

## Wild Night 881

Chapter 881 Late

The insistent chirping of the alarm clock was the rude awakening Lucy never needed. It shattered the peaceful slumber Lucy and Tom had been enjoying.

With a groan, Lucy slammed her hand down on the snooze button, her eyes still squeezed shut, momentarily silencing the shrill cry.

Sunlight, a traitor in the situation, streamed through the blinds, painting bold stripes across Lucy's face. "Ugh, what time is it?" she mumbled, her voice thick with sleep.

Tom, who had also woken up, reached for his phone, "Uh oh," he said, a hint of amusement creeping into his voice since he knew how upset would be when he told her the time.

"It's almost eight o'clock," he said after glancing at the time displayed on the screen.

Lucy's eyes snapped open, and she shot uprihht, horror dawning on her face. "Eight? P.m. or A.m.? Please say it is p.m.," she said, and Tom chuckled.

"You'd rather it is Monday night and you missed work? Besides, can't you see the sunlight?"

"We're going to be late!" she shrieked, throwing the covers off and scrambling out of bed.

She dashed towards the closet, flinging open the doors and rummaging through her clothes.

"Where's that damn grey skirt?" she muttered, her movements frantic.

Tom watched the whirlwind of activity with a smile playing on his lips. "Not even a good morning kiss for your sweetheart?" He asked, and she shot him a look that could curdle milk.

"Maybe if we hadn't overslept, you'd have gotten more than a good morning kiss, but I don't have the time for romance right now. Not when I'm going to be late for work," she said as she returned her attention the closet.

She ditched the missing gray skirt and instead pulled out a beige colored tailored pantsuit and a colorful scarf.

"Relax," he said calmly. "I'm also going to be late but you don't see me being so upset," he pointed out.

"Easy for you to say, Mr. CEO. You are the boss. You don't have to worry about something like that," Lucy said as she took off her clothes and headed for the bathroom naked.

"Actually," Tom called after her, stretching languidly, "you don't either." He winked at her, a mischievous glint in his eyes. "Not when the boss happens to be your very understanding boyfriend."

Lucy couldn't help but crack a smile at that. While she thrived on being independent and successful on her own merit, a part of her enjoyed the perks that came with being associated with Tom. Still, responsibility tugged at her conscience.

"Indeed. Get off the bed, my very understanding boyfriend. I don't have to be later than I already am because of you," Lucy called back to him from inside the bathroom as she pressed some toothpaste on her brush.

Tom chuckled as he rose, "I don't get why you're so worked up. Nobody's going to fire you or even question your arrival time."

Lucy walked over to the bathroom door to look at him with her toothbrush in one hand, and shot him an exasperated look. "That's not the point. I still need to be responsible, even if you are the CEO. You know me. I don't like the idea of being late. It's unprofessional," she said, her voice regaining a semblance of normalcy.

Tom crossed the room his smile widening. He enjoyed seeing this responsible side of her, the one that thrived on routine and accomplishment.

He kissed her forehead, "Alright, alright," he conceded. "Let's get ready for work," he said as he placed both hands on her bare ass and kneaded it.

"There should always be a little time for romance," he said, making her laugh.

"I will use the shower alone. When I'm done you can go in. I can't trust you to behave yourself and I don't have the time," Lucy said before disappearing into the bathroom, quickly brushing her teeth and washing up, Tom picked up his phone and wasn't surprised to see that he had several messages from Barry. He was sure they were reports of Henry's and Mia's day, and details of the dinner with Tyler.

There was also a text from Bryan letting him know Jeff would be at his office by 10 a.m. to discuss the details of his movement, and that Jeff's cousin who would be standing in for him had arrived.

Just as Lucy emerged from the bathroom, a towel wrapped around her hair, her phone buzzed on the nightstand, "Go shower," she told Tom as she picked up her phone.

"It's Tyler," she announced, her voice laced with curiosity. "He sent a message."

Intrigued, Tom joined her by the nightstand. "What's he saying?"

Lucy opened the message, and saw a small blue icon that indicated it was a voice recording.

"I think it's the recording of dinner with Henry Rosewood," Lucy said as she pressed play.

Diana's voice filled the room as she welcomed Tyler into the house.

"I'm guessing this is the lady you talked about," Lucy said, momentarily forgetting that she was in haste to get to the office.

Next, Henry's voice came up, and they listened intently as the conversation unfolded, Henry's words filled with self-assurance and thinly veiled arrogance.

Tom chuckled at Mia's subtle attempt to send a message through Tyler. Unfortunately even though they had more than one means to know what was happening in the house, there was hardly a way to send a message to her yet until Jeff was there.

"He plans to hurt her again and have Tyler treat her?" Lucy asked, her eyes wide with fear.

Tom covered her hand with his, "Don't let it bother you. We will try not to let it get to that," Tom promised.

Just as the recording ended, Lucy's phone rang. Tyler's name flashed on the screen.

"At this rate, we are not only going to be late to work. We might miss it entirely," Lucy murmured, knowing that Tyler most likely wanted to talk to Tom.

"Don't worry about me. Go ahead and receive the call. You can dress up while I talk to him. I will try to be fast," Tom assured her and Lucy received the call, putting it on speaker.

"Hey, Ty! You're on speaker with both of us. Are you calling to hear my voice? Or do you want talk to my boyfriend?" Lucy asked and Tom grinned.

"I will like to talk to Tom if he's there with you," Tyler, who had just arrived home from the Rosewood mansion said.

"It's high time you start calling him directly instead of bothering me," Lucy hissed at him, making him chuckle.

"You got my message, right? Send it to Sony," Tyler said before Lucy could hand the phone to Tom.

"Sure. Thanks for doing it," Lucy said before handing the phone to Tom and walking away to go dress up.

"We just listened to the recording. Tom said, his tone amused. "Quite the performance."

Tyler chuckled. "Yeah, he's something else. Tried to play the benevolent host, but it was clear he was fishing for information. You heard, right? I'm going to be his doctor. I figured I accept the job and maybe you can have the opportunity to talk to her if or when she visits my office," Tyler explained.

"I'm hoping she won't have any reason to visit your office, Tyler. But I'm glad you accepted the offer. Thank you."

"It's the least I can do since he would never have known she was alive had I not alerted him to it," Tyler said with a sigh.

He was very certain now that if anyone ever asked him what he regretted most in his life, exposing Mia would be his response. He should have just minded his business and kept his mouth shut.

"Don't beat yourself over it. I have to go now. I'm running late for work. If anything comes up, please let me know. And thank you once again for doing this."

"It's no problem at all," Tyler replied.

"I will text you my number now, so you can reach me directly," Tom said before hanging up.

Immediately he hung up, he turned to look at Lucy, and chuckled when he saw her pointing to the bathroom for him to go freshen up.

"Fine. I heard you," he said as he headed for the bathroom.

By the time Tom stepped out of the bathroom, Lucy was fully dressed and had laid out his clothes on the bed.

"I'm very tempted to take a cab and leave you behind to come when you please," Lucy said, as her eyes darted to the clock which just struck nine.

"If it will make you happy, do it," Tom said easily as he dried his hair.

"Unfortunately, it won't," she muttered and Tom chuckled again, the sound warm and pleasant.

"Then relax. I will escort you to your office if you want me to. And if you feel so bad, maybe you can give Amy a call to let her know you're running late," Tom said patiently.

"Do you remember the last time we fought over being late to the office?" Tom asked, and Lucy nodded, a smile tugging on her lips.

"It seems like such a long time ago" she said, remembering how upset she had been, and also how Jamal had gotten upset when Tom yelled.

"Yes. Now tell me, did the office building fall apart because you were not there early enough?" Tom asked and she scowled but didn't respond.

"We had a misunderstanding over it, yet your absence or rather late presence didn't affect anything at the office. I'm not justifying lateness. I'm just saying, we are late already. Arguing or fighting with me isn't going to change that. Instead, if you're really worried, just let Amy know you'll be a bit late. Text or give her a call so she can make the necessary adjustment to your schedule, and then relax," Tom said before returning his attention to getting ready.

Lucy sighed as she texted Amy, and when she was done, she forwarded Tyler's message to Sonia, making a mental note to call and check on her when she gets to the office.

"Have you heard from Candace about Aaron's arrival time?" Tom asked, and Lucy shook her head.

"I sort of forgot about it. I will chat her up now," Lucy said and when she opened their chat, she saw that Candace had left her a message in the middle of the night already.

"He should be here by 1 p.m." Lucy said and Tom nodded.

"Let's meet in my office by noon and leave for the airport then," he said and she nodded in agreement.

Once Tom finished getting ready, they walked out the door, hand in hand.

## Chapter 882 Doubts

Jade stirred from sleep, reaching out instinctively for the warmth that usually resided beside her. Her hand met only the cool sheets, and she blinked awake, glancing around the room.

The suite was quiet, the curtains drawn to a sliver allowing the early morning light to filter in.

"Harry?" she called softly, sitting up and rubbing her eyes. The room remained silent.

Without getting out of the bed, she reached for the suite remote. She flipped the bathroom wall to transparent, and just as she thought, it was empty.

She did the same to the walls of the bedroom, and there was no sign of Harry anywhere in the suite or around it.

A faint frown creased her brow as she glanced at the wall clock. It was 10 a.m. A knot of unease tightened in her stomach as she slipped out of bed naked, her concern growing.

She walked over to the closet and quickly put on a matching sweatpants and shirt, wanting to go check the gym if perhaps Harry had decided to go work out.

After wearing her pair of trainers, she stepped out of the suite. As she approached the gym, she walked past the lounge, a soft murmur of conversation drifting over.

She paused when it occurred to her that she had caught sight of a familiar fabric— one of Harry's, so she walked back, and the sight that greeted her wasn't what she'd expected.

Harry was seated at a small table, a steaming cup of coffee in front of him. Across from him was a woman with sun-kissed hair, her laughter carrying over to Jade.

Jade recognized her instantly – the same woman she had seen Harry talking to the previous day when she returned from kayaking but the woman had walked away before she got to where they were.

It had seemed like a fleeting, casual interaction yesterday, but here, it seemed like a full-blown conversation, animated and intimate.

A frown creased Jade's forehead. Who was this woman, and why was Harry having coffee with her alone, especially after leaving her in bed?

A pang of insecurity twisted in Jade's stomach. Memories of past relationship surfaced, whispers of betrayal echoing in her mind.

She watched them for a moment, her heart sinking as the woman leaned in closer to Harry to show him something on her phone. He smiled, saying something that made the woman laugh again. Jade turned away, the scene too painful to watch.

No matter how much she tried to reassure herself that Harry was not Todd. Harry was different and would never hurt her, the little voice in her head kept telling her that Harry was a man, and all men were the same.

The voice kept reminding her that she had also trusted Todd so foolishly and he had repaid her trust with the utmost betrayal.

A wave of emotions washed over Jade. Jealousy, a gnawing sense of inadequacy, and a confusing hurt. She wanted to walk over, plant a kiss on Harry's cheek, and ask him who the woman was. But the insecurity held her back. What if it was something innocent, something she'd blow out of proportion? What if by questioning him, she came across as suspicious and clingy?

Torn between wanting an explanation and keeping quiet, Jade retreated back to their suite, her head held high but her heart heavy with unspoken questions.

Back in their suite, Jade paced the room, her mind racing with questions. Why had Harry left her in bed to talk to this woman? Did he not want to disturb her, or was there something more? The insecurities she thought she had buried resurfaced, making her feel small and inadequate.

Deciding to put the time into good use while she waited for him to return, she freshened up. She brushed her hair with more force than necessary, trying to push the negative thoughts away, but her mind replaying the scene at the lounge.

She was upset, but she didn't want to jump to conclusions. She would wait for Harry to return and talk to him.

Every minute she waited, felt like an hour, and she couldn't help imagining things.

Just as self-doubt began to solidify into a bitter pill, the door opened, and Harry stepped in, a bouquet of vibrant lilies in his hand.

A smile lit up his face when he saw her, and he crossed the room to meet her, "Good morning, love. I thought you'd still be sleeping after last night," he said, his voice warm and his eyes crinkling at the corners as he brushed his lips against hers.

"Thought I'd bring you these," he said, holding out the flowers to her.

The sweet fragrance of the flowers filled the air. The gesture calmed a storm inside her, replacing it with a question that wouldn't stay buried.

Jade forced a smile as she accepted the flowers, her eyes searching his face for any hint of deceit. "Thanks. Where were you?"

"I woke up early and didn't want to disturb your beauty sleep, so I grabbed some coffee at the lounge," Harry said as he headed for the bathroom to wash his hands.

Jade's heart pounded in her chest as she followed him, "Did you meet anyone interesting?"

Harry shook his head, his expression casual. "Nah. Why do you ask?" He asked as he met her gaze in the mirror.

Jade bit her lip, torn between pressing the issue and letting it go. What if it was nothing? What if she created a scene out of thin air, tarnishing their idyllic vacation?

Harry paused when he saw the expression on her face, "What's wrong?"

The knot in Jade's stomach tightened, "It's nothing. Nothing important. Thanks for the flowers," Jade said as she turned to leave, but Harry caught her hand before she could walk away.

"Tell me," he said firmly, placing a finger under her chin to make sure she was looking at him.

"I saw you. You were having coffee with a lady," she confessed.

For a minute Harry didn't say a word, and he sighed as he took her hand and led her back to the bedroom.

"Yes. I did have coffee with a lady," Harry said and she looked at him.

"You lied that you didn't meet anyone interesting," she pointed out.

"What does having coffee with her have to do with her being interesting? She isn't of any interest to me," Harry said flatly.

"You both were together yesterday too," Jade said and Harry realized where she was going.

"You think I'm interested in her and I'm cheating with her?" He asked and when she shrugged, he felt sort of hurt.

"You believe I came all this way on a vacation with you, and I would cheat on you with some random lady? Me?" Harry asked, and as much as Jade wanted to believe him, she knew just how guys loved to gaslight ladies.

She had fallen once for shit like this, and she didn't want to fall for it again no matter how much she loved Harry.

"What did you both talk about? Why was she with you yesterday? Why did you leave me in bed to go have coffee with her today?" Jade asked, and Harry sighed.

"I can't tell you that," he said, and she nodded, swallowing past the painful lump of hurt that had formed in her throat.

"I see," she said and turned to walk away.

"What do you see?" Harry asked bringing her back.

"That you don't want to tell me," Jade said, too hurt to look at him.

"Don't you trust me?" Harry asked, not liking that they were having this conversation in the first place.

"I don't know. I want to. I'm trying to, but it's so hard. I don't want to be made a fool of again," Jade said, her lips trembling as tears dropped from her eyes.

Harry embraced her, "No one is going to make a fool of you, baby. I will never hurt you. I don't want to lie to you about who she is, hence I don't want to tell you why I'm meeting with her yet, but trust me, esquire, she is nothing to me," Harry whispered.

"Are you going to see her again?" Jade asked as she looked up at Harry with teary eyes.

"Yes. I have to. But if it will make you feel better, you can hang around whenever I have to talk to her. But you won't listen in on our conversation," Harry said, and Jade frowned.

"We agreed that you will leave work behind. Why are you still working here when it should be just the both of us?" Jade asked, assuming it was business.

"Because this is very important. You will understand better when I've sealed the deal," he promised, and when she didn't say anything, he asked, "Have I ever given you a reason to doubt that I love you? Or to doubt my commitment to you?"

Jade shook her head as she held his gaze, and he nodded, "So, can you please trust me?" Harry asked and she nodded slowly.

"Besides, if I so much as hurt you, Tom would have my head and I will also have to deal with my dad, Candace, Andy, Lucy, and everyone else too, you know? And guess who will bury me alive if I hurt you? Me. Shouldn't that make you more confident knowing that you have me and everyone else on your side?" Harry asked, and Jade smiled reluctantly.

"If you saw us together having coffee, why didn't you come over?" Harry asked and she shrugged.

"I just couldn't," she said quietly.

"Were you really not going to ask me about it had I not asked? Didn't we agree to communicate clearly?" Harry asked and Jade looked down.

"I'm sorry. It's just hard to think logically when such feelings come," she explained.

"You have nothing to fear, esquire. I got you. For life. And maybe if you're still having such a hard time trusting me, we should wait for a year or two before thinking about getting married," Harry said and Jade shook her head.

"No. I don't want to wait," Jade said immediately.

"Why not?"

"I think I might feel more secure after we get married," Jade said and Harry shook his head.

"I don't think so. I think if you don't work on your feelings of insecurity now, it might only get worse as time goes on, regardless of what I do or how I try reassure you," Harry said softly.

"It won't," Jade insisted and Harry sighed.

"What is it going to take for you trust me?" Harry asked and she shrugged.

"Let's get married first."

Although he wanted to argue with her and give her reasons why he knew that her feelings of insecurity would get worse in marriage if she didn't learn to trust him before they get married, he decided to let it go for the time being.

"Let's go breakfast. But first, you need to give Bryan a call as you planned," Harry reminded her, and Jade nodded.

"I'm sorry I doubted you," she whispered.

She still wasn't sure how to work on her trust issues, but she was going to try her best to stop doubting Harry so much. She needed to keep reminding herself that Harry was a one in a million guy and far different from Todd.

Chapter 883 Pregnant.

The oppressive cloud that had seemed to permanently reside over Amy's head for the past few weeks had mysteriously vanished. Gone were the perpetually furrowed brows and downturned lips, replaced by a lightness in her step and a barely concealed smile that played on her lips.

Her colleagues couldn't help but notice the change. As Amy walked past one of the intern's desk on her way to Lucy's office, the intern couldn't resist a playful jab.

"Did you win the lottery over the weekend, Amy? You look positively radiant."

Amy stopped, a genuine, full-bodied laugh escaping her lips. "I don't play the lottery," she said, her grin widening. "But we can say I won something," Amy said before continuing to Lucy's office.

As she cleaned and organized Lucy's desk, she let out a deep sigh as her mind drifted back to the phone call with Lucas the previous evening, the memory sending a pleasant warmth through her.

After their phone call, Lucas had texted her a couple of hours after she got home to find out if she was home. Lucas was such a gentleman, she thought with a soft smile as she returned to her desk.

She had deliberately decided not to text Lucas when she woke up that morning. As much as he was putting up with her and being friendly with her, she didn't want to overdo it.

The notification chime of her phone startled her out of her daydream. She eagerly snatched it up, hoping for a message from Lucas, but a pang of disappointment hit her when she saw it was just Lucy, informing her she would be late and needed Amy to reschedule some appointments.

Well, it was pretty obvious that she was running late since she was usually almost always the first person to arrive at the office in their team, but almost everyone was at the office now and she wasn't.



As Amy focused on organizing the files in front of her for Lucy, her phone buzzed again, this time with a text from Lucas. Her heart skipped a beat as she saw it was from him. It was a simple message:

[Good morning, your time. Heading to bed now. Have a nice day.]

A small smile tugged at her lips. It wasn't much, but it was enough to make her stomach flutter. She liked that he thought of her before going to bed and cared enough to send a message.

[Sweet dreams, Dr Luca.] she texted back and taking a deep breath, she decided to focus on work.

Away from there, the corner of Lucas's mouth quirked up as he read Amy's message. A soft warmth spread through him. Although he had sort of expected that she would send him a text when she woke up, he had also been relieved that she didn't.

A part of him had braced for her to bombard him with texts now that she had his number and he had given her the go-ahead to text him, but he liked that she wasn't putting any pressure on him.

He appreciated the casualness, the unspoken understanding that their communication wouldn't be a constant barrage. He liked that while she was reaching out to him in friendship, she was also leaving room for him to return the energy as he pleased.

He looked at the door when Tyler knocked on it, "I didn't realize you were back," Lucas said as Tyler walked in.

"I guess you were in the shower when I knocked," Tyler said and Lucas nodded.

"So? How did dinner go? Did you see her?" Lucas asked, and Tyler nodded.

"Yeah. I did," Tyler said and went on to tell Lucas all about dinner with Henry.

Tyler sighed, "I wonder how they are going to be able to help her."

"Don't worry about it. Leave it to Tom. I'm sure he will find a way," Lucas said confidently.

"What have you been up to all day?" Tyler asked and Lucas shrugged, instinctively keeping his phone screen pointed down.

"Nothing much. Just catching up on some reading," he said vaguely, gesturing towards a book lying open on the bed.

Tyler's gaze flickered to the book, then back to Lucas's face. "Funny," he remarked, a hint of amusement in his voice. "Why do you look and sound much livelier?" Tyler asked and Lucas frowned.

"What do you mean?"

"You sound sort of excited. Did you chat with Amy today?" Tyler asked and Lucas felt a heat rise in his cheeks but covered it with a scowl.

"What has that have to do with anything?" He countered defensively.

Tyler's grinned. "Nothing, nothing," he placatingly raised his hands. "Just asking. Guess you must have then. I'm off to bed," He winked before Lucas could protest further, then turned and exited the room, before Lucas could deny it or argue further leaving Lucas alone with his churning stomach.

Lucas eyed the door with displeasure and scowled as he stalked over to the mirror, scrutinizing his reflection. Did he look different? He poked and prodded at his face, searching for some outward sign of his internal turmoil. Finding nothing, he muttered a curse under his breath. "He loves to jump to conclusions," he grumbled to himself before turning off the lights and flopping onto the bed.

Away from there, once Tom arrived at his office, he asked Harry's secretary to reorganize his appointments for the day since he had a meeting with Jeff by 10 and needed to leave the office by noon to pick Aaron.

Seated behind his desk, he took out his phone and played the recordings which Barry sent to him. He was grateful that Barry filtered the recordings and only sent him those he considered to be important.

One of the recordings he was listening to, was a conversation between Diana and Henry after the dinner with Tyler.

"So? Do you think he knows the truth?" Diana was asking Henry.

"It doesn't seem like it. And if he knows and he is pretending not to know, then he must be a smart young man," Henry said and Diana sighed.

"Well, I'm sure if he knew he wouldn't have reached out to Dr Evans, unless of course he wanted to get favor from you," Diana said reasonably.

"You're right. So? What do you think about her so far?" Henry asked, referring to Mia.

"Are you asking me that to see if I am jealous? You know very well that I don't like that I have to share you," Diana said in a sucky tone.

"You're not sharing me. We both know she is only my wife in name. Haven't I proven that to you already? I made you the lady of my home. You're the Queen of my kingdom," Henry promised, his voice surprisingly warm.

"Well, I have news for you," Diana said, her voice sounding like she was anxious.

"What news?"

Diana cleared her throat, "I wasn't going to tell you. I mean with the new development. I didn't want to put you in a tough position..." she let the rest of her words trail off.

"What is this about?" Henry asked, sounding very curious.

"I think I'm pregnant. But you don't have to worry. I already booked an appointment with the doctor. I plan to terminate it. I know a man like you would never want to have a child out of wedlock..."

"Did you just say you are pregnant?" Henry cut in, sounding very excited.

"Yes?" Diana said, and Tom who was listening to the conversation chuckled.

This was even more interesting to him than a soap opera.

"I'm sorry. I know I should have been more careful. But considering that we were planning to get married before she showed up, I didn't really make a big deal..."

"Say no more, my sweetest Diana. You're not going to terminate this baby. My baby," Henry said, his voice firm and soft at the same time.

"But what about your wife?"

"What about her? She has no say in this matter. Don't worry. Trust me and wait, okay?" Henry said and Diana sighed.

"I wish I could do that, but I don't want to take any risks. I love you, but I need you to give me something I can hold on to," Diana said, and Tom chuckled once again, wondering why Henry was so gullible.

"What do you want? Tell me," Henry urged her.

"What does this baby worth to you? Give me something you value. Anything," Diana said and Tom could hear the wheels in Henry's brain turning.

"Everything. You know I love and adore you, Diana. I will give you everything and anything you so desire. All you have to do is say the word," Henry said, and Tom tsked.

"I will think about what I want carefully and get back to you," Diana said and the Tom shook his head as he stopped the recording.

He dialed Barry's line. "Send her a text and let her know we are on to her. I don't want her messing with my plans," he told Barry before hanging up.

#### Chapter 884 I'm Worried

Just as Tom hung up the call with Barry, he received another phone call from an unsaved contact, but before he could receive the call, Jeff knocked on the door.

Tom asked him to enter before going on to receive the call. "Thomas Hank," Tom said in a clipped voice as he gestured to Jeff to sit down.

"Mr. Hank, this is Robert Henderson, I trust you know who I am." The voice on the other end was clipped and professional, with a hint of underlying curiosity.

Tom's brow furrowed slightly. Robert Henderson. The name sent a jolt through him. It was the owner of EliteHouse Inc, the domestic staff company that provided services to Henry Rosewood.

Seeing as Mr Henderson had reached him directly and not through his aide, he could see that his mother hadn't been bluffing when she said she knew the family personally and could get them to help.

Internally, he braced himself, unsure of what this call might entail. "Mr. Henderson," he acknowledged politely. "It's good to hear from you," Tom said, while Jeff, oblivious to the power play unfolding, tapped his foot impatiently, his mind a whirlwind of worry and longing for Mia.

"I received a call from Evelyn. I didn't realize who you were," Henderson began, his voice measured. "Your grandfather and my family go a long way. For that reason, I'm willing to hear you out. How can I help you?"

Tom leaned back in his chair, "Well, Mr. Henderson, I won't waste your time or mine. Since acquiring your company is apparently out of the question, perhaps we can discuss a different kind of arrangement."

A beat of surprised silence followed his very direct statement. Tom could practically picture Henderson's confusion on the other end of the line. "An arrangement?" Henderson finally repeated, a hint of suspicion creeping into his tone.

"Indeed," Tom confirmed. "Specifically, the addition of a new chef to the staff at Rosewood."

The tension in the room thickened as Jeff looked at Tom, realizing who Tom was speaking with.

Tom on the other hand watched the dust motes dance in a shaft of sunlight filtering through the window, his gaze unwavering.

"A new chef?" Henderson's voice held a note of skepticism.

"Yes. How much did my mother tell you?" Tom asked, wanting to know just how much he knew.

"Not much. She expressed... some concerns regarding a situation at the Rosewood household and asked that I render assistance to you in anyway I can," Henderson continued cautiously.

"Well, in order to be able to handle things in the Rosewood household, I need my own person there to keep an eye on things," he said, his voice a low rumble.

"What is this person going to be doing there? Is this individual a qualified professional?" It was clear he was treading carefully, caught between his loyalty to Lawrence and whatever protocol his company adhered to.

Tom glanced at Jeff. Seeing how Mia had agreed that Jeff come in as a chef, he was certain that Mia had watched Jeff prepare meals and approved of his meals.

"Absolutely," he assured Henderson, his voice dripping with false sincerity. "Highly skilled, impeccable references. Just the kind of addition Rosewood needs. And he will only be keeping an eye on things. He won't cause any troubles for you."

There was another pause, longer this time. Tom knew Henderson was weighing his options, caught between the lucrative contract he had with the Rosewoods and doing Lawrence's grandson a favor.

"Mr Hank," Henderson finally said, his voice laced with wariness, "I understand your desire to... improve the situation at the Rosewood Household. However, I cannot simply insert someone into an established household staff. My staff has contracts, and I have a reputation to uphold."

Tom knew he had to tread carefully. He couldn't push Henderson too far, but he also couldn't afford delays. "Mr. Henderson," he said, his voice softening slightly, "rest assured, my intention is not to cause any disruption. The current chef, well, let's just say they haven't been meeting expectations. Perhaps a... friendly departure could be arranged?"

He left the suggestion hanging in the air, a silent offer for Henderson's cooperation. Jeff, noticing the shift in Tom's tone, glanced at Tom, a flicker of hope sparking in his eyes.

"A friendly departure," Henderson repeated slowly, clearly contemplating the situation. "And what about this new chef? What exactly are their... duties?"

Tom couldn't help but smirk. This was it. "Aside from cooking, the new chef will be primarily concerned with the well-being of Mrs Rosewood," he began, his voice dropping to a low murmur.

Henderson scoffed. "Are you sure this 'chef' of yours wouldn't be more interested in... extracurricular activities?"

"Let me assure you, he is a man of integrity. His sole purpose will be to ensure the safety of Mrs Rosewood and... let's say, keeping her out of trouble.". Discreetly, of course."

Another long pause. Tom could almost hear Henderson weighing the risks and rewards. Finally, with a resigned sigh, Henderson spoke.

"Mr. Hank," he said, his voice tight, "I have a contract with both my staff and the family at Rosewood. Replacing someone wouldn't be easy, especially without a good reason. But if you can find a way to make the current chef vacate the position then I can see about accommodating your request. However, understand that my hands are tied until then..."

"Consider it done," Tom interrupted smoothly, his voice firm. "I will have the current chef discharged within the next three days. No muss, no fuss. The new chef will be at your office in three days.

A tense silence followed. Finally, a grudging acceptance filled the receiver.

"Fine," Henderson grumbled. "But if it turns out you're deceiving me and playing games, you'll be answering to me."

"You can rest assured, Mr. Henderson, my intentions are pure," Tom said smoothly, the tension draining from his shoulders.

He hung up the phone, a triumphant smile playing on his lips. Turning to Jeff, he met the man's hopeful gaze. "Everything is going according to plan. I hope you've packed your bags. You have to be there to take over from the chef in three days."

Jeff's face lit up, a spark of determination replacing his earlier worry. He could finally be near Mia again. He wouldn't let anything stop him from protecting her.

"But, how do you plan to get rid of the incumbent chef? Did you hear from Mia? Has she found a way to get it done?" Jeff asked as an afterthought.

Tom looked at Jeff for a moment and knowing that he was most likely worried about Mia, he decided to tell him about Tyler's dinner and let him hear the recording, but he wasn't going to tell him about Barry.

"Don't worry. I'm going to get it done one way or the other. About Mia. Tyler had dinner with them," Tom said and played the recording for Jeff to hear.

After Jeff was done listening to it, he sighed deeply. Mia sounded like a completely different person. He hoped that Henry had not touched a hair on her head else he would make sure to teach Henry a lesson before he was handed to the police.

His silent vow echoed in the room, a promise fueled by love and a burning desire for justice.

"Don't you think this lady might cause some troubles for us?" Jeff asked, thinking about what Mia had said about Diana following her everywhere and being in charge of everything.

"Don't worry about it, I have things under control..."

Jeff hit the table before Tom could finish, "No! I'm worried," he said as he rose, "I don't care if you have things under control or not, what I care about is that if you know something I don't know, you should tell me. Do not ask me not to worry. If you were in my shoes and the woman you love is going through stuff like that would you be able to stay still and not worry?" Jeff asked heatedly.

Without waiting for Tom to respond, he continued, "I need to go in there with as much knowledge as I can. Do you have any idea how worried she must be for her to have tried to send that message to us that way? Do you expect me to go in there with no information to cheer her up? We are all doing this for Mia and I don't think it is fair that you're withholding information," Jeff said, unable to hold back his annoyance.

"I see," Tom said calmly, "Now that you've admitted that you're in love with her, I think I should ask this now. I hope your feelings won't get in the way of our plans? You're not going to blow your cover and put both Mia and everyone else at risk, right?" Tom asked and Jeff took a deep breath.

"I won't."

"You had better now. If you're going to act this emotionally when you get there, it's better we send someone else in there. It will be safer for everyone that way," Tom said and Jeff held his gaze.

"I told Mia I'm going to be there with her. I intend to keep it that way. I won't blow my cover," Jeff said and Tom let out a sigh.

"Alright. I'm not sure what you want to know, but you already know that we have acquired some of the companies working for Henry. Harry did that before he left, so that means we can have our people go in and out in the guise of going to fix things. I have my people keeping an eye on the house. Diana Locke seems to be there with motives of her own. So I plan to blackmail her with what I know about her so she can let go of the incumbent chef, and you can replace him. Does that answer your question?" Tom said and Jeff sighed deeply, then nodded.

"Yes. You could have just said so. You didn't have to be so mysterious about it," Jeff muttered, "Besides, don't you think I had every right to know this considering that when I am sent there, she is going to be suspicious of me? And if you didn't tell me about it now I wouldn't have known why?" Jeff said, and Tom shook his head.

"I wasn't planning on making it seem like it was about you. I was just going to make her fire the current chef thinking I have something against the chef or had use for him," Tom said with a shrug.

"So you didn't plan on letting me know about her?" Jeff asked and Tom shrugged.

"The less you know about plan B, the better. Don't let Diana know you know she is with Henry for ulterior motives. Stick to plan A and let me worry about plan B. I will control her from out here, while you do what you need to do in there. You can't tell Mia about Diana either," Tom warned.

"How then will I explain how I got to be in the house?" Jeff asked with a frown.

"Was it Diana who sent you there? I did. I talked to the domestic staff company and they withdrew their staff and sent you. It's as simple as that. Don't make the mistake of blowing your cover," Tom said, and Jeff nodded.

"Alright. I will do as you have said. I feel better knowing there is a plan B in place and you have things under control. Thanks," Jeff said as Tom looked him over.

"You need a makeover. Your disguise has to be perfect."

"Yes. I plan to get it done just before I leave. I don't want to go about in my new look in case Henry's men are still watching," Jeff said, easily.

For the next thirty minutes they both spent time going through Mia's plan once again, and after Jeff left, Tom dialed Barry's line once again.

"Her first assignment should be to dismiss the chef. Tell her she has three days to get it done, and it should be done without unnecessary drama."

The game was afoot, and Tom, with his newest pawn in place, was ready to checkmate Henry Rosewood. He would make a lesson out of Henry.

At first he had only wanted to do this for Mia, but after seeing first hand what a rude punk Henry was, and how he had not only disrespected him, but also Harry, Tom was more than delighted to show Henry that the world didn't revolve around him.

## Chapter 885 Sign It

The soft glow of the laptop screen illuminated Cassidy's face, casting long shadows across his room. A smile played on his lips as he watched a familiar video – the Jonas sibling interview as most blogs had termed it.

He'd seen the video over a hundred times since the interview, yet each time, it held the same power to pull him in. She looked radiant, her eyes sparkling with a nervous excitement as she spoke.

He found himself captivated, not just by her beauty, but by her animated expressions and the timbre of her voice. He loved the way her voice dipped and soared with excitement as she talked about her new family, it all filled him with a warmth that surprised him.

He was so happy that Aaron Jonas had accepted her as his own and made her a part of his family. He was happy that things were going well for Andy.

Her voice however, came as a shocking surprise to him. He never knew she could sing so well, and neither had he known she had dreams of becoming a singer. That revelation had made him realize just how little he knew about her.

He hadn't realized just how much he had been missing her until he saw her face in the interview the past week. Or maybe he had.

After watching her leave, he had called himself all sorts of names for letting her go just like that instead of doing his best to reach a compromise with her, especially considering how they had spent her last night there together.

Perhaps he could have asked her to stay with him and come and go as she pleased, instead of just letting her go completely.

However, the logical part of him believed that he had done the right thing by letting her go. He had no right to seek a compromise. Not after all he had done.

Suddenly, a small voice shattered the quiet, breaking into his thoughts. "Daddy!" Maribel stood at the doorway, clutching her favorite bunny bear in her hand.

Her gaze locked on the laptop screen, a gasp escaping her lips. "Andy!" she squealed, her tiny hand pointing at the image.

Cassidy's smile faltered for a brief moment. "Hey, Angel," he said, quickly minimizing the video as he sat up.

"What are you doing up so late?" He asked, reaching for her, "Did you have a bad dream?" He asked, since he had tucked her in over an hour ago.

"I want to see Andy. Please let me see Andy," she pleaded, her eyes reverting to the laptop screen as she went closer to her father.

"It's late, Angel. You need to..."

"Can I see Andy?" Maribel's lower lip trembled, a telltale sign of a brewing tantrum.

"Not tonight, sweetheart," Cassidy said gently, forcing a smile as he patted her head.

Maribel's eyes welled up. "But I miss her!" she cried, throwing herself onto the bed beside him.

"I know you do." I do too, Cassidy thought to himself.

"Can we go and see her? I want her to brush my hair and sing to me," Maribel cried, and Cassidy sighed, realizing that he should have just let her watch the video.

Now she didn't want the video, she wanted to see the real Andy. She had been throwing tantrums a lot more than usual now ever since Andy left.

"We can't see her now. It's very late, and Andy's probably fast asleep already," Cassidy said placatingly, "but because you're such a lovely Angel, I will let you see a video of her singing before you go back to sleep," Cassidy said as he adjusted her on the bed so that they could both watch the end of the interview where Andy was singing.

After watching the short clip, Cassidy turned off his laptop, and to his surprise Maribel broke into a sob.

"What now?" He asked softly as he carried her onto his lap.

"I miss Andy. She promised she would take me to the amusement park," Maribel said, tears streaming down her cheeks.

Now why would Andy do something like that when she knew she wouldn't do it? Cassidy mused, irritably.

"She can't do that now, baby," he said gently, his voice strained. "She's not here anymore. She lives with a new family now."

"I want to leave here! I don't want to stay here anymore. I want to go see all the fun places she told me about. She left because this place isn't fun. I don't like it here."

Cassidy's heart ached for his daughter. He understood her longing. Their life on the island, while idyllic in its own way, was limited. There were no amusement parks, no towering buildings, none of the glittering world Maribel glimpsed through the flickering screen of his old laptop.

He wrapped his arm around her, pulling her close. "But baby," he said gently, "we have everything we need here. The beach, the boats, the beautiful sunsets. Remember how much fun we have exploring the reef?"

Maribel sniffled, wiping her tears with the back of her hand. "But it's always the same here, Daddy." Her eyes, so like his own, held a yearning that tore at Cassidy's soul.



He was torn. A part of him, the selfish part, clung to the life they had built together. He loved the simplicity, the quiet solitude of the island. But another part, the part that ached with love for his daughter, yearned to give her a world of possibilities, a world beyond the horizon.

"I know, Mari," he whispered, his voice thick with emotion. "But we can't just leave."

"You leave all the time. Why can't you take me too?" She cried.

"Because it's not safe out there," he said softly as he looked down at his daughter, her small frame trembling with suppressed sobs.

He didn't want to lie to her or promise her something he couldn't give, so all he could do was hold her close, offering the only comfort he could – his love and his presence.

Soon a heavy silence descended upon them after Maribel had cried herself to sleep. Cassidy felt a familiar conflict gnaw at him. He wanted nothing more than to give Maribel the world, to see the joy that lit up her face in Andy's presence. But leaving the island meant putting them at a possible risk.

As he gently placed Maribel on the bed and lay down beside her to sleep, different questions echoed in his mind.

Was the life he'd built for them here enough, or could he dare chase a different future for them? One that included Andy?

Would it be okay if he reached out to Andy using Maribel as an excuse? Or should he just do his best to forget all about her and help Maribel forget her too? Was there any hope for them?

Away from there, Aaron stepped off the plane, adjusting his suit jacket and scanning the bustling terminal. He moved with a purposeful stride, his mind focused on the visit ahead.

As he approached the baggage claim, he was surprised to see Lucy and Tom, standing side by side with a smile on their faces.

"Well, well, well," Aaron said with a warm smile. "What are you two doing here?"

Lucy stepped forward, her eyes twinkling. "We're here to be your chauffeur and wait on you, of course."

Aaron chuckled, a deep, knowing laugh. "Candace sent you, didn't she?"

Lucy nodded, a slight blush coloring her cheeks. "She was only worried about you, Aaron. We all were."

Aaron sighed, shaking his head. "There's nothing to worry about. It's just a visit. But I appreciate the concern."

Tom stepped forward and took Aaron's backpack from him. "Let us take care of you, Aaron."

"Alright, alright. Lead the way. Though, I must say, this chauffeur service is a bit extravagant."

They led him to the car, the three of them exchanging warm pleasantries along the way. Aaron was genuinely happy to see them, their presence a welcome distraction from the weight on his mind.

"You look more beautiful than the last time I saw you, Lucy," Aaron said, his eyes crinkling at the corners as he smiled at her.

"And you look more handsome too," Lucy replied with a grin, a playful twinkle in her eyes.

"Don't I look more handsome too?" Tom asked Aaron.

"I don't care about how you look," Aaron said and they all laughed.

As Tom drove them to Sara's correctional facility, Aaron entertained them with tales of Jamal.

They arrived at the correctional facility an hour later, the imposing structure looming ahead. Aaron's expression grew more serious the closer they got to the building.

Seeing this, Lucy reached for his hand and squeezed it, making him turn to face her. He smiled at her, "I appreciate you both being here, but I need to do this alone," he said firmly as Tom parked the car.

Lucy opened her mouth to protest, but Aaron shook his head. "No, Lucy. I'll be fine. Just wait for me in the car. I won't be long," Aaron said as he opened his backpack and took out an envelope and a pen.

With a reluctant nod, Lucy agreed, watching as Aaron walked toward the entrance of the facility.

"Don't worry. He will be fine," Tom said as he placed a reassuring hand on her shoulder, and they settled into the car, waiting for Aaron's return.

Inside the correctional facility, Aaron was led through a series of checkpoints, his thoughts focused on the impending meeting.

As he sat down waiting for Sara to be brought to him, he took a deep breath, steeling himself for what lay ahead. He was determined to see this through, no matter how difficult it might be.

Aaron's breath hitched when a frail looking woman in a prison jumpsuit was led in. He couldn't believe that the woman standing before him was the same Sara he had seen months ago.

Gone was the vibrant, fiery Sara he remembered. In her place stood a gaunt woman, her face etched with lines deeper than time could carve alone. Sickness painted her skin a dull grey, and her eyes, once sparkling with defiance, were shadowed with shame.

As Sara met his gaze, a flicker of recognition sparked, followed by a swift retreat back down at the floor. Shame radiated from her like heat waves.

The torrent of questions Aaron had prepared – the "why"s, the "how could you"s – all dissolved on his tongue. The only words that escaped his lips were a hesitant, "Sara? How are you?"

The question, uttered in a voice rough with unshed tears, seemed to crack the dam within her. Sara's shoulders slumped, and a sob, raw and desperate, erupted from her.

For a heart-wrenching moment, Aaron watched her cry, a war raging within him. Pity warred with the anger that had festered for years, fueled by Candace's pain.

But as he watched the woman before him crumble, a bitter memory surfaced. The memory of Candace walking into his hospital room the first time they met.

He remembered how ashamed she had been when she told him she had been a stripper. He remembered all she had said about Jamal's father and all she had had to endure as an orphan. Anger solidified within Aaron, chasing away any lingering sympathy.

"Don't expect my forgiveness, Sara," he said, his voice low and devoid of warmth. "Don't expect compassion. I once fell for this act. But this... this ends now."

He reached into the envelope and pulled out the divorce papers, a legal severing of the ties that once bound them. He placed the envelope, along with a pen, on the table between them.

"Sign it," he commanded coldly.

Without a word, Sara reached for the pen and scribbled her signature across the dotted line. As she pushed the papers back across the table, a choked apology escaped her lips.

Without a word, Aaron stood up, the movement stiff with the weight of the years that had passed. There was nothing more to be said. He had done what he came for, and that was it. He turned and walked out of the waiting room, leaving her and any lingering he had for her behind him.

Once out of the visiting area, Aaron allowed himself to stop. He leaned against the rough surface of the wall, tears blurring his vision. Tears for the shattered love, for the lies and deception, and most of all, for the lost years with Candace.

Taking a deep breath, Aaron brushed off his tears. He straightened his shoulders, a newfound determination in his eyes.

Sara might have broken a part of him, but she wouldn't steal his future. He was done with this chapter of his life, and now he was moving on.

With a final glance back at the place that held a piece of his past, Aaron turned and walked away. It was time to move on and to finally find the peace that had eluded him for so long.

By the time he got to the car where Tom and Lucy were waiting, he had a genuine smile on his face.

"How did it go?" Lucy asked as he got into the car.

"It went," Aaron said with a grin and both Tom and Lucy laughed in relief.

"Where to? Harry's place?" Tom asked as he started the car.

"I'd rather go somewhere I can have a drink alone to celebrate my divorce," Aaron said and Lucy smiled with approval.

"Ready to be hooked up?" Tom joked and Aaron chuckled.

"Unlike you I don't need to be hooked up and I don't need a disguise to find a nice lady," Aaron said and Tom glared at him, while Lucy laughed with him.

As they all settled in silence, Lucy texted Candace, [Nothing to worry about. He is out now, and he looks very fine.]

Chapter 886 New Chef

Exactly six days after Mia left Ludus, Jeff's heart pounded as he approached the imposing gates of Henry Rosewood's mansion.

Three days had passed since his meeting with Tom, and today, he was finally here, in the lion's den.

He adjusted his round-rimmed glasses which was perched on the bridge of his nose, that made him look nothing like the Jeff who shared an apartment with Mia.

As he pressed the intercom button, he couldn't help but feel a surge of apprehension. This was dangerous, but it was a risk worth taking for Mia.

A crisp voice answered the interview, and Jeff introduced himself as the new chef from EliteHouse Inc. Moments later, the heavy iron gates swung open, and Jeff walked up the long, winding driveway, the grandeur of the estate reminded him of the power and control Henry wielded.

Even though his heart was pounding a frantic rhythm against his ribs, he put one foot in front of the other until he got to the main door.

Necessity, had a way of trumping fear. He needed to see Mia. He needed to be with her and to make sure she remained okay until Henry was taken care of.

He was glad that Tom's plan had worked out, and now he was here finally just as he had promised Mia. He couldn't wait to set his eyes on her again.

He knew that he would probably never get a chance to talk to her, but for now seeing her and preparing her meals was enough for him, Jeff thought as he rang the doorbell.

Inside the house, Diana paced around the bedroom she shared with Henry, clasping and unclasping her hands as different thoughts ran through her mind, putting her in a state of anxiety.

It had been three excruciatingly long days since she had been strong-armed into the blackmail scheme by an unknown person.

Who was blackmailing her? How did he know something that even Henry didn't know? How much did he know? Was it even a male or female? What did the person want? Was she at risk of being exposed? Should she just wrap up things quickly and escape before she was exposed and things become messy?

Just when she had thought her plan was going smoothly, they had thrown a wrench in her plans and now she had no idea what to do.

Every moment felt like a tightrope walk, a constant state of hypervigilance. Today, however, brought a new wrinkle the supposed "new chef," was due to arrive.

Perhaps she could try to see if he had some business with the blackmailer? She mused and then shook her head.

It didn't make sense that the blackmailer would have any say regarding who the agency would send to the house. Mr Henderson was a very principled businessman hence all the elite families trusted him when it came to the domestic staff assigned to them.

The doorbell's chime echoed through the mansion interrupting her thoughts. Diana, her heart pounding really fast, smoothed down her blouse and hurried towards the door.

Diana opened the door, her eyes narrowed as she appraised him, suspicion etched on her face. "You're from EliteHouse Inc.?" she asked, her tone clipped.

"Yes, ma'am," Jeff replied, keeping his voice steady and polite. "I'm the new chef."

"And your name?" She asked, stern faced.

"Josh Davies," Jeff said with a polite smile.

With both arms crossed, and a frown marring her face, she studied him for a moment longer before stepping aside to let him in. "Come in."

Ignoring the disquiet churning in his stomach, Jeff stepped inside the cool, echoing foyer, his eyes sweeping over the surroundings. The unfamiliar scent of wealth and privilege hung heavy in the air. He could feel Diana's gaze boring into his back as he walked, and he wondered if she suspected anything.

Diana led him through the labyrinthine corridors, his pulse quickening with each turn.

"Wait here," she instructed, "I'll get Mrs Rosewood," Diana said before walking away, leaving Jeff alone in the living room.

Jeff forced himself to relax, trying hard not to let his gaze dart around the space in search of hidden cameras.

Without knocking, Diana barged into Mia's room, and she froze, her eyes widening in shock at the sight before her.

Mia, who was in the process of changing her clothes when the door swung open had her back to the door, revealing the hideous scars marring her back.

Knowing that the cameras in the room were likely recording everything, Diana resisted the urge to ask Mia any questions about her scars and quickly composed herself.

"Vanessa," Diana said, her voice surprisingly calm. "Come downstairs. The new chef is here."

Mia turned to look at Diana as she adjusted her dress. In the days since she returned with Henry, she had become used to both Diana and Henry barging into the room, and she really didn't care.

She had no reason to bother about them walking in however and whenever they wanted, when she knew that there were cameras in her bedroom and she was always being watched.

"A new chef?" she asked, confusion in her voice. "I didn't know the previous chef was leaving."

Diana shrugged, avoiding Mia's gaze. "Something came up, and the agency sent a replacement. Come on," she said, not wanting to answer any questions.

That morning after she received the message from the blackmailer, she had thought about the best way to get rid of the chef and had finally told Henry that she didn't feel like eating the meals prepared by the present chef anymore. That she wanted him to be changed so she could eat something different for her and their baby.

Henry had surprisingly agreed without question or doubt and had asked her to inform the agency that they needed another chef.

Mia followed Diana downstairs, her mind racing. Was it what she was thinking? Was it possible that Tom and Harry had found a way of getting Jeff in even when she had been unable to do anything to help the situation?

Jeff's breath hitched in his throat as he watched as Mia enter the room, her posture stiff, her eyes distant.

As they reached the living room, Mia gave Jeff a once over. At first glance she didn't recognize him. Her heart plummeted with disappointment, but when she perceived his familiar scent, she looked again, more closely, and her heart nearly stopped when she realized he was the one.

His disguise was impeccable. A blonde wig and round-rimmed glasses transformed him into a completely different person. He had also completely shaved off his beards which had been a neat trim for Bryan's wedding.

Jeff's heart skipped a beat as his eyes met Mia's, and he almost smiled when he saw the way her eyes lit up after the flicker of recognition.

He quickly masked it, maintaining his professional demeanor as he looked down politely while Mia observed him.

Diana spoke first, her voice sharp. "Vanessa, this is Mr. Davies, the new chef."

"Hello, Mrs. Rosewood. It's a pleasure to meet you," Jeff said, his familiar voice flooding Mia with warmth.

Mia nodded, her mind whirling with questions. "Well, welcome aboard, Mr. Davies."

"Thank you, ma'am," Jeff replied smoothly, bowing his head slightly.

"I do hope you won't cause any problems. The last chef was quite efficient and I hope you will be so too. Focus on your duties and the reason you are here and refrain from doing anything that might be misconstrued wrongly," Mia said, her voice devoid of emotion.

"I will do my best ma'am. I have a lot at stake so I can't afford to make any mistakes and lose my job," Jeff said and Mia nodded with approval.

Diana watched the exchange closely, and resisted the urge to roll her eyes. She could see that Mia was trying so hard to act like the tough lady of the house.

Was she doing that because she didn't want the new chef to know that she didn't have any authority in the house? Diana mused as she cleared her throat to get both their attentions.

"It will interest you to know that while Mrs Rosewood might be the lady of the house, I am the one you will answer to. Do not give me any reasons to kick you out," Diana warned, taking charge again, and Jeff nodded.

"I suppose you'd like to see the kitchen and your living area. Come with me," Diana said as she led the way, and seeing that Diana had her back to them, Jeff gave Mia a subtle wink before following Diana.

Mia's lips twitched with a smile, so she pressed her lips together to keep herself from smiling as she watched them go.

She had no idea how Tom and Harry had made this happen, but she will forever be in their debt.

She knew there was no possible way to talk to Jeff and ask him any questions, but his presence here told her that she was not hopeless.

Even though she couldn't do anything because of Diana, Tom and Harry were handling things, now all they had to do was play their parts perfectly to outwit Henry Rosewood.

Harry lounged comfortably on the hammock swing, its gentle swaying matching the rhythm of the waves crashing on the nearby shore. The morning sun cast a warm glow over the resort, highlighting the lush greenery and pristine beaches.

He glanced at his watch. Nearly half an hour past their planned departure time but Jade was still busy getting ready.

He peered into the suite, and shook his head in amusement when he saw her meticulously applying makeup after she had spent almost an hour agonizing over the perfect outfit for their sightseeing adventure.

They had agreed to spend the day sightseeing outside the resort. The anticipation of exploring new places should have excited him, but a nagging worry lingered in his mind.

He was supposed to be excited about this trip and proposing to Jade, but a gnawing uncertainty had taken root in his chest since his last episode with Jade.

Needing a distraction, he took a deep breath, savoring the salty air, before pulling out his phone from the pocket of his shorts to call Tom.

The line rang twice before Tom answered, "Whats up, Buddy?" Tom's voice came through, cheerful and relaxed. "Missing me?"

Harry chuckled, as he rose and walked away from the suite. "You know I can't breathe without you," Harry said and Tom chuckled.

"Yeah. I've always known that. You love me so much you just had to be with someone that shares same blood with me. You're obsessed," Tom said and Harry laughed despite the knot of unease in his stomach.

"How's everything going over there?" Harry asked curiously.

Tom's tone shifted, becoming more serious. "Everything is good. What's up? Everything going smoothly?" Tom asked, detecting a hint of something in Harry's voice despite the joke.

"Yeah. Everything is great. Just soaking up the sun while waiting for Jade. I wanted to check if Jeff arrived at Husla as planned. Is he at Henry's now?"

"Yeah. I talked to him yesterday," Tom replied. "He's in the house now and has seen Mia. Everything's going according to plan."

Relief washed over Harry. "That's good to hear. How did Mia seem?"

"Jeff said she looks like she's holding up. He's only worried about the other lady in the house. He is worried she might cause problems for him," Tom explained.

"She wouldn't dare..."

"Yeah. That's what I told him too. I asked him to act like she doesn't exist and keep an eye on things as planned," Tom said and Harry nodded, glad that things were going smoothly.

He was very invested in this since he had been the one who offered to help Mia, and she had directly asked for his help.

"How is the proposal plan coming along?" Tom asked, a hint of excitement in his voice as he shifted the conversation.

Harry hesitated, staring out at the shimmering ocean as he contemplated whether to tell Tom or not since Jade was his sister. After a moment he decided to just confide in Tom, since Tom was his best friend and also Jade's elder brother, so he was sure that Tom would give him his honest opinion without any form of bias.

"Actually, I've been having second thoughts about it," Harry admitted.

There was a pause on the other end, then Tom asked, "Second thoughts? Why? What's going on? I thought you were excited about proposing to Jade."

Harry rubbed his forehead, feeling the weight of his thoughts, "I was," Harry admitted. "Don't get me wrong, I still very much want her to be my wife. I love her with every fiber of my being..."

"But?"

Harry sighed, "But I'm worried that getting married to her right now might not be the right step. She's not ready for it and I don't think that's what she needs."

"What do you mean?" Tom's voice took on a concerned tone.

"She's still dealing with the insecurities and trust issues from her last relationship. She's not over the hurt yet and some times it just crops up," Harry explained and went on to tell him about her reaction when she saw him having coffee with the event planner.

Tom frowned, "Do you think those insecurities won't improve after you're engaged or even married? I mean, by then she should feel more secured in your relationship, right?"

Harry sighed, running a hand through his hair. "She said so too, but I don't know, Tom. That's not a risk I want to take. I love her, but I don't want our marriage to start with these unresolved issues. If she doesn't work through her issues first, our marriage could suffer. I need to find a way to actively help her deal with the emotional baggage."

"Is it that bad?" Tom asked, knowing that if Harry was worried about it, then it was cause for concern.

Harry sighed. "Yeah. She gets anxious and insecure, especially when it comes to other women. She doesn't always trust me, even though I've never given her a reason not to. Even though I try to understand her, it sort of hurts when she does that. This whole thing makes me regret ever respecting her relationship in the first place instead of making a move back then," Harry confessed.

"I understand. Do you want me to talk to her?" Tom offered.

"Are you a therapist now? Who is taking care of them company now that you've switched career?" Harry asked dryly and Tom chuckled.

"Big brother to little sister," Tom said and Harry shook his head.

"Nah. I'm not talking to you as her brother. I'm talking to you as my best friend. Besides, when we talk about it, she is logical and all of that. But when she is faced with it, logic flies out the window and her emotions take over. That's what I need to deal with," Harry explained.

Tom was silent for a moment, then spoke with conviction. "Maybe you should still go through with the engagement, but push back on the marriage plans until she gets some therapy. It might give her the confidence and reassurance she needs to work through these issues."



Harry considered Tom's words. "You really think that could work?" He asked, since he too had thought of it but wasn't sure.

"Yeah. It's worth a try. After the proposal you can tell her there will be no wedding until she gets professional help and you can proceed with the wedding after you see improvements. And if it helps, you could go with her for couple counseling."

Harry considered this, feeling a flicker of hope. "That might work. I just want to do what's best for her and for us."

"You're a good man, Harry, and you both deserve to be happy and secure in your relationship." Tom said warmly. "Take it slow and do what's right. She will appreciate your patience and understanding."

"Jonas, we are going to be late!" Jade called out to him from inside the suite.

"Thanks, Tom. Gotta go now."

"Anytime. Take care and enjoy your day," Tom said before hanging up.

Harry pocketed his phone just as Jade stepped out onto the balcony. She looked stunning in a light summer dress which fluttered in the breeze and a smile lit up her face. "Ready for our adventure?" she asked, her eyes sparkling.

"Absolutely," Harry replied as he went to join her by the balcony, "You look too pretty. Let's take some pictures before we leave," Harry suggested as he picked up his digital camera which he had brought with him on the trip.

Jade eyed him. "Aren't we a little behind schedule because you spent so much time on your phone." Her voice held a mock accusation.

Harry chuckled, the sound warm and rich. "Yeah. Sure. We are behind schedule not because you took an hour to find the right outfit and another hour to get ready. It's my fault for talking on the phone while waiting for you to get ready," Harry said with a nod as he raised the camera to his eye level.

"Touché," Jade admitted with a grin as she struck a playful pose, with both hands extended palm up in front of pouted lips as though she was blowing him a kiss.

Harry's grin widened as he captured the image, then another and another, each frame bursting with her infectious energy. Finally, with a satisfied click, he slung the camera around his neck.

Jade's eyes sparkled as she took him in. "You don't look like the Harry Jonas of I-Global right now," Jade said with a grin as she admired him.

"Really? What do I look like?" He asked as he picked up his backpack before locking the door.

"You look more like a photographer. A tourist photographer," she said as she took out her phone from her sling bag.

"I'm the son of my father after all," he said and Jade smiled.

"You know, I forgot about that for a moment. You'd have made a fine photographer. But being a boss suits you more," she said and Harry raised a brow.

"You think so?"

"Yeah," Jade said with a nod.

"Let's take a selfie," she suggested and then looked back at the suite.

"We left our hats and sunglasses," she said, wanting to return inside to get them, but Harry shook his head.

"They're with me," he assured her as he opened the bag and took out their matching straw hats and sunglasses.

"You're too perfect for me Jonas," she said, slipping on her hat and adjusting her sunglasses, and Harry did the same.

A playful glint returned to her eyes. "Now, let's capture some memories for social media, shall we?" She leaned in close, phone poised, and snapped a picture.

The flash momentarily captured the joy sparkling in her eyes and the love in Harry's gaze as he smiled at her.

"Let's make a funny face," Jade suggested and Harry raised a brow.

"For social media?" He asked and when she nodded he shook his head, "No, thanks."

"Why not?" She asked with a frown.

"How will the staff at the company take me seriously if they see photos of my funny face online?" He asked and Jade giggled.

"For crying out loud, Jonas!" She hissed playfully.

"I'd rather make a serious face," he said, pulling his brows together like an angry bird, and Jade laughed as she captured that.

"Let's get going else we are going to spend all day snapping pictures of ourselves," Harry said as he took her hand.

"Just one more. One more," she pleaded, but Harry ignored her as he pulled her along until she broke into a giggle and followed him.

Instead of taking the resort's private car, they decided on a more immersive experience by boarding a tourist bus with an open roof.

They settled into their seats, the excitement of the day's exploration evident in their smiles. As the bus rumbled through the city, Harry wrapped an arm around Jade, pointing out various landmarks and sharing the little trivia he knew had read about them.

They shared laughs over street performers' antics and marveled at the intricate architecture of old cathedrals as the bus wove through bustling markets, historic buildings, and serene parks, each stop revealing a new facet of the city's charm.

Harry did his best to capture as many pictures as he could, some times taking snapshots of Jade when she wasn't looking.

At one stop, they disembarked to explore a vibrant market. The air was filled with the scent of exotic spices and the sound of vendors calling out their wares.

Jade's eyes lit up as she browsed through colorful stalls, picking up handcrafted jewelry and sampling local delicacies.

Harry watched her, feeling a surge of love for her despite his worries about her feelings of insecurity.

"You should have a taste of this. It's divine," she said, raising a local delicacy to his lips.

Although Harry wasn't exactly interested in eating something he didn't know, seeing how she was bubbling with childlike enthusiasm, he took a bite.

"Isn't that the best thing you've tasted?" She asked and Harry shook his head.

"Not at all. That would be you," he said and chuckled when Jade gasped and looked at the vendor with a blush on her face to see if she had heard Harry.

"Harry Jonas!" Jade scolded, making him laugh even more. Moments like these reminded him why he loved her.

"You asked a question, and I answered," he said simply and then pulled her close, "Having fun?"

Jade nodded, her cheeks flushed with excitement. "This place is so beautiful."

They continued their tour, the bus taking them to a picturesque viewpoint overlooking the city. They stood together, taking in the breathtaking view of rooftops and winding streets below. Jade rested her head on Harry's shoulder, a contented sigh escaping her lips.

As they boarded the bus again for the final leg of the tour, Harry's mind returned to his conversation with Tom. He knew that their journey together wouldn't always be easy, but moments like these gave him hope.

He resolved to go on with the engagement and to talk to Jade about his concerns, to be open and honest about their future and to find a good therapist that would counsel them as a couple so he could know the best ways to help Jade.

## Chapter 888 Knight

Andy's room was a sanctuary of sorts. Its walls were painted in soothing shades of lavender and white, adorned with framed posters of her musical idols and inspirational quotes about music which she had brought from their old house.

A worn plush microphone sat perched on her nightstand, a constant companion for her dreams of belting out tunes in front of adoring crowds.

Lying on her bed, she surfed the internet, searching for various islands or clues that might lead her to Cassidy.

In the last couple of weeks she had tried her best to put him out of her mind, but no matter how much she tried, she had found herself thinking and dreaming about him a lot.

She couldn't help but wonder if Cassidy was thinking about her too. She also wondered about her little doll, Maribel.

Unable to help herself, she had decided to try to find a way to reach him. Although she planned to ask Harry for help, but she didn't want to disturb his vacation.

So, while waiting for Harry to get back, she busied with trying to find his location. She knew that she would recognize the place if she saw pictures of it on the internet.

There was every possibility that Cassidy wanted to see her too but was waiting for her to make the first move.

Perhaps he was keeping his eyes on her and if he sees that she was trying to find him, he would reach out to her first.

She was so engrossed in her search that she didn't hear Candace as she walked into the bedroom with her laptop and some books.

"What are you searching for?" Candace asked as she plopped down on the bed beside her, startling Andy.

"Nothing serious. Just surfing the net and looking at interesting places," Andy said as she turned the screen of her tablet away so that Candace wouldn't see the islands displayed on it, "Where is Jamal?" She asked, changing the subject smoothly.

"He has cried himself to sleep," Candace said as she opened her laptop and lay down beside Andy.

"Why? What happened?" Andy asked with a worried frown.

"He fell while riding his bicycle and hurt himself," Candace said with a sigh.

"Aww. My poor darling" Andy said, feeling sorry for him.

"So? Any luck?" Candace asked and Andy raised a brow.

"With what?"

"With what you were searching for," Candace said, giving her a pointed look.

Andy opened her mouth to reiterate what she had said earlier about surfing the net and looking at interesting places, but she shut it when Candace dared her with her eyes to lie.

Andy sighed, shaking her head. "Not yet. But I'm going to keep looking. And when Harry gets back, I'm going to ask him to help me find him. I know you probably thinks this is a bad idea and that I'm suffering from Stockholm syndrome or whatever. And maybe you're right too. But that doesn't change the fact that I miss him and I still want to see him," Andy said simply.

Candace stared at her for a moment, "What happens when you find him? Do you want to return to the Island to be with him?"

"You know very well that I can't do that. That's not the kind of life I want," Andy said and Candace frowned.

"Then what's the point? It's not like he can leave the Island..."

"Why can't he? From the little I found out while I was there, he leaves whenever he wants and returns to the Island. I'm sure we can work out something. He could visit me, I could visit him. Anything," Andy said and Candace sighed.

"Do really think he misses you as much as you miss him? Are you sure he would want to do any of this with you?" Candace asked, her tone gentle yet probing.

"I think so. I hope so," Andy replied, her voice barely above a whisper. "I think about him all the time. I just wish I knew if he thought about me too."

Candace gave her a sympathetic smile, "Well, I guess the heart wants what it wants. If there's anyway I can help, let me know, okay?" Candace said and Andy smiled, grateful for Candace's understanding.

"You're helping already by not judging me. Thank you," she said and Candace smiled.

"I can't judge you for wanting to follow your heart. Besides, after all you said about him and the reason he did all he did, I think I sort of understand him. I don't see him as a terrible person anymore. I just want you to be sure about your feelings, that's all," Candace said and Andy nodded.

"Sure. Thanks," Andy said before returning her focus to her tablet while Candace sat cross-legged on the bed, with her laptop on her thigh as she got busy with working on her school assignment.

The room lapsed back into a comfortable silence, each sister lost in her own world.

Candace's fingers danced over the keys as she crafted a detailed analysis for her class. Her brow was furrowed in concentration, and she periodically pushed her blue cut lenses up her nose as she looked at the screen.

With Jamal fast asleep, and Aaron yet to return, the house was unusually quiet, providing the perfect backdrop for the sisters to engage in their respective activities while still being together.

After working in silence for some time, Andy looked up, "I can't believe Dad is still not back," Andy murmured, breaking the silence.

Candace sighed, her fingers pausing on the keyboard. "I know. He promised it was just a quick trip. He said he'd be back by Wednesday, yet it's Friday already and he's not back yet."

"Do you ever wonder what Dad's up to in Ludus?" Andy asked and Candace nodded as she looked up from her laptop.

"Of course. I hate not knowing what's going on. I would have been very worried if he didn't sound okay each time he called." Candace said with a sigh.

"Do you think he's really okay? What if he's putting on a show for us because he doesn't want us to worry?" Andy asked, her voice tinged with concern.

Candace shook her head, her brow furrowed. "I don't think it's a show. But who knows? It would have been better if he stayed at Harry's. I can't understand why he's lodged at a hotel and won't even disclose his location so that Lucy and Tom can check on him."

"Well, I hope he is fine. It's hard not to worry about him. And I miss him," Andy said and Candace smiled.

"Yeah. I miss him too," Candace agreed.

Once again, they fell into a comfortable silence, each lost in their thoughts and tasks. The ticking of the clock on the wall was the only indication that time was passing.

The peace of the moment was suddenly shattered by the sound of the doorbell, startling them both.

"Do you think it's Dad?" Andy asked as she set aside her tablet.

"Only one way to find out," Candace said, closing her laptop and sliding off the bed. "Let's go see."

They both hurried out of the room and down the stairs, their footsteps echoing in the quiet house. Andy reached the door first and peeked through the peephole.

"Guess who?" She asked Candace with a grin.

Not wanting to play any guess games, Candace threw the door open, and her eyes widened with surprise and delight as she saw who it was.

"Matt!" she exclaimed, launching herself into his arms and Matt laughed, catching her easily.

"Hey, beautiful. Miss me?"

Candace nodded, burying her face in his shoulder. "So much. What are you doing in Sogal? Didn't you say you were going to be busy until..."

"Yeah. But I had some time off and thought I'd surprise you," Matt said, his eyes twinkling. "Looks like it worked."

"It definitely did," Candace said, still holding onto him.

"Do I get a reward?" He asked with a grin and Candace kissed him long and hard, making him groan.

"Get a room, will you?" Andy asked as she stepped forward, a smile spreading across her face.

Candace and Matt chuckled as they turned to face Andy. "Hey, Andy," Matt said, pulling her into a hug as well. "Good to see you."

"Hey, Matt. Long time no see."

"Come in," Candace said, leading him into the house.

"Why is the place so silent? Where is Jamal?" Matt asked curiously.

"He's taking a nap. You're staying the night, right?" She asked hopefully.

"Do you want me to?" He asked with a grin.

"Of course, you have to. Heaven knows when next I'm going to see you. I've missed you so much I could eat you up whole right now," she said and Matt chuckled.

Andy smiled at the sight of Candace and Matt, feeling a pang of envy. She wanted that kind of certainty, that kind of love. She cleared her throat, drawing their attention.

"I will be upstairs," Andy said, wanting to give them privacy.

"Andy, I actually came to see you too," Matt said, stopping her.

Andy raised an eyebrow, curiosity piqued. "Oh? What's up?"

Matt smiled, moving to sit on the couch. Candace and Andy joined him, settling in with eager expressions. "So, I've got some news that might interest you, Andy."

Andy leaned forward, her interest fully captured. "Go on."

Matt took a deep breath. "Well, my assistant has been receiving a lot of calls from various record labels. They saw your interview and are really interested in signing you. Since they didn't know

how to reach you, and they know about my relationship with Candace, they reached out to my assistant to get to me so I can get to you."

Andy's eyes widened with excitement. "Wait, seriously? Record labels want to sign me?"

Matt nodded. "Yes. They're really impressed with your talent."

Andy felt a surge of exhilaration. This was a dream come true. She'd always hoped to get noticed, but to have multiple labels interested was beyond her wildest expectations.

"Wow, this is incredible!" She said, with tears in her eyes. She felt overwhelmed with joy.

Candace beamed at her sister, her excitement palpable. "That's amazing, Andy! I always knew you had it in you."

"I can't believe this. It feels like I'm dreaming," Andy said, and Candace reached for her cheek and pulled it.

"Ouch!"

"There. You're not dreaming," Candace said and they all laughed.

"This is huge, Andy. I'm so proud of you," Candace said happily.

"You will need a manager to handle all the offers and negotiations," Matt advised.

"I actually have a plan. I was thinking of signing with I-Global Entertainment, if Harry and Tom can make room for me there," Andy said without hesitation.

Matt looked impressed. "Have you talked to them about it? You'd likely be the first singer to be managed by them, but there is no doubt that you'd have a solid support system there with Tom and Harry being in charge. I'm sure they will employ only the best and most qualified people to manage your career."

"Exactly," Andy said. "I trust them, and I know they'll have my best interests at heart. Plus, it would be great to work with family. I haven't told them yet. For some reason I kept pushing it. Maybe it's because I wasn't entirely sure if my talent would be recognized. But seeing as lots of record labels want to sign me, I guess this is a sign to do so. I will talk to Harry and see if they can fit me in."

"I'm sure they will," Matt said confidently. "You're too talented for them to pass up."

"Stop with the self doubt. You're amazing, Andy. And you should definitely tell them today! No more procrastination," Candace said and Matt nodded in agreement.

Andy smiled, her heart swelling with hope and excitement. "I can't wait to see where this leads. Thank you for telling me, Matt."

Candace looked at her sister with pride. "You've got this, Andy. We're all here to support you every step of the way."

Andy felt a surge of gratitude for Candace and Matt. "Thanks, guys. This means a lot."

"Anytime," Matt said, giving her a warm smile. "I can't wait to see you shine."

"Speaking about shining, how have you been dealing with the attention from the press?" Matt asked Candace.

"Please do not remind me of that. I can never understand why anyone would want to be famous and be in public light," she said, and both Andy and Matt laughed.

"Tomorrow is another lecture day. What are you going to do? Skip classes? I doubt your knight in shining armor would be there to save you tomorrow," Andy said and Candace snorted.

"He was hardly a knight. Wouldn't even look at me," Candace said and Matt raised a brow.

"Were you hoping he would look at you?" He asked and she grinned.

"I didn't mean look at me the way you think..."

"What way were you expecting him to look at you then?" Matt asked and Candace shrugged.

"I expected him to acknowledge my gratitude, that's all," she said and Matt nodded thoughtfully.

"Don't worry. I am your only knight. I will take you to school tomorrow," he promised.

"Really? You will?" Candace asked excitedly.

"Of course. If you want them to stop hounding you it's best you give them what they want. I will answer their questions while you go in for your lectures. I don't like other men playing knight in shining armor to my lady," Matt said and Andy grinned.

"Smooth!" She said, clapping for Matt, and as he chuckled, Candace leaned forward to kiss him.

"Of course. You're my one and only knight."

#### Chapter 889 Deborah Steele

Aaron settled into his seat on the plane, the gentle hum of the engines and the soft murmurs of passengers around him creating a cocoon of solitude. As the plane taxied down the runway, he found himself reflecting on the whirlwind of the last four days in Ludus.

He had come with a singular purpose: to finalize his divorce from Sara, a chapter he had long wanted to close but had been unable to bring himself to do it.

The visit had been emotionally taxing, but it had also been a journey of emotional release and unexpected encounters. One such encounter replayed vividly in his mind as the plane took off, the ground below shrinking away.

Aaron leaned back in his seat, a smile on his face as he closed his eyes and his thoughts drifted to the lounge where Tom and Lucy had dropped him off so he could have his solo celebration for the end of his deceptive marriage.

#### Four Days Earlier

The lounge was an elegant mix of old-world charm and modern sophistication, with plush leather seating, dim lighting, and soft jazz playing in the background. The place had been organized in such a way that each patron had as much privacy as they wanted.

Aaron had been pleased when he walked in since it was exactly what he sought- a quiet spot where he could toast to his newfound freedom without any form of interference or disturbance.

As he sipped his whiskey, savoring the warmth it spread through him, a middle aged woman approached his table. She was strikingly beautiful, with an air of familiarity that tugged at the edges of his memory.



"Mind if I join you?" she asked, her voice smooth and her smile confident.

Aaron looked at her, surprised by the approach, and even though he didn't want company, he gestured to the empty seat across from him. "Not at all."

She smiled, taking the seat. "You're Aaron, right?"

He blinked, trying to place her face. "I'm sorry, do we know each other?"

She laughed, a melodious sound that sparked a distant memory. "It's Debbie. Formally Deborah Hart but now Deborah Steele. We used to know each other a long time ago, before... well, you got married. Remember me? We used to live in the same block."

Recognition dawned on him. And the image of a bright eyed and cheerful young Deborah with a light sprinkling of freckles on her nose flashed before his eyes.

"Debbie? Wow, it's been ages. How have you been?" Aaron asked, pleasantly surprised to meet someone from such a long time ago.

"I've been good, mostly. I was so surprised to see you walk in," she said, her smile touching her eyes.

Aaron smiled. "I'm surprised too. I didn't expect to run into anyone I knew from back then."

Diane's eyes softened. "How have you been? I hope the years have been kind to you?" She asked, searching his face as though she was trying to find the answer to her question on his face.

Aaron wasn't sure how to answer that question so he merely nodded and smiled, "Yeah. Mostly. What are you doing here?"

"I own this lounge," she said, waving a hand around the room, "I like to spend most of my time here."

"I see," Aaron said, not sure what else to say as he picked up his glass and took a sip.

"Is this your first time here? I've never seen you here before. Do you live in Ludus now?" She asked, very much interested in having a conversation with him.

"No, I don't. I came here for... business. Decided to have a drink to celebrate the success of my business," he said and she smiled.

"Why then are you celebrating alone? Mind if I join in the celebration?" She asked, and Aaron chuckled, wondering what she would say if she knew what he was actually celebrating.

"Sure. It's not every day you run into someone from that long ago. But can you stomach whiskey?" he asked and in response Deborah signalled to come over.

"Get me a glass," she ordered and as the waiter walked away she turned to Aaron.

"So, how is your wife doing? Last I heard you both had a baby before relocating," she asked, and watched as something flickered in Aaron's gaze.

"I'm not married to her anymore. My kids are fine," he said and she smiled.

"I see. You know, I had quite the crush on you back in the day. I was really disappointed when I found out you were dating Sara," she said with a small smile.

Aaron looked at her, taken aback by the revelation. "I had no idea."

She smiled, "I know you didn't know. You were quite clueless. And I couldn't bring myself to tell you about it either. I was just too shy then," she admitted.

"I guess you're not so shy anymore," Aaron said and she laughed softly.

"No, I'm not," she said as she the waiter returned with a glass, and Aaron poured her a finger of whiskey.

"So, you're married now?" He asked, since she had referred to herself as Deborah Steele instead of Hart.

"Was. Lost him two years ago," she said, and Aaron flashed her an apologetic smile.

"I'm sorry to hear that."

"Thanks. That's why I love spending my time at the lounge. I can't bring myself to sell the house because it holds a lot of precious memories, and at the same time, it's lonely being there."

"No kids?" Aaron asked and she smiled.

"I do. I have a son. Ronnie. He's married. I welcomed my first grandchild some weeks ago," she said with so much pride in her voice that Aaron couldn't help but grin.

"So, you're a grannie," he teased and she laughed.

"That I am. Hold on, you should see a picture of my princess," she said and scrolled through her phone for pictures of her granddaughter.

Aaron smiled as he watched the pictures, "She's a beauty," he said and Debbie beamed with pride.

"That she is. What about you?" She asked, and Aaron's eyes gleamed with mischief.

"Me? I am a beauty too," he said, and Debbie looked at him in confusion for a moment before laughing out loud.

"I meant how are your kids? Any grandkids?" She asked, and Aaron grinned even as his eyes lit up.

"My kids are fine and all doing well for themselves. I have three of them. Harry, Candace, and Andy. And I have a grandson, Jamal. He's

"Why do those names sound familiar?" She asked with a frown.

"Probably because they were all on Eric Howell's show last week," Aaron said and watched as her jaws dropped.

"The Jonas sibling? Those are your kids?" She asked in disbelief since that interview had made quite the buzz.

"Yeah," Aaron said, and he watched as she processed it and tried to remember what could from the interview, and then her eyes widened.

"No way! That Sara they talked about was your Sara? She left you, sold one of your kids and abandoned the other?" Debbie asked in disbelief.

Aaron nodded slowly. "Yeah," he said, and he took a deep breath, deciding to share his reason for being there since she had been honest with him, "I actually came to Ludus to see her. I came here to finalize my divorce from her. That's what I'm celebrating."

Debbie's eyes widened slightly. She felt sorry for him even though she was curious to know why he waited for so long to divorce her.

"Oh, Aaron, I'm so sorry. It all must have been incredibly hard for you," she said, reaching across the table to squeeze his hand.

He nodded, a mixture of relief and sorrow in his gaze. "It was. But it's also a relief. I'm celebrating tonight."

"Well, in that case, I don't think whiskey should be the celebratory drink," she said and called a waiter over, asking them to get them a bottle two flutes of champagne.

When the waiter arrived with the drinks, she smiled at Aaron, "Congratulations," she said, raising her glass. "To new beginnings."

Aaron smiled as he raised his glass to hers. They clinked glasses, and for a while, they sat in comfortable silence, sipping their drinks.

Aaron felt a sense of peace he hadn't felt in a long time. Talking with Debbie was like reconnecting with a piece of his past, one that was untainted by the chaos that had followed.

"You know, life has its way of surprising us. When I watched that interview last week, I felt sorry for your kids and their poor. I never imagined that poor father would be you," she said and Aaron shrugged.

"Same way I never would have imagined running into you here," Aaron said, and she nodded, her expression understanding.

"So, what have you been up to all these years?" Debbie asked after some time.

Aaron sighed, leaning back in his chair. "After she left with all my money, I had to pack up my studio and focus on taking care of my son, Harry. It was... tough. But we managed. I was able to start afresh and I'm doing well for myself now."

Debbie reached out again, placing a comforting hand on his arm. "I'm sorry you had to go through that. It must have been incredibly challenging."

"It was," Aaron admitted. "But we got through it. And now, I have Candace, Andy, and Jamal with me. I'm really happy. Right now I just want to focus on them and make up for all the time we lost."

Debbie smiled. "Yeah. You should. Tell me more about them." Debbie's eyes twinkled with curiosity.

As they shared stories about their families, Aaron found himself relaxing more and more. Debbie's presence was comforting, a reminder of a simpler time.

He learned that she had lost her husband two years ago, a blow that had left her reeling but determined to carry on.

"You know," she said after a while, "I really enjoyed this conversation. Would you like to come home with me? I'd love to host you."

Aaron hesitated, feeling a pang of uncertainty. "Debbie, I appreciate the offer. But I have no intention of getting into a relationship. I need to focus on myself and my family, especially Candace and Andy until they get married, and then on Jamal."

Debbie's expression softened. "I understand. And you don't have to worry, I'm not looking for a relationship and I don't wish to remarry either. Maybe we can keep things casual, just enjoy each other's company as friends without any strings attached. You could see me whenever you're in Ludus, and whenever I visit Sogal I can do the same if you want me to."

Aaron considered this, a smile tugging at his lips. "That sounds... nice. I'd like that."

After that, he had followed her back to her place, and he had let her convince him to spend some extra days with her. They had spent the last four days together, until he decided to return to Sogal.

When she first made sexual advances at him, he had been hesitant and scared because he was afraid that he was going to embarrass himself and disappoint her since he believed he was rusty in that department because he had not been with a woman in almost three decades, but she had asked him to relax and let her take care of things.

It had been wonderful, being with a woman after so long. Aaron smiled at the memory as the plane soared through the skies.

Those four days in Ludus had been transformative. Meeting Debbie had been an unexpected but welcome twist, a reminder that life could still hold pleasant surprises.

The time he spent with her had been refreshing. They had kept things casual, enjoying each other's company without the pressure of future commitments. It was exactly what Aaron needed at this point in his life.

He recalled their conversation the previous night before he left Ludus.

They sat on the terrace of her home, the night air cool and filled with the scent of blooming flowers. Aaron felt more at ease than he had in years.

"I'm glad we reconnected, Debbie," he said, looking out at the twinkling lights of the city.

"Me too," she replied, her voice soft. "It's been nice having someone to talk to, someone who understands."

Aaron nodded, feeling a deep sense of gratitude. "You've helped me more than you know. I'm heading back home with a clearer mind."

Debbi reached out, taking his hand. "You helped me too. And if you ever need a break, you know where to find me."

He squeezed her hand, feeling the warmth of her friendship. "Thank you, Debbie. I will."

Aaron opened his eyes, the memories of Ludus fading as the present came back into focus.

The plane began its descent, and he felt a mixture of excitement and anticipation. He was eager to see his family.

He had not told them he was coming back because he didn't want them to expect him. He wanted to surprise them, Aaron thought with a grin.

This was the first time he would be having people waiting back for him at home since Harry became an adult and left the house. He was looking forward to it.

He could imagine the joy that would be on Jamal's face when he sees him. He knew Jamal would have a thousand stories for him when he gets home. He chuckled as he imagined Candace nagging him and asking lots of questions about where he was and what he did, while Andy would smile and ask if he had fun and then tell Candace not to nag him.

As the plane touched down in Sogal, Aaron felt a renewed sense of purpose. He had faced his demons, closed a painful chapter, and reconnected with an old friend.

The future, uncertain as it might be, no longer seemed daunting now that the burden of his past had finally lifted. Instead, it felt filled with potential, waiting to be explored.

He gathered his belongings, feeling a lightness in his step as he made his way through the terminal. He was ready to step back into his life, stronger and more determined than ever.

He was happy to be home.

## Chapter 890 Delinquent

Tom leaned back in his chair, satisfaction washing over him as he closed his laptop. It had been a productive day, with meetings and appointments wrapping up earlier than expected.

He glanced at the clock on his office wall and smiled. There was still some time left before the close of work. That meant Lucy didn't have to go home with Adolf today as she had been doing all week.

Picking up his phone, he called Adolf and asked him not to bother picking Lucy, since he was done for the day and would leave the office with her.

Because of his busy schedule, they had been unable to go on a date all week as they agreed they would be doing, and even though Lucy was not complaining, he knew that she must be feeling pretty bad about how late he got back from the office and how he was usually too exhausted whenever he got back to spend time chatting with her.

An idea began to form in his mind, one that made his lips curve in a silly smile. He decided to surprise Lucy at her office and kickstart their weekend a little early.

Gathering his things, Tom went into his office closet and when he found what he was looking for, he changed his clothes before heading out of his office.

The moment Harry's secretary, who was working for him in Harry's absence saw him, she blinked in surprise then stifled the urge to laugh.

Tom winked at her walked past her, and headed for the elevator. As Tom walked past some of the employees, they couldn't help but stare, but he ignored them all as he continued for Lucy's office.

The anticipation of seeing Lucy brought a lightness to his step. He couldn't wait to see her reaction.

Inside Lucy's office, she sat at her desk, immersed in a report she needed to finish before the weekend officially began.

She was so focused that she didn't notice Tom entering the room until he cleared his throat softly. Startled, she looked up, blinked in surprise, and then her expression quickly changed to one of delight.

"Howdy, ma'am? Tom Handy at your service," he said with a wink and she burst into a peal of delightful laughter as she pushed away from her desk.

"Tom! What are you doing here dressed like this?" she exclaimed, standing up to greet him.

Tom grinned, wrapping his arms around her for a warm hug. "I finished up early and thought I'd surprise you. How about we start our weekend a bit early?"

Lucy laughed, her eyes sparkling. "You always know how to make my day. Let me just finish this up, and we can head out," she said as she let him kiss her and then she returned the kiss.

After a moment she stepped away to look at him again and take in his outfit, "How many people saw you coming here dressed this way?" She asked, looking him over since he was dressed like he used to back when he was deceiving her and acting as her driver.

He had rolled up the sleeves of his shirt to reveal his arm, he buttoned down the first three buttons of his shirt to reveal his chest, and he was wearing earrings and a nose ring.

"A whole lot," he said, and she shook her head.

"Ladies?"

"Mostly ladies," he said, and she scowled.

"You know what? Let's start by rolling down your sleeves. I don't like other women looking at what's mine," she said, and Tom grinned as she adjusted the sleeve of his shirt.

"And let's take out the nose ring..."

"C'mon! You're ruining all the fun," Tom said and she eyed him.

"You're CEO, love. You can do this outside of here. When we get home you can do this. But I don't think you should..."

Tom sighed, "Who says I can't do this as a CEO? Who made the rules? Why can't I dress and act the way I want in my own company? It's not like I'm dressed this way to go see a client. Everyone in the company has seen me this way before. It won't be their first time. Loosen up Lucy. Let's not place unnecessary expectations on ourselves," he said and Lucy contemplated it for a minute.

"Okay."

"So, tell me, do you like how I look?" Tom asked, wriggling both brows playfully and Lucy wrinkled her nose.

"Although it brings back memories of how we started and how I came to fall for you, I still..." she trailed off when Tom sighed dramatically.

"You haven't changed much, have you? You still don't know how to answer simple yes or no questions. I don't want the explanations," he said, and she smiled.

"Partially. It's not a full yes or a complete no," she said and Tom nodded.

"I can live with that. Now wrap up whatever you have left and let's get going," he said as he sat down opposite her chair and she went around the desk to get into her seat.

Tom watched her as she quickly wrapped up her work, and once she was done, she grabbed her things, and they headed out together.

"I must say I'm pleasantly surprised you finished early today. I was already mentally preparing myself to the office without you," Lucy said as they got into the elevator so they could ride back up to his office and leave via his private elevator.

"I'm glad I don't have to," Lucy said and Tom smiled.

"Me too. I'm glad you don't have to. I know it's been one hell of a week. Two more weeks and Harry will be back, and then things can go back to normal," he said and she smiled.

"Yeah. That means we are going over next weekend for the engagement, right?" Lucy asked and that sort of reminded Tom of the conversation he had with Harry earlier.

"Yeah. Looking forward to the trip?" He asked and she smiled.

"Yeah. I'm actually more interested in seeing Jade's reaction. I can picture it already," Lucy said with a giggle and Tom laughed.

"So, I take it you didn't get my text?" Lucy asked and Tom raised a brow.

"What text?"

"It said I was going to stop by to check on Sonia before going home," she said as they walked into his office.

"So, you want us to do that?" He asked, and she nodded.

"Although I've been talking to her over the phone, I want to see how she is doing," Lucy explained.

"So, what should we do? Go there now, or get home first and get ready for our date before going there?" Tom asked as they got into his private elevator.

"Whichever is more convenient for you," Lucy said and Tom nodded.

"Let's go there then. That way when we freshen up, we'd be fresh to our date," he said with a wink and she giggled.

As they drove to Sonia and Bryan's place, the excitement of the weekend ahead filled the car with a buoyant atmosphere.

When they arrived at the house, the door was answered by a woman in her thirties whom neither of them recognized. She had a warm, welcoming smile and introduced herself as Sally, the new housekeeper.

"Good evening. Please come in," Sally said, stepping aside to let them enter since she recognized them both from the interview which they had done regarding Lucy.

As they walked into the living room, Sonia and Bryan appeared from a side room. Sonia's face lit up when she saw Lucy.

"Baby! It's so good to see you!" she said, moving forward to hug Lucy.

Lucy grinned, happy that Sonia sounded more like herself, "It's great to see you too," Lucy said, returning the hug.

She stepped back to look at Sonia. "You look so much better now. You've regained your color."

Sonia smiled, glancing lovingly at Bryan who was exchanging pleasantries with Tom. "Thanks to my dotting husband here, who has refused to let me do anything on my own."

Bryan chuckled, pulling Sonia close. "Just making sure you and our little one are okay."

"Oh, wow! Tom. You look different," Sonia observed and Tom winked at her.

"Yeah. I was aiming for a different look. What do you think?" He asked and Sonia glanced at Lucy who shook her head, before giggling.

"I think you look goood," Sonia said and Lucy shut her eyes while Tom leaned forward to kiss Sonia's cheeks.

"Exactly one of the many reasons I love you," Tom said making Sonia giggle.

As they all settled into the comfortable living room, Sally came in with a bottle of wine and glasses for them, and after she left Lucy looked at Sonia.

"How are you doing? And how is our little bun doing in the oven?" She asked and Sonia smiled.

"Very fine. You won't believe I felt its very first movement two days ago," Sonia said in a high pitched voice that told Lucy just how excited she was.

"Really?" Lucy asked, her eyes lighting up and Sonia bobbed her head.

"I've always read about how those first movements may feel like flutters, you know. And then two days ago I was just speaking to it and rubbing my tummy and then I felt it move. It was the most beautiful feeling ever. It was as though it was trying to reassure me that it was okay and I don't have to worry about anything," Sonia said, her eyes gleaming with tears, and Lucy teared up too as she held Sonia's hand.

Tom and Bryan exchanged a look, and in unspoken agreement they both rose and walked away with their glasses to the game room so they could talk about other things while leaving the ladies to cry or do whatever they wanted.

Tom and Bryan discussed Jeff's arrival and how he was settling in at Henry's abode, and Bryan told Tom about the visit from Jeff's cousin.

"Do they really look very much alike?" Tom asked and Bryan shrugged.

"I could tell the moment I saw him that he wasn't Jeff, but I don't think a stranger who has seen Jeff only once or twice would be able to tell the difference. They do have similar body builds," Bryan said and Tom nodded.

"I suppose that's good enough. By the way, has Jade told you anything about her ex?" Tom asked and Bryan shook his head.

"No. Why?"

"I spoke with Harry. It seems like that bastard messed up Jade more than we realized," Tom said and explained what Harry had told him.

"That's messed up," Bryan said with a frown, "I wish he were alive. Then we could fuck him up," Bryan said and Tom nodded in agreement.



"Well, let's hope that Harry is able to handle it. It's going to be really stressful for him and he's going to need all the patience and understanding in the world," Bryan said and Tom chuckled.

"What's funny?"

"You. You suddenly sound like an experienced old man. Who would believe you were once a bad boy? Sonia did a terrific job taming you," Tom said and Bryan chuckled.

"In case you have forgotten, I am a married man. And it will interest you to know that I tamed Sonia too. And what the hell are you wearing earrings and nose rings for? You look weird," Bryan said and Tom laughed.

"This was the bad boy look I pulled to win Lucy's heart," Tom said and Bryan shook his head.

"I can't believe someone like Lucy fell for someone who looked this way. You look like a delinquent teenager," Bryan said and Tom glared at him.

"Whose idea was the bad boy thing?"

Bryan chuckled, "So, you couldn't be a bad boy without these? You think this is all a bad boy is about?" Bryan asked in amusement.

"And you think those useless advise you gave me would have helped? I only got a chance with her because I didn't act entirely like a jerk," Tom said and Bryan shook his head.

"Why are we even having this conversation right now? Oh, right! Because you are looking like a delinquent," he said with a nod.

"Whatever. Let's play a game," Tom said, pointing to the ping pong table.