never in his life had he heard his father like this. Utterly confident in every other corner of life, but completely and adorably lost when it came to his daughter.

Milton glanced down at Elliana, still curled against his shoulder, her presence warm and steady. A smile played on his lips—soft, encouraging. "Dad, maybe you should ask her yourself."

With that, Milton tapped the screen, switched to speaker, and angled the phone toward her.

Elliana froze. Just moments ago, she'd found amusement in Arthur's anxious ramblings. But now, with the attention shifting to her, reality

slammed into her like a sudden wave. She was no longer a passive listener; she was part of the conversation. And she was just as terrified.

All the questions Arthur had fretted over were suddenly hers, reflected back with equal force. What should she say? What if her voice sounded wrong? What if she wasn't who he'd hoped for? What if, after all these years of waiting, she disappointed him? He had waited twenty years for this. The weight of that expectation was crushing.

Her heart thundered wildly, each beat louder than the last. The phone loomed close, expectant. She parted her lips but then closed them. Tried again, but still nothing. Her throat constricted around the words.

On the other end, Arthur said nothing. Only his shallow, trembling breaths filled the silence.

Milton watched the silent standoff—Elliana's tense face, Arthur's strained breathing crackling through the speaker. The invisible thread between them taut and trembling.

And then, Milton let out a quiet laugh as he slowly pulled his phone toward his lips and said, "Dad, she's just as nervous as you are."

There was a sharp breath on the other end. "She is? Oh no! Was I too forward? Did I overwhelm her? I didn't mean to. I just... I didn't want to scare her off."

Elliana pressed her teeth into her bottom lip, frustration prickling beneath her skin. One word. Dad. Just say it. Why couldn't she?

"You didn't do anything wrong, Dad," Milton said gently, his tone steady as stone in a storm. His eyes locked onto Elliana's, warm and grounding. "You're afraid you won't be the perfect father she needs and she's just as scared she'll fall short of the daughter you've spent your life hoping to find."

Milton paused, as his gaze stayed on Elliana, patient and tender. "Am I right?"