

ABANDONED 491

Chapter 491

At the Farwell residence, Lucian stood outside Estella's room for a long time after hanging up. Devoid of expression, he was preoccupied with the snippets of Roxanne alongside another man. Hmph! That hard-hearted woman left without a second thought six years ago, and I've been tracking her down for six years!

Now that Roxanne was back, Lucian would never let her be closely acquainted with other men. He had already blown a gasket after seeing her interactions with Larry several times lately. Since she'll collaborate with Jack Damaris, they'll cross paths more often inevitably. If something happens between them...

At the thought of that, Lucian's face turned grim. It was as though there was a drastic drop in the temperature around him. No way! I won't let that happen! As for Roxanne, I can't let her continue avoiding me! Because of Jonathan's first-hand information, Lucian had been racking his brain the following days on how he could mend his relationship with Roxanne. He had been sending Estella to and fetching her from the kindergarten lately, hoping to run into Roxanne so he could talk things out with her.

Unexpectedly, she did not show up at all in the following days. As a result, Lucian could not help but despise himself for having such a ridiculous idea. I have lost count of the days she's been trying to hide from me. Even Estella has accepted the indisputable fact that she might not be able to meet her again. Why am I still anticipating bumping into her here?

"Daddy." Estella's mellifluous voice sounded abruptly in the car when Lucian fell into a trance.

He furrowed his brows as he regained his composure before turning to look at Estella quizzically.

Seeing that she had managed to attract her father's attention, Estella uttered sweetly, "Ms. Ward told us that our kindergarten will hold an anniversary celebration.

Lucian nodded. "What about it?"

Needless to say, he was aware of it. As he had invested in the kindergarten, the management had requested his permission when they planned to organize the event. However, he could not fathom why Estella suddenly brought up the subject,

There was unmissable anticipation in Estella's eyes as she piped up, "Ms. Ward told us everyone has to perform during the anniversary celebration. Our parents have to join too!"

With that, she gazed at her father eagerly. It was clear enough for Lucian to get what

she meant. If parents are requested to join, Ms. Jarvis will surely show up too! Even if she tries to avoid us and refuses to speak to me, it's good enough that I can have the chance to see her! Lucian's gaze darkened as he looked intently at the anticipation in Estella's eyes. He nodded indifferently. "Okay! I know."

Hearing that, Estella tilted her head with a look of disappointment on her face.

Initially, she expected Lucian would share the same sentiments as her. It never came to her that he would only respond with sheer indifference. Does it mean Daddy doesn't like Ms. Jarvis anymore? Oblivious to what was playing in Estella's mind, Lucian only hummed nonchalantly before retracting his gaze. Even so, he could not overlook the frustration surging from within him.

He knew fully well that Estella wished to grab the opportunity to meet Roxanne. Nonetheless, he yearned for more. He was not satisfied with just seeing her and vowed to find ways to mend their relationship. As the thought occurred to him, Lucian could not help but feel his temples start throbbing

He was sure as h*ll that Roxanne would not spare them any glance if they had the chance to bump into her during the occasion. Hmph! After all, she's determined to keep a distance from us!

He had no choice but to exercise restraint. Otherwise, it would only exacerbate the situation.

Subsequently, he and Estella each had something on their mind. None of them uttered any words along the way home.

Back in the Farwell residence, Lucian only noticed that Estella seemed to be in low spirits. He knitted his brows in bafflement. Wasn't she in high spirits in the car a while ago? So why is she suddenly upset?

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Catching sight of Estella having her meal gloomily, Lucian could not restrain himself from questioning, "Essie, what's the matter? Why're you unhappy?" Estella pouted her lips and grumbled, "You don't like Ms. Jarvis anymore."

Flabbergasted, Lucian was silent for a few seconds before querying desperately, "What makes you say that?"

Down in the dumps, Estella stared at him. "We can finally meet Ms. Jarvis during the anniversary celebration, but you don't seem to look forward to it at all." Lucian's brows twitched uncontrollably as he refuted, "That's not true."

Estella threw him a glance doubtfully. Daddy didn't look excited at all in the car just now. Even when he's denying it now, he doesn't look glad at all. He's bluffing!

Sensing Estella's doubt, Lucian frowned resignedly. "I only can't help thinking we can't carry on like this."

Perplexed, Estella tilted her head.

Lucian stroked Estella's head affectionately. Deep down, he knew he needed her help to mend his relationship with Roxanne. Oh! Why don't I make things clear with her now? "Essie, you like Ms. Jarvis, don't you? Since she's paying no heed to us, don't you think we should take the initiative first?" He guided her patiently.

Estella nodded fervently.

"Essie, if Ms. Jarvis shows up during the anniversary celebration, go to look for her, okay?" Lucian asked.

Estella was more than willing to do so. Thus, she nodded without thinking twice.

Lucian nodded slightly, racking his brain on what excuse he could use to approach Roxanne that day.

Just as his head was aching, the screen of his phone on the table lit up.

Lucian grabbed it instinctively to have a glimpse. It was a message sent by Pippa to the parents' group chat: Dear parents, our kindergarten will arrange for our students to have stage performances during the anniversary celebration. We sincerely hope that all of you can attend it and watch their performances. Apart from that, we plan to have our students perform a play together with their parents on the stage. It is to strengthen the relationship between the students and their parents. Thus, we look forward to everyone's cooperation.

At the sight of the message, Lucian felt his heart flutter.

At that instant, one of the parents responded with a question: Is it compulsory for everyone to take part in the play? How will the performers be confirmed?

Pippa replied: We hope that everyone can take part. However, parents who can't make it can contact me directly. As for the parents who can take part, we'll divide everyone into groups. I'll share the team list here once the list of parents participating is confirmed.

Everyone agreed in unison.

The moment Lucian realized everyone would be divided into groups, he arched his brows as something popped into his mind.

After replying to Pippa's message in the group chat, he called Cayden right away.

Cayden had just had his dinner when his phone rang with Lucian's name blinking on the screen. He answered it at once. "Mr. Farwell, what can I do for you?"

Lucian instructed solemnly, "Get in touch with the head of the kindergarten. Tell him to talk Roxanne into attending the anniversary celebration this round. On top of that, request him to arrange Essie and her two kids in the same team."

Cayden was clueless about the series of activities during the anniversary celebration of the kindergarten. Even so, he dared not dawdle to carry out the mission as instructed by his boss.

Right after Lucian hung up, Cayden called the head of the kindergarten to relay the former's instruction. The latter agreed with that readily.

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Meanwhile, Roxanne hesitated when she read the text message sent in the group chat.

She had just sealed the deal with the Damaris family, and it was expected of her to adjust her schedule according to the request of the Damaris family. Hence, she was not sure if she would be busy then. Moreover, she had to attend the anniversary celebration. With that said, she would inevitably run into either Lucian or Estella; or both.

She could not bear to see the sad puppy eyes of Estella.

While Archie and Benny were discussing the anniversary celebration with her, they saw the message posted by Pippa in the group chat. Upon noticing the worrisome look on Roxanne's face, they asked cautiously, "Will you go, Mommy?"

Their tone of voice put her in a quandary. "If I don't go, would you two be able to attend the event on your own?"

The boys exchanged a glance and shook their heads vigorously. "We want you to be there, Mommy!"

Actually, the two kids were not bothered if Roxanne was absent. However, they thought about the chance of their mother running into Estella if she were to show up at the anniversary celebration.

It's been a long while since Mommy has paid Essie a visit. We really want to cheer Essie up.

Roxanne frowned instead of answering immediately.

Benny put up a pitiful face and stared into Roxanne's eyes. "Mommy, this is the very first time we're going to perform on stage."

Right then, Archie chimed in, "We really want you to watch our performance. Little children like us will get stage fright if Mommy isn't there."

Roxanne found it amusing to hear Archie express his fear so solemnly, but she acknowledged their desire to want her there.

Even though she was not sure if the boys were up to anything, she did not want to miss the kids' first-ever performance. After mulling it over for a long time, she agreed, "Okay, I got it. I'll accompany you to the celebration."

With that, Roxanne exited the chat with Pippa.

Initially, she wanted to inform the latter that she would be absent on the day of the event. However, the eagerness of the children changed her mind. She did not have the heart to disappoint them.

When Archie and Benny heard that their mother said yes, they cheered excitedly. Both of them hugged Roxanne and exclaimed dotingly, "Thanks, Mommy! We love you the most!"

Roxanne smiled and patted their heads.

Afterward, her phone buzzed. Roxanne took a peek and saw that it was a message from Pippa. Ms. Jarvis, would you be coming to the anniversary celebration?

Roxanne was briefly stunned by the teacher's question and wondered why she would purposely ask her that.

During the last tree-planting event, Ms. Ward just assumed my presence. I don't remember her personally checking up on me for a response.

Just as she was still puzzled over the strange gesture, Pippa seemed to have sensed the awkwardness. Therefore, the latter quickly added another line to explain herself. The upcoming school event is rather important. Thus, the school leader requested the teachers to confirm with all parents.

With her question answered, Roxanne did not dwell much on it anymore. She replied: Don't worry, Ms. Ward. I'll be there on time for the event and participate actively. Thanks for asking

Pippa heaved a sigh of relief when she received a favorable response from Roxanne. After having brief small talk, Pippa exited the chat and sent the screenshot of her conversation with Roxanne to Jeffrey, the head of the kindergarten.

Jeffrey instructed Pippa to get Roxanne's confirmation. In the case Roxanne declined the invitation to the celebration, Pippa was asked to persuade her accordingly.

When Pippa approached Roxanne, she was worried that the latter would say no. Should that happen, the former had to come up with an excuse to make Roxanne change her mind. Fortunately, none of her worries came true.

After updating Jeffrey, Pippa received an instant reply: Put Ms. Estella Farwell on the same team as her two children.

Pippa did not dare to question Jeffrey's intention. She assumed that Estella had requested to be on the same team as the boys. Hence, she agreed.

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When Roxanne was having lunch the next day, she saw Pippa's text in the group chat. It was about the kids' activity grouping:

Upon clicking the link, she caught her name at the top of the list right away. It was followed by Lucian's name.

Roxanne was flabbergasted. She checked it once more and even queried the teacher: Ms. Ward, am I supposed to read the name list horizontally or vertically? Oh no, it's Murphy's law! If it was arranged horizontally, I'll be in the same group as Lucian. Anything that can go wrong will go wrong.

Pippa replied in a jiffy: Hi, Ms. Jarvis, please read it horizontally.

Roxanne's expression froze at the sight of the message. Refusing to give up, she asked once more to try her luck: May I switch to another team?

Meanwhile, Pippa was helping other parents to regroup the other kids. When she read Roxanne's text, she felt bad for not doing her a favor. She responded: I'm sorry, Ms. Jarvis. The groups have been fixed, and we can't change them anymore. In addition, it has been submitted to Mr. Bauer. If there's any reason to amend the list, we'll need to seek Mr. Bauer's advice.

Pippa figured that since Jeffrey had given her a specific instruction, it was better for her to bring up Jeffrey's name when the scenario did not quite go as planned.

A trace of strong resistance appeared in Roxanne's eyes. She frowned at Pippa's reply.

Shortly after, Pippa sent her another text. It read: We've considered various aspects before grouping the kids together. Among all the classmates, Essie is the closest to Archie and Benny. If we let Essie work with other families, I'm afraid she won't participate in the stage play. Thank you for your understanding.

At the mention of Estella, Roxanne's heart softened.

As much as she rejected the idea of being grouped with Lucian and Estella, she agreed with Pippa's rationale. She could not imagine how the little girl could feel comfortable around other families. After much hesitating, she thanked Pippa and ended the conversation despite feeling very troubled by it.

She had prepared herself to bump into Lucian and Estella at the anniversary celebration

However, she did not expect to be in the same team as them,

Suddenly, she lost all of her appetite.

She took a few mouthfuls, switched off her phone, and left.

There was still a strand of hope in her, thinking that there would not be much intimate interaction with the father-daughter duo since it was a kindergarten play. It's probably just a fairy tale or a fable. By the time she returned home in the evening, the boys were already back.

At the sight of Archie and Benny, Roxanne's smile became stiff. She could not help but be reminded of the upcoming collaboration with Lucian on the school play.

On the contrary, the boys who were aware of the groupings were over the moon and anxious at the same time.

On the one hand, they were looking forward to performing with Estella. On the other hand, they were reluctant to face Lucian, knowing that Roxanne had no intention of crossing paths with him. Yet, there was only one way they could perform with Estella, which was to be on the same team as Lucian!

They were scared that Roxanne would change her mind and not show up at the anniversary celebration the moment she found out about the arrangement.

At that thought, the boys fell very silent and did not mention a word about the event.

Roxanne found their reactions strange and took a wild guess. "Have you guys heard about the grouping?"

Her question made their hearts skip a beat. The kids stared at each other nervously. No one uttered anything in response.

Moments later, Benny posed a question cautiously, "Did you find out about it, Mommy?"

Roxanne nodded firmly. "Ms. Ward sent the list this afternoon."

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After hearing Roxanne's reply, Archie and Benny became concerned. "So, are you still going, Mommy?" they asked.

Roxanne read their minds, and shook her head passively.

The two boys thought she meant she was not going, so they anxiously tugged at her and whined, "Mommy, you gave us your promise, so you can't take back your word! If you don't want to talk to Mr. Farwell, we will keep him from you!"

Roxanne was amused by their reactions. She ruffled their hair affectionately and assured them, "Don't worry. Since I gave you my word, I will definitely honor it. Moreover, Ms. Ward has already finalized the groupings, so mommy can't possibly trouble her to make changes now, can I?"

The boys heaved a sigh of relief upon hearing her assurance.

However, Roxanne's heart sank as she thought about the one she had to partner with. "Do you know which play we are doing?" she probed.

She heard from Pippa that the children drew lots to see which play they would be involved in, so she was positive Archie and Benny knew the answer.

Upon hearing her question, Benny ran to his bag and dug into it for a while. Then he came back with a piece of crumpled paper, likely the piece they got from the draw earlier that day.

Roxanne froze on the spot after she took a look at that piece of paper.

Neatly written on the paper were the words Sleeping Beauty. For the benefit of the children, their teacher even added phonetic alphabets under the words.

"Mommy, do you know this story?" Benny looked up at Roxanne and curiously asked.

Roxanne did not have the habit of reading bedtime stories to the boys. On the rare occasions when she did, she also would not pick fairy tales about princes and princesses for the boys. As such, the fairy tale Sleeping Beauty was alien to Archie and Benny

Roxanne was at a loss for words, not knowing how to answer Benny's question about the storyline.

Her mind was on the play. She could imagine the roles of Sleeping Beauty and the prince would likely fall on her and Lucian. Knowing how the storyline was, she became anxious.

If she had known earlier that their play was Sleeping Beauty, Roxanne would never have agreed to participate. Alas, it was too late for her to back out.

After contemplating for a while, Roxanne looked at the kids and said, "Mommy's going to make a phone call, so you boys should stay quiet and don't make too much noise, okay?" The kids obediently nodded their heads.

Roxanne took out her phone and called Jeffrey Bauer, the head of the kids' kindergarten.

Pippa had told her in the afternoon that only Jeffrey could make changes to the groupings for the plays. Roxanne desperately wanted to switch to another group. If that was not possible, she would request a change in the play.

She frowned and disappointedly hung up after receiving a busy tone. After a short wait, she was about to call again when Jeffrey returned her call.

"Hi, Ms. Jarvis. Sorry I missed your call. How can I help you?" Jeffrey asked.

Roxanne apologetically replied, "I'm so sorry for calling you at this hour, Mr. Bauer. May I know if it's still possible to make changes to the groupings for the anniversary celebration performances?"

At the other end of the phone, a conscience-stricken expression appeared on Jeffrey's face when he heard Roxanne's request. He was quick to compose himself and patiently explained, "As you know, our kindergarten is a little different from the usual ones in that all the parents are busy professionals. The groupings for the performances were finalized after many rounds of consultation and discussion with all the parents. If we wish to make any changes, we'll have to go through another tedious round of coordination with the other parents. I'm afraid that's going to be challenging... Moreover, our activities for the anniversary celebration are about to commence next week. If we are to make any changes now, we may not have sufficient time for rehearsals. I can foresee that's going to affect the performance..." He gave Roxanne the impression that her request would make things difficult for everyone.

After the subtle rejection, he asked with concern, "Is there any particular reason for you wanting to switch to another group?"

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Since her request was going to make things difficult for others, Roxanne could not insist on it. She smiled in resignation and said, "In that case, don't worry about it. We'll leave it as it is."

Almost immediately, Jeffrey replied, "Thank you for your understanding, Ms. Jarvis. If there's nothing else, I'll end this call with you. Other parents are trying to reach me as well, so I'll have to get back to them." He was in a hurry to hang up, seemingly worried that Roxanne would change her mind.

After ending the call with Jeffrey, Roxanne stared blankly at the crumpled piece of paper with the words *Sleeping Beauty* on it.

The two boys noticed her reaction and gingerly called out, "Mommy."

Roxanne looked at them with downcast eyes. Seeing that their mom seemed disheartened, the boys anxiously asked, "Mommy, you don't like that play?"

She nodded, which aroused the curiosity in the boys.

"Why? Is it a terrible story? Can you tell us that story?" they asked.

Roxanne frowned slightly and bit her lips, feeling a little awkward. "... I will tell you the story another day," she finally replied.

She highly suspected she and Lucian would be given the lead roles for the play. Horrified by the idea of her being Sleeping Beauty with Lucian as her prince, she became despondent and was not in the mood for storytelling.

She prayed hard that the kindergarten would modify the story to cater to the audience of young kids.

Roxanne's reaction triggered the interest of Archie and Benny in Sleeping Beauty. Aware that Roxanne was not keen to tell them, they decided not to pursue further. They merely asked, "Mommy, you're still going to participate, right?"

Roxanne nodded with a heavy heart. She kept checking her phone to see if Pippa would provide more updates with regard to the script of the play.

After a few minutes, a notification came in. It was a message from Pippa in the group chat for parents.

Roxanne pursed her lips nervously and read the message.

Pippa had sent an attachment. It was the file that listed the participants in each group and their respective plays.

Ms. Raranne Jarvis and Mr. Lucian Farwell will be doing Sleeping Beauty.

The other plays were also fairy tales, such as The Little Match Girl and Little Red Riding Hood. It was obvious the kindergarten had made conscious efforts to choose stories with varied themes.

It was just unfortunate for Roxanne that she got a love story.

Roxanne was troubled. She stole a look at her boys and secretly bemoaned her bad luck for having gotten Sleeping Beauty as their play.

Another message from Pippa came in: Dear parents, please join us for a meeting at the kindergarten tomorrow to discuss the script for the plays.

The other parents started replying to Pippa's message to confirm their attendance.

Although she was feeling dispirited, Roxanne obligingly replied: Noted. I'll be there. Noted.

The next message that came in immediately after Roxanne's reply was Lucian's short one-word reply. Although his reply was curt, it attracted lots of attention as he almost never responded to messages in the group chat previously.

A curious parent wrote: Are you joining us in the anniversary celebration activities this year, Mr. Farwell? Which play are you in, and who is your partner?

That parent even tagged Lucian in the message.

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Sleeping Beauty, with Ms. Jarvis.

Lucian replied and tagged Roxanne in his reply. His reply caused quite a stir within the group, given that he was usually a group chat ghost. Roxanne was about to move on when she saw the tag notification. Surprised, she went back into the group chat and read Lucian's reply. There was a long period of silence after Lucian's reply, and the active exchange in that group suddenly died down. Roxanne had no idea if the other parents were too stunned by Lucian's involvement or if they were waiting for her reply.

She stared at Lucian's message for a long time, frowning slightly as she speculated on Lucian's intention. Troubled and confused, she finally decided not to pay attention to that group chat and went offline.

Archie and Benny were quietly sitting next to Roxanne, observing her. They became anxious when they detected her mood change, worried that she would decide to withdraw from the play.

"We're sleepy, Mommy. Can we go back to our room?" The boys pretended to yawn while they secretly watched for Roxanne's reaction.

Roxanne's mind stopped wandering, and her attention was successfully directed back to the boys. She rubbed their heads lovingly and said, "Sure. Let's have an early night. Mommy will send you to school tomorrow."

The boys' eyes lit up upon hearing that, and they excitedly nodded their heads.

Roxanne put on a forced smile, brought the kids to their room, and tucked them in.

After she left and the boys heard her closing the door to her room, they cautiously opened their eyes and sat up in their beds.

"Archie, do you know the story about Sleeping Beauty?" Benny stared at Archie in the dark and asked, curious.

The boys had noticed Roxanne's mood changes throughout the evening.

When she heard they were in the same group as Lucian, she was a little apprehensive but accepted without complaints. However, after realizing the play they were going to do was Sleeping Beauty, Roxanne became visibly troubled.

Moreover, she refused to tell them the storyline.

Archie thought about it briefly and climbed out of his bed. He turned on the computer and said, "We can go online to search for it!"

Benny's eyes lit up and he hurried over to Archie's side.

Archie quickly typed in the search word, and in no time, they found what they were looking for.

The two stared at the screen intently, reading about the story. At the end of the story, there was an illustration. Sleeping Beauty was lying in bed, dressed in a pretty gown, and the prince was bent over her, giving her a kiss.

The boys blinked their eyes as their little brains processed the information. They reckoned they had found the reason for Roxanne's resistance to the play.

The boys knew Roxanne and Lucian would take the roles of Sleeping Beauty and the prince. Since she disliked him, she would definitely not want to be acting out that kissing scene with him,

The boys felt bad for Roxanne. They wanted her to participate in the play with them so Estella could get to spend time with her. However, they also understood her hesitation about being kissed by Lucian in the play.

Daddy and Mommy kissing...

The boys turned to look at one another, and their eyes sparkled with anticipation.

Although they did not really like Lucian, deep in their heart, they wished to see their family being united. They began to look forward to seeing their parents being together, especially their intimate interaction.

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Pippa was already waiting by the gate when Roxanne arrived with her boys. She smiled and greeted them.

"Hi, Ms. Jarvis. It has been a long time!" Pippa said.

Roxanne politely smiled and replied, "I've been busy at work lately. Did Archie and Benny give you any trouble?"

Roxanne suspected the boys might have done something wrong in school, resulting in their strange behavior that morning.

Surprisingly, Pippa shook her head and said, "Not at all! Archie and Benny are really good boys. Sometimes, they even help me look after other kids. I have to thank you for bringing up such sensible boys!" Roxanne lowered her eyes and looked at the two boys that were standing by her side. They looked up to her with wide-eyed innocence, leaving her perplexed.

Seeing that they were not going to let her in on their secret, she gave up and looked away.

"Ms. Jarvis!"

A sweet, child-like voice rang out from behind Roxanne.

Roxanne turned around and saw Estella running toward her as fast as her tiny legs could take her. Her chubby little face was turning red from the exertion. The little girl was dressed in an adorable dress and had a head full of curly hair.

Roxanne was stunned by the sight of Estella's curly hair. She bent over and hesitantly asked, "What happened to your hair, Essie?"

She remembered Estella had naturally straight hair and wondered who styled her hair.

Estella tugged at her own hair and innocently said, "Grandma! Grandma said all princesses have curly hair!"

Sonya was aware of the kindergarten's anniversary celebration. She heard Estella was going to act in the play, so she excitedly brought the little girl to the salon to style her hair.

Lucian did not want to quarrel with his mother over such a small matter, so he let her be.

When Estella mentioned Sonya, Roxanne's heart became heavy, and she instinctively stood up and took a step away from the little girl.

Estella could sense her change in attitude. She tilted her head in confusion and looked disappointed.

It pained Roxanne to have to put a distance between herself and the little girl, but she had to do so.

Realizing she had overlooked something, Roxanne looked behind Estella, and true enough, she saw Lucian walking toward them.

Dressed in an expensive tailored suit, Lucian strode regally in her direction, his gaze fixed intently on Estella and her.

Roxanne quickly looked away when her eyes met Lucian's. She grabbed her boys' hands and turned to walk into the school compound.

Although she knew she would have to work with Lucian and Estella due to their collaboration in the play, she wanted to delay their interactions as long as possible.

"Hello, Mr. Farwell!" Roxanne heard Pippa greet Lucian respectfully as she hurried past the gate. She was too slow as Lucian had already caught up with them. Lucian gave Pippa a small nod in acknowledgment. Then his gaze swiftly swept to Roxanne, who was back facing him and walking away in a hurry.

Roxanne had a prickling feeling on her back and could sense he was looking at her.

"It has been a long time, Ms. Jarvis," Lucian greeted her as he walked to her side, Estella in tow.

Roxanne's heart skipped a beat when she heard his voice. Scenes of them parting unhappily after their last meeting juxtaposed with the kissing scene in *Sleeping Beauty* and flashed in her mind. She got flustered and did not know how to face him.

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"Ms. Jarvis." Estella spoke, gingerly tugging on Roxanne's outfit.

Roxanne dropped her gaze and saw the little girl piteously looking at her with her big round eyes. She seemed to be asking why Roxanne was ignoring her.

Roxanne was ruffled by her puppy-dog eyes, but she could only return a forced smile.

Lucian noticed her uneasiness with Estella. His brows furrowed, but he quickly hid his emotions and said, "We are counting on your support to make the play a success, Ms. Jarvis. This will be the kids' first performance, so I hope you can set aside your personal feelings for the benefit of the kids."

Roxanne's expression froze. Her heart was in turmoil, but she put on a nonchalant front. She casually nodded her head and replied, "Don't worry. I will."

As his gaze swept past her face, he could see she had pursed her lips and looked indifferent. Very obviously, she had no intention of engaging with him.

Lucian lowered his gaze and exchanged a knowing look with Estella.

The little girl got the hint, moved over, and clung to Roxanne, asking, "Are you still very busy, Ms. Jarvis?"

Roxanne could not bear to ignore the little girl anymore. She hesitated for a moment, then replied, "Yes, I'm still busy. But since we promised to take part in the anniversary celebration, I'll make time to join you in your rehearsals."

Estella's eyes instantly lit up when she heard that, joy written all over her face.

Roxanne noticed the change in Estella, and her heart melted. She could no longer behave coldly toward the little girl.

On the way to the classroom, Estella chattered with Roxanne, who entertained her tenderly.

As they stepped into the classroom, Roxanne felt all eyes were on them.

A bewildered Roxanne stopped in her tracks, turned to Archie and Benny, and asked, "Are we in the wrong classroom?" The boys shook their heads and said, "No. This is our classroom."

Roxanne nodded, then looked up and saw that the other parents were giving her a weird look. She was puzzled.

She had met those parents before, so she could not understand the hint of jealousy she detected in the air,

"It has been a while, Ms. Jarvis." Roxanne was trying to convince herself to ignore the unwelcome attention when a lady came up to her and greeted her.

She was taken aback. It was the mother of one of her boys' classmates. She had met that lady at the class outing to the botanic garden the last time, although she did not recall talking to her. Later, Roxanne found out that lady was Cassandra Clark.

Cassandra sneaked a look at the man behind Roxanne, then moved in and cozied to her.

Taken aback, Roxanne subconsciously stepped back and found herself knocking onto a muscular chest, losing her balance.

Immediately, a hand reached out and held onto her by her waist to steady her.

Suddenly, the whole classroom turned eerily silent, and Roxanne could tell all attention was on her.

After a brief daze, she quickly realized what had happened. She stumbled out of Lucian's arm, grabbed Archie and Benny by their hands, and stepped away from Lucian. At that moment, she wished the ground would open up and swallow her.

She tried all ways and means to keep her distance from Lucian, yet he publicly made such an intimate gesture for all to see.

Roxanne's heart was still pounding wildly, and she had not noticed Cassandra walking up to her.

"From the looks of it, Ms. Jarvis is really close to Mr. Farwell." Cassandra looked at Roxanne from head to toe with an enigmatic expression.