

Chapter 161 - Divorced Heiress

-I have accepted him as a partner, and I'm truly happy to see his progress and the desire he has to rebuild his life. By the way, who will stay at Lancaster Collection? You are here and he is too, you can't neglect the company at this point.- I changed the subject before becoming melancholic, as I began to remember the night I saw him for the first time, so happy and full of life.

-Don't worry about that, besides, Alexis won't stay for long, he needs to continue with his therapies and treatment. He wants to move forward, to recover and conquer the world. I've always said he's the better one of us, and he proves it every day.-

I smiled with warmth at how well Alexander spoke of his brother despite the circumstances.

The vague question of how it would have been if Alexis hadn't had that tragic accident crossed my mind, but I quickly dismissed it. I wasn't interested in knowing.

The sound of my cellphone interrupted my thoughts, and I looked at the screen with a glimmer of hope that it was lawyer Richman. However, it wasn't, but it didn't diminish my optimism when I saw that it was the lawyer handling Rachel's case.

-Lawyer, good day, do you have good news for me?- It was the first thing I asked, trying to stay positive and praying for a piece of good news amidst all the chaos. I needed it urgently.

-Ms. Sarah, I have the best news for you. Mrs. Duncan has signed up for the witness protection program, so we already have a scheduled date for her testimony. In five days, Mrs. Rachel will be confessing everything.-

My eyes widened in disbelief at what I was hearing. Was this real? Did I finally have good news? I was so used to everything going wrong that I couldn't fully believe what the lawyer was telling me.

-Five days? Are you joking? I quickly did the math, still looking amazed and incredulous, and soon realized that it was the same date as the launch of my company. Damn.-

-Of course not, you know me, Ms. Doinel, I wouldn't joke about something so delicate. In five days, we will have the testimony. We'll just be waiting for the arrest warrants for the accused, and Rachel will be released from prison thanks to her cooperation with a new identity, a new life.-

A wide smile adorned my face, and I had to clear my throat to dispel the knot that was slowly forming. The excitement overwhelmed me, I didn't even know if I could speak without difficulty. This news had changed my day.

-Is it necessary for me to be present?- I asked, thinking about how important that date had become. If I went to New York, I wouldn't be able to be present at the launch of my brand. And if I focused on the launch, it would be impossible to get to New York on time. I held my breath, praying for a miracle.

-It's your choice, it's not your obligation. We, as your lawyers, will handle the proceedings.-

I let out a sigh of relief as I felt each and every one of my muscles starting to relax, as if a great weight had been lifted off me.

-Thank you very much, lawyer.- I ended the call without fully processing the information, without fully believing it and without wiping the smile off my face. The only thing I could think of at this moment was that Rachel wouldn't do the same as Richman, that she wouldn't abandon the ship after getting on board, leaving fears aside.

-Did the lawyer show up?- Alexander's voice reminded me that I was still in the car with him and I nodded my head, but quickly shook it as I realized he was not talking about the same lawyer.

-No, but I don't think we need him. Rachel is going to testify in five days.- I said directly, before letting out a sigh of relief and getting out of the car without waiting for a response from him.

Upon entering the house, I was greeted by a cheerful Tristan who ran from the couch and hugged my legs. I didn't hesitate for a second to lift him up in my arms and spin him around, causing him to burst into laughter.

-Mom, look at Uncle Ales.- Tristan's words stopped me in my tracks and I paid attention to the pair of men sitting on the couch where Tristan had been moments ago. Alexis was looking at us as if he had just witnessed the best scene of his life, and Vincent was arranging the toy dinosaurs scattered on the floor.

What was he doing here?

-Alexis, you're here, I...- Alexander's cheerful voice made me stop and I saw him more animated than before, maybe because he was seeing his brother again, combined with the good news I gave him in the car.

Alexander hurried over to Alexis, who stood up from the couch to embrace him, before engaging in a pleasant conversation.

-Sarah, I wanted to see Tristan, so I brought him, hope you don't mind.- Vincent informed me as he approached me, but my eyes couldn't stop looking at that scene of two identical men exchanging words.

Anyone could confuse them, but for some reason, I knew which one was which, and it had nothing to do with one being paler than the other, or one using a cane and the other walking naturally.

-It's fine, I don't mind.- I said, taking my eyes off the pair of dark-haired men and focusing on Tristan, who was curiously watching his father talk to his uncle.

-Did you have fun? Did you learn a lot from Maga?- I asked my son, grabbing his attention, and he nodded enthusiastically.

-What happened with the lawyer? And why do you come with your hair in a mess and a red cheek? Don't tell me Alexander...-

I shook my head before they finished the sentence, as it was far from the truth and almost ruined my good mood with the mention of Richman.

-The lawyer disappeared.- I blurted out and his expression of frustration mirrored Alexander's.

-But, I have good news.-

-The one you were crying for has arrived. - Abby's lively voice captured everyone's attention, including Tristan's, who slipped out of my arms and ran to hers.

-My little one, I missed you too.- She said tenderly as she held him in her arms.

-Abby Steele.-

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Vincent's green gaze paused for a few seconds on Abby, after murmuring her name with that last name so that only she could hear it, looking her up and down, with her messy hair like mine, the mark of fingers on her cheek, and the obviously torn navy blue lace dress, then he looked at me the same way, furrowing his brow before tilting his head as if secretly accusing me.

Okay, I thought he already knew what happened between us just by looking at us.

-Abby, can we talk alone?- I asked her before someone could distract her, and when I said someone, I meant Vincent, who seemed hesitant to go with her or stay silent scolding us with his eyes.

Abby's gaze finally settled on the others, and her smile was replaced with a look of astonishment as she saw the twins observing her curiously.

-Oh no, this can't be. The slap is making me see double.- She said when her gaze landed on the Lancaster brothers, and I had to hurry to take her arm and lead her to a place where we could talk alone, but she stopped me when Alexis spoke.

-She is the friend you've talked about, Vincent. I don't think we've been properly introduced. I'm Alexis Lancaster.-

Abby raised her eyebrows in surprise, and I didn't know if it was because Alexander's twin was introducing himself or because Vincent had referred to her as his friend.

-Friend. Alexis. Lancaster. My head is going to hurt, and it's not because of the hair-pulling we did.- Abby murmured dramatically for me to hear, but quickly smiled at Alexis.

-Of course! Alexis, the good twin. I'm sorry, Alexander, I'm not saying you're bad, but there should always be one that's better than the other. I'm Abby, the friend of everyone you see here, and of course, Vincent Grey... I mean, Lefebvre, and now, I'm also your friend. You're so lucky, welcome to the friends club.-

Abby approached him, passing in front of Vincent, taking the opportunity to “accidentally” step on his foot, and shook hands with Alexis without any care, as if she was taking out her anger on the poor man who wasn't at fault, and left Tristan in Alexander's arms.

-Excuse us, friend, I have a pending conversation with my friend.-

This time, she took my arm and pulled me, all while keeping up a fake smile.

-Sorry, I'll be right back.- I apologized before disappearing from the room towards the hallway that led to the office, and Abby's fingers dug into my skin forcefully.

-You're hurting me.- I said once we were inside the office, where no one could hear us or interrupt us.

-When I think I've seen it all from that idiot, he comes and surprises me. One day he says I'm his girlfriend, passionately kisses me in front of a lawyer tied to a chair, and the next day, he tells the first person he sees that I'm his friend and completely ignores me. I swear he's testing my patience, which is already wearing thin. I hope one of these days his little Grey stops working and... No, I'm not going to wish that without trying it first. But what the hell am I saying? Where did I leave my dignity? Did I leave it lying down with the slap?-

I rolled my eyes as I sat on the desk with my legs crossed, waiting for Abby to finish venting in her own way.

-Are you done?- I asked calmly, and Abby looked at me with a flushed face of anger and nodded.

-Did you get any information? You came back sooner than I imagined.-

Abby sighed heavily and collapsed on the couch as if she were exhausted, closed her eyes for a few seconds before fixing her gaze on me.

-Paul has no idea that the lawyer was going to betray him.- She said confidently, but I wasn't completely convinced of that until she gave me more details.

-At first, I was convinced that he knew something about the paper lawyer, as he began to insist that Attorney Richman take on the case, but I cried to him while making up a story that I couldn't trust another woman because they were the first ones to want to destroy us. I'm sorry, I didn't mean it seriously.- She said, embarrassed with me, and I waved it off, downplaying it.

-It doesn't matter, keep going.- I asked as I stood up to sit in the chair behind the desk.

-He agreed that Richman would be the lawyer in charge of the lawsuit and called him, his phone was ringing, but he didn't answer. Paul wouldn't have done that if he had disappeared, I know him like the back of my hand.-

-Without getting an answer, he called the law firm to ask about him, but no one has seen him since yesterday morning. He called his house and got no response either, finally, he called his wife, the cheater answered immediately, but her response wasn't positive; the last time she saw him was this morning, she said he left home earlier than usual without saying where he was going, and since then, she doesn't know anything about him.-

-To be honest, Paul seemed so interested in filing a complaint against you, we tried to locate him by any means necessary, but it's as if the earth swallowed him, no one knows about him and his wife got worried.-

I crossed my fingers on the desk, thinking about what Alexander had told me in the car and now that Abby confirmed that Paul had nothing to do with it, I didn't know what to think anymore.

If there was something more behind this, what was it?

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No matter how much I thought about it, I couldn't find a logical answer, the only thing that came to mind was an accident, a robbery, or maybe he was involved with other dangerous people and they were settling scores.

We were left without an ally and without evidence that could definitively sink the Dubois, the only thing left for me was Rachel's collaboration with justice and I prayed it wouldn't go wrong, that she wouldn't regret it at the last minute, it was my only resource before rushing to report the Dubois for embezzlement at Doinel, which was the only thing I could prove.

-Are you sure? Couldn't it have been a distraction?-I asked, doubting even my own name, and Abby stood up from the couch to sit in the chair in front of the desk and look me in the eyes.

-Lately, I know when Paul is lying to me, he has lied to me so many times with such ease, that I detect it right away with his body language, with his gaze, his facial expressions. Besides, knowing him as I do, he wouldn't risk alarming an entire law firm and his wife, no matter how unfaithful she is, with the disappearance of a lawyer, what do you think would happen?-

The question was unnecessary. It was clear that they would investigate until they found the true culprits, Paul wasn't foolish enough to dig his own grave.

-Sari, the lawyer disappeared for another reason or because of other people. Or on his own.-

I let my back drop heavily and closed my eyes thinking about what I would do now. For the moment, I had the recording, if I presented it as evidence in Rachel's statement, along with the recording Alexander made of Paul's conversation with Rachel, it could lead to an investigation against the Dubois.

God, I needed a break from all of this.

-Could you leave me alone? I need to think.-I asked, opening my eyes to look at her tiredly, and she took my hand while giving me a half-smile.

-I'm going to change, your designer dress got ruined.-

I looked at her with a raised eyebrow, realizing that the dress that I had torn was mine and she didn't have the audacity to tell me before.

-Goodbye.-

-Abby!-

Before she could receive my complaint, she stood up from the chair and vanished from the office, leaving me alone, with a mess in my head, and regretting breaking that dress.

Well, it was just a dress, I had bigger problems to solve.

I took a deep breath and turned the chair to look at the family photos, those images where I appeared smiling with my parents. I missed them so much it hurt.

I smiled nostalgically as I examined the face of each one from my seat and furrowed my brow when I saw a sealed envelope that seemed so familiar to me. I approached it with the chair, remembering that my father gave me that white envelope as a birthday gift, and without hesitation, I took it to read the note he wrote for me.

“Happy 30th Birthday to the Doinel heiress. With love, your father.”

His words when he handed it to me resonated in my head as if I were hearing them right now.

”You can open it when you feel like things aren't going the way you want.”

And honestly, nothing was going the way I wanted.

I wanted to have them back, I wanted our company back, I wanted the Dubois to pay. Every step forward was followed by two steps backwards, taking me back to almost the beginning.

But starting over didn't mean starting from scratch.

After thinking it over for a few seconds, with tears welling up in my eyes and feeling my heart sink, I decided it was time to open the envelope, after all, it was a gift from my father.

However, as I was about to open it, a letter in the place where the envelope used to be caught my attention. It was then that I realized that was not where I had left the sealed envelope and someone had moved it, leaving that letter underneath where no one could see it.

I had a hunch when I had the letter in my hands, after leaving the envelope in the desk drawer, locking it so that no one would touch it without my authorization.

I brushed away the rebellious tears that escaped from my eyes when I saw that it was the same as the letter my parents sent me and quickly opened it to read it.

It was another message from my parents, another sign of life reminding me that I was not alone, that I was not crazy for saying that they were still alive even though they haven't appeared.

The elegant and impeccable handwriting illuminated my eyes and I read each word slowly, regaining the hope I thought was lost, letting me know that not everything was lost, on the contrary, we were closer than I thought and chasing after the Dubois, that we were taking control of our lives. It was reminding me that after the storm comes the sun.

“Knots have a solution if you give them some time. Wait a few days. Days to seek justice. Just a few days to see you smile. Just a few days away from our reunion. In a few days you will be able to open your gift, you will know what that day is, just wait.”

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I couldn't stop tapping the ground with my heel, nerves attacking every part of my body. I didn't know if it was because my brand launch was about to begin in just a few minutes or because I was waiting for my lawyers to contact me with good news about Rachel's case.

My soul was hanging by a thread, and I couldn't fully concentrate on this important event where influential guests from the fashion industry were invited. I wanted it to be a success, an unforgettable night, but I wasn't sure if I could achieve it with everything weighing on me today.

-You look radiant, Zafiro has outdone themselves with your dress.- Abby entered my dressing room where stylists were finishing my hair and makeup. Now that my friend mentioned it, I focused on my image and smiled satisfied with the result.

They were actually doing a good job, but I couldn't wait for them to finish so I could make sure everything was in order with the models and designs that were going to be presented to the public. Even though my partners were taking care of it, I wanted to check for myself that everything was going as expected.

I looked at Abby's reflection in the mirror and smiled at how beautiful she looked. The blue dress highlighted her slim and slender figure perfectly, and her hair was tied up in a high ponytail, looking elegant and delicate. She could easily capture everyone's attention.

-You look gorgeous. I almost didn't recognize you.- I joked a little, and she gestured with her hand as if she were embarrassed and flattered at the same time.

-Humbly, we did what we could. I have to live up to it, and outside is crowded, I see many familiar faces. I can't believe so many well-known figures accepted the invitation without even knowing the name behind L&J. This is so exciting.-

Abby seemed ecstatic about tonight, and I should be the same if it weren't for the uncertainty that weighed me down and didn't let me breathe normally.

I remained silent as the stylists finished applying the red lipstick that matched my burgundy dress. They finished their work with me, and I stood up from the chair to take one last look. The makeup and hairstyle were so well done that I was afraid of ruining them.

-Thank you.- I gratefully thanked the stylists, who began to put away their tools. I turned around to face Abby.

-Credit goes to our public relations officer. The rest is up to us, so there shouldn't be a single mistake. I'm going to check on the preparations. Are you coming with me? - I asked Abby while adjusting my dress.

-Wow! You really look fantastic. I can't take my eyes off you. You're a goddess. Move aside, everyone, the goddess Doinel is on her way.-

I playfully shook my head as Abby complimented me, then grabbed my phone, hoping to receive news before the event started. I strutted in my heels towards the exit.

-I'll believe it if you say it again.- I said as I passed by Abby. Before taking a step out of my dressing room, Abby stopped me by holding my hand. I looked at her with curiosity, finding a nervous smile.

I knew that expression very well, and honestly, I was afraid of whatever she was about to tell me.

-Sari, my goddess, before we go to the models' dressing room, I want you to know that I have a surprise that will make your day, well, night, even better.-

I let go of her grip when she said that and raised an eyebrow while crossing my arms.

Of course, I had reasons to fear. Abby's surprises could leave you breathless; you could expect anything from her. That was why I didn't know what to think at the moment. The last thing I wanted was a surprise from my friend; I would end up having three heart attacks.

-Abby...-

-No, no, no, you're going to love this surprise.- She interrupted me, realizing that I wasn't in the mood for her craziness, before pulling my hand to make me follow her. I made my best effort to trust her blindly, mentally preparing myself not to lose my mind over her surprise.

-Now we're complete.- She said before I could fully understand what she meant, seconds before opening the door to the models' dressing room.

Most of the models were ready and rehearsing for their presentation, some were finishing their makeup with the stylists. I smiled satisfactorily as I saw that everything was going wonderfully under the supervision of Hugo, Vincent, and my star designer, Zafiro.

Honestly, I still didn't know what surprise Abby was talking about, but soon, she guided me with gentle pushes to one of the vanities where a model was being made up and surrounded by a group of three models who were speaking animatedly with Vincent and Hugo.

I looked at the reflection in the mirror of the blonde girl with her back turned to me, and my eyes widened as I recognized that face I hadn't seen for years.

-Britney?-

The blonde observed me through the mirror, a smile appearing on her face before she turned her chair, leaving her makeup half finished. I couldn't believe she was here, I had lost contact with her over three years ago when she had to leave for London for her modeling job.

-You're here!-

Of all the surprises Abby had given me, this was the best, it even made me forget for a moment the worries that had been bothering me.

-Sarah!- She jumped up from her chair and ran to hug me, ignoring the stylists who warned her that she would ruin their work. I didn't hesitate and received her in my arms, jumping with excitement.

-Surprise!- She said playfully when we let go, and I couldn't stop looking at her. She was wearing the dress and the jewelry that were prepared for the closing of the runway, then everything made sense.

-Don't tell me, don't tell me.- My smile widened, and Abby confirmed what I deduced just by looking at the honey-eyed blonde.

-What's better than closing the launch with the best model?-

I couldn't contain the excitement in my chest. Britney was as recognized and influential as all the guests at the launch, her image would be very favorable for L&J.

-I can't believe it!-I covered my mouth to avoid letting out a scream of excitement in front of everyone.

-Believe it, and if it hadn't been for Abby, I wouldn't have found out about this and... everything.-

She paused, and her expression changed to one of sadness, and my smile disappeared immediately.

It had to be Abby.

-Sari, I'm sorry about your parents. I'm sure they'll be back soon, and all of this will be like a bad moment, in the meantime, you have to give it your all with your new company and give that idiot Paul a good blow. He's despicable. I never imagined he would be capable of doing something like this, I swore he was in love with you.-

-Even I, being his sister, believed him, but it was all a hoax. Now I have to endure seeing his face every day at home, just to maintain the lie of the lawsuit against Sarah. God, this is exhausting.- Abby spoke with grief, because after the fight at Doinel and reading the letter that my parents made sure she received, I asked her to stay a few days at the Dubois mansion to avoid raising suspicions, trusting that Rachel's trial would have positive results, as well as hoping my parents wouldn't take long with their plans.

Britney looked at us with amusement on her face before speaking.

-I would have paid to see that fight, too bad no one recorded it. Terrible service.-

Chapter 102 Fake girlfriend part 2

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Abby and I laughed at the disappointment in her voice, and the stylists asked Bri to come back to finish working on her appearance since we were running out of time.

-Come on, we'll have time to catch up. But first, a group hug.- Abby said excitedly, and the three of us hugged each other.

-We're finally complete, and I hope this time lasts longer than last time.-

-Oh, there you are, my girlfriend, I've been looking for you.- Bastian's voice made us separate, and Britney looked at Abby questioningly after hearing how my cousin had called her before staring at her, mouth agape, from head to toe. It seemed like she was speechless seeing her fake girlfriend.

-We need a lot of time to catch up.- Britney said before returning to her chair.

-Abby, you're... you're, are you Abby? Are you my girlfriend?-

Bastian didn't even know what to say, and I heard a throat clearing behind me, followed by a giggle.

I turned to see Bastian's brothers, who pretended to be talking about something important, although Hugo couldn't conceal his laughter well, which threatened to escape again, and Vincent's flushed face gave him away as he tried to loosen his tie, which seemed to be suffocating him.

Jealousy, jealousy, and more jealousy.

I took the opportunity to approach Vincent and enjoy a front-row seat to his fit of jealousy.

-You're such an idiot, really, can't you see it's me?- Bastian glanced Abby up and down again, and Abby took the opportunity to twirl, causing the train of her dress to open and revealing her left leg.

-You look beautiful, very beautiful.-

I heard the man next to me clear his throat, unable to hide his discomfort at Bastian's words. Bastian approached Abby, took her by the waist, and whispered something in her ear that only my friend could hear.

-Is she here? Is she coming?- Abby asked as she looked at the door as if it were about to open at any moment, and I knew they were talking about Bastian's ex-girlfriend.

-Well, let's get to work.-

-Brother, I have only one thing to tell you. The shrimp that falls asleep gets replaced by the fake boyfriend.- Hugo spoke in a mocking tone, and I couldn't help but laugh.

-They make a lovely couple.- I played along with Bastian, adding fuel to the fire.

And the truth was, I didn't agree with what Vincent was doing, he was in a constant push and pull, if he didn't decide to express his feelings soon, he would lose the only woman he had truly cared about.

I didn't know what he was waiting for to make a move.

I looked at Vincent, who helped himself to a glass of whiskey on the table behind us, which was exclusive to the L&J team after the launch, but he didn't care and drank it all in one gulp, never taking his eyes off the couple who were closer than ever, as their first performance as a couple was about to begin.

-This is just pretending, she doesn't like Bastian.- Vincent spoke quietly, as if he was speaking to himself, but of course, Hugo and I heard him.

-She may not, but Bastian is starting to like Abby.-

I looked at Hugo in surprise at what he had just said, and Vincent was also looking at him, with a mix of evident concern and anger.

-You're in trouble, brother. You know how Bastian is when he starts feeling something for a woman, just look at what he's doing for his ex-girlfriend. If I were you, I would consider this battle lost.-

Vincent swallowed hard, making his Adam's apple move up and down, and poured himself another glass of whiskey, which he downed in one go.

-I may lose a battle, but not the war.- Vincent whispered to himself, but I managed to hear him, and I couldn't help but get excited because things were getting better and better.

The door opened, and Sofia, my public relations manager, entered with a couple, and I immediately recognized the woman, the blond with hazel eyes, she was the presenter who would cover the event, she was Bastian's ex-girlfriend, and due to the closeness she had with the impeccably dressed man accompanying her, he was probably her fiancé.

Sofia called me to greet Jane, as I needed to meet the person who would be introduced as the General Manager of L&J at the end of the fashion show. After exchanging a few words, I returned to my cousins, not wanting to miss my friend and cousin's performance, nor Vincent's reaction.

This was going to be good.

-I should be making sure everything is in order outside, but I can't miss this for anything in the world.- I said as I crossed my arms, watching the fake couple who were startled by the presence of Jane and her fiancé, and Bastian pulled Abby closer to his chest with one hand on her waist and the other affectionately caressing the exposed skin of her neck.

They were so connected to each other that anyone would believe they are a real couple.

-Bastian?- The woman recognized Bastian, even though he had his back to her and turned around without letting go of Abby's waist when he heard her voice.

-We need some popcorn to better enjoy the show.- Hugo joked next to Vincent, who began rubbing his hand on his face with discomfort and frustration.

-Jane. What a surprise to see you here.- Bastian pretended to be surprised by his ex-girlfriend's presence.

I couldn't deny that Abby made a great couple in every way, both had a wild side and were serious when necessary, they spoke their minds without filtering and when it came to acting, both could win an award, they did it so naturally, as if it ran in their blood.

-This is ridiculous.- Vincent turned towards the table, as if he didn't want to see what was happening a few meters away.

-This stupidity would only happen at Jane's engagement party. You two are immature.- He kept complaining while Bastian and Jane exchanged words, and a few seconds later, Abby shook hands with the blonde with a smile on her face.

-I didn't know you already had a girlfriend, how cute.- Jane spoke with a smile that could be seen from miles away that it was fake, and looked at Abby as if she wanted to devour her, but my friend looked so radiant and confident, while tenderly caressing Bastian's shoulder.

-Thank you, Jane, how sweet.- Abby spoke as if she liked the woman, although I could see from here that she couldn't stand her.

-The truth is that we fell in love when we were teenagers, but due to circumstances of fate, we separated without having the chance to be more than friends, and now that we have reunited, I won't let him slip away.-

Abby hugged Bastian by the neck to look at him with eyes full of love, as if she was truly in love with him, and he looked at her the same way, with a perfect smile that revealed his small dimple.

-It is often said that all roads lead to Rome.- Bastian's sweet words made Vincent let out an unfunny laugh, which only showed his bad mood, and I stood frozen in place, gaping with my eyes wide open at what I saw next.

I must be hallucinating.

Chapter 103 A great day to celebrate.

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Bastian gently caressed Abby's face with his fingers and took her by surprise as he pressed his lips against hers. My friend was stunned, but she disguised it well with her arms still around her fake boyfriend's neck.

-He's kissing her.- I heard Hugo's voice say, confirming that it wasn't a hallucination. And when Vincent heard that, he turned around to look at the scene with a furrowed brow, heavy breathing, and cheeks more flushed than usual.

Obviously, he was very angry, jealous, irritated, and frustrated because he knew he couldn't do anything. He couldn't confront either of them for such an act, because he had brought it upon himself. If he had taken a risk and expressed his feelings like an adult, things would be very different right now. He would be the one kissing Abby, not his younger brother.

-This has to be a damn joke.- Vincent growled beside me as he took another sip of whiskey, looking at Abby and Bastian with disgust as she kissed him back, under the watchful gaze of Jane and her fiancé.

-Excuse me, I have things to do.-

He barely finished speaking before he left the dressing room, loosening his tie as he passed by the couple who had finished their kissing session.

-I said it and I stand by it. This is going to end very badly.- Hugo agreed. Abby was playing with fire and could get burned.

-I have things to do too. Are you coming with me? - I asked Hugo so he wouldn't be alone in such a tense moment.

-I'm going with you. I don't want to see the world burn.- He replied.

Outside, the place was filled with socialites and important businessmen, some of whom I knew personally and others I had seen in news about influential entrepreneurs. I couldn't believe that Sofía had managed to get so many recognizable people to attend the launch. Julian and Alexis were welcoming each one of them at their respective tables.

After making sure everything was in order with Hugo, he left with Vincent who was still drinking recklessly at the event's bar. I chose not to intervene in a conversation between men, so I sat at the table reserved for L&J executives and their guests, waiting for the last few minutes to pass before the fashion show began.

My phone rang in my hand and my brow furrowed as I saw an unknown number on the screen. If it were under different circumstances, I would have hesitated to answer the call, but I was waiting for my lawyers to contact me with news, so it could be them.

-Hello?- I spoke aloud as the melodies of the piano echoed throughout the venue. I waited for someone to speak on the other end of the line, but there was nothing but heavy breathing.

-People with nothing better to do.- I muttered. When I was about to hang up the call, a voice on the other end froze me in place, unable to utter a word.

-Sarah, it's me, it's Joelle.- The voice said.

My heart stopped and then beat so strongly that I could hear it despite the music. My breathing quickened and tears threatened to escape my eyes. Soon, I realized that I was surrounded by many people and had to act normal, not mentioning the names of my parents.

-Mrs. Petit, you have no idea how glad I am to hear from you again.- I spoke, disguising that I was talking to someone else, but the emotion in my chest was indescribable. It changed my mood just by hearing her voice.

-My girl, I miss you too and you can't imagine how much. I understand that you can't talk at the moment. Congratulations on the launch of your new brand, I'm so proud of you.- She said.

Those words caused my tears to slide down my cheeks, but I quickly wiped them away and cleared my throat in an attempt to alleviate the knot that had formed in my throat.

My parents weren't by my side at this moment, but they had never been more present and aware of all my projects, all my movements, than now. They were watching over me like guardian angels.

-I would like for you to be here.- My voice broke and I didn't feel capable of continuing speaking or I would end up crying without being able to stop just minutes before starting the presentation.

-We are with you wherever you go, we are in your heart.-

I remained silent with my eyes closed, holding back the urge to cry, and my mother continued. - Daughter, I have some instructions for you. In the place where you left your father's gift, we left a folder that we have been preparing. Review it when you get home, you will know what decision to make. I love you very much, we will be together again soon.-

Curiosity arose in my chest upon hearing my mother's instructions and when I wanted to ask what it was about, the call ended, leaving me with more than one question in my mouth.

-Darling, we almost didn't make it. You want to give me a heart attack, you look beautiful, more than that, are you real?-

I startled in my place when I heard Alexander's voice next to me and he looked at me amused for a few seconds with Tristan in his arms, his expression changing to one of concern when he saw me trembling with nerves.

-Are you okay? Did something happen?-

I immediately shook my head, while trying to calm my nerves before it became more evident, and smiled as I saw Tristan's cute suit, dressed just like Alexander.

-There's nothing to worry about, I'll tell you later. Look how beautiful my baby boy is.- I took Tristan in my arms to give him many kisses on his face, unleashing his boisterous laughter.

-You look like a little doll, so cute.-

-Just like his father.- Said Alexander, pretending to be an irreparable narcissist, and I laughed at his expression.

-He only has your eyes, actually he looks like me.-

That was the biggest lie, as he was a miniature version of Alexander and it seemed unfair when I was the one who had carried Tristan in my belly for nine months and had to endure all the pain.

The most beautiful pain.

-I don't like to contradict you, my dear, but this time you are wrong. But we can solve it by having a daughter with your beautiful green eyes, your beautiful eyelashes, your light brown hair. Tristan, would you like a sister?-

Alexander's question almost made me choke on my own saliva and I shook my head. Tristan didn't even know what his father was talking about, yet his head nodded emphatically with a positive response.

-Alexander, no.- I warned him with a look to drop the subject there, and he raised his hands as if he was innocent.

-Okay, okay, give me a kiss and I'll shut up.-

I gave a playful glance to Tristan, as he would worry whenever he saw us kissing. Seeing that he was focused on the stage decoration, I quickly approached Alexander and gave him a fleeting kiss on his lips that made him smile.

-I enjoy doing business with you, beautiful fairy.-

The lights went out for a few seconds, at the same time that the place fell into silence long enough to play the next piano melody, and Alexander took the opportunity to steal a kiss from me, leaving me bewildered.

Chapter 103 A great day to celebrate part 2

Chapter 167 - Divorced Heiress

-Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, I invite you to take your seats and enjoy the great show about to begin. Thank you all for joining us on this wonderful night, the night in which you will all get to know the promising new brand L&J and the person who has made all this a reality, the person who has brought out all the good from the most difficult and tough moments in their life, turning them into great projects. Applause, please.-

Jane's voice sounded over the music and most of the guests took their respective seats while applauding. That sound filled my heart with happiness because, although problems still loomed over me, I had many reasons to be happy, starting with the fact that I heard my mother's voice after so long, even if it was for a short time.

The seats at our table were occupied by Abby, Bastian, Julian, Alexis, and Hugo, who applauded me, although the other people had no idea that I was the founder of the brand.

-Bravo, goddess!- Abby shouted ecstatically, and I couldn't help but remember that she was kissing Bastian just minutes ago.

-The L&J brand will not only launch high-fashion designs by renowned designer Zafiro Martin. L&J starts big by including collaborations with great jewelry designers, footwear designers,

handbags, and other amazing surprises that you will soon discover. I don't want to bore you, so let's begin the launch of L&J.-

I couldn't deny that Jane did a good job. With her small but pleasant speech, she managed to get everyone excited and expectant for what they were about to see.

The stage lights dimmed, and Jane disappeared from the stage before the blue background lights and white floor lights turned on, perfectly illuminating the path of the models.

The piano melodies stopped playing, making way for the music prepared for the fashion show. Then, the models appeared, showcasing each tailor-made design, as well as the shoes, jewelry, and handbags. A smile appeared on my face as I watched the models one by one and took the opportunity to observe the guests' reactions. While some looked expressionless, I could see a hint of acceptance in their slightest gestures.

My phone started ringing on the table, and I quickly picked it up to see my lawyer's name on the screen, but I couldn't answer immediately due to the high volume of the music.

-Alexander, I need to take this call. I'll leave Tristan with you, I'll be right back.- I said as I left Tristan sitting on my chair while Alexander nodded in response.

I walked away to the bar where Vincent was still drinking while looking at the table where I had been sitting seconds ago, to be more specific, he was staring at Abby, who was enjoying the fashion show with Bastian by her side.

I wanted to approach, but the call couldn't wait.

-Hi, what news do you have for me?- I asked, covering my free ear to only hear my lawyer's voice.

-Ms. Doinel, I have very good news. Rachel's statement and the evidence you managed to get have yielded positive results for the case. We will prepare the lawsuit against Paul Dubois, and Rachel will have her probation under the witness protection program. Congratulations.- He said. My mouth opened as if it had a life of its own, and I had to cover it with my hand.

I couldn't believe it, all this was too good to be true. So much good news in one day only made me scared because every time a spark of hope ignited, it immediately went out.

-Are you serious? Thank you very, very much. When can we proceed with the lawsuit?- I asked hastily, reflecting the excitement I felt in the wide smile that appeared on my face.

-Very serious, the case has been a complete success. We can proceed when you order.-

A sigh of relief escaped my lips, and I didn't hesitate to give him an answer.

-As soon as possible, I want to see that rat behind bars already.- I said confidently and looked at the models' fashion show which was going smoothly. Everything was turning out so perfect that it seemed unreal.

-In that case, we will be at your house tomorrow to finalize the details, and the authorities will take action promptly.-

I bit my lips as I internally thanked for this wonderful news.

-Tomorrow, tomorrow I would give Paul what he deserved, and I couldn't be happier about it.-

-Then I'll be waiting for you tomorrow at the Villa. Thank you very much, you have done a great job.-

The lawyer said goodbye, congratulating me again, and I ended the call without wiping the smile off my face.

Nothing and no one could ruin my good mood, this was an excellent day to celebrate.

My eyes traveled to the man who was a few meters away from me with a glass of whisky in his hand and his gaze focused on the same place I saw him a while ago. I put my phone in my clutch and approached Vincent, who didn't look very well.

-A glass of 1982 Lafite wine, please.- I asked the bartender in charge of serving alcoholic drinks and sat next to Vincent, who apparently hadn't noticed my presence.

-Drinking that way won't solve anything.- I said over the music to capture Vincent's attention. He rubbed his chin with his fingers without any delicacy.

-She's driving me crazy, Sarah. I swore not to feel anything for a woman thanks to unrequited love and Abby...-

By the tone Vincent was using and the way he slurred his words, I could tell he was a little drunk, and it was no surprise considering how much he was drinking. If I were in his place, I would already be unconscious from so much alcohol in my system.

-God, Abby thawed my heart, made me feel again, I feel complete when I'm around her and it terrifies me. I don't know how to act, I don't know what to do or say to her, I want to be with her, but fear overwhelms me and it sickens me to see her like that with Bastian, if he wasn't my brother I would put him in his place, he kissed her right in front of me! But I don't have the right to do that either, I have behaved like a complete idiot with her. I don't know, Sarah, I'm not her owner, but I feel like she's mine, and without having her, I'm losing her.-

For the first time, Vincent was confessing his feelings for Abby, he was opening up completely to me, all thanks to the whiskey glasses that loosened his tongue.

The bartender handed me my glass of wine and I smelled it before tasting its exquisite flavor. I looked towards where he was looking, at Abby, and for a few seconds, I put myself in my cousin's shoes.

It wasn't easy being a robot, a fridge for so many years, staying out of everything related to love and then, when you least expect it, having a person installed in your heart. And on top of not knowing how to express feelings because of fear of the unknown, someone else seemed interested in that person, and what was worse, that someone was your brother.

-I was really screwed.-

-Take a risk, don't be selfish with yourself, allow yourself to feel, to live new experiences. Get tired of being with women with contracts involved, Abby is worth more than a few clauses, and luckily, your feelings are reciprocated. What can you lose? You lose more because of fear than by trying. Bastian is a sham, yes, but you're throwing her into his arms, and your brother seems to be getting interested in her, and unlike you, he will be willing to do anything to win her over.-

My counseling side came out with just one sip of wine and I hoped he would take my words into account.

-Although Abby and Bastian were very similar and could seem like the perfect couple, she had more compatibility with Vincent, they complemented each other perfectly.-

-You're right. I should dive in headfirst, take a risk, that's what she would do, and she did it in New York when she kissed me. After all, life is only one, right?-

I nodded satisfied with his response and took another sip of my wine, but I almost choked when Vincent got up staggering, with the clear intention of going to his table.

-No, what are you doing? This is not the right time, wait until we get back to the villa.- I said, grabbing his arm to stop his movements and before he said a single word, I heard a very familiar female voice that gave me chills and accomplished what I thought was impossible, putting me in a bad mood.

-The great Sarah Petit with another man, no surprise there. Oops, I forgot, the poor girl turned out to be a rich girl.-

I turned my face, moving the glass in my hand, to observe the pair of vipers that shouldn't be setting foot in this place.

Chapter 104 Are the three heart attacks already coming?

Chapter 168 - Divorced Heiress

I drank what was left of the wine in my glass in one gulp, in an attempt to get rid of the bad taste in my mouth that the mere fact of seeing the venomous snakes again left me with, which I didn't miss at all.

I was beginning to understand why Vincent drank his whiskey that way. I knew from the mocking expressions on Amelia and Gina's faces that they did not come in peace, as if they hadn't had enough with the million-dollar lawsuit in New York, adding to it the punishment from Grandfather Lancaster for publicly embarrassing the family.

How did Grandfather Lancaster let them travel to Paris?

Didn't they learn from their mistakes?

How much poison did they have stored up to spit at me?

-Aren't these the women who were stopped at the end of Fashion Week in New York? - Vincent's question was unnecessary, of course I remembered, but I was so drunk that I couldn't think clearly, I even slurred my words even more than before.

-Yes, they are. Look, Sarah, your mother-in-law and sister-in-law.-

I discreetly nudged Vincent to shut his mouth, but he exposed me when he complained of pain.

Spending so much time with Abby was turning him into someone like her, reckless and indiscreet.

-Huh, in their dreams they would be part of the Lancaster family again.- Amelia didn't hesitate to mock deliberately, and I smirked as if I were enjoying their unpleasant presence.

It was obvious that they had no idea that things between Alexander and I were improving more and more, and surely they would be just as shocked as when they found out my true identity, when they meet Tristan Lancaster, I would enjoy it very much.

I didn't know how much they were informed about my life or the most recent events, but I would enjoy their ignorance as long as I could.

-What are you doing here? I don't remember you being on the guest list.- I didn't feel like starting an argument tonight when everything seemed to be going well, and even less with them, but if they attacked me, I wouldn't hesitate to defend myself.

I didn't even have the slightest idea how they found out about this event or how they managed to get in without an invitation, and for a moment I thought the invitation came from one of the Lancaster twins, but neither Alexander nor Alexis had a good relationship with them since the moment we went to trial in New York, at least not from Alexander's side.

-But who does this woman think she is? Now she thinks she's something because she has an important last name and is the heiress of a fashion company. The one who shouldn't be invited to such a grand event is you, haven't you heard? My son, Alexis Lancaster, is a shareholder of this brand, we don't need an insignificant invitation, we have the right to be here.-

I had to hold back my laughter because they were humiliating themselves again, as if they were very proud to be at MY launch, and I pretended to be impressed by that information, pretending I didn't know that Alexis was my brand's partner.

-Now, I ask you the same question, what are you doing here?-

-What a silly question. Can't you see she's hunting? I mean, since Alexander didn't look at her again, she has no choice but to look for a new rich husband, only a blind person could notice her.-

Gina kept spewing her venom with contempt and I nonchalantly looked at my nails, listening to every nonsense that came out of her lips.

-Sir, if I were you, I would think twice before being with that woman, she's divorced and has a very bad reputation.-

It truly seemed like an impossible task for those two women to show a bit of education and manners, they could only bring shame upon themselves by going through life insulting and boasting about what they didn't achieve on their own, with their own efforts.

I wasn't going to waste words on the pair of venomous snakes, I was going to shut them up and put them in their place when they realized they were speaking to the owner of the brand they boasted so much about and for which they had an air of superiority.

-What nonsense am I hearing, what clueless women, don't they know who they are talking to? Do they know who the great Sarah Doinel is?- Vincent sounded furious about the way those women were speaking about me, obviously, my cousin intended to defend me from their attacks, but I stopped him by raising a hand in the air before he could disclose any information.

Ignorance can sometimes be a double-edged sword and I was going to take full advantage of it.

-Calm down, Vin. Let them vent, let them release all the frustration they have in their chest, let them let out all the resentment. They are only proving that the days in jail were worth nothing, they are still ill-mannered women.- I said calmly, showing a smile that I couldn't wipe off my face and I left the empty glass on the bar before I finished directing myself towards them.

-I will give you a recommendation, you can decide whether to take it into account or not. - I hooked onto Vincent's arm, as if giving them the idea that I was with my new conquest, and with a raised eyebrow, I continued. - Be careful with your words and to whom they are directed, it might not be so lucky for you next time to be able to get Grandfather Lancaster to answer to a

new multi-million dollar lawsuit and end up locked up for a good while like what happened with Rachel.-

I didn't want to compare them to Rachel because her case was different and, besides, her confession was very helpful, but I just wanted them to get an idea of how things would go for them if they kept bothering me for no apparent reason, they had brought it upon themselves with their bad actions.

Mrs. Amelia looked at me as if she wanted to insult me in every language, but she limited herself to pursing her lips in anger and Gina opened her mouth as if she was appalled, before looking at her mother with fear in her eyes.

-Are you threatening us?- Amelia asked with a tone of disdain and I calmly shook my head.

-Oh no. How could you think that I would threaten you? No, I wouldn't do such a thing.- I responded pretending to be anguished by the misinterpretation of my words and both of them adopted their posture of superiority again, which was perfect for me to give them my last words, before returning to the table and enjoying this beautiful night.

-I act without warning, just like I did during Fashion Week in New York, I suppose you must remember that perfectly. Rather, consider yourselves lucky, I am warning you now while there is still time. Enjoy the show, tonight is a great night. Come on, darling.-

Chapter 104 Are the three heart attacks already coming? Part 2

Chapter 169 - Divorced Heiress

I took one of the champagne glasses that were already prepared on the bar and raised it in the air as a toast, leaving them astonished and with an unpleasant expression, before walking alongside an unstable Vincent who remained silent, but when we were far enough from the Lancasters, he burst out laughing while leaning on my shoulder and I almost lost my balance.

-I don't think your mother-in-law and sister-in-law really like you, do you think my mother-in-law and brother-in-law like me?-

Although Vincent didn't have an official girlfriend, I knew very well that he was referring to Abby with that and I couldn't help but laugh in the middle of the way because of the unfortunate situation that both of us were going through with our partners' families.

-What are you saying? They adore me, haven't you noticed? It's their way of showing love.- I responded with obvious sarcasm, while taking a sip from the champagne glass in my hand.

-Margaret and Paul love you, they just want to kill us and won't rest until they see us completely broken, but it's nothing out of this world, just small things.-

I waved my hand, downplaying the issue and Vincent let out a chuckle that made us stagger towards the table.

-At least I don't have to go through the task of getting to know my first girlfriend's family.-

I nodded in agreement, touched by how he started calling Abby that, but my smile faded when I saw the scene at the table that Vincent wouldn't like at all.

I could understand that it was all part of the act for Bastian's ex-girlfriend, but at this moment, there was no reason for such a scene, there was no reason for the fake couple to be kissing again as if Jane was present watching them.

I immediately stopped in my tracks, causing Vincent to stop abruptly and look at me not knowing why I had stood there like a statue, but I didn't know what to do, or what to think at this moment, I didn't know if it was a good idea for Vincent to witness such a scene again, he could go back to the bar and drink until he emptied the flower vases or create a scene in the middle of the presentation.

Why did Vincent decide so late to express his feelings?

Why was Abby so close to Bastian? Why did I have to be in this situation?

-Vincent...- When I was about to ask him to accompany me back to the bar, I sighed with relief to see Abby separate from Bastian and avoid him when my cousin tried to kiss her again. Oh my God, I didn't want to see the world burn.

-Are you very drunk?- I asked the first thing that came to mind, and he shook his head as if I had insulted him, although it was obvious he was drunk.

-What are you talking about, I'm fine. Let's go to the table, I want to be with Abby and tell her how amazing she looks in that dress.- Vincent let go of me and hurried to the table, and I had no choice but to follow him with my nerves on edge, praying that Vin wouldn't cause a jealous scene.

Luckily for me, all he did was drag a chair to the middle of Abby and Bastian, where he sat down without caring that he was separating them and without taking his eyes off my friend, who seemed confused or amazed by his sudden presence.

I sat in my seat feeling calmer and smiled at Alexander, but then I remembered that I had just met his mother and sister, so my smile disappeared immediately.

-Is everything okay, darling? Was it the lawyer? Did you get news?- Alexander asked me next to me with Tristan sitting on his lap, my son clapping excitedly with his eyes on the models on the runway, looking so beautiful and adorable in his little suit.

-It was the lawyer, he gave me the news we've been waiting for so long. This nightmare is going to end soon.- I informed Alexander, putting the issue of the vipers on the backburner, at this moment, Rachel's confession, Paul's accusation, and the lawsuit were more important than the presence of the Lancasters.

Alexander smiled widely and didn't hesitate to give me a brief kiss on the lips in celebration, then the applause around us increased and Jane's voice echoed through the events hall, catching my attention.

-And we conclude this presentation with a model that many of you know and surely many here long to have on their runways. She is Britney Bonnet, showcasing the exclusive designs of L&J.-

Britney appeared in the red dress that left her back uncovered, the silver jewelry matched perfectly with the silver high-heeled sandals that were not uncomfortable at all.

Abby and I were the only ones at our table who stood up and applauded excitedly. Tristan got even more excited, and I picked him up in my arms to enjoy Britney's magnificent closing, overflowing with elegance with every step she took, perfectly showcasing my brand.

-That's my friend!- Abby shouted from her place, although it was barely heard over the applause and music.

-Isn't she beautiful? Have you met her?-

Suddenly my friend was next to Alexis, as if she was escaping from the Lefebvre brothers. Poor Alexis shook his head while continuing to applaud Britney.

-How come you don't know her? Oh right, you were playing Sleeping Beauty. You have to meet her, she will be our star model, and besides, she is our best friend and you know we're all friends, so she will be your friend too.-

-Abby!- I called her to warn her not to be so rude to Alexis. How could she call him Sleeping Beauty?

-Don't worry, Sarah, I'm getting used to her peculiar personality.- Alexis defended her with a playful smile, although I still felt embarrassed about how my friend referred to his coma state.

-The moment has come, ladies and gentlemen. It's time to introduce the person who started this project from scratch, a person admired by many, at least I admire her, a person who is an example to follow, an example of struggle and perseverance. She is going through a tough time right now, but that didn't stop her from bringing her project, her own brand, to success. This person is like a phoenix, rising from the ashes.-

Jane wasn't giving details of my life, as the only thing she knew about my personal life was what was on the news, but it made me feel proud of myself.

-That's my beautiful wife.- Alexander whispered in my ear, and it was impossible not to smile like a fool while feeling a pleasant sensation settle in my chest.

-Applaud for mommy, Tristan. She deserves it.- Alexander's arms wrapped around me from behind, holding Tristan with one hand and with his free hand, he caressed my waist.

Tristan applauded in the midst of silence, the silence that had been created to hear the name that would come out of Jane's lips. My gaze automatically shifted and stopped at a couple of faces that looked at me as if I were a fright. The corners of my lips curved in slow motion, without taking my eyes off the Lancaster's, when Alexander planted a kiss on my cheek.

-Please, applause for the founder of L&J, the one responsible for a promising brand. Let's welcome Sarah Doinel.- Jane's voice echoed throughout the place and was immediately followed by applause directed at me.

The collective gasp of the guests made me smile, as I was taking many by surprise, but especially Amelia and Gina, who couldn't stop staring at me with daggers in their eyes.

In the next second, I noticed that Amelia's gaze was fixed on Tristan, who was applauding me enthusiastically, and she was forced to sit at one of the tables while sipping a glass of champagne as if it were water.

I glanced at my son in my arms and smiled at his cute outfit, but soon I understood the attack Amelia was undergoing, and that was because no one could deny that he was a mini version clone of Alexander. They looked so alike, and the identical outfit didn't help much.

I had to suppress the urge to laugh when I saw Gina starting to fan her mother's face.

Were the three heart attacks coming soon?

And I had just begun to enjoy this wonderful evening.

Chapter 105 Your grandson.

Chapter 170 - Divorced Heiress

Being on stage, representing my new company, reminded me of the day my father introduced me as his daughter, his heiress, leaving many in disbelief and the Lancasters on the verge of

collapse. This time, I was once again enjoying the look of disbelief on their faces. They deserved it for spewing their poison again, as if they didn't care about anything.

I stopped paying attention to the women for a moment and focused on what was important, observing the important guests from my position, the entrepreneurs and familiar figures who would become my potential clients.

I took a deep breath when Jane asked me to say a few words and positioned myself in one spot, with my gaze fixed on the table where my family and friends were sitting, those who believed in me, those who supported me when I had lost all hope, those who looked at me with pride.

-Welcome to the launch of this brand that is inspired by my parents, Leonardo and Joelle. Thank you very much for attending even though you had no idea who would be behind this new brand.- I said as the applause resonated again, trying to hide my nervousness with a smile that soon disappeared as the nerves crept up on me while standing in front of so many people looking at me with surprise, excitement, or simply expressionless, as they had been all night, waiting for the applause to die down.

-Allow me to introduce you to L&J, the project that has been my lifeline during difficult times that my family and I have been through in recent days.- I continued, smiling nervously as my gaze landed on Alexander and Tristan.

-You can do it, darling, speak from the heart.-

I read Alexander's lips as he realized that nerves could hinder my speech. He nodded with a smile on his face, a clear sign that I could deliver the best welcome speech.

-I don't expect you to see me as the daughter of... No. I am standing on this stage representing my own name, Sarah Doinel, CEO and founder of L&J, a company that will provide you with the best experience in terms of quality and variety, everything you're looking for in one place. Of course, taking the risk of starting a company from scratch is not an easy task, but if there's one thing I've learned, it's that our greatest weakness is giving up, and the surest way to succeed is to try again, because strength is not only shown in the ability to persist, but in the ability to start over.-

-We may step back, but we will never give up. We may experience many defeats, but we won't feel defeated, because it's hard to defeat someone who never gives up. And I didn't give up, despite the problems I have faced. I am still here, giving my heart to this new project. Please applause for L&J.- I paused as the applause resumed, looking at Alexander, who nodded in agreement with my words, joining in the applause.

-But this wouldn't be possible without my team, without those who believed in me blindly. I invite them to join me on stage.- I said, gesturing for my partners to come forward. Immediately, my partners hurried to greet the guests as they walked towards the stairs leading to the stage.

The only ones who remained at the table were Alexander and Tristan, and I invited them to join us, waving my hand in the air, because they deserved to be here more than anyone else, and although I tried to keep my son away from screens, this was a special occasion.

I handed the microphone back to Jane as she would introduce each member of my team as they deserved. Then, Alexander stood by my side with our son in his arms, and I gave him a broad smile before looking at the audience. But my smile faded when I saw that man among the crowd, watching the show in complete silence, as if he disliked seeing us.

When our eyes met, I stopped hearing Jane's words and any noise around me. All I could hear were the fast beats of my heart as panic took over.

What was he doing here? I was sure he wasn't on the guest list for this event, just like the Lancasters.

-And last but not least, Abby Dubois, partner and right-hand person of Sarah Doinel.- Jane announced, and my body froze when I heard her words.

A shiver ran down my spine as I looked at Abby with concern. She was already enthusiastically greeting the audience as her name was mentioned as a partner of L&J.

For him, Abby and I were going through a rough patch and he could sue me at any moment, and now we shared the stage while informing everyone that she was my business partner.

We were screwed.

No. He was screwed, but he didn't know it.

Tomorrow he would have a big surprise.

-I thought you didn't want him to be part of your company or to be associated with me.- Alexander murmured beside me, causing me to look away from Paul and snap out of my thoughts. I smiled at him, realizing that his mother and sister were enjoying the show.

-You're not part of my company, but you're part of my life and I want to celebrate this achievement with my family. Is that too much to ask?- I asked, placing my hand on his waist in a comforting gesture. A smile appeared on his face.

-Of course not, Tristan and I are delighted to accompany you, right Tristan?-

My little son, in his cute outfit, nodded his head before hugging Alexander's neck with obvious excitement. I couldn't help but smile as I hugged both of them.

Jane finished introducing the team and invited the models to take one final walk with Sapphire and the designers who collaborated with my company to bring my ideas to life, before starting the celebration for the launch, a moment I would take advantage of to connect with the big shots.

Along with the others, I stepped off the stage to reach our table, and I found it impossible to set aside my nerves this time because Paul was present and I was afraid of whatever he might do to get back at Abby for the lie.

But when I looked back to where I had met Paul's gaze, he was gone. Damn it. Now I only knew that I had to protect Abby until Paul was finally behind bars.

-That speech was incredible, so moving. It gave me goosebumps just listening to you. And it wasn't just about L&J, it was about all the shit you've been through lately, starting with Paul, and how you're still standing without a scratch.- Abby spoke excitedly, sitting between the Lefebvre brothers, and I couldn't help but glance at Vincent to make sure he was okay and that his drunken state was under control.

But he only looked at Abby as if she were the most amazing thing his eyes had ever seen.

-She's an example to follow, strong, capable, and determined. She never gives up, even when everything seems to be going wrong.- Alexander followed my friend's sweet words, and all I could do was smile and forget about the presence of the undesirables.

-For that and a thousand more reasons, I love you.-

Our eyes met when I heard those last words directed solely at me, and it was hard for me to ignore the tingling that ran down my back and settled in my neck.

It had been many years since I heard that phrase from his lips, with his intense gaze, full of love, admiration. His bright eyes seemed to want to see inside me.

I opened my mouth to speak, but I couldn't make a sound. I didn't know what to say to him, and I didn't get a chance to respond because a pair of women approached our table with sour expressions.

Thankfully, the attention of the guests was focused on the models who were giving their final appearance on stage, along with the sound of the music and applause that drowned out Amelia's words.

-Alexander! Stay away from that woman. And you, Alexis, you've disappointed me. How could you associate yourself with this liar?-

When Alexander heard his mother's voice, he just looked at her with a furrowed brow from his seat and hugged Tristan protectively. This was what was missing, for these women to make a scene at the launch in front of so many people.

I wouldn't allow that.