

## **ABANDONED 351**

### Chapter 351 A Heavy Heart

After confirming that Estella was all right, James did not linger and left before dinner.

Lucian stayed in his study for some time. Then, he took out his phone and gave Pippa a call.

He had personally sent Estella to the kindergarten in the morning. Even if she had left alone, Lucian reckoned that she would have left from the kindergarten. Pippa should have known what had transpired.

On the other end, Pippa was nervous to get a call from Lucian, and she told him everything.

"I left after leaving Estella there. Ms. Jarvis told me she would send her back. Did she not?" Pippa said apprehensively.

She regretted leaving Estella with Roxanne right then.

After all, she had not sought Lucian's consent and brought Estella to Archie and Benny's home, and even proceeded to leave the little girl there.

There was no explaining it any other way. She was being irresponsible.

Lucian was displeased with Pippa's recklessness. Besides, Estella had gone home on her own...

"She did." Lucian's eyes darkened. "How is Benny doing?"

Nonetheless, Lucian chose to tell Pippa that Roxanne did send Estella home. Pippa heaved a sigh of relief upon hearing that. She hurriedly replied, "He is doing fine now. Benny should be able to return to school in two days' time."

"I see. Thank you," Lucian replied curtly.

Pippa apologized profusely before finally hanging up the phone.

Lucian was deep in his thoughts after listening to Pippa.

Ever since bumping into Roxanne the other day at the café, Lucian had not seen her since.

He had no idea what his mother told Roxanne the other day. However, he could sense that Roxanne would not wish to see him for some time after that.

Hence, he only knew that Benny was not feeling well. He had no idea about his recovery and everything else. Lucian knew that Roxanne would not tell him anything even if he were to call her and ask. Lucian's lips pursed into a thin, hard line at the thought.

According to Pippa, Roxanne should have been the one to send Estella home.

She would not have dropped Estella halfway.

Roxanne should have dropped Estella off at the manor's entrance and did not get in. Hence, Catalina did not realize that it was Roxanne who sent Estella home.

In other words, Roxanne was still avoiding him.

Lucian grew exasperated at the thought and pinched between his brows.

Someone knocked on the door to his study right then. It was Catalina. "Mr. Farwell, it's time for dinner."

Lucian snapped out of his thoughts and mumbled a response. Then, he strode out of his room and went to get Estella.

She did not linger in her room and came out right after Lucian called her. Even though she was not in her best mood, she looked normal.

Lucian slowed down and followed behind the little girl solemnly.

Estella should have been happy if she had gone to Roxanne's place. However, she did not look happy at all. Lucian could not help but wonder what Roxanne had told Estella. Didn't she promise that our spat won't affect the children?

After getting downstairs, Lucian sat down beside Estella and asked casually, "Where did you go today?"

Estella was stumped for a moment. Then, she shook her head in silence. It was obvious that she did not wish to talk about it.

Lucian furrowed his brows and grew more certain that Roxanne must have told her something.

Just when he was befuddled as to what Roxanne had told his daughter, Estella tugged at his shirt.

Lucian lowered his head in a puzzled manner.

"I want veggies," Estella gave her father a puppy-eyed stare and pointed at the vegetables that were at the other corner of the dining table. Lucian was taken aback.

It was the first time that Estella had spoken to him ever since the abduction incident, and it had nothing to do with Roxanne.

Chapter 352 Aversion

Noticing that her father had given her no response, Estella pushed her plate forward and egged Lucian on.

Lucian finally snapped out of his surprise and put some veggies on Estella's plate.

She lowered her head and started to eat. Her appetite was obviously much better than before.

Estella finished her dinner and wiped her mouth clean before heading upstairs. Lucian called out her name, stopping Estella in her tracks. "Essie."

Estella stopped and turned around to look at Lucian in a puzzled manner.

Lucian met her gaze and could no longer restrain himself as he asked, "Did you go to Ms. Jarvis' place today?"

The little girl's lips pursed into a hard line after listening to her father. Then, she lowered her head and appeared reluctant to divulge anything to Lucian.

He got up from his seat and walked over to Estella's side. Lucian carried her to the couch and said, "I called Ms. Ward. She told me."

Estella furrowed her brows and said, "I don't like Ms. Ward."

She had promised Estella that she would not tell Lucian about this.

Lucian eased her furrowed brows and corrected her, "Ms. Ward was right. You are my daughter. I have the right to know about your whereabouts at school. Besides, Catalina told me that you came back on your own. I was worried, and I could only ask Ms. Ward what happened. She was surprised to hear what happened too."

Estella looked guilty and uttered in a small voice, "Not on my own."

Lucian had expected that reply.

Lucian patted her head and said, "I know. Ms. Jarvis must have sent you home. I explained it to Ms. Ward too."

The tense expression on her face eased a little.

"Why can't you tell me about going to Ms. Jarvis' place?" Lucian asked softly. Of course, he already had an answer. However, he would not deign to admit it to himself. Estella merely shook her head in silence.

Lucian frowned slightly and egged her on, "Did she ask you to do this?"

Estella immediately shook her head and hurriedly explained, "Essie wanted to!"

"Why? Do you think I will stop you from seeing Ms. Jarvis?" Lucian asked. Estella, who would hardly speak to him, jumped to defend Roxanne. Lucian could not help but feel defeated. Estella lowered her head and said nothing.

Silence stretched between the father and daughter duo for some time.

Lucian could not help but feel that something was amiss. Ever since he met Archie and Benny, he could sense that the two were averse to him.

Moreover, Lucian sensed that their aversion toward him had reached its peak recently.

He could forgo that.

However, he could not forgo the fact that even Estella was trying to hide something from him.

Estella had no idea about her true identity, and yet she was already defending and siding with Roxanne.

Lucian even surmised that Estella might think that both himself and Roxanne were equally important.

Silence continued to fill the air for some time. Just when Lucian was about to give up questioning Estella, she suddenly said in her innocent voice, "Ms. Jarvis does not like you." Lucian's brows creased.

The little girl lifted her head and looked at Lucian and gave her father a wistful gaze. "Ms. Jarvis will chase you away."

Even though Estella stopped at that, Lucian knew the little girl actually had more to say.

If Lucian knew that she was going to Roxanne's place, he would have tagged along.

Roxanne had been keeping her distance from him. If she saw that Lucian was also there, Roxanne would have chased him away, and Estella would not be welcome either.

Chapter 353 Fury

Estella stared right at Lucian after she was done talking.

She could sense Roxanne, Archie, and Benny's aversion toward Lucian.

Estella had attributed their aversion to Lucian.

She had been honest with Lucian in hopes that he would reflect upon himself and treat Roxanne, Archie, and Benny better so that they would warm up to Lucian. Maybe Roxanne would decide to stay then.

At the thought that Roxanne would migrate overseas, the little girl turned wistful.

Lucian's mood took a roller coaster at his daughter's remarks.

Roxanne had said the very same thing.

"Did she say that to Essie too? Is that why Essie came back sulking?" he wondered.

Lucian wanted his questions answered. Hence, he asked, "Did Ms. Jarvis tell you that she doesn't like me in the afternoon?"

Estella shook her head.

Somehow, Lucian heaved a sigh of relief when Estella shook her head. He knew that Estella had only made her own deduction after observing the way Roxanne treated him. However, given that Roxanne had said no such thing to Estella, then why did the little girl come back sulking? Estella was acting oddly during dinner time as well.

The more Lucian thought about it, the more befuddled he was. "Why did you come back sulking then? Did Ms. Jarvis tell you something?"

His question hit the bullseye.

Estella had ruminated over what Roxanne told her the whole afternoon and lowered her head sadly. In the end, she muttered, "Ms. Jarvis will not play with me anymore." Lucian's eyes darkened. "Why?"

Roxanne had promised that whatever happened between them would not affect the children. Why did she tell Estella that?

Again, Estella shook her head.

Lucian pressed on, "Did Ms. Jarvis say you can't tell me?"

The little girl shook her head.

"Then you can tell me. Maybe I can help you persuade her," Lucian said.

Even though Estella knew the chances were slim, she could not help but see a glimmer of hope and said in a small voice, "Ms. Jarvis is moving overseas with Archie and Benny." She grew despondent after saying that.

Lucian's heart skipped a beat when he heard that. His face turned cold as the air grew still.

"Roxanne is moving overseas with the boys?" he thought. It was something that he never heard before.

"Is she doing this because of me? Or is she just brushing Essie off?" Lucian thought.

If that was true, judging from the way she had been avoiding him lately, Lucian reckoned that he would not have known until after Roxanne had already left.

Lucian had been trying to locate the woman for six whole years, and had finally done so after much effort. He fumed with fury at the fact that Roxanne was planning to leave without another word. The more he thought about it, the angrier he got.

Estella's eyes brimmed with tears as she did not manage to get a reply from Lucian. "Daddy, I don't want Ms. Jarvis to go..."

Then, she carefully tugged at Lucian's shirt.

When he finally snapped out of his thoughts, Lucian turned to his daughter. However, he could not seem to utter any words of assurance to her daughter.

Of course, Lucian did now wish for Roxanne to evade him once again.

Then again, given the state of their strained relationship right then, he knew that he had no right to interfere in her matters.

Chapter 354 Get The Hell Out Of Horington



Seeing how her father kept silent, Estella slowly lowered her eyes. She too remained speechless for a while before lifting her head to look at Lucian with puppy-dog eyes. "Then can I play with Ms. Jarvis when I grow up, Daddy?"

Lucian was stunned once again when he heard his daughter. Estella's still so young, yet she's already thinking about the future. If Roxanne promised Estella that, it means she really does plan to go overseas. In fact, she will stop contacting Estella after leaving.

With that thought in mind, Lucian could not help feeling the sting of irony.

Lucian wondered how Roxanne would react if she found out that she was about to abandon Estella again after having done the same when the girl was still a baby.

Still, Estella had already made up her mind. "Ms. Jarvis said I could play with her when I got older, so I'm going to grow up faster," stated the girl in all seriousness as she looked at Lucian.

I don't doubt that Roxanne has taught Estella to say that. Lucian had mixed feelings when he remembered Estella's odd behavior at the dining table just then.

Estella ate more than usual and even started conversations with me. She's probably hoping to get better soon because of what Roxanne said to her. Does Roxanne have any idea just how much influence she has on Estella?

The girl muttered to herself for a moment before lowering her eyes again in despair. "It'd be nice if Ms. Jarvis stays..." Even though Ms. Jarvis promised me that I could play with her overseas when I grew up, it'll take a long while before that happens. I want to see Ms. Jarvis every day.

Lucian's face hardened when he saw how sad Estella was. "Daddy will find a way," promised Lucian in a deep voice. Even though my relationship with Roxanne is pretty stiff now, I won't let her get away so easily now that I know she's planning to run off. Not only because I spent six years looking for her, but she's also Estella's biological mother!

Estella became hopeful again after listening to her father, so she nodded firmly.

Meanwhile, at the hospital, Aubree waited until it was time for Lucian to get off work, but still, she did not see the man. Instead, she got a call from her subordinate. "Ms. Pearson, Ms. Estella went to look for Roxanne with her teacher. She stayed at Roxanne's until four o'clock in the afternoon. Then, the woman sent her home."

Aubree's face immediately turned grim when she heard that. "What about Lucian? Did you see him?"

She only went through all the suffering because she wanted Lucian and Roxanne to have no time for each other.

Besides that, Aubree also deliberately showed how important Lucian was to her the last time Roxanne visited her at the hospital. If Lucian went to see that b\*tch again today, all my suffering would be in vain! "Mr. Farwell never showed up. However, he returned home with a man not long after Ms. Estella did. Ms. Estella seemed to be in trouble because Mr. Farwell looked anxious," reported the subordinate hurriedly.

Aubree secretly let out a sigh of relief before ordering, "Okay. Continue to keep your eyes on Roxanne." With that, the woman ended the phone call.

After listening to her subordinate, Aubree assumed that Lucian stayed home to keep Estella company.

The woman then lay down on the hospital bed and began scheming against Roxanne. My plan might've cut down the possibility of Lucian seeing that b\*tch, but it doesn't affect the little brat. If I don't do something about that brat, it'll be only a matter of time before Lucian and Roxanne meet again. My only option is to get that b\*tch the hell out of Horington!

#### Chapter 355 Not Good For Her Mental Condition

After some thought, Aubree pulled out her phone and called Sonya.

It did not take long before Sonya answered the call. "Is something wrong, Aubree?"

"Mrs. Farwell, can you please come over? My arm hurts so bad, and I'm scared..." Aubree's voice was full of unease. "Just give me a moment. I'll be right over," promised Sonya immediately.

With that, the woman hurriedly got changed before striding out the door.

Only after getting into her car did Sonya begin to wonder why Aubree called her if Lucian was with the young woman. "What about Lucian? Isn't he with you?" inquired Sonya curiously.

"I'm not sure where he is either. Maybe he's working overtime. I didn't call him because I didn't want to disturb him. My parents weren't answering my calls, so I had no choice but to trouble you." There was a hint of sadness in Aubree's voice.

Hence, Sonya quickly comforted the young woman. "It's okay. You only got hurt because of me, so taking care of you is the least I can do. Just wait for me at the hospital. I'll be right over."

After Aubree agreed to her request, Sonya hung up and dialed Lucian's phone number with a hardened face.

She found it hard to believe that her son would still be working at such a late hour.

Lucian tucked Estella in after chatting with her, and as soon as he left his daughter's room, he got a call from Sonya.

"Where are you? You haven't gotten off work yet?" questioned Sonya suspiciously.

Having figured out why his mother called almost immediately, Lucian rubbed his temple. "I have. Essie isn't feeling well today, so I came home early to look after her."

When Sonya heard that Estella was unwell, her tone softened up. "How's she doing now?"

"Better than how she was in the afternoon. I just tucked her in," replied Lucian.

"She seemed fine the last I saw her. What happened to her today?" Sonya continued with her questioning.

Lucian fell silent for a while when he thought about why Estella was sad. In the end, he decided to brush off the question. "She's probably just suffering a relapse."

After that, the man suddenly thought of something, so he added, "Dr. Lambert said Essie needs me right now, so I might not be able to go to the hospital at the moment. If necessary, I can hire a top grade caregiver for Aubree."

In response, Sonya furrowed her eyebrows in disagreement. "If that's the case, you should take Essie to the hospital so she and Aubree can bond. I'm sure Aubree's better at taking care of the child. After all, women tend to be more thoughtful and caring.

"There's no need for Essie and Aubree to bond. Besides, the environment at the hospital isn't good for Essie's mental condition," protested Lucian somewhat coldly, for he was sure he had made it clear back at the café that he would not marry Aubree.

The man did not expect his mother to be so persistent even after what he said.

Rubbing his eyebrows irritably, Lucian added before Sonya could respond, "Aubree has almost fully recovered. I'll send a caregiver over tomorrow, and if you're still worried about her, you can always visit her. I won't stop you."

Frowning, Sonya was displeased with Lucian's tone. However, before she could say anything to reprimand her son, the man voiced once again, "Essie's awake. I have to go check on her. If there's nothing else, I'm hanging up now."

Lucian then ended the phone call without waiting for Sonya's response, leaving the woman to her thoughts.

Chapter 356 Nothing Is More Important

Sonya's veins immediately popped after the call ended.

The woman remained boiling with anger even after she had reached the hospital. I've wanted to see Lucian marry Aubree for so many years, but now he tells me that he's planning to break up with Aubree? I won't accept that!

Only when Sonya reached the door to Aubree's room did she replace her anger with worry.

Curled up in bed, Aubree seemed to have fallen asleep, so Sonya tiptoed into the room to check on the young woman.

When Sonya noticed how much thinner Aubree had become, she was convinced that the poor woman had suffered because of the injury.

Even though Aubree was asleep, her eyebrows were tightly knitted, showing her discomfort.

Seeing Aubree like that only made Sonya feel more guilty. "I'm here, Aubree," informed Sonya in a soft voice.

Aubree furrowed her eyebrows even more when she heard Sonya. Only after staring at the elderly woman for a while did Aubree regain her senses. "I didn't expect you to be here so soon, Mrs. Farwell." Sonya quickly stopped Aubree when the young woman tried to sit up. "It's okay. You don't have to get up."

After gazing at Aubree's injured arm, Sonya inquired concernedly, "How's your arm? I can get someone to check it out for you."

In response, Aubree pretended to feel her arm for a while before smiling apologetically at Sonya. "It doesn't hurt anymore. It seems I made a big fuss out of nothing. I'm sorry for troubling you at such a late hour, Mrs. Farwell."

Sonya let out a sigh of relief. "I'm glad to hear that you're fine."

Then, Aubree looked expectantly behind Sonya as though she expected someone to be following behind the elderly woman. When she could not find anybody, she lowered her eyes in disappointment. "Where's Lucian, Mrs. Farwell? Is he still working?" asked Aubree, pretending to be unaffected by the man's absence.

Sonya boiled with anger once again when Lucian was mentioned, but for Aubree's sake, she suppressed her emotions. "Lucian's already gone home. Essie's not feeling well, so I'm afraid that he won't be..." "He should stay home with Essie," voiced Aubree with a warm smile. "My arm's fine. Plus, Essie is more important.

When Sonya saw how understanding Aubree, she felt even guiltier about her son's actions, so she promised, "You're the best daughter-in-law anyone can ever ask for. I'll get Lucian to marry you as soon as you recover!"

To that, Aubree responded with a shy nod.

Sonya could not see it, but Aubree's lips had already cracked into a devious smirk.

It can't be a coincidence that the little brat got unwell as soon as she left Roxanne's place! Aubree could not believe that her plan to keep Lucian by her side got sabotaged by a little girl, so she vowed to deal with both Roxanne and Estella.

After a moment, Aubree lifted her head to meet Sonya's gaze. "Hey, Mrs. Farwell. I remember that Essie likes Ms. Jarvis very much, doesn't she? Do you think it'll help with her condition if she gets to spend more time with Ms. Jarvis?"

Sonya raised an eyebrow curiously when she heard that. "I thought you didn't like Roxanne."

"I was afraid she would steal Lucian from me, but I know I was wrong to think that way now. There's nothing I can do about it if she's the one Lucian loves. Besides, nothing is more important than Estella's well-being," responded Aubree with a bitter smile.

A hint of displeasure flashed across Sonya's eyes at Aubree's concern for Estella and at the thought of Lucian rejecting her suggestion.

If her son had heeded her words over the years to have Estella spend time with Aubree, Estella might not be so attached to Roxanne, given Aubree's fondness for Estella. Estella, too, would have no need for Roxanne.

Aubree made a remorseful face. "To be honest, I'm still slightly envious of Ms. Jarvis and how she gained Essie's favor so quickly. It would be nice if Essie were that fond of me." Aubree glanced slyly at Sonya, who frowned at those words.

"What nonsense!" she snapped. "If you are to become Essie's mother, it's only a matter of time before she becomes fond of you. Who does that woman think she is, anyway? I've told her I will make her life in Horington difficult if she tries to contact Lucian and Essie again."

Sonya's words struck a chord with Aubree and filled her with delight.

Everything is falling into place! I was just trying to figure out how to convince Sonya to kick Roxanne out of Horington but she suggested it. In that case, just a little fanning of the flames would suffice. Spurred by that thought, Aubree put on a worried expression. "Will such a day ever come, Mrs. Farwell? Essie is very fond of Ms. Jarvis. Even if Lucian isn't prepared to marry her, Essie's feelings would still be his top priority, like how he has been rejecting me. I feel he might even accept Ms. Jarvis for Essie's sake."

Sonya's expression became stony. "I've told him to stay away from Roxanne."

"Essie is still a child," Aubree argued. "She wouldn't understand and would cry for Ms. Jarvis no matter what we adults tell her. I think we should wait before doing anything as I can't bear to see her upset. I will be happy for Essie if Lucian ever falls for Ms. Jarvis and decides to marry her for Essie's sake."

"Never," Sonya vowed quietly.

A look of puzzlement flashed across Aubree's face as if she did not understand the other woman.

Sonya scowled. "If we can't stop Essie from seeing her, then we'll have her disappear from Horington. Essie will forget her existence with the passage of time."

Having planned that from the start, she knew it was an inevitable eventuality.

Given Roxanne's current financial and social standing, it would only take a few phone calls to exile her from Horington.

Aubree snickered to herself while adopting a façade of panic. "Don't act rashly, Mrs. Farwell! Ms. Jarvis did nothing wrong. Besides, it might exacerbate Essie's condition if Ms. Jarvis disappears suddenly." Sonya gazed at the other's injured arm with a concerned frown. "Your arm wouldn't be hurt for the second time if it was not for her. Speaking of Essie's condition, I was planning to have you spend more time with her and develop a rapport. You need to warm her up to you slowly."

Though Aubree was already beside herself with glee, she still felt the need to put on an act of dissuading the older woman. Though every refrain sounded like she was trying to stop Sonya, Aubree was actually fanning the flames.

Sonya's dissatisfaction with Roxanne grew the more Aubree spoke. At last, she patted the younger woman's hand. "You shouldn't have to concern yourself with these matters. Just focus on getting better during your stay here at the hospital."

Aubree pretended to fall into disgruntled silence, carefully putting on a disagreeable expression as she did so.

Sonya did not plan to persuade her further. Instead, she insisted for Aubree to fall asleep while she kept her company.

Chapter 358 According To You

Aubree shut her eyes and pretended to sleep.



After a while, she vaguely heard Sonya's voice, engaged in a conversation on the phone, coming from outside the ward.

"Find out what Roxanne has been up to after returning to the country."

The person on the other end must have found something in their investigations and was making a report to Sonya.

"I see," Sonya replied. "If that's the case, notify all the medicinal herb suppliers in Horington that it is now an act of rebellion against Farwell Group to provide medicinal herb supplies to Roxanne." The person on the other end hurriedly assured her.

At the sound of Sonya's footsteps fast approaching, Aubree quickly adjusted her expression to appear that she was fast asleep.

Sonya stood beside the bed. Her eyes blazed with tenderness and guilt upon noticing how weary Aubree looked.

Roxanne shouldn't have come back after walking out six years ago! I will have her disappear from our sight for good this time, no matter what it takes. My son should not let a good girl like Aubree down. Aubree was beginning to feel uneasy under Sonya's scrutiny. Pretending to be startled awake from her slumber, she appeared surprised at the sight of the older woman standing by her bed. "What time is it, Mrs. Farwell? Why are you still here?"

Her act was flawless. Even her hoarse voice upon waking was impeccable.

Sonya smiled as if nothing had happened. "It's all right. I'm just staying here to keep you company."

Aubree frowned. "You should be getting back. It isn't ideal for you to spend the night here. I will feel so guilty if you fall ill tomorrow."

It was only then that Sonya agreed reluctantly.

"I'll walk you out." Aubree made to sit up.

Sonya hurriedly pressed her shoulders firmly back against the bed. "You rest. I'll see myself out. The driver is waiting downstairs."

Aubree did not force her. Instead, she nodded docilely. "Have a safe trip home."

Sonya assured her that she would before adding, "The caretaker Lucian arranged for will arrive tomorrow. You can give me a call if you need anything."

Sonya only felt at ease to leave the ward after extracting Aubree's promise. She then turned off the light in the ward along her way out.

Shrouded by the darkness, Aubree scoffed disdainfully after hearing the room door click shut.

So what if Lucian's little b\*tch doesn't like me? So what if they prefer Roxanne? They'll have to choose me if Sonya's plan succeeds! As for that b\*tch Roxanne, she had stolen Lucian from me once six years ago. I will not allow the same thing to happen again six years later! That b\*tch should just go back to where she came from! I am the only woman Lucian is permitted to have by his side!

In the meantime, Roxanne was ignorant of the schemes of the two women.

Her tale to Estella of taking up residence abroad was merely a last-minute concoction to appease the child.

Upon further consideration, Roxanne felt that going abroad may not necessarily be a bad idea if she wanted to throw the Farwells and Aubree off her back once and for all.

At the very least, she would be able to lead a stable life as she did once before.

However, the decision was a little rushed as many preparations were to be made. She also had to have a serious discussion with her professor.

Roxanne pulled an all-nighter to send Harvey a message to express her thoughts.

Harvey's reply was prompt as it was daytime on his end. "That's according to you. However, you must first resolve the outstanding matters in the research institute if you wish to return." With a smile of relief, Roxanne promised him.

It was already dawn when her discussion with Harvey ended. After drawing up a simple to-do list for herself, Roxanne tidied up and fell asleep.

### Chapter 359 Keep It Between Us

As she had fallen asleep late the night before, Roxanne slept deeply but was awoken by her phone ringing early the following morning.

Unable to marshal her thoughts into coherence immediately upon waking up, she reached out blindly around her pillow for a long time before locating the source of the noise. Upon obtaining her phone and squinting at the screen, Roxanne answered groggily.

Colby sounded very anxious on the other end. "Something's happened, Dr. Jarvis."

Wide awake suddenly, Roxanne sat bolt upright. "What is it?" she asked hoarsely.

"A shipment of medicinal herb supplies we expected to receive this morning is still nowhere to be seen." Colby looked grave.

The medicinal herb supplier the research institute partnered with was usually very punctual in delivering their supply.

If a morning delivery had been promised, the research institute would have received the goods at the beginning of office hours. The shipment was delayed particularly long that day.

If the medicinal herb supplies were not delivered on time, many projects would be shelved in less than two days. Their progress would, as a result, be interrupted, and the research institute would suffer a hefty loss.

Roxanne froze. "Have you given our business partners a call?"

As she spoke, she turned on speaker mode and swiftly washed up while she listened to Colby's report.

"I did," Colby answered despairingly at the mention of the problem. "Some of them didn't even pick up. Those who did were vague and refused to offer a decisive answer."

He preferred it if they had just told him they did not want to be partners anymore. Their beating around the bush was so discouraging that he did not even dare seek other suppliers to order the medicinal herb supplies.

Roxanne's heart sank as she scrambled to get dressed. "Noted," she replied. "I'm coming over right now."

Without another word, she hung up.

The children were already seated at the dining table when she came downstairs.

Benny had recovered sufficiently to attend kindergarten that day, and Archie and Benny could not wait to see Estella at school.

The boys looked expectantly at Roxanne when she came down the stairs as they wanted her to give them a ride to school.

Roxanne noticed the boys' expectant looks. "Something happened at the research institute," she said apologetically. "I must hurry over. Ms. Lane will send you."

Though crestfallen, the boys were used to their mother's hectic schedule. "Drive safely, Mommy," they chorused with understanding nods.

Roxanne assured them hastily and hurried out the door without waiting for their reply.

She had planned the night before to hand her work over to Colby before taking the children abroad.

Her work at the research institute would have made Harvey proud as she had resolved many issues for the research institute upon her return and had also taught the researchers in the institute a lot of modern techniques.

She did not expect such an incident to destabilize everything she had planned.

Roxanne sped the whole way.

When she arrived at the research institute, Colby was already waiting at the entrance.

"Do the researchers know?" Roxanne asked at once as she arrived briskly before him.

Colby shook his head. "I haven't said anything to them. I don't want them to panic."

Roxanne heaved a small sigh of relief at his words. "Let's keep it to ourselves for now. We'll try our best to think of something. Run me through the problem." Colby agreed.

The pair made their way quickly into Roxanne's office as they spoke.

Chapter 360 Why Wait Until Now

As they were alone in the office, the full extent of their worry appeared on their faces.

"I wonder if you remember what Pearson Group did when they picked on us the last time," Colby said as a twitch of concern flickered across his brow.

Roxanne's forehead creased at his words. She too recalled the experience of being sabotaged by Aubree upon her return to the country.

All the medicinal herb suppliers in Horington had rejected partnership offers made by the research institute without providing a reason under the order of Pearson Group then.

Somebody must have ordered the medicinal herb suppliers to cut us off. But who could the mastermind be?

Roxanne's gaze darkened. Her mind was in a mess.

As they had already resolved the trouble Aubree had caused them, Roxanne was sure they would not be subjected to the same tactics.

Though Colby did not voice it aloud, he knew Roxanne was the intended victim of the ordeal.

He patted her shoulder trying to comfort her as he saw how worried she was. "Don't overthink it right now. Since you're here, I think you should personally call our partners and find out their intentions. It is of utmost importance to search for another supplier quickly if they do not want to work with us anymore. We need to ensure that all our projects remain on schedule."

Roxanne pulled herself out of her reverie and nodded in agreement.

Soon, Colby produced the contact numbers of all the research institute business partners for Roxanne to call one by one.

"I'm really sorry, Dr. Jarvis. Though it has been a pleasant partnership with the research institute, we cannot accommodate your demands for the specific ingredients you need given such short notice, so..."  
"Is that you, Dr. Jarvis? Apologies for not having informed you earlier for it happened so suddenly. Our

factory is rushing to meet a huge order for a hospital, so it is very likely that we cannot make it for the research institute's order."

Roxanne called several companies in a row, and the persons in charge found all sorts of reasons to reject her.

The meaning behind their words could not be more explicit. They did not intend for the partnership to continue.

Roxanne clenched her fists. Undeterred, she dialed another number.

Taking pity on her for how distraught she looked, Colby patted her hand tenderly. "Don't bother."

Roxanne glanced at him in confusion.

"It's obvious that somebody has a bone to pick with the research institute. Besides, they seem to be on equal footing with the Pearson family and possibly even more influential. It will end the same way as before if this goes on."

Though she was reluctant to admit it, she knew he was right.

After a moment's silence, Roxanne placed the phone down dejectedly.

"If I may ask," Colby asked in concern, "have you offended anybody of late?"

Roxanne stiffened up imperceptibly at his words.

"I don't mean to sound like I'm blaming you," Colby explained hastily. "After all, you were the one who solved this very problem we faced previously. I want to remind you that since they are capable of going to such lengths, they might find it in them to act against you or the kids. You must be careful. Don't worry about the research institute as I can still persist for some time."

Colby then smiled reassuringly at her.

"Thank you," Roxanne said, her eyes shining with gratitude.

However, she still could not think of anybody who would take such drastic measures against her.

The only possibility is Sonya.

However, Roxanne had made things clear to Sonya the last time they met and had not contacted Lucian within that period.

If Sonya had done it, she could have done it on the day of the breakup instead of waiting until now.