

“Daddy!” Sarah exclaimed, running over to her dad. He was a doberman, standing at a firm attention with his arms behind his back. He wore a white button up that was tucked into his slick black pants. He glanced down at Sarah as she shuffled through her bag just ahead of him before pulling out a scribbled drawing on a crumpled sheet of paper of a scuffed brown and black smudge on the paper next to a large and concerning flower that overlapped it.

“I drew you in your garden!” She offered the paper to him, and allowed him to inspect it in silence. He pulled it back and nodded his head sternly.

“You have improved a lot since your last drawing. I will put it in the fridge with the others.” He nodded. She squealed all the way into the backseat as her father circled around to the drivers side.

“Wait! Mr... M-Mr. Milo?” someone called from inside the school, racing through the other parents to reach him. He stood still, letting the car lay between them and his hand on the doorknob.

“Is something wrong, Ma’am?”

“Well it’s just that umm... Well to put it simply... You are a bit intimidating and some of the other parents are concerned with how Sarah is being raised as a human a-and it’s just... You don’t show up to any parent teacher conferences either, so it’s just difficult for them to trust you as a parent...” The teacher said slowly, her own words seemed to tremble before the doberman.

“Who are they? I can put their worries at ease permanently.”

“N-no no! It’s just... Maybe show up to some of the conferences, socialize a bit with the other parents around, you know? And uhm... It wouldn’t hurt to smile as well and not be so upset all the time!” She proposed. It seemed to fall on deaf ears as he didn’t budge the slightest muscle in response before nodding his head and getting into his car. She thought he had just ignored her until he rolled down the window.

“Thank you for communicating your concerns to me.” He said as began to drive off. He was usually viewed like this, stern, unmoving, mistakenly emotionless, and only those close to him know that he’s none of those things. He adopted Sarah a

few years ago, and she was uneasy with him when they first met, which baffled him due to how he views himself. It took some time and talks, but they learned to trust one another and love one another as family.

When they got home, Milo carried Sarah in with the drawing in his other hand. At the door, he was met with his husband, Teddy. He is a big dog, much like Milo. A St. Bernard who worked on dinner while they were out, happily hugging Milo and Sarah and excitedly taking her off Milo, carrying her about as they excitedly told each other about one another's day. It was one of the things that Teddy could do much easier than Milo, which was expressing himself through his face and body, as well as his actions. Milo used some magnets to set up the drawing that Sarah made. It was nice of her to do that and it definitely made him happy, but from the outside, he just stared blankly at the drawing before getting picked up from behind, helpless as Teddy decided to show his love for Milo.

“And how's my favorite husband doing?” He smiled excitedly, still keeping Milo off the ground with a tight embrace.

“A teacher informed me that other parents are uneasy about this household and that I need to be more presentable to them.”

“Wait what?”

Teddy lowered Milo and turned him around, his expression shifting from happy to a more confused and concerned look. Milo explained how the teacher informed him on how the other parents view their relationship and them raising Sarah. Teddy scoffed, crossing his arms and huffing in annoyance.

“Ugh. but all the moms there keep asking who's the ‘man of the house’. It's miserable to go there. Let alone that but there aren't any other dogs there so I stuck out like a sore thumb when I went.” He groaned, reminiscing on how many times each they've gotten a similar complaint.

“From what I found and see from Sarah, all their concerns are misplaced. Her behavior and assignments are fine, so it's simply a misled perception of us as parents.” Milo added, stroking his chin.

“Hey, let's just ignore them for now. We have spring break in just a few days and we can take a nice long vacation to The Harrow Seashore! Just like we planned.” Teddy suggested, leaning down a bit with a smile. As tall as Milo was, Teddy somehow grew up to be bigger, leading to most cars and buildings to be uncomfortable for him. “Plus, I made your favorite for dinner today!” Teddy added, wanting to steer the evening in a more positive light. Milo gave a sigh of relief as acknowledgement and nodded, still not over the words of the teacher, but ready to be with his family.

“You can tell Sarah that the food's ready, I'll get the plates together.” Teddy smiled, petting Milo as he turned away to get some gloves on again before he started touching food. He didn't always wear gloves, but once he started making food for Milo, he realized just how much he sheds.

“Whoa you made chicken alfredo!” Sarah screamed as she ran over to her seat at the table, excitedly bouncing in place as Teddy gave her a plate. As soon as it was set in front of her, she wasted no time in eating it.

“Remember what you say before eating your food?” Milo asked as he took his seat as well, not yet eating the pasta until Teddy sat down as well.

“Oh right! Thank you, Dad!” Sarah squealed between forkfuls.

“Thank you, sweetie. I love seeing you be happy.” Teddy smiled, taking his seat and holding Milo's paw as they ate together.

Later that night, Sarah was tucked in and the two dogs were in their room, getting ready for bed in their own ways. As Teddy took a brush across his body, Milo was getting his earbuds ready. Milo doesn't grow his fur out and already doesn't shed much, so the brush isn't as much of a necessity as his husband. And as much as Teddy loves Milo and everything he does, the two can never find common ground in white noise, leading to Milo getting earbuds to help go to sleep.

“Teddy?”

“Yes honey?”

“...Do you believe I need to smile more in order to become a better parent?” Milo asked, urging Teddy to poke his head out in confusion.

“I understand that Sarah is expressing herself freely and that I am still understood regardless of my lack of expression. But I am starting to think that these critiques on us are just a tad bit valid.” Milo sighed, fiddling with his fingers on the foot of the bed where Teddy joined him, stroking his back as he spoke.

“I haven’t smiled in what feels like years and this causes me to come across as upset to most who don’t know me. I understand this but I fear that this is an avid problem. Most parents can both smile for themselves rather than one parent having to smile for both. Am... Am I making it worse for us?” Milo asked, hardly being able to turn his face to Teddy before being brought into a hug.

“You could be everything you’re not and they’d still find something to complain about. You’re fine, we’re fine, Sarah’s fine. Just because you don’t want to smile all the time doesn’t make you a burden. You and I don’t work the same and *that’s okay.*” Teddy said, keeping Milo covered in his half brushed fur. Milo kept silent, but hugged back, squeezing his husband and closing his eyes.

“Don’t let them get to you, honey. You’re doing great.” Teddy smiled again, patting Milo on the back slowly. “I still have to finish brushing my hair though so don’t fall asleep yet.” He joked, feeling Milo sink into his hug.

“Right. Thank you, Teddy. This means a lot to me.” Milo sat back up and took a few deep breaths.

“Would you like me to brush your back?”

“Oh thank goodness I thought you’d never ask!” Teddy exclaimed, quickly handing Milo the brush and turning his back with a vibrant smile.

“Thank you, Honey!”

“Of course, Teddy.”

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