Chapter 241 He Was The Reason

"It looks good, doesn't it?" Janessa glanced at the dishes and took the initiative to praise them. She picked up her chopsticks, plucked a piece of scrambled eggs, and put it in her mouth. She chewed slowly and with some apprehension.

"Well?" Alana prodded. "How is it, Janessa? Does it taste good?" She had run out of the kitchen just in time to see her friend try the food.

Janessa took one look at Alana's bright expression and balked. She couldn't bring herself to say that it tasted bad, but if she said that it was good...

Taking a deep breath, she reached out and patted Alana's shoulder. "Well, it's not too bad, but there is still room for improvement."

And she wasn't lying. Although the eggs were a tad too salty, at least they had been cooked well enough to be edible. For someone who had never worked in the kitchen before, it was a decent first try.

"Really? All right! See? I told you I have the skills to be a chef! You just don't believe me. I bet you're convinced now that Janessa gave me her approval." Alana was practically beaming with pride, and she sniffed haughtily at Gordon and Rylan.

The men exchanged a look, then glanced at Janessa in unison. Without a word between them, they each picked up a bite of food and tasted it for themselves.

"What's with the face? Can you both stop being so dramatic?" Alana rolled her eyes. I'm sure it's not that bad." She picked up her own chopsticks and tried a bite as well, only to spit into the trash can a few seconds later.

When the man saw Alana spewing her bite of food, they followed suit and grabbed napkins to spit into.

"It's so salty!" Alana declared, her face flushed with embarrassment. Her good humor vanished into thin air.

Janessa glared at Rylan and Gordon before going over to comfort her roommate. "You've done a good job. This is only your first time, so it's okay to make mistakes. At least they're cooked! Just... be careful with the seasonings next time. You'll definitely get better with practice."

"Do you really think so?" Alana pouted. She wasn't sure if she should believe Janessa or not.

"Of course I do. It's not like people are born with the innate talent for cooking—it's acquired and developed over time. When I first tried my hand, I didn't even do as well as you did. I couldn't control the fire properly, and the dishes ended up burned with a strange smell. With this, you're already better than me. Right?" Janessa directed that last question to the men, then promptly kicked their shins under the table.

"Yes, Janessa is absolutely right!" Rylan blurted out. "You will surely get better and better from here. We will stand witness to your inevitable success." In truth, he didn't really think Alana should be left alone in the kitchen, but he couldn't exactly say it to her face.

More importantly, it was clear that Janessa wanted them to encourage Alana, and he was willing to do anything for the woman, even lie and cheat.

"In any case, you can just learn from Janessa in the future. I would love to eat the meals prepared by my beloved sister."

"Who says I would cook for you? You never praise me of your own accord anyway." Despite her words, Alana felt a small ball of warmth blossom in her chest.

She did want to carefully and lovingly prepare a meal one day, but it would be for someone else...

Well, if she could somehow learn to be independent and know her way around the kitchen, that person would certainly see her as a better woman when he came back. Perhaps then, he would never leave again.

Rylan clapped his hands. "Well, then! Why don't we go and eat outside? I mean, I do appreciate the meal, Alana, but why don't you continue learning for now?" He really had no appetite for overly salty food.

Unless, of course, if it was made by Janessa. Rylan would gobble up anything she cooked, no matter how bad it might taste.

"All right, all right. Let's go. I apologized for mistreating your taste buds. I admit today's failure. I need the comfort of good food."

They made quick work of cleaning the table and were soon heading out.

Although Alana didn't cook well today, everyone decided to encourage her.

Since Rylan offered to pay for dinner, Alana didn't hesitate to order a five-star meal.

She became more cheerful and energetic once she finished eating, and decided to take her friends to the bar for some drinks.

Gordon loved to spoil his sister, and so did Janessa. And if they both went, that meant that Rylan had to go, too.

The group walked to the bar across the street and settled in a private box.

There was an entire wall of two-way mirror. They could see the dance floor outside, but wouldn't have to deal with annoying drunk strangers.

"Everyone, enjoy yourselves. This one's my treat," Alana announced as she plopped down on the huge couch.

Janessa turned to her in surprise. 'Isn't it good to treat us to dinner? Why is she buying us drinks?'

But they were here now, and there was really nothing else to do but drink and dance.

Rylan and Janessa indulged themselves to a few glasses of wine, while Gordon opted for some juice. Alana was a different story, however.

She drank glass after glass, as if she was possessed. Try as they might, no one could stop her.

In the end, Gordon could only sit back and narrow his eyes at his sister. He tilted his head to the side and asked Janessa, "Is she going through something? She's been acting unusual all day."

Janessa shook her head, equally bemused. "I don't know, either. Maybe something went wrong with her shop?"

"That's impossible. If there was a problem with her shop, she would tell me right away. I bet it something else."

Janessa peered at Alana for a moment, then it hit her. Briefly, she wondered if it was okay to tell Gordon about it, but he spoke again before she could make up her mind.

"Forget it. She is living with you now, anyway. You can take care of her tonight, although I'm sure it would be a challenge. She's not quite herself." He might not know what was bothering his sister, but he was fairly certain that she would get better with Janessa by her side.

"Don't worry. I'll keep her company all night."

Just then, Alana pounced on her with a microphone in hand. "Come on, sing with me! I haven't sung with you in such a long time."

"Okay, what do you want to sing?" Janessa asked as she shot Gordon a helpless look.

Alana was actually good at singing, but when she was drunk, she would automatically go out of tune. Janessa had been trying to stay clear of the microphone this entire time, but it would appear that she had no choice.

"Let's sing 'Without you'." Alana proceeded to enter the song number into the machine.

Janessa paused and took a deep breath. So her guess was right, after all. Eric was the reason that Alana had been acting weird all day.

She remembered the time when they had first met in a bar. Eric had sung this exact same song.

His mellow and soothing voice had lent more melancholy to the already sad ballad.

"Come on!"

Alana was smiling from ear to ear, but for some reason, Janessa felt like her friend might break down crying at any second.

The two women launched into the song, with Janessa carefully eyeing Alana in case anything bad happened. But nature called to her right after they finished singing, and she rushed out of the box and into the bathroom.

It was only after she emerged back into the hallways that Janessa realized she couldn't remember their room number.

She hesitated between A68 and A66. 'It must be one of these two, but which is it?'

She hadn't even thought of bringing her phone with her when she exited their private box. What was she supposed to do now?

The door facing the hallway was made of wood with no glass windows, too, so as to ensure the clients' privacy. She couldn't actually peek into the rooms to check. Janessa had no choice but to guess and hope for the best.

She closed her eyes and chose a room number. The moment she pushed the door open, the people inside ceased their laughter and conversations.

Janessa could vaguely make out a man pressing a woman against the sofa, while a handful of other women watched with drinks in hand.

"Sorry, I got the wrong room," she muttered sheepishly. As she turned around to make her escape, a large hand grabbed her by the arm and pulled her back. Hard. And then came a deep, cold voice.

"All of you get out!"