

Marry My Daddy

Chapter 5

Molly.

“Once upon a time, in a land far, far away, there was a little girl who lived in a castle made entirely of books,” I read aloud, pausing as Ruby let out a delighted gasp. “She spent her days reading every story in the kingdom, but there was one book she could never open.”

Ruby, curled up beside me on a plush beanbag, propped her chin on her hands. “Why not?”

“That's the mystery,” I teased, tapping the page. “What do you think is inside?”

“Hhmm.” She scrunched her nose, deep in thought. “Maybe it's magic. Or maybe a secret about her family!”

I smiled, smoothing down her unruly curls. “Both are excellent guesses.”

The afternoon had flown by, and despite the extravagance of the Baron estate, I had almost forgotten where I was. Here, in this moment, it was just me and Ruby, lost in stories and laughter.

“Miss Brooks, will you stay for dinner?” Ruby asked suddenly, her small fingers clutching my sleeve. “Mrs. Dalton is making my favorite pasta.”

I hesitated, but before I could answer, the deep timbre of Logan's voice filled the doorway. “Not tonight, sweetheart.”

Ruby let out a disappointed sigh as I turned my head, and—

Oh.

Logan had changed.

Gone was the sharp suit from earlier. Now, he leaned against the doorway with his hands in his pockets and his ankles crossed, wearing a fitted navy sweater that clung to his broad frame and dark jeans that somehow made him look even taller.

Although I hadn't known him long and had only seen him two in person, something about seeing him so casual, I couldn't tear my gaze away.

Not even on TV or in magazines had anyone caught him in anything apart from a suit.

His damp hair was tousled, as if he'd just stepped out of the shower, and the faintest scent of something clean—sandalwood, maybe?—drifted into the room.

I swallowed, forcing myself to focus. This was Ruby's father. Just Ruby's father. The man who had basically insulted my credibility as a teacher, and made it impeccably clear that he believed I was working at the school to land a rich husband. This was the man who barely spent time with his daughter who evidently had a condition.

This was the man who, without a doubt, has played into far more women's beds than I would like to know.

I guess I couldn't blame myself for taking in the view—was an attractive man, after all. But, that's it. Nothing more.

“You ready to go?” Logan asked, his eyes meeting mine.

I nodded, slowly rising from the beanbag, though a part of me didn't want to leave just yet. Ruby clung to my hand, her lower lip jutting out in an exaggerated pout.

“But Daddy, she has to stay!” Her lips trembled now, and I panicked as I tried to find words to assure her. “I asked Mrs. Dalton to make pasta for us!”

Logan's gaze softened, and for a fleeting moment, I saw something in his expression that I hadn't seen before. Not indifference. Not annoyance. Something else.

Pure and utter love for his daughter.

And it made something in me falter.

“She can't stay, sweetheart,” he said with a sad smile. “Her driver is already here.”

“Can she at least come back tomorrow?” Ruby countered, her big hazel eyes full of hope. “Or can I go to school on Monday?”

“I don't know,” he told Ruby gently. “You have a big week ahead of you with some more medical tests, Ruby.”

“But—”

“I'll come back tomorrow,” I heard myself say.

Logan's eyes flickered to me then softened with something unreadable. “You don't have to.”

“I know.”

A silence stretched between us, heavy and charged, as Ruby finally released my hand and hopped off the beanbag.

“You promise, Miss Brooks?” she asked.

I bent down, tucking a loose curl behind her ear. “I promise.”

Logan, seeming stunned, cleared his throat as he gestured for me to follow him. "I'll walk you out."

I crouched down, brushing Ruby's hair back as she threw her arms around my neck.

"We'll finish the story tomorrow, okay?" I said as she pulled back.

Her face lit up. "Right! The book that won't open!"

I smiled, tapping her nose playfully. "Exactly. And I have a feeling we'll figure it out."

She hugged me one last time before I joined Logan.

As we stepped into the grand hallway, the air between us shifted. He walked beside me, his strides unhurried, his hands casually tucked into his pockets. The tension from our first meeting wasn't gone, but it had changed.

"You were good with her today," Logan said.

"I try," I replied. "She's an incredible kid."

"She is." He exhaled, glancing at me. "She's been happier lately."

I looked at him, searching his face. "I'm glad."

We reached the door, but neither of us moved to open it. There was something unspoken lingering between us, something neither of us seemed willing to name.

"You didn't have to say yes today," he finally said. "But you did."

I lifted a shoulder in a half-shrug. "It wasn't a hard decision."

He studied me for a long moment, as if trying to decipher something. Then he stopped walking, forcing me to stop too.

He stared at me for the good part of thirty seconds, his eyes raking over my features as if it was the first time he was actually seeing me.

I grew a little self-conscious, of course. I wasn't wearing any make-up apart from a light pink lipstick, and dark eye-liner that I usually think brought out the green in my eyes. My black hair was simply pulled into a ponytail. Yet, he looked at me as if he just started... seeing me.

I shivered visibly and willed myself to start walking again, forcing him to do the same.

"Most people wouldn't go out of their way like that," he continued as if he hadn't just had me questioning my entire appearance under his gaze.

"I'm not most people."

A slow exhale. A flicker of something in his eyes. Respect? Amusement? I couldn't tell.

“Clearly.”

His fingers twitched at his side, like he was considering something, but instead of saying anything else, he reached for the door. The cool evening air drifted in as he pulled it open, and I stepped out, pausing on the threshold.

I hesitated, my fingers tightening around the strap of my bag. “Logan—”

He looked at me then, his brow slightly raised, and I forgot what I was going to say.

“Mr. Baron...” I mumbled. “Sorry, that slipped.”

“No,” he said quickly. “Logan is fine.”

I nodded slowly, trying not to read into it too much.

“I’ll see you,” I murmured instead.

A pause. Then, a slow nod. “See you soon, Molly.”

As I stepped into the cool evening air, I let out a breath I hadn’t realized I was holding. This was supposed to be simple. Just a visit for Ruby.

So why did it feel like something far more complicated?

And why did I already want to come back? For Ruby, of course. But also, for... him?