Father Figure

Drawings and Discoveries

Molly burst into the hangar, her eyes scanning for Baloo. She clutched a handful of drawings in her small hands, eager to show them off.

"Baloo! Baloo!" she called out, looking around for her favorite pilot.

Baloo, who was lounging on a chair with his feet propped up, grinned at the sound of Molly's voice. He quickly hopped up and welcomed her with open arms.

"Hey there, Button-nose! What've you got there?" Baloo asked, kneeling down to Molly's level.

Molly beamed, excited to share her day's work. "I made some more drawings at school today, Baloo! Wanna see?"

"You bet I do," Baloo replied, taking the drawings from her and spreading them out on the floor. The two of them spent the next half hour examining each one, with Molly enthusiastically explaining her artistic choices. Baloo listened attentively, asking questions and offering praise. They carefully pinned each drawing up on the wall around Baloo's desk, creating a colorful gallery.

From her own desk, Becky couldn't help but watch the pair with a mixture of curiosity and contentment. She found it surprising that Baloo, known for his laziness, would invest so much time and energy into doting on Molly. She considered asking him directly but decided against it, not wanting to disrupt the happiness they all shared.

As Baloo and Molly continued their animated conversation, Kit and Wildcat walked into the hangar, returning from a supply run. Kit grinned as he saw the growing collection of Molly's artwork on the wall.

"Looks like we've got a real artist in the making," he teased, playfully ruffling Molly's hair.

Molly blushed and giggled. "Thanks, Kit!"

Wildcat, meanwhile, had been examining one of the drawings with a puzzled expression. "Hey, Baloo, what's this one supposed to be?" he asked, pointing to an abstract doodle.

Baloo chuckled and replied, "Well, Wildcat, that's an elephant playin' the saxophone. Can't you see it?"

Wildcat squinted at the drawing and then laughed. "Oh, yeah! Now I see it. That's pretty cool, Molly!"

Molly beamed with pride as her artwork was admired by her friends. Baloo wrapped an arm around her and gave her a gentle squeeze. "You sure are a talented little artist, Button-nose."

As the group continued to chat and admire the drawings, Becky observed from her desk. Though she couldn't quite understand Baloo's devotion to Molly, she decided to let it be. After all, happiness was a precious thing, and she didn't want to risk taking it away.

The next day was a Friday, so the weekend was coming up fast. Before his first run, Baloo approached Becky and asked her if it would be okay to take Molly up in the Sea Duck. He explained that she had been asking. Becky replied that they could find some time when the three of them could go up. Baloo said Becky was always welcome, but he was thinking of letting Molly go on a short run, now and then. He offered to make a special seat for her, to keep her safe. Becky hesitantly agreed, if the seat was up to her specs.

A Special Flight

The weekend flew by, and on Monday, just after preschool, Baloo led an excited Molly into Higher for Hire's office. Her eyes sparkled with anticipation as she tugged on her mother's arm.

"Mommy! Can I go? Can I?" Molly asked, bouncing with excitement.

Becky glanced at Baloo, who had an expectant look on his face. She remembered their conversation about taking Molly on a flight and the special seat Baloo had promised to make.

"Alright, let's see this seat of yours," Becky said, trying to hide her own enthusiasm.

Together, the three of them made their way to the Sea Duck. As they climbed inside, Baloo proudly unveiled the custom-made seat for Molly. It was padded and equipped with dual seat belts, securely mounted to a fitted metal rod that slid into the co-pilot's spot. The original co-pilot's seat was strapped to the framework of the Sea Duck.

Becky examined the seat with a critical eye, surprised by Baloo's dedication to Molly's safety. "When did you make this, Baloo? Or did you buy it?"

"Nah, Becky," Baloo replied, scratching his head sheepishly. "I came in on Saturday and Sunday to put it together. Wanted it to be perfect for Molly."

Becky couldn't help but feel touched by Baloo's efforts. "Well, it looks good. But I want to go on the first flight with you two."

Baloo nodded and began to change the seats back, but Becky stopped him. "No, it's okay, Baloo. I'll sit in the jump seat this time."

With everything settled, the trio took to the skies above Cape Suzette. Molly was thrilled, making sound effects and cheering as they flew. She especially loved seeing her preschool from above. Becky watched her daughter's joy, amazed by Baloo's thoughtfulness and the bond they shared.

When they returned to the ground, Molly wrapped her arms around Baloo in a tight hug, unable to contain her happiness. Becky, also grateful, gave Baloo a brief hug as well. She still couldn't understand why Baloo had sacrificed his weekend to make Molly happy and safe, but for now, she decided to let the mystery be and just enjoy the moment.

Gone Fishin’

Despite Baloo's seemingly endless enthusiasm for spending time with Molly, Becky couldn't help but worry. She appreciated the bond they shared and the happiness it brought Molly, but she wanted to make sure Baloo's responsibilities at Higher for Hire remained a priority. To balance things out, she tried to schedule short runs around the time Molly came home from preschool, so Baloo could take her along if he wished.

With Wildcat's assistance, they installed another receptor for the passenger/co-pilot seats, ensuring Kit wouldn't feel left out. Baloo's dedication to both his protégé and Molly was admirable, and it kept the balance between his pseudo-children in check.

One summer day, Baloo took Molly and Kit on a quick run. They were supposed to be back within a couple of hours, but as time ticked by, there was no sign of them. Becky's concern grew, and she frantically tried to reach them on the radio with no success.

Just as she was pleading with the air patrol to send out a search and rescue mission, the familiar rumble of the Sea Duck's engines filled the air. Relief washed over her as she thanked the control tower and raced out to greet the returning plane.

Upon inspecting the Sea Duck for bullet holes, as her maternal concern and imagination ran wild, Becky flung open the side door, nearly causing Baloo to topple out. Before she could demand an explanation, Molly proudly held up a fish she had caught.

"Mama, look what I caught!" Molly exclaimed excitedly.

Baloo explained, "Becky, we took some time to teach Molly how to fish, something she had never done before. I know we took a few minutes longer than we should have, but Molly had so much fun."

Becky, still tense from worry, pointed out, "Baloo, 120 minutes is more than 'a few,' and you could've at least used the radio to let me know what was going on."

"I'm sorry, Becky," Baloo replied, looking genuinely apologetic. "I didn't mean to worry you. It won't happen again."

Seeing Molly's crestfallen expression, Becky softened and decided to let the matter rest for now. "Alright, just remember to keep in touch next time. I'm glad you had fun, Molly."

Molly beamed at her mother, her spirits lifted. Baloo then offered to make the final run of the day alone so Kit and Molly could enjoy some ice cream at the local shop. The two youngsters excitedly scampered off while Baloo loaded up the Sea Duck for his last delivery. As the plane disappeared into the sky, Becky retreated to her office, not to prepare for the next day, but to gather her thoughts. It was time for her and Baloo to have a talk.

The First Talk

Once the Sea Duck had been tied up for the night, Becky called Baloo into her office. It was technically after work hours, so she offered him some chocolate-chip cookies as a way of compensation. Baloo was happy with the trade and had a seat, sipping on the milk that came with the cookies.

"Baloo, I just wanted to talk to you about something," Becky began hesitantly. "I'm not upset, but I'm curious about why you're going so far above and beyond to make Molly happy."

Baloo, looking thoughtful, replied, "Well, Becky, I just thought she needed some extra attention. She's taken to me as a father figure, and I'm happy to help out, especially since I never had the chance to do that with my own child. And I want to be there for her until you find someone to officially take on that role. I don't expect you to stay single for too long, and someday I'll move back to more of a favorite uncle level."

Becky's eyes widened in surprise. "Your own child? What do you mean, Baloo?"

Baloo hesitated for a moment, gathering his thoughts before continuing. "Well, about 15 years ago, I was married to a woman named Brenda. She was a lot like you in some ways: ambitious, disciplined, and organized. We rushed into marriage, for the usual reason, and tried to make it work, but she started thinking we wouldn't have a stable life together, mostly because of my laid-back attitude."

Becky listened intently, encouraging Baloo to go on. "What happened?" Yes, it was a personal question, but he had brought it up.

"One day, about a month before our child was supposed to be born, she left me a note," Baloo said, his voice tinged with sadness. "She said it wasn't my fault I was the way I was, but she wanted better for our kid. I never saw or heard from her after that. I tried looking for her and the baby, but I never found them."

As he finished his story, Baloo gave a sad chuckle. "I never did change, so she was probably right in the first place."

Becky listened to his story, her eyes glistening with unshed tears. Finally, she said, "Baloo, Brenda was a fool. She didn't see just how great a father you would have made."

Baloo offered her a small, appreciative smile. "Thanks, Becky. I appreciate you saying that."

The conversation helped Becky understand Baloo's motivations and deepened their bond. From that point on, they both continued to work together as a team, ensuring Molly and Kit got the love and guidance they needed.

A Day for Molly and Baloo

The next Saturday, Baloo called to see if Molly was free to spend some time with him. He suggested a day at the zoo, followed by a visit to the amusement park. Becky agreed, offering to join them, but Baloo insisted it was going to be some special Baloo-Molly time. He added that perhaps she could join them on another outing, if Molly agreed.

Baloo and Molly started their day at the zoo. They marveled at the majestic lions, with Molly exclaiming, "Baloo, look at that lion's mane! It's so big and fluffy!" Baloo chuckled and replied, "Yep, that's one impressive cat!" They laughed at the playful monkeys, and admired the colorful birds.

As they walked past the giraffes, Molly asked, "Baloo, do you think giraffes get sore necks from being so tall?" Baloo smiled and said, "I don't know, kiddo, but I bet they have a great view from up there!" They chatted about the animals they saw, discussing their favorite ones and sharing fun facts with each other. Molly's excitement was infectious, and Baloo was delighted to see her so engaged and happy.

After the zoo, they headed to the amusement park, where they rode roller coasters, played carnival games, and ate cotton candy. As they sat on a bench taking a break from all the fun, Baloo and Molly enjoyed some ice cream cones.

During their break, Baloo brought up the topic of Molly's drawings. "So, Molly," he said, "I was wondering, what kind of drawings do you make for your mom?"

Molly thought for a moment before answering, "Well, I make her drawings like the ones I make for you, but I don't think she likes them as much. She only looks at them for a little bit, and sometimes one makes it onto the refrigerator, but mostly they don't."

Baloo, sensing an opportunity to help Molly strengthen her bond with her mother, suggested, "Why don't you try to make a really special drawing for your mom? Put your very, very best effort into it, and I bet she'll love it."

Molly nodded, her face lighting up with determination. "Okay, Baloo, I'll do my best!"

With that settled, Baloo and Molly continued to enjoy their day at the amusement park, trying out more rides and sharing laughter and smiles throughout the day. Eventually, it was time to head home.

Once they arrived back at Becky’s apartment, Baloo pulled Becky aside and whispered, "The next drawing Molly makes for you, really take the time to appreciate it. She's putting her all into it, and she needs her mom to value her efforts as much as her father figure does."

Though Becky didn't quite understand the significance Baloo placed on the drawing, she agreed to follow his advice. That night, before bedtime, Molly presented her mother with a special drawing. To Becky, it looked much like the others, but she knew it was the very best Molly could do.

Taking Baloo's advice to heart, Becky examined the drawing carefully, asking Molly questions about the details and offering specific praise, much like she had seen Baloo do. Molly's face lit up with joy, and she gave her mom the most heartfelt hug she had received in a long time. Perhaps there was something to learn from the laid-back bear after all.

Becky plans the weekend

As Friday rolled around, Becky found herself thinking about the upcoming weekend. This time, she wanted to take the initiative and plan a fun family outing. She had heard about a guided pony ride in the area that she thought Molly would love. Although she considered inviting Kit, she worried that he might be a little too big for the ponies. And Baloo? Well, the mere sight of him would probably send the poor animals into a panic.

Despite these concerns, Becky decided that the pony ride would be an excellent starting point for a family outing. She began to research other activities that would suit everyone's interests and abilities. Along with the pony ride, she discovered a nearby park with paddle boats and picnic areas. The park also had walking trails and a playground, perfect for some outdoor fun.

Becky also found a small aviation museum not far from the park. Given their shared love for flying, she thought both Kit and Baloo would enjoy learning more about the history of aviation and seeing the different aircraft on display.

With a newfound determination, she began to plan the weekend, excited to spend some quality time with her daughter and the rest of her makeshift family. She made a mental note to pack a delicious picnic lunch, ensuring they'd have plenty of energy to enjoy the day's activities. The anticipation grew as the weekend approached, and she couldn't wait to create lasting memories with Molly, Kit, and Baloo.

The Family Weekend

The weekend finally arrived, and Becky led the group to their first activity of the day: the guided pony ride. Molly's eyes lit up with excitement as they approached the stables.

"Are we really going to ride ponies, Mommy?" Molly asked, her eyes wide with anticipation.

"We sure are, sweetie!" Becky replied, smiling at her daughter's excitement.

The staff had a slightly larger than normal pony that was perfect for Becky and Molly to ride together. As they gently trotted along the trail, Becky suggested, "You should remember this pony for your drawing of the day."

Molly nodded enthusiastically, already envisioning the details of her artwork. "I'm going to draw us riding together!"

Next up were the paddle boats. Kit and Molly teamed up in one boat, while Becky and Baloo shared another. Though they found it challenging to steer and often went in circles, they still enjoyed the leisurely activity as they chatted and laughed together.

"Phew! This is more work than I expected," Baloo admitted, slightly out of breath.

"Yeah, but it's fun!" Becky replied with a grin, as their boat slowly spun in circles.

Lunchtime came around, and they all gathered around the picnic area. Baloo complimented Becky on her culinary skills as they enjoyed the sandwiches she had prepared with precooked deli meat and cheese.

"Thanks, Baloo. I'm glad you like it," Becky responded, appreciating the compliment.

After lunch, the group headed to the aviation museum. They were all pleasantly surprised by the interactive exhibits and flight simulators. Kit tried out a jet simulator, while Baloo and Molly took a turn on the hot air balloon contraption.

"Wow, this is awesome!" Kit exclaimed as he expertly navigated the jet simulator.

Baloo laughed as he and Molly tried to control the hot air balloon. "You're doing great, Molly! Just keep steering like that."

Becky didn't participate in the simulations but found joy in watching the others have fun. "You all look like you're having a blast!" she called out, smiling broadly.

As the day came to a close, they returned to Becky's apartment, tired but content. Kit led the way inside, while Baloo and Becky followed behind. Once inside, they all gathered in the living room, sharing stories and laughter from the day's adventures. Molly yawned, rubbing her eyes as sleepiness took over.

"Alright, kiddo, time for bed," Becky said, scooping up her daughter and carrying her to her bedroom.

With Molly tucked in, Kit retreated to his room, leaving Baloo and Becky alone in the living room. Just as they were about to part ways for the evening, Becky pulled Baloo's collar and gave him a tender, unexpected kiss goodnight. Their eyes met for a moment, conveying a warmth and affection that needed no words.

"Goodnight, Baloo," Becky whispered, her cheeks flushed.

"Goodnight, Becky," Baloo responded, his heart swelling with happiness. As he made his way home, he made a mental note to talk to Becky about that special moment the following week.

The Second Talk

Throughout Sunday, Baloo found it difficult to focus on anything other than the kiss he shared with Becky. He couldn't shake the feeling that the kiss held a deeper meaning, and he knew they needed to talk about it. On Monday morning, Baloo uncharacteristically woke up early and made his way to Becky's office, where he waited for her to arrive.

Becky, surprised to see him there, asked, "What brings you here so early, Baloo?"

“You did," he replied. "It's about your goodnight kiss on Saturday.”

She tried to brush it off as a friendly gesture, saying, "Oh, that? It was just a kiss between friends, Baloo."

Baloo shook his head. "Come on, Becky. I know there's more to it than that. Let's be honest with each other."

Nervously, Becky searched her purse for a cigarette, before remembering she didn't smoke. Finally, she sat back in her chair and said, "Okay, Baloo, let's talk."

Baloo asked her directly, "Are you considering starting a romantic relationship with me?"

Her response was evasive. "What if I were, Baloo? What would you say?"

He told her firmly, "If that's what you're thinking, I have to stop you right there."

Becky was taken aback. "Why? Don't you like me, Baloo?"

Baloo sighed. "Of course I like you, Becky. But that's not the point. There are a couple of reasons why I don't think we should be together."

She asked him to explain, and Baloo went through his reasons. Firstly, he was still legally married, although that could be easily resolved. Secondly, and more importantly, there was a significant age difference between them. He believed she deserved someone closer to her own age, who could share her energy and enthusiasm for life.

Becky argued, "But it's my choice to make, isn't it?"

Baloo insisted, "Yes, it is your choice. But I don't have to go along with a decision I believe is wrong for both of us."

Becky then suggested that maybe he was jumping to the wrong conclusions. Baloo replied, "I don't think so, or else you would have set me straight at the beginning of this conversation."

She had no answer to that. After a moment of silence, she asked, "What about Molly?"

Baloo reassured her, "I'll continue to be a father figure for her. I promised I'd be there for her, and I intend to keep that promise. I'll be more than willing to be a placeholder until you find a permanent replacement."

Becky took a deep breath, trying to process everything Baloo had said. "You're right, Baloo. I hadn't considered that. I had a vague idea of the sort of man I might like in my life, and it's someone a lot like you, but maybe not you."

She asked him if he'd consider talking to her about all of this after she had time to think. He agreed. "Of course, Becky. Take all the time you need. I'll be here when you're ready to talk."

After two more cookies, Baloo left the office, leaving Becky with her thoughts and a heavy heart. She needed to reflect on what she truly wanted in a partner and what was best for her and Molly.

Beating some sense into her man.

Over the next couple of weeks, Becky experienced a mix of emotions. Baloo never showed any signs of anything being amiss around Molly, continuing to talk, play, and create imaginative toys with her. His desk area had become a cluttered display of their creations. Molly and Kit still accompanied Baloo on their flights, but Becky often found it too painful to join them.

Why did she kiss him? They were essentially a happy family. Mother, father, son and daughter. Doing family things together. All that was really missing was living together. She had even let Kit have the spare bedroom so that he didn't have to sleep in the drafty, filthy shed out back with Baloo and Wildcat. Would she even want the big palooka in her nice, clean bed with her? She sighed. The answer of course was ‘yes’.

One day, she seized an opportunity and pulled Baloo into her office, shutting the door behind them. "What's the matter with you, Baloo?" she asked, frustration evident in her voice. "Any other middle-aged man would jump at the chance to have a younger, prettier wife or girlfriend. Why won't you just reach out and take what's right in front of you? So what if you’re older? And a little bit on the hefty side. Or not exactly rich, either. I’m starting to see Brenda's point of view, but that doesn't matter.”

Baloo hesitated, searching for the right words. "Becky, it's just... I worry about the age difference, and whether I can really give you and Molly what you deserve."

Becky's emotions poured out, her words coming faster and more forceful. "What matters is that I love you, Baloo, and I want you, not someone like you. I’ll make you see that, even if I have to beat it into you!" She raised her fist as if to start right then.

At this point, Baloo couldn't help but laugh. "Alright, Becky, alright. I hear you. Let's give it a try, your way."

Finally getting there.

Over the next few days, they talked – a lot. They discussed their feelings, their fears, and their hopes for the future. Baloo’s main concern remained his age. He would be old long before she would. Was that fair to her?

"Baloo, I love you, and I know you love me too. We've been through so much together. Can't you see that we can face anything as long as we're a team?" Becky pleaded.

Baloo sighed, "I know, Beckers. It's just that... I don't want to hold you back. You and Molly deserve the best, and I'm not sure I can give you that."

"But Baloo," Becky countered, "you've already given us so much. Your love and support mean more to us than anything else. We're a family, and that's what really matters."

As the days turned into weeks, Baloo started to see things from Becky's perspective. He realized that despite his age, his appearance, and his financial situation, what truly mattered was the love and happiness they shared. Slowly but surely, Baloo let down his guard and allowed himself to embrace the possibility of a future with Becky.

Eventually, Baloo moved in with Becky, and they both enjoyed sharing her bed. While this brought them closer together, it took more than that to fully make them a family. Over time, they faced challenges and worked through their differences, eventually solidifying their commitment to each other. As they continued to navigate their deepening relationship, they found strength in each other and in the love they shared, ready to face whatever life had in store for them.