



40 Chapter 40 Unexpected Conversations

Elara 1

Orion squirmed and whined, his little face scrunching up dramatically. "Uncle Dominic, put me down! Ouch, ouch, ouch!"

I couldn't help but laugh. Poor kid looked like a dangling puppy.

"Dominic, be gentle with him," I said softly.
"He's just a cub."

Dominic shot me a look that was half amusement, half betrayal. "A cub? This pup is huge already."

Orion, seeing an opportunity in my intervention, immediately switched tactics. His eyes went wide and innocent as he looked at Dominic with the most practiced puppy-dog expression I'd ever seen.

"Uncle Dominic, Uncle Dominic, you're the best! I've lost weight recently, see? My cheeks are smaller!" He patted his still very round cheeks hopefully. "Too skinny for punishment, right?"



I bit my lip to keep from laughing as Dominic rolled his eyes dramatically. The Alpha carried his nephew away. They made quite a pair - one tall and serious, one small and dramatic. 2

I went back to sit with Hunter, feeling surprisingly at home.

"Don't mind those two," Hunter said with a warm chuckle. "They're always like that. My older son is busy building his corporate empire from coast to coast, so Orion stays here with me most of the time. But the boy loves his dad. Gets so excited when he comes home."

I nodded but didn't ask questions. No wonder Orion wanted me to be his mom. The poor kid needed a mother figure.

When Dominic returned with a freshly washed and slightly sulking Orion, the little boy immediately came to my side.

He ignored his uncle completely and climbed onto the chair next to mine.

"Auntie Elara," he asked, his voice sweetly hopeful, "can Orion sit with you?"

Despite his chubby cheeks and round belly, Orion was adorable. He had perfect features and clearly got the best genes from both



parents. My wolf practically melted at the sight of him.

"Of course you can," I said, pulling out his chair.

Orion climbed up with surprising speed for such a chubby kid. Once settled, he shot a defiant pout at his uncle, who looked like he wanted to grab the boy again.

By dinner's end, Orion had my phone number and showed me his smartwatch for video calls. I couldn't say no to such a cute request.

As soon as we finished eating, Dominic practically dragged me away.

"Your nephew is really sweet," I said as we walked to the car.

Dominic scoffed. "Sweet? He's a little schemer. And he needs to lose weight."

"Don't say that about him," I said gently. "Kids take things seriously. What if he gets upset about his body because of comments like that?"

"He won't get upset," Dominic said with complete confidence. "Trust me."

"He's only six," I reminded him.

Dominic laughed, his eyes suddenly bright with mischief. "You really like kids, don't you? Maybe



we should have one of our own someday?"

The moment he said it, everything went quiet.

My heart did this weird skip-beat thing that I definitely wasn't prepared for.

The way he'd said "our own" - not like it was part of our fake arrangement, but like he was actually picturing a future with me.

I stared out the passenger window, my wolf stirring restlessly. This was supposed to be a business arrangement. Nothing more.

So why did the thought of having his children make my chest feel tight and my pulse race?

The silence lasted the entire drive home.

I kept stealing glances at him from the corner of my eye.

His hands gripped the steering wheel a little too tightly, and there was a tension in his jaw that hadn't been there before. Like he was just as affected by his own words as I was.

Finally, he cleared his throat.

"I didn't mean anything by that," he said quietly. But his voice was rougher than usual, like the words cost him something to say. "Just joking around."



"I know," I replied, though my voice sounded breathless even to my own ears. Though neither of us sounded like we believed it.

The mate bond hummed between us, that invisible thread that I'd been trying so hard to ignore. But moments like this made it impossible to pretend it wasn't there.

When we got home, we went to our separate rooms without saying another word

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