

Marry My Daddy

Chapter 3

Molly.

The first day Ruby didn't show up, I wasn't too worried. I had assumed that after what happened yesterday, that her father would take her to the doctor, as I can only assume it probably got worse when they left. But, I had hoped that she'd be back the next day.

By the third day, the worry settled in my chest like a stone.

I tried to remind myself that Ruby had always been fragile. She had missed school before, sometimes for a day or two. But by day five, I was itching with anticipation of seeing her little dark pigtails bouncing through the door.

They never did.

By the second week, I was checking the attendance sheet the moment I arrived in the morning, my stomach sinking each time I saw her name missing. Again. I told myself I was being paranoid. Kids got sick. Maybe it was a stomach bug. Maybe her father had taken her on some last-minute business trip.

But a nagging voice in the back of my head kept whispering: What if it's something worse?

I hated that the only person who could answer that question was Logan Baron.

And I hated even more that he hadn't said a word. No email. No phone call. No message relayed through a nanny or an assistant. Nothing. It was as if she had vanished.

The only reassurance I had was that no one had told me she'd withdrawn from Primrose Academy. As far as I knew, she was still enrolled. Still part of my class.

Still mine to worry about.

By the time Friday rolled around, I had given up hope of seeing her. I had told myself that if she didn't return by Monday, I would break the school's professional barrier and call whatever emergency contact was on file. The thought of reaching out to Logan myself made my skin prickle with unease, but I needed to know if she was okay.

So when I walked into my classroom that Friday morning and saw her sitting in her usual seat, I froze.

She looked smaller somehow. Paler. The usual brightness in her hazel eyes was dulled by exhaustion, and the little smile she sent my way didn't reach as high as it used to. She looked like she had been through far more than any six-year-old should have endured.

But she was here.

Relief and concern tangled in my chest, but I forced a smile as I walked over.

“Ruby,” I greeted warmly. “I missed you.”

“I missed you too, Miss Brooks,” she said softly.

I crouched beside her desk. “Are you feeling okay?”

She nodded, but I didn't believe her. Not when she looked like she was one wrong step away from collapsing.

One of her dark pigtails had started to unravel, the elastic band barely holding on, and strands of her soft curls spilled loose over her shoulder. Without thinking, I reached for it, gently gathering the stray pieces and twisting them back into place.

"Your hair tie broke," I murmured as I secured it with the spare one I kept around my wrist.

Ruby blinked up at me, then gave a tiny, tired smile. "Thank you, Miss Brooks."

"Anytime, sweetheart," I said softly, though the worry in my chest remained. I blinked once again, noting the paleness of her cheeks. “Are you sure you're okay?”

Before I could push for more details, Ava leaned over from the next desk. “Ruby, guess what! We learned a new song while you were gone. I'll teach you at recess!”

“Okay!” Ruby perked up at that, some of her usual excitement returning.

I let the moment of happiness settle before gently squeezing her shoulder. “If you start feeling sick again, just tell me, okay?”

She nodded, but I wasn't convinced.

The rest of the school day passed in a blur. I kept one eye on Ruby the entire time, watching as she participated, laughed, and tried to keep up. But I could see the exhaustion creeping in. By the time the last bell rang, she looked ready to collapse.

As I dismissed the class, Ruby lingered behind, fidgeting with the strap of her backpack. I sat at my desk, waiting for her to say what was on her mind.

Finally, she looked up. “Miss Brooks?”

“Yes, sweetheart?”

“I missed you a lot,” she mumbled.

The words shouldn't have hit me as hard as they did, but something about them made my throat tighten. “I missed you too, Ruby.” My gaze softened. “I was so worried.”

"I'm sorry I made you worry," she said, swinging her weight slightly which showed me that she was nervous.

"Hey hey." I rounded the desk so I was directly in front of her, meeting her hazel eyes, that I now recognized as a mixture of brown and Logan's green eyes. "Don't feel bad for not feeling well, okay? It's not your fault and I was only worried because I care about you."

She hesitated. "I wish I could spend more time with you."

I swallowed past the lump in my throat, offering her a soft smile. "I'm always here, sweetheart."

She nodded, though her expression was thoughtful, like she was considering something bigger. Before she could say anything else, her usual driver appeared at the door. She waved goodbye and disappeared into the hallway.

I watched her go, my heart unsettled.

That night, as I sat curled up on my couch, grading papers, my mind kept drifting back to her words. I wish I could spend more time with you.

My tiny studio apartment was a world away from the pristine hallways of Primrose Academy. The space was barely big enough for a couch, a small dining table, and the narrow bookshelf overflowing with secondhand novels. The scent of coffee lingered in the air from my earlier attempt to stay awake, and the hum of the old radiator filled the silence. But it was home.

Something, I didn't know if I could say the same for Ruby.

She was lonely. I had known that for a while. Even with her bright personality and the way she made friends so easily, there was a sadness in her that most kids didn't carry.

And that sadness had a name: Logan Baron.

I sighed, tossing my pen onto the coffee table. I shouldn't be thinking about him. He was just another absent parent too busy with his empire to notice what was happening right in front of him.

Gosh, it was eight in the evening, and all I could think about was if the poor kid had a proper meal to eat.

A sharp buzz pulled me from my thoughts. I glanced at my phone, expecting to see a message from a friend or a reminder for something school-related.

But the number on the screen was unfamiliar.

I hesitated before answering. "Hello?"

A low, familiar voice came through the receiver, smooth as silk but carrying a weight I wasn't expecting.

“Good evening, Miss Brooks.”

My breath hitched. I knew who it was, even though I'd only had one conversation with the insufferable man.

Logan.