

Chapter 67 Clean This Up

Lancelot felt himself shriek when Madeline placed her hands on both his shoulders and tiptoed to plant kisses on his cheeks, and even on his forehead. What was all this sudden show of motherly love?

"We heard everything about your journey Lancelot! I am so proud of you my son, so proud of you!"

Of course, there had to be something attached to it. His mother had never been one to just shower love on him without condition. Hell! This wasn't even really love. She was just satisfied by the results he had given her, and now, she was acting with all the dopamine in her head.

Madeline locked her left arm with Lancelot's right arm and led him to the rest of the waiting party. Roxanne and Peter followed him behind, equally in awe of their reception.

"Believe me son, I wanted to make a bigger deal out of your return, but your father insisted that I do not close down the streets of London!"

By the goddess! This was the happiest Lancelot had seen his mother be in a long time. He tried to find some atom of glee in him, something to push him to celebrate with the rest of his family.

"I can imagine," he muttered, but Madeline laughed. Finally, they stood before the rest of waiting party. Lancelot took a swift glance around and noticed the presence of notable elders, Ava, Aunt Eloise, Lady Marion and

even Lady Hermione and her children, both his brothers were present, but only Arthur had a smile on his face.

Edward moved to his son and tapped his shoulders with both hands. On his face, was the smile of a father in awe and proud of all his son's accomplishments. Indeed, he was. Lancelot had been informed of the journey on short notice, still, somehow managed to perform a miracle of getting through the three tasks so easily. Their twelve years of hard work was finally paying off.

"I'm proud of you boy," Edward spoke up, his tone laddered with joy. Madeline gripped Lancelot's arm harder and smiled.

"Indeed, we are both proud of you Lancelot," she spoke, releasing him and stepping to her husband's side. It was then she was able to catch a glimpse of Roxanne's smiling face beside Peter. The both of them stood behind Lancelot, awaiting further instructions.

Madeline narrowed her eyes at her, a subconscious frown formed on her face. Lancelot had returned from his task victorious, now, the only thing standing between him and everything they had all worked so hard for, was this woman. And

Madeline was ready to do whatever it took to take her out of the equation. Her son did not struggle for twelve years of his life to have one woman step into it and ruin everything.

Reluctantly, she tore her eyes away from Roxanne and turned back. Her eyes fell on Ava's bright eyes. When they met, Madeline urged her to come forward by blinking twice and tilting her head to Lancelot's frame.

Immediately, Ava picked up the signal and stepped forward to meet Lancelot. She was dressed in a beautiful red dress, after Madeline had told her red was her son's favorite color, with both her hair and makeup done to perfection. Right now, she was an outstanding beauty.

"Your Grace!" Her high-pitched voice seemed overly excited to see him. Lancelot's blue eyes watched as she prostrated before him. After that, she stood up and placed kisses on both his cheeks.

"I am so glad to have you back, Your Grace! We have terribly missed you." As she spoke, she glanced over his shoulder and met Roxanne's brown and cold orbs. Ava smiled wryly and held on to Lancelot's arm.

Everyone seemed to gush at the sight of seeing them together. Madeline was determined to take advantage of the situation.

"Now, now, Ava, I know you're very happy to see him, but, you have to let him go for now. We all need to see his face when we make the big announcement."

Lancelot's brow squinted at his mother's evil smile. Ava chuckled and slipped out of his arm, taking her stand beside his mother.

His eyes moved from his parents to everyone else in the room, and he noticed they all had the same enthusiastic and yet, evil grins.

"What big announcement mother?"

"Impatient, isn't he?" Madeline asked, looking to the crowd behind her, everyone laughed in unison. She turned back to Lancelot's suspicious face.

"Well, beneath these doors..." She paused for a moment, an effect that was intended to build anticipation from everyone around her.

"...is a big feast to celebrate your return!" she finally screamed, throwing her hands in the air at the end of the sentence. Once again, cheers and loud applause erupted from around him. Lancelot stared blankly at them, even though he knew his mother would not notice his indifference. Even if she did, she would ignore it and have her way.

"Come on in! We must drink and be merry!"

"We certainly must!" one of the elders called out, everyone was in high spirits. Everyone except the one the celebration was meant for.

As everyone else hurried inside, laughing and cheering out loud, Lancelot stood still and turned to Peter. When his assistant stepped forward to meet him, he leaned into Peter's ears.

Peter looked up at his boss, his brow arched and his lips thinned in confusion.

"Is everything alright sir?"

"I need you to do something for me," Lancelot spoke up.

Peter nodded.

"Whatever you need."

Lancelot sighed and looked ahead, then looked swiftly over his shoulder. When he saw that Roxanne's attention was focused on a guard drawing their luggage behind them, he saw it as a good moment to speak. "When we go in, you must make sure that Roxanne is not present at the gathering today."

Peter opened his mouth to protest, but Lancelot was faster.

"You have to understand. The elders of the council are here. I managed to pacify them the last time, I do not want all of that to go up in smoke. Make sure she stays faraway from wherever many are gathered."

Peter nodded in understanding. Truly, he understood the need of keeping Roxanne away from the royal cabinet. The trouble her presence had caused the last time was grave, they could not afford another scandal at this point. So, he was ready to obey Lancelot's orders without question.

"Yes sir, I would do as you've said."

After his salute, Peter watched Lancelot walk away from him, heading towards the door of the palace. He sighed, with worry. Deep down, he

feared for Roxanne and wished more than anything, that Lancelot would finally tell her the truth, and the real reason she was here.

"Let's go join the party!" Roxanne's voice called out, barely inches behind him. Peter snapped out of his range of thoughts and turned swiftly towards her. Speak of the devil, and she gracefully appears, Peter thought. He tried to make his stance and expression as believable as possible, before clearing his throat. "We are not allowed into the party."

Disappointment replaced the enthusiasm in Roxanne's eyes. Thirty minutes ago, she only wanted to lie on her bed and force herself to sleep. But now, after the announcement of a feast, she had thought "there was no harm in feasting on food before resting, was there?" After answering herself affirmatively, she decided to join the feast, grab one or two meals before leaving for her room.

Peter's new reveal did hurt, but it only meant she would have to rush to her room and get some sleep.

"If you say so. I'll just go up to my room then," she replied, a gloomy expression on her face.

Peter sighed. He hated to lie to her, but he had to, it was for her own safety.

"Do make sure you remain in there and do not come out unless you're summoned."

Roxanne's brows furrowed at him. There was something suspicious about his demands, but Roxanne could not place a hand on it. So, she stayed quiet and nodded. After all, she needed the rest. Her bones were aching, and her eyes stung from lack of sleep.

Together, they walked into the palace. A crowd of royalties were present in the corridor, chatting and laughing. Peter left Roxanne's side and moved into the crowd, saying he had to find Lancelot and urging Roxanne to go on. She watched him until he disappeared into the crowd, before taking three steps up the stairs, but a harsh female voice stopped her.

"You there!"

Roxanne flinched, her grip on the staircase rail tightened. She knew this voice too well to be pleased to hear it. Roxanne turned on her heels slowly, until she came face-to-face with Madeline's spiteful glare.

"Where are you going?"

"Your majesty, I..."

"Never mind," she brushed her off, rudely.

"There is so much work to be done in the kitchen, do join the kitchen maids there," she spat out, eyeing Roxanne from head to toe.

Roxanne stood there, stupefied. Last she checked, she was Lancelot's assistant, not a kitchen maid. And she was very sure the queen knew this. However, she could not protest, all she could do was obey her. This was Madeline's kingdom after all.

So, she bowed and forced a polite smile.

"Of course, my queen."

When she rose her head up, she saw Madeline stick her nose in the air and turn her back towards her. Roxanne tried to tell herself there was nothing in joining the maids in the kitchen. Besides, it was just kitchen work, she would be done in no time.

Or so she thought.

She climbed up the stairs and headed towards the kitchen.

As she walked to the kitchen, she noticed how all the servants who walked past her would stare at her in disdain, scoff and turn their noses away from her. They all looked upon her as though she were a walking abomination. And she could not help but wonder why.

Finally, she arrived at the door of the kitchen. She was greeted by the overwhelming traffic activities, and the aroma of different meals, ranging

from fried turkey to baked chicken and roasted pork filled her nose. She closed her eyes and allowed herself savor the scent.

Immediately she opened it, two maids, dressed in their usual apron brushed past her rudely with trays in their hands.

"Be gone."

"Get out of the way."

They both roared before walking past her. Roxanne stood there, mouth ajar. She was not shocked by their rudeness, but it still managed to keep her glued to the floor. She said nothing, she was unable to say anything at all. All she could do was look at them walk away from her, while hoping they would turn back and mutter apologies.

"Are you just going to stand there? Or would you put on an apron and start work?"

For the second time today, Roxanne felt her stomach knot in slight fear. She could not recognize this voice, but she could tell the owner was far from happy to see her.

Slowly, unsure of what to do, she turned her head to the direction of the speaker. Her eyes landed on a tall woman. The lady stood, approximately six feet tall, with thick arms and legs. The woman's round eyes stared down at her with a scowl spread across her lips. Her face was far from friendly, and it caused Roxanne to shudder. If she thought the Queen's gaze was hostile, this woman's gaze was worse.

On her white apron, was a golden name tag. Roxanne read through it.

"Marilyn."

"That's my name. And I'm in charge of this kitchen, now..." She rose her hand and dumped the white apron she was holding on Roxanne's head.

"Put this on and follow me."

Roxanne bit her upper lip in annoyance. Why was everyone being extremely rude to her? She had been yearning to return here, but now that she was here, she just wanted to leave.

She pulled the apron down from her head and spread it wide, so she could put it on.

"Fast!" Marilyn bellowed above her, causing Roxanne to jolt.

Roxanne hurriedly put it on. The faster she did as instructed, the faster she was out of here. This woman was definitely out for her head.

Roxanne tied the rope behind her back and the woman's scrutinizing gaze swept over her once more. Saying nothing, she turned her back to Roxanne and began to walk.

Roxanne followed her behind. As she walked past alleys of gas cookers, kitchen cabinets and tall fridges, she could still sense all eyes on her, and hear the maids whisper in hushed tones, while she could still sense the spite in them. She stayed silent and watched closely, while she walked behind the head maid.

When the lady stopped, Roxanne stopped as well, still confused as to what she was to do.

Suddenly, the head maid shifted and took two steps backwards, now standing behind Roxanne.

In front of her, was a sink occupied with three tall heaps of dirty plates, pots, bowls, and other kitchen utensils. Inside the sink was filled with more dirty plates and dirty water contaminated with bits of rice, bones, and grease.

Roxanne's eyes widened, her face turned pale as she stared, stupefied at the mess.

Was she really expected to...?

"Clean this up," Marilyn snapped, towering above her.

Roxanne risked a glance at the woman, before returning her eyes to the plates.

Did she say she would be out of here soon? Well, that was a lie. From the looks of it, she would be here for a very long time.