

## Chapter 444 Did You Break Up With Him Because Of Me

Edwin felt warmth spread over the top of his head.

Slowly raising his head, he fixed his bright eyes on Mark.

He examined Mark as though he might vanish any second.

Mark squatted down unhurriedly.

Holding his son gently with one hand, he pointed to the math problem and spoke in soft tones. "Give it another shot. If you're stuck, I'll help you through it."

A blink later, Edwin's surroundings snapped into sharper focus.

This was no dream. His father was genuinely there, right in front of him.

With a nod, Edwin set his mind to the math problem once again.

Good genes ran in both the Evans and the Fowler families, so it didn't take long for Edwin to find the right solution.

Mark's hand found its way to Edwin's head, a gentle affirmation.

A surge of joy bubbled in Edwin at the soft touch. He gestured towards the last two pages of his homework, his voice barely above a whisper, "These next ones are pretty tough."

Mark's smile was a quiet promise. "I'm not going anywhere."

A servant was quick to bring Mark a chair and prepare tea for him.

Requesting a glass of water instead, Mark caught Edwin's fleeting glance before the boy returned to his work.

Time passed as Mark kept Edwin company.

However, Mark soon sensed that something was amiss. Edwin, usually a bright student, stumbled through the next two pages, getting nearly

half of the questions wrong.

Noticing Edwin's reddening face, Mark pieced it together.

Oh, what a silly kid!

But Mark kept his realization unvoiced, choosing instead to guide Edwin through each incorrect answer, causing Edwin's eyes to twinkle with understanding.

The servant couldn't help but remark, "Edwin's a sharp one."

Mark's smile didn't waver. "Indeed, he's quite the brain."

Caught in the praise, Edwin's face colored even more.

Just then, Cecilia made her way downstairs, Olivia cradled in her arms, in search of some milk powder.

She didn't expect to find Mark there.

Mark's visit was intended to pick up Edwin as well as have a conversation with Cecilia.

But this wasn't the right moment for a chat.

Mark extended his arms to take Olivia. Feeling her forehead, he found her fever had subsided.

As any loving father would, Mark cherished his little girl, showering her soft cheeks with gentle kisses. The tender scene nearly brought tears to Cecilia's eyes. She spun around, heading off to prepare some milk.

Sensing the mood, the servant discreetly exited the room.

With Olivia snug in his arms, Mark sat, only to be joined by Edwin, eager to engage with his little sister.

Cecilia soon returned, milk in hand, and passed it to Mark.

Settling on the sofa, Mark cradled Olivia as she clutched her bottle, sipping quietly. Despite still being clad in his business suit, he didn't seem out of sorts.

It was as if his knack for childcare was instinctive.

For a moment, Cecilia just watched them in silence. Then, notifying Mark of her intention, she ascended the stairs.

Mark's attention remained fixed on Olivia.

Edwin observed Mark, a thought brewing in his mind.

After a moment, he ventured, "Mom's not with Mr. Smith anymore. Dad... does that make you happy?"

Mark hesitated.

The complexities of adult relationships weren't something easily distilled into simple words.

Yet, Mark understood the crux of what Edwin sought.

Turning to him, Mark responded gently, "Your mom's having a tough time. Try to be there more for her and help look after your sister, okay?"

Edwin nestled up to Mark, pressing his lips together in thought.

The question hanging in the air was whether Edwin would like to spend a few more days with him. Though the boy yearned to stay with his father, he couldn't bear the thought of parting from his sister, his goodnight kiss to her a cherished ritual.

After wrestling with the idea, Edwin inquired, "Can I bring Olivia along?"

Mark shared the wish to have Olivia over, but her tender age made it impractical. She needed her mother's presence.

Edwin's desire to remain with his father was palpable.

Sitting close, he ran his fingers through his sister's brown locks, his tone mature beyond his years. "Olivia, I'll be away for a week. I'll come back next week, I promise."

Bottle in hand, Olivia paused to gaze at her brother with her bright, black eyes.

Overcome with affection, Edwin leaned in for a kiss.

He whispered, "So adorable."

After Olivia's feeding, Mark spent some time playing with her before ascending the stairs to hand her over to Cecilia.

Cecilia was propped against the sofa, script in hand.

Beside her stood a treadmill. Mark set Olivia down, allowing her some space to play.

"What's up?" Cecilia lifted her gaze to inquire.

Taking a seat opposite her, Mark studied Cecilia's eyes, noticing the slight redness.

He couldn't tell if it was from lack of sleep or the melancholy of parting ways with Thomas. Although he yearned to know, it wasn't his place to ask. After a pause, he ventured, "You and he..."

"We broke up," interjected Cecilia, her tone casual.

She then strolled over to the window, reaching for her coffee cup.

Mark's eyes followed her, noting a touch of solitude in her posture.

She was still in her early 30s, he thought, surely she yearned for companionship. He'd encountered Thomas a few times, and the man seemed to mesh well with Cecilia. Love aside, Mark believed they could have had a fulfilling life post-marriage.

His emotions were a tangle.

It was a blend of relief and self-reproach.

Olivia, in her playful zest, scampered toward Mark, intending to leap into his embrace, but the treadmill stood in her path.

She stamped her little feet, craning her neck to look up at him.

In response, Mark scooped her up.

Olivia's arms found their way around Mark's neck. Admiring how handsome her father was, she planted kisses on his face, leaving a trail

of drool on his chin.

Mark didn't mind.

He ambled slowly behind Cecilia, Olivia secure in his hold.

After what felt like an eternity, he managed to ask, "Did you care for him?"

Eyes downcast, Cecilia offered a smile. "If I admit I did, would you cease to appear before me, or stop visiting my house?"

A pang of pain shot through Mark's heart.

They were both acutely aware of her split with Thomas.

Yet, Mark couldn't make that promise.

He accepted his own selfishness, understanding that when someone craves something deeply, they might just do anything to obtain it.

Cecilia's demeanor remained even. "Mark, there's no hidden message here. I'm simply stating that Edwin and Olivia hold more space in my heart than anyone else... It's not about you."

Her words, stark and grounded in reality, stung.

But they were Mark's to bear.

He grasped her intent. She was signaling her rejection, not just of his advances but of any romantic entanglement.

Though she'd ended things with Thomas, she still didn't envision a future with Mark.

Mark nodded in acquiescence. "I understand."

"What do you understand?"

Cecilia spun around, tears brimming in her eyes, a hint of anger in her voice.

Yet, there Mark stood, Olivia in his arms, the little one busily smearing her saliva on his chin with a look of innocent delight.

Beneath it all, Mark's gaze held a profound depth.

And in that moment, his allure remained undiminished, even amidst the domestic chaos.

Cecilia held back her rising irritation.

Mark, ever perceptive, sensed it. He playfully tapped Olivia's backside, remarking, "Your cute little devil."

Oblivious, Olivia merely wrapped her arms around Mark's neck and planted a kiss on him.

Mark didn't beat around the bush.

He handed Olivia to Cecilia, his hand lingering on the child's soft cheek for a moment. "When she's a bit older, let me look after her for some time. I'm taking Edwin back with me today. Don't fret, I'll ensure he's well taken care of."

Cecilia's eyes shifted to Olivia.

"Did Edwin agree to this?"

Just as she posed the question, Edwin emerged upstairs, schoolbag slung over his shoulders, looking spruce and orderly.

Cecilia found herself unable to protest.

She approached, smoothing out her son's attire with one hand, and relayed instructions to Mark.

Mark's gaze never wavered from her.

Cecilia exuded a mature allure, a quality that never failed to captivate men.

"Be sure to listen to your grandma... alright?"

Edwin nodded in affirmation.

Mark clasped Edwin's hand and shared a parting kiss with Olivia, who eagerly reciprocated.

"We're heading out," Mark murmured, his warm breath grazing Cecilia's ear, eliciting a slight shiver.

Her eyes lifted to meet his.

He raised a hand, gently caressing her shoulder and back, his voice a soft prompt. "Try to get some rest."

Before she could muster a retort, Mark had whisked Edwin away.

Descending the stairs, they encountered Korbyn.

Mark greeted him politely.

Korbyn, sipping his tea with a leisurely air, remarked with a smirk, "Hearing you this humble feels odd. But after your near-daily visits? That's better now I guess."

Though not a fan of Mark, Korbyn harbored a deep affection for Edwin.

He beckoned the boy over with a wave, ruffling his hair and planting a kiss atop his head.

As Mark departed, Korbyn's final words carried a laden meaning. "Cecilia's no spring chicken. There are certain matters neither her mother nor I need fret over. But just remember, as long as we're here, no one's going to take advantage of her and get away with it."

The implication wasn't lost on Mark.

He was free to woo Cecilia, but coercion was off the table.

Mark's smile held a trace of resignation. "I understand, Dad."

A flicker of discomfort crossed Korbyn's features, finding Mark's familiarity brazen. He scoffed. "Don't call me that. You are no longer married to Cecilia."

Mark's response was a simple, amiable smile.

With Edwin in tow, Mark headed back. Midway, his phone rang; Waylen was calling.

Assuming the call concerned Cecilia, Mark answered.



Yet, Waylen's first question caught him off guard. "Is Rena with you?"

Gripping the steering wheel, Mark hesitated before replying, "No, she's not here. I haven't heard from her today."

Concerned, Mark probed further.

Waylen's cough was a prelude to a tensed voice. "Nothing major, just... we had a bit of a spat."

Mark was familiar with their dynamics.

Over the years, Waylen and Rena maintained a stable relationship, marred only by Waylen's bouts of possessiveness. Despite Rena scaling back her social interactions, any hint of her mingling with the opposite sex would set Waylen's jealousy simmering for days on end.

The situation was complex, neither entirely positive nor negative.

Naturally, Rena wouldn't head home and voice her grievances.

Waylen's possessive nature was well-known in their circle, often fueling gossip.

Far from embarrassed, Waylen wore his infamy with pride.

After the call, Mark reached out to Rena. She answered promptly.

"Uncle Mark?" her voice came through.

In hushed tones, Mark inquired, "What's happening between you and Waylen?"

Rena, amidst drinks with Vera at a bar, couldn't help but chuckle. "He sent you to check on me, didn't he?"

Mark offered no denial.

"It's nothing major," Rena reassured softly. "Just a hiccup. We'll smooth things over in a day or two."

It wasn't Mark's place to pry into their relationship.

Conversation over, Rena ended the call. Vera shot her a questioning look. "No plans on heading back tonight?"



Perched on a barstool, Rena faced a vast pane of French glass, showcasing more than half of Duefron's nighttime skyline. Central to the view was Exceed Group's illuminated tower, blazing like a beacon.

Tears glossing her eyes, Rena's smile was wistful. "No, I'll stay at a hotel tonight."

Vera clinked glasses with her.

"What about the kids?" she probed.

Rena's gaze dropped to her shimmering crystal glass, her mind seemingly elsewhere. "If I'm not there, he'll surely head home early."

The rift between Waylen and Rena had its roots in the Smith family's party the other night.

That night, Rena encountered Harrison.

Waylen acted like the bigger man and even asked Harrison to take care of Rena for him. Yet, post-celebration, he arrived uncharacteristically early to fetch Rena, almost like he suspected there was something going on between Rena and Harrison.

Rena's refusal of Harrison's ride was fortuitous; otherwise, Waylen's reaction could have been unpredictable.

Still, the evening concluded with Waylen whisking Rena to their post-nuptial villa, where passion reigned through the night. Amidst their fervor, Waylen's words lacked their usual filter.

Rena wished she could forget all those unpleasant things he said in a fit of angry jealousy.

This episode, seemingly concluded, lingered. Waylen's routine altered--late departures, early returns, yet constant surveillance on Rena, whether through personal tracking or via a bodyguard.

What appeared protective in his defense was, in truth, surveillance.

Rena's patience wore thin under Waylen's intense control, reaching a

breaking point when she discovered her phone was bugged.

In a fit of defiance, she discarded the device.

Communications between the couple ceased.

Rena held back these details from even Vera, too embarrassed to disclose.

Vera, a hopeless romantic, would likely misconstrue the ordeal as a grand love gesture, thrilling and passionate.

But for Rena, it felt far different.

Rena loved Waylen, aware of the depth of his affection for her, but she knew love wasn't an excuse for treating her like a prisoner. Nobody enjoyed feeling watched.

Needing a breather, Rena decided to step out.

As she descended the stairs, her form-fitting, elongated dress drew an extra glance from Waylen.

She paid him no mind, requesting Ross to chauffeur her.

Once downtown, she switched to a taxi, throwing Waylen off her trail.

Her phone vibrated. It was Waylen, again.

She answered this time.

Her tone was soft, yet firm. "I'm with Vera."

After Waylen's response, she ended the call, only to blacklist his number when he tried again.

Vera, observing, cradled her chin in surprise.

"Even after all these years, his love for you hasn't waned," she noted.

Rena replied, her voice tinged with humor, "Perhaps Waylen's going through a midlife crisis." That might explain his fixation on Harrison and the unconscious need to measure up to younger men.

Truthfully, Rena didn't despise this side of him, but she insisted he

amend his invasive tendencies.

As she concluded, a male voice drifted in from the private room's entrance.

"Midlife crisis, am I?"

Rena swiveled.

Waylen, clad in a business suit, appeared to have just left a formal engagement. Drawing close, he bent down to plant a kiss on her lips, murmuring, "Mrs. Fowler, it seems you value me less now that you have me, is that so?"

