

ABANDONED 271

Chapter 271

Naturally, Estella refused.

Aubree stood up and glanced at Lucian. "Lucian, I'll go downstairs and ask the receptionist. Let's get another room if it's possible."

Estella turned around and shot Lucian an expectant look, hoping he would reject Aubree's suggestion.

There was a dark and unfathomable look in Lucian's eyes.

Even if I refuse Aubree's suggestion to switch rooms, Roxanne will surely make the same decision once she comes back. After all, she didn't seem too receptive to Ms. Ward's suggestion of sharing rooms yesterday. Now that Aubree's here today, Roxanne will only want to avoid me more.

Considering the possible reactions Roxanne would make, Lucian seemed to have silently accepted Aubree's suggestion.

Not getting a single response from Lucian and seeing Aubree actually walking out to request a change of room made Estella stomp her feet in anger. She then followed Aubree into the elevator. Aubree was stunned. "Essie, why are you here? You can just wait with your daddy in the room."

Estella merely lowered her head without responding to Aubree's words.

Seeing that, Aubree frowned with displeasure and retracted her gaze, pretending as if Estella was not there.

Since they were the only ones in the elevator, Aubree could not be bothered to waste her energy talking to Estella. The latter kept silent, and Aubree, too, did not bother pretending.

Once the elevator stopped on the first floor, the doors opened slowly. At the same time, Aubree's expression changed. She put on a subtle smile, pretending to be kind. Just as she wanted to hold Estella's hand, the latter had already darted out of the elevator, running out of the hotel.

Aubree was too panicked to move. She even forgot to run after her. Even her purpose of going downstairs was lost in her sea of thoughts.

Estella, on the other hand, headed in the direction of the botanical garden.

I don't like this evil Ms. Pearson! I don't like Daddy, too! I'm going to look for Ms. Jarvis!

Just as Aubree was standing frozen in the hotel, she heard a sound behind her.

"Where's Essie?" Lucian scanned the entire lobby, but Estella was nowhere to be seen. His face darkened instantly.

Aubree shuddered guiltily at the sound of Lucian's voice. "S-She ran out..."

"Why didn't you stop her?" Lucian shouted angrily.

He knew Estella was a stubborn person, but he never expected her to be that stubborn.

When the elevator door was about to close earlier, Estella had suddenly run out of the room.

Regardless of how fast Lucian had reacted, the elevator door had still shut before he could arrive.

Hence, Lucian could only wait for the next round.

He figured with Aubree in there, she would not let Estella run away on her own.

But to his dismay, Aubree actually lost Estella.

Lucian had no time to find out if Aubree lost Estella or did not even bother watching over the latter in the first place.

"I didn't expect her to run out like that. I asked why she came with me, but she didn't answer..." Aubree was filled with panic.

"You'd better pray nothing happens to Essie, or else"-Lucian glared at her expressionlessly. A murderous aura exuded from his body, which made Aubree feel suffocated "you won't be able to make it up for today's matters even if you die."

With that, he rushed out of the hotel.

Aubree stood rooted to the ground for about a minute. When she finally returned to her senses, she attempted to run after him, but her legs were too weak to move.

Although she did not like Estella, she knew where to draw the line.

Estella was the Farwell family's prized child. It was still fine when Aubree had secretly bullied the former, but if she really caused something to happen to Estella, she could just forget about getting married into the Farwell family.

Chapter 272

Lucian did not hesitate as he made his way to the botanical garden right away.

Estella wanted to hang out with Roxanne, so the only place she would go was to the latter. Besides the botanical garden. there was nowhere else she could go.

Lucian ran all the way to the botanical garden, but Estella was nowhere to be seen.

His heart sank. He fished his phone out of his pocket and called Roxanne.

Roxanne was strolling around the botanical garden with the kids when her phone rang. She couldn't help frowning when she saw the caller ID on her screen.

Lucian? Shouldn't he be with Aubree? Why is he calling me?

The phone rang for quite some time before Roxanne finally picked it up.

"Have you seen Essie?" Lucian asked in his deep voice the moment the call connected.

He sounds nervous.

Roxanne didn't know why, but she had a bad feeling. "No, I haven't seen her. What happened?"

Lucian scanned his surroundings. He didn't dare to blink because he was worried that he would miss his daughter. "Essie is missing."

Roxanne's heart trembled when she heard that. Panic was written all over her face. "Isn't she with you? How did she get lost?"

Thinking about the events that led to Estella going missing made Lucian frown. "It's a long story. Let's look for her for now. She should be somewhere around the botanical garden." Roxanne dared not dawdle. She immediately agreed to his plan. "Okay, I'll search around the place with the kids."

After hanging up, she turned to Archie and Benny, wanting to bring them along to search for Estella.

"Mommy, what's wrong?" asked the kids in confusion when they saw the panicked look on Roxanne's face.

Roxanne, who was worried, took a deep breath to force herself to sound calm as she said, "Essie is missing. We have to look around for her."

Archie and Benny were shocked to hear that. Their faces were filled with worry as well.

Archie, however, was calmer. He let go of his mother's hand and suggested, "Mommy, let's split up. We'll have a better chance of finding her that way."

Benny nodded in agreement.

Roxanne wasn't worried about Archie and Benny getting lost, so she simply advised, "Okay, look for her inside the botanical garden. If you can't find her, then go to the entrance and wait for me there." Archie and Benny nodded obediently. Then all three of them walked away in different directions.

Roxanne made her way to the entrance of the botanical garden immediately.

After all, no one had seen Estella walking into the botanical garden. She reckoned that Estella might have gotten lost nearby.

When Roxanne reached the entrance, she saw Lucian, who had the same idea.

He was frowning deeply and his lips were set in a hard line.

"How is it? Have you found her?" Roxanne asked anxiously.

It was obvious that Lucian was focused on looking for Estella because he didn't even notice Roxanne until he heard her voice.

He looked over slowly and into her eyes, his frown relaxing a little. But he still did not look good as he answered her question by shaking his head.

Roxanne's face was scrunched up. Seeing Lucian shake his head only made her feel worse.

Essie was still smiling and planting trees with us this morning. Yet now she's missing...

Roxanne was filled with guilt.

When she left the cafeteria earlier, she could tell that Estella had definitely wanted to tag along. However, she had turned her down ruthlessly because Lucian and Aubree were there. If I had agreed to take her along, things would have turned out differently...

Chapter 273

"How did she go missing?"

Roxanne couldn't help asking about it when the two of them left the botanical garden.

She would keep blaming herself for it if she never learned the truth.

Lucian gave her a deep and sullen look. Although Estella did not say it out loud, he knew she had left to look for Roxanne.

Roxanne's anxiety rose when she looked into his eyes. "Wasn't she with the two of you? How did two adults..."

How did two adults manage to lose a single child, especially when that child is as obedient as Essie?

Roxanne didn't finish that sentence.

Lucian was already panicking because Estella was missing. She knew that if she were to say those words out loud, she would sound as if she was putting the blame on him. Lucian frowned. He looked deeply into her eyes and said tersely, "There was a disagreement with Aubree."

"What happened?" Roxanne couldn't understand. What could possibly have happened to get Estella so angry that she ran away?

Lucian retracted his gaze and remained silent.

Guilt is already written all over her face even though I didn't tell her what exactly happened. If she ever learns that Essie has left to find her, she will put all the blame on herself. Roxanne could tell that Lucian had no intention of telling her the truth, and that made her frown. Her lips parted, but she never got the words out of her lips.

After all, it was their family's matter, and she had no right to butt in.

The only thing she could do at that moment was to search for Estella.

"I'll look over there. You should try searching the route toward the hotel."

The two of them parted ways after they left the botanical garden. Lucian left her some instructions before making his way toward the mountain.

As the matter was urgent, Roxanne dared not waste time. She ran toward the hotel right away.

Inside the botanical garden, Archie and Benny parted ways. While searching, they shouted Estella's name.

Archie and Benny were physically small, so they practically crawled through every hole and searched every inch of the botanical garden.

Still, Estella was nowhere to be seen, and neither showed up with her when they met up.

"Essie, come on out. Let's not play hide-and-seek anymore," Benny choked out. He was so worried as they had yet to

find her.

Archie was upset as well, but he held his brother's hand and said, "Don't cry. Mommy is already worried sick, and we can't afford to worry her even more."

Benny sniffled upon hearing that and forced himself to hold back his tears. "Let's leave the botanical garden and look for her out there, too."

Archie shook his head. "Let's not make things more difficult for Mommy. We'll just wait patiently at the entrance."

Benny nodded obediently.

The two of them were making their way to the entrance when they ran into Pippa.

"Archie, Benny, why are the two of you here on your own? Where's your mommy?" asked Pippa. She couldn't help worrying when she saw the kids being there on their own. Archie politely explained the situation to their teacher. "Essie is missing, so Mommy went to look for her."

Pippa's face darkened. "When did that happen?"

Archie replied, "We don't know. But we've searched the entire botanical garden, and she's nowhere to be found."

That means it has been a while...

Pippa immediately instructed, "Okay, I understand. You two find a spot and wait there. I'll go get the others to help look for Essie."

Archie and Benny nodded in response.

After settling the two boys, Pippa sent a message to the parents' group chat and asked for help. She also got the other staff at the kindergarten to look for Estella. Fortunately, almost everyone knew who Estella was, so it wouldn't be difficult for them to help.

Chapter 274

Roxanne went all the way back to the hotel. When she reached the lobby, she saw Aubree sitting on the couch with her

back to the door.

In the past, Roxanne would have politely kept her distance from Aubree.

That day, however, Roxanne didn't hesitate to make her way to Aubree because the matter involved Estella. "Has Essie returned?"

Aubree was still in a daze because of what had happened earlier. She didn't realize that Roxanne was right in front of her until she heard the latter's voice.

Their eyes met, and at that moment, Aubree's anxiety was replaced by anger.

It's her! Roxanne Jarvis. She's the reason Essie is missing!

Roxanne slightly knitted her brows when she noticed the hostility in Aubree's gaze. She was confused and was about to ask about it when Aubree suddenly sprang up from the couch.

Aubree pointed at Roxanne's nose, yelling, "I can't believe you have the audacity to ask that! Essie wouldn't have run away if it weren't for you. This is all your fault, you b*tch!"

Roxanne turned slightly pale. "What are you talking about?"

How is this my fault? What exactly happened before Essie left?

"What the hell did you drug Essie with to make her so attached to you? All I did was get her a different room. How is any of this my fault?" Aubree roared, her face contorted. There was no telling if she was blaming Roxanne or convincing herself.

Roxanne could barely breathe as the guilt buried deep in her heart began to weigh her down.

So... it's really because of me that Essie left? None of this would have happened if I had agreed to take her along... This is all my fault.

"How will you make up for it if something happens to Essie, you b*tch?" The more Aubree spoke, the more she thought she was in the right and was standing on the moral high ground. "I've warned you and told you to stay away from Essie and Lucian, but you wouldn't listen. You know what Essie is like, but you still let her get attached to you. Are you trying to use her to get back together with Lucian? Well, listen carefully-that will never happen!"

Roxanne couldn't even hear a word Aubree was saying. All she could think about was Estella.

She would never forgive herself if anything were to happen to her.

"So she hasn't returned?" asked Roxanne softly.

Aubree grimaced and was quiet for a few seconds before answering impatiently. "No. I told you she left to go look for you."

Roxanne nodded absently and ignored Aubree, then left the hotel immediately after.

Since Essie's missing because she's gone to look for me, I must find her as soon as possible. She's all alone now, and she must be scared.

Aubree remained inside the lobby, glaring at Roxanne as she left.

It's that b*tch's fault that I am in such a terrible state. Ugh, and that little b*stard is so annoying. Why did she have to run away on her own? Why did she have to go to that b*tch?

Aubree desperately wanted to put the blame on Roxanne, but that still couldn't calm her down.

She thought about it for a while before fishing her phone out and calling the police. After that, she called Sonya.

It's better that I tell her about it instead of having Lucian be the one to do so.

Sonya picked up the phone after it rang twice.

"Aubree, what's up?" Her voice was filled with glee. "You went to visit Essie, didn't you? How is she?"

"Mrs. Farwell, E-Essie is missing," Aubree choked out.

Chapter 275

Sonya was on the couch watching TV when she heard that news. "What did you say?" She sprang to her feet.

Aubree pinched herself to make herself sound worried and guilty. "This is all my fault. I should've taken good care of Essie and kept an eye on her."

"How long was she gone? Have you called the police? Where are you now? I'll send someone over right away," Sonya said, wishing she was there with them.

My sweet granddaughter... How did she suddenly go missing?

Aubree replied, "We're looking for her now. We've already called the police, so you don't need to worry."

Sonya was so anxious that her tone was a little unpleasant as she said, "How am I supposed to not worry? It's getting dark, and Essie is just a kid. She must be terrified now. No, I must tell Elias and get him to send someone there to help."

Aubree agreed to let them help.

At that moment, every additional pair of eyes would help.

Aubree left to help look for Estella after she hung up the phone.

Sonya, on the other hand, called Lucian to get a better idea of what was going on.

Lucian was walking uphill to search for Estella when he suddenly received a call from his mother.

"Have you found Essie?" asked Sonya as soon as Lucian picked up.

Lucian frowned when he heard that "Who told you about this?"

"How long do you plan to keep me in the dark about something so important? Where are you right now? I'll send someone over."

Lucian felt a headache coming. "You don't have to. I already had Cayden send some people over."

Sonya didn't insist further when she heard that, but she wanted to go in person to help look for Estella. Lucian stopped her, saying, "We're in a rural area. Even if you come over, you'll be waiting in the hotel. Don't trouble yourself. I will call you once I've found her."

Sonya had no choice but to give up. "You must find Essie as soon as possible, and call me the second you find her."

"Okay," came Lucian's answer before he hung up the phone..

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As the sky turned darker, Roxanne grew more and more anxious. However, she had no choice but to return when she thought about Archie and Benny who were waiting at the entrance of the botanical garden. From afar, she saw Archie and Benny holding hands and waiting for her by the entrance.

"Mommy!" shouted the kids when they saw Roxanne. They ran to her and asked, "Have you found Essie?"

Roxanne didn't want them to worry, so she forced a smile. "Not yet. I will take you back, then go back out there to look

for her."

After saying that, she stroked Archie's and Benny's heads and took them back to the hotel.

Archie looked at the orange sky above when they were on their way back. He was truly worried about Estella. "It's getting dark. Essie must be scared."

Benny was just as worried, but he didn't want to worry his mother further, so he clamped his mouth shut.

With a heavy heart, Roxanne said, "I will find her as soon as possible."

After sending Archie and Benny back to the hotel, she grabbed a torchlight from her luggage and turned around to leave.

Archie pulled her shirt and suggested, "Mommy, you should have some dinner before you leave. Otherwise, you'll run out of energy."

Roxanne could no longer maintain the smile on her face. Looking pale, she shook her head. "I don't have an appetite. I have to find Essie soon because she only got lost trying to look for me..."

Archie and Benny tilted their heads in confusion. "Mommy, what are you talking about? We've been with you the entire time, so how is it your fault that Essie is missing?"

Only then did Roxanne realize that she had let that information slip out of her tongue. She quickly acted as though it was no big deal and said, "It's nothing. Be good and stay here. I have to go now." After saying that, she patted the kids' heads and turned around to get into the elevator.

Chapter 276

Pippa sent a message to the parents' group chat to get an update.

Yet every response she received was of no good news.

Everyone knew how precious Estella was to Lucian, so they had gone all out to look for her. Unfortunately, the botanical garden was located near the forest, and no one was dumb enough to go there. Lucian read everybody's reply, and he looked even more upset knowing that no one found Estella.

He did not get in touch with Roxanne after the two of them parted ways at the botanical garden, so he did not know how she was doing

It was getting late, and he didn't feel right to have her, a physically weak woman, continue searching.

Thus, he gave her a call.

However, the automated responses told him that she was not in the service area after he made several calls.

Lucian's gaze became even darker.

Cayden arrived with his team at that moment. "Mr. Farwell, we've sent our men to spread out in the forest and commenced the search."

Lucian nodded and sternly informed, "Search overnight if that is what it takes to find Essie. We must hurry up."

"Understood."

Lucian looked at his phone screen which had turned dark. He frowned and said, "I need to drop by the botanical garden. Keep me in the loop about the search."

After saying that, he made his way toward the botanical garden.

It's late. If that woman still hasn't returned, then there may not be anyone around to take care of the boys. There's no saying how much guilt she will drown in if the boys go missing before Essie is even found. When he reached the botanical garden, he realized that Archie and Benny weren't there.

Lucian's heart sank. He turned around and went back to the hotel, praying that they were waiting there.

When he saw them waiting in the room, he sighed a deep breath of relief.

"Mr. Farwell, have you found Essie?" asked Benny worriedly.

Lucian shook his head. "I'm still searching. Where is your mommy? Did she send you back?"

Benny's face was filled with worry. "Mommy left to go look for Essie after she sent us back. She didn't even have dinner and said that Essie went missing while looking for us."

Benny paused for a moment at that point. He stared at Lucian in puzzlement and asked, "Did Essie really go missing because of us?"

If that were the case, Benny would feel extremely guilty.

Essie wanted to tag along earlier today, so why did I urge Mommy to hurry up? This is all my fault...

Lucian's eyes turned cold. "It's not true. This has nothing to do with any of you. Be good and wait here in the room. Don't open the door for anyone but Essie."

Archie and Benny nodded and watched as Lucian turned around to leave.

They didn't know why, but they thought he seemed angrier when he left.

As Lucian walked out of the room, he kept replaying the words Benny had said in his mind.

Roxanne said that Essie went missing on her way to her. Only Aubree would say something like this! That woman... She made Essie angry and didn't keep an eye on her. That is why Essie is missing. How dare she put all the blame on Roxanne?

Judging from the look on Archie's and Benny's faces, Lucian could imagine how guilty Roxanne must have felt when she learned that Estella had gone missing because of her. That was the only reason she would forgo dinner and go to search for Estella instead.

The mere thought of it made Lucian feel even more unhappy.

My calls couldn't get through when I tried calling her earlier. That means she has likely gone into the forest to look for Essie.

Lucian had tolerated Aubree long enough.

If anything happens to Roxanne or Essie, I will not forgive that woman!

Chapter 277

The second Lucian left the hotel, he rushed toward the forest. He called Cayden while he was on his way.

"Have the men pay extra attention. Roxanne has gone into the forest."

On the other end of the line, Cayden murmured an affirmative reply. He was impressed with how much Roxanne cared about Estella. It's so late at night, yet she still went into the forest to look for Ms. Estella. After hanging up the phone, Lucian heard a voice filled with fear.

"Lucian, any news on Essie?"

Aubree had searched nearby but to no avail. As she was too scared to go into the forest, she returned to the hotel instead. To her surprise, she saw Lucian at the entrance and was overwhelmed with guilt. Lucian put his phone away and glared at Aubree when he heard her voice.

All he saw was her in a red dress that was still clean. There was not even a drop of sweat on her face. Her breathing was a little uneven, but it was possible that was just because she was scared of him. Aubree's heart clenched when she looked into Lucian's eyes, which were burning with rage. "I've searched all afternoon but couldn't find her anywhere. How did the search go on your side?" "Essie went missing because she left to look for Roxanne. That is what you told Roxanne, isn't it?" Lucian replied with a question of his own.

Aubree's face stiffened and panic was written all over it.

H-How did Lucian know about this?

Lucian got his answer when he saw the look on her face. "You better pray that nothing happens to them. Otherwise, I won't show you any mercy despite the years we've known each other." With that, Lucian walked past her and left

Aubree could tell that he was truly furious. She reached out and grabbed his sleeve in a fluster. "Lucian, I didn't mean it. She dropped by the hotel this afternoon, and I simply shared what I guessed. I never meant to put the blame on her."

Lucian turned around. The aura he exuded was chilly and scary. "You're still putting the blame on others? She was never at fault! It's bad enough that you went behind my back and got my mom worried by telling her about this. Now, you've made things worse by coming up with a lie to trigger Roxanne. What do you wish to accomplish from any of this?"

Lucian's intimidating aura sucked the air right out of Aubree's lungs. She had to force herself to stand as she defended herself. "I don't mean anything. It's my fault for not keeping an eye on Essie, and-" "It is your fault!" Lucian shook her hand off. "Leave if have no intention of searching for Essie. Stop wasting my time."

After he said that, he turned around and left without even glancing at her.

Cayden led his men and searched every inch of that forest.

Despite searching until ten at night, they still couldn't find Estella or Roxanne.

When Lucian rendezvoused with them and got an update, his foul mood worsened.

Cayden stood beside Lucian and could feel the surrounding air becoming more and more chilly. He could sympathize with Lucian.

It was late at night, and they were in the wilderness. Roxanne was a woman and Estella was a kid. Anyone would be worried.

"Mr. Farwell, perhaps you should return and get some rest. It's been a long day," suggested Cayden cautiously.

He had been working for Lucian for years, but he had never seen the man in that disheveled state before.

Lucian was still covered in mud because he hadn't changed out of his clothes after the activities in the morning. Having searched all night in the forest, he looked pale, and his hair was messy. Yet the aura he gave off was still as overpowering as ever.

He furrowed his brows and said, "Let's split up and search the place."

With that, he turned around and went deeper into the woods.

Chapter 278

The forest was dark. Roxanne could only rely on her torchlight because the faint moonlight was insufficient to illuminate the path ahead of her.

She walked carefully inside the forest, not knowing where she was.

Roxanne only knew Estella was nowhere in sight thus far in her venture into the woods.

After sending Archie and Benny back to the hotel, she checked the messages in the WhatsApp group and noticed none of the other parents had seen Estella.

No one has yet to search the forest. This is the only place left. If Essie is really in here...

Roxanne felt more frightened the more she dwelled on that thought.

Even she was scared of being alone in that environment, not to mention Estella, who was just a little girl.

Essie would not have come inside here if it weren't for me.

At that thought, Roxanne gritted her teeth and hastened her steps. She must locate Estella as soon as possible.

"Essie! Where are you?"

Roxanne shouted Estella's name as she moved deeper into the forest, hoping to receive any response from the little girl. However, even after she shouted until her voice turned hoarse, her surroundings remained silent.

Suddenly, there were movements at a bush nearby.

Roxanne's eyes shone. She thought Estella was there, so she quickly strode over.

Just as she got closer, something jumped out from the thicket

Roxanne shuddered in fear. She was on the verge of screaming due to the shock.

Upon taking a closer look, she realized that it was just a wild rabbit. She let out a sigh of relief at that realization.

Still, when she was reminded of Estella's unknown whereabouts, her anxiety intensified, and she walked forward at a quicker pace.

Soon, despite not knowing where she had reached, Roxanne could vaguely hear the sound of intermittent sobs around her.

Roxanne's heart skipped a beat. She wondered if that was Estella crying.

With that thought in her mind, she slowed down and cautiously approached the origin of the sound.

In a deep pit, Estella was squatting on the ground in a pitiful condition with dirt all over her. She was crying hysterically to the point of almost suffocating.

She had run out of the hotel in the afternoon, intending to return to the botanical garden to look for Roxanne, Archie,

and Benny. However, halfway there, a snake suddenly appeared beside the road. Overwhelmed by fear and shock, she ran aimlessly and unknowingly entered the forest beside the road. When Estella came to her senses, she had already arrived in the deeper part of the forest.

She wanted to leave that place as quickly as possible, but she failed to find her way out. Her surroundings grew darker the more she stumbled forward.

Then, she accidentally fell into a hole.

Estella tried to climb out, but her attempts were unfruitful due to the slippery, moss-covered walls. She repeatedly fell back to the bottom of the hole after trying to climb out a few times.

Estella sensed she might not be able to escape that place. Nevertheless, she knew Lucian and Roxanne would come looking for her, so she squatted in a corner, quietly waiting for help to arrive without feeling too afraid.

However, her surroundings gradually grew darker, and the pit she was trapped in turned pitch black.

All of a sudden, something fell on her hand,

She let out a shriek and cowered in a corner. Tears streamed down her cheeks uncontrollably as she stayed still and did not dare to move a muscle.

Moreover, Estella was now hungry and terrified after waiting for the whole afternoon. She could not help but weep. Still, she did not dare to cry out loud for fear of attracting something dangerous.

Estella had lost track of time.

She developed hiccups due to prolonged crying. "Daddy, Ms. Jarvis, Archie, Benny..."

Anyone, hurry up and find me. I'm so scared. I will never run away again.

Estella felt sorrowful when she was reminded of Roxanne's gentle face.

I wonder if Ms. Jarvis is looking for me. I miss her so much....

Chapter 279

"Essie, is that you?"

Roxanne grew certain she did not imagine the sobs and started to feel more hopeful

Estella stopped crying when she heard Roxanne's voice as well. "M-Ms. Jarvis?"

Roxanne heaved a sigh of relief upon hearing that. She hastily walked toward where Estella was.

She had barely taken a few steps forward when she suddenly slipped.

Roxanne's heart jumped into her throat as she narrowly steadied herself by grabbing a large tree next to her.

She gazed downward and noticed Estella, who was cowering miserably at the bottom of a pit that was partially concealed by the dense plants around.

"Essie?" Roxanne's heart ached terribly when she saw Estella.

Looking up at the beam of light shining into the hole, Estella saw Roxanne smiling at her in relief.

"Everything is okay now. I'm here." Roxanne felt more guilt-ridden at the sight of Estella's face. Yet, she did not dare to express her emotions because she did not want Estella to be afraid.

Estella's face was flushed, as she had cried for so long. Her eyes and nose were red, and her cheeks were smeared with dirt from when she had wiped her tears earlier. She appeared very pitiable with her head hung low and her body covered in grime.

"Ms. Jarvis..." Roxanne was finally there to rescue her after she waited for so long. Estella began crying harder after a few seconds. Roxanne was very anxious when she saw Estella wailing her lungs out. "Don't cry, Essie. I'm going to find something to pull you up."

Roxanne searched her surroundings for something that could help her pull Estella up as she spoke.

She consoled Estella while she looked around.

Unfortunately, Estella was bawling so loudly that she could not even hear Roxanne's voice.

Roxanne finally found a sufficiently long tree branch after much difficulty. After bringing the stick to the edge of the hole and trying its length, Roxanne figured Estella could reach the other end of the tree branch if the latter tiptoed.

"Estella, stop crying. Come here and grab this tree branch. I'll pull you up." Roxanne was close to losing her voice after yelling excessively earlier. She cleared her throat to make her voice more audible. Estella glanced up, wiped the tears on her face, and tiptoed to grasp the tree branch.

However, she could only touch the tip of the tree branch. There was still some length to be covered for her to take hold of the tree branch.

Roxanne frowned. She crawled forward and pushed the tree branch further into the hole.

Only then could Estella seize the other end of the tree branch.

After Estella wrapped her hands around the tree branch, Roxanne gritted her teeth and pulled with all her might to drag Estella out of the hole. Unexpectedly, Roxanne did not have much strength left in her after starving for the whole night and walking for so long inside the forest.

To make things worse, Estella was too weak to cooperate with her.

As the two exerted force simultaneously, Estella remained rooted to her spot. Instead, Roxanne was tugged forward, causing half her body to hang over the edge of the pit.

Noticing Roxanne's position, Estella hurriedly let go of the tree branch and ran worriedly to the side of the hole. "Ms. Jarvis!"

Roxanne managed to seize hold of a tree root beside her with effort. She grinned tenderly at Estella. "Don't be scared, Essie. I'm fine."

While uttering those words, Roxanne tried her best to climb back up.

Estella suddenly squalled hysterically at the bottom of the pit.

Heart-wrenching agony filled Roxanne's chest. She turned her head around and saw Estella sitting on the ground, crying her eyes out.

Estella's sobs gradually diminished, and her breathing became shallower.

Overwhelmed by panic at that instant, Roxanne's grip slackened. The next second, Roxanne had also fallen into the pit.

With tears in her eyes, Estella threw herself into Roxanne's arms after the latter fell into the hole.

ums

Roxanne hurriedly hugged the little girl. Guilt washed over her when she felt Estella's cold body.

If I had brought her together with me in the afternoon, or if I had found her sooner...

Chapter 280

Royanne patted Estella, trying her best to comfort the latter. Still, the sobs of the little girl in her arms sounded weaker and weaker. "Essie?" Roxanne gazed down concernedly.

Estella had passed out after crying for so long, but tears continued to roll down her cheeks from the corner of her eyes.

Roxanne struggled to catch her breath, as she could hardly stand the pain in her chest when she took in Estella's wretched state.

The weather is so cold, and Essie's wearing such thin clothes. She won't last if this situation drags on. I need to think of a way to get out of here!

At that thought, Roxanne took off her jacket and wrapped Estella with her outerwear before racking her brain to figure out a solution.

However, no matter her methods, she could not climb out of the pit.

Instead, she ended up exhausting all her energy.

After several attempts, she stopped her futile struggles in slight desperation. She held Estella in her arms to provide the little girl with warmth.

The night breeze blew past the forest, causing a series of rustling sounds. Sadly, Roxanne did not hear the voice of any other person in the woods. Despaired, Roxanne took out her phone.

Although she knew there would not be any signal in the wilderness, she could only place her hope for a miracle to happen.

The light from her phone screen illuminated her face. She browsed through her contact list for some time. In the end, Roxanne still decided to call Lucian. Unfortunately, there was no miracle, as she failed to make the call.

Roxanne hung up the phone while wearing a wry smile. Then she looked up at the opening of the

pit.

Luckily, she brought a torchlight. At the very least, Roxanne felt a little at ease when the interior of the pit was not completely dark.

"Roxanne?" Just when she was about to give up and deal with that predicament the next morning, a person's deep and tired-sounding voice reverberated beside her ears. Am I hallucinating? Roxanne blinked her eyes in doubt as she gazed upward at the hole atop her.

Lucian's voice sounded again. "Are you here?"

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c restat up when she is that she was not imagining things, She responded

Certul t h herr Niste and larr both down here."

Weer in the air for a few seconds after she spoke. Then she heard the diminished sound of

When the foxsteps halted above Roxanne, she saw Lucian's worn-out face as he peered into the

Roxanne felt immensely relieved when she saw him. She croaked, "Essie fainted after crying for too long. Hurry up and get help to bring her out of here."

Lucian's heart switched painfully: He replied solemnly. "I'll be right back. Wait for me."

Roxanne began to wait for him.

Lucian immediately turned on his heels to find Cayden and the others.

His face turned grim right after he turned around.

I arrived here too late.' That's why Raranne and Estella are in such terrible conditions. I can't even imagine how seared they must have been!

He walked for some distance before finally meeting Cayden and the others.

At that moment. Cayden was troubled because even though Lucian had roughly described his position to Cayden, it was still very difficult to navigate the terrains of the deep forest. Looking up and noticing Lucian striding in their direction, he immediately darted forward.

Once the group reached the side of the pit, Cayden instructed his subordinates to take out some ropes to pull Roxanne and Estella out of the hole.

However, Roxanne could merely grab the rope without having any strength left to muster. Moreover, she was carrying Estella with her other arm.

Noticing that, Cayden hastily thought of ordering one of his men to go down into the pit and piggyback them up.

Before he could give the instruction, Cayden caught Lucian jumping into the hole from the corner of his eyes.

He was taken aback. "Mr. Farwell!"

Lucian landed steadily at the bottom of the pit. He glanced at Roxanne. Her face was as pale as a ghost. She was evidently exhausted and was holding the teary-faced Estella in her arms. "Bring Essie up first." Roxanne handed the little girl to him.

He nodded, hugged Estella, and climbed out of the pit with the help of the rope.

Roxanne was planning to climb up on her own when she saw Lucian jumping down the hole again. Before she could react, he had pulled her into his embrace.