

Chapter 191 - Divorced Heiress

She followed the path to the boardroom as if she knew it by heart, and I returned to Alexis and Julian, who were already aware of the proposal and the strategy I would present in the board meeting.

"Are you ready?" I asked the two men, and they both nodded as if they were waiting for any indication from me to make a move.

In the boardroom, everyone was ready to begin, and they were all surprised to see me enter with Alexis and Julian, especially Alexander, who looked at his twin with obvious confusion. He even shifted uncomfortably in his seat with Tristan on his lap.

While everyone prepared what was necessary for the meeting, I took Britney aside to be filled in on the companies interested in the collection, and the information she gave me was more than good. L&J was off to a great start.

The meeting started by informing us, through the finance manager, about the poor handling of assets, the million-dollar embezzlement, and the almost non-existent profits that the company still held. But that wasn't enough. The situation was a ticking time bomb, and if we didn't act immediately, we'd lose everything.

"I've been working on a strategy with Jack, with it, we could recover in a short amount of time, maybe months or even weeks." I spoke after a long silence in which everyone processed the horrifying information about Doinel's terrible management, which led to its ruin in such a short time.

"Now, only a miracle could save the company in months or weeks after such a catastrophe. I don't want to be pessimistic, but let's be realistic, Mr. Dubois left us the remains of a company." The finance manager spoke from his perspective, showing genuine concern for the current situation of the company, and I understood his fear very well. The figures were larger than anticipated.

"Thank you for your words, but my proposal could be very useful and although it doesn't solve the problem completely, the recovery will be remarkable. I will use L&J to recover Doinel."

I stood up from my seat, catching the attention of those present. My mind went blank when I saw everyone's expression, some seemed hopeless, others incredulous, and Vincent looked expressionless. It took me a couple of seconds to formulate my strategy with the confidence that

I had given up on, all thanks to Julian's supportive smile, who, apparently, was the only one who believed in my ideas.

I presented the risks and benefits of my proposal, the idea was to associate both companies, that way, L&J would inject a significant amount of money as an investor, as well as grant Doinel million-dollar loans, to cover part of the lost assets and launch a new collection on the same date as the collaboration with Lancaster and Innova. My company started with great success, so much so that it could afford to take on Doinel's responsibilities.

"I disagree." Vincent's voice left me frozen when I finished speaking, but I quickly recovered when I remembered his decision and that I didn't support it at all, definitely, the situation that Paul left us in was causing us more than just a money problem.

"L&J is just starting, no one guarantees us that it will be successful enough for that, we are talking about a million-dollar company, I'm sorry, but I disagree, it would be execution for L&J, it would end before even starting."

"The sales reports after the launch are really favorable, even though L&J also has to fulfill its responsibilities, its recent and constant growth allows it to be an investor and lender, as I said at the beginning, while it wouldn't be enough to fully recover Doinel, it would at least give it a great boost."

Vincent opened his mouth to continue contradicting me, but he didn't know what to say, he wasn't aware of L&J's unprecedented success and the great help it could be.

"I think it's a great idea, as a partner of L&J, you have all my support and as a collaborator of Doinel, I inform you that the royalties I receive from the collaboration, I will donate for the prompt recovery of the company."

I opened my eyes wide when I heard those words from Julian and shook my head, that was the most unfair thing I had ever heard in my life.

"Of course not, Julian, you don't have to, it's your work, your effort, your money and..."

Julian interrupted me as I refused to accept such an absurdity.

"Sarah, the money doesn't interest me. I collaborated with Doinel, I collaborated with you, I already won."

That left me astonished, I didn't know how to interpret his words, nor did I have the mental capacity to do so, all I could think about was his good heart and how willing he was to give us a hand.

A throat clearing made me look away from Julian and focus on Alexander, who seemed uncomfortable with the situation.

"My royalties will also be at the disposal of the company and..."

"No! Everyone is making bad decisions, first L&J, and now the collaborators' royalties." Vincent stood up in agitation and I let out a tired sigh at the irony of life.

"Bad decisions? Bad decisions, just like yours of selling your shares in the company right now?" My question provoked more than one gasp of surprise and all eyes in the room turned towards him, except for Alexander's who continued to look at me uncomfortably.

"What did you do?" Abby asked, unable to believe the bombshell I had just dropped without stopping to think if it was right to say it in front of so many people.

"I can't believe it, Vincent, you're going to run away from all of this just like that."

"No! I'm not running away!" Vincent raised his voice with irritation, causing Tristan to wake up from his comfortable nap in his father's lap.

"God, I'm sorry. "

"Alright, let's take a break. " Alexis intervened, being the only one who looked unperturbed and tried to cut the tension that had been created.

"It's understandable that it's a complicated moment, but we won't solve anything by getting upset."

"I'm sorry, it wasn't my intention to shout, it's just that all of this has me a little tense." Vincent apologized again and sat down in his chair before taking a deep breath to speak.

" I want you to understand something, I'm not selling my shares because I'm running away at the most critical moment or because I'm abandoning the ship, no. Don't think that this decision hasn't cost me, it's my family's company and you know I've dedicated time and a lot of work to keep it as successful as it has always been, and this is no exception. If I don't do this, we may not even have a company in the future and we know that many families depend on this job."

Now that he was explaining himself better, in a calmer manner, I understood his reasons for selling his shares, however, I didn't agree with leaving his part of the company in the hands of a stranger.

"That's why I will sell my shares to someone who can do more for the company than I can do."

My brow automatically furrowed, not knowing what he meant by that, I didn't understand how he was so sure of that if the decision to sell was recent, how was it that he already had a buyer? Then, that question answered itself in my head, but his next words confirmed it all for me.

"I will sell my shares to Alexander."

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My gaze automatically landed on the face of Alexander who looked carefree, and I felt truly angry at that crazy idea they both had while I was meeting with Jack, without even consulting me first if I agreed or not.

This was absurd, I could not agree with such madness.

"I hope you're joking." I said, my icy words hanging in the air as Vincent interrupted me, ignoring the looks going back and forth and not daring to utter a word due to the tension in the room after revealing the name of my cousin's buyer.

"It's not a joke, Sarah. We can discuss the details later, I just want you to know that the decision has been made, Alexander will be Doinel's new partner and it's not up for discussion."

Everyone at the table remained silent as my cousin and I argued about the matter as if it was just the two of us. This was going to give me a headache for a week.

I stayed silent for a few seconds, making my best effort not to argue. However, there was something I had to do before falling into madness.

"Let's take a five-minute break." I ordered, knowing that if we continued with this back and forth, we would end up in bad conditions, and that wasn't the idea in these critical moments. Even though it was completely difficult, I had to start accepting their decision and the reasons that led them to it, although there was much to clarify, but before...

"Alexander, can we talk for a second?" It didn't even sound like a question, obviously it was an order. I needed to know what he was aiming for by buying the shares.

Why him? He knew very well that I preferred to keep him away from the business and he was doing everything possible to go against me.

I walked out of the boardroom without looking back, and Alexander appeared seconds later without Tristan in his arms. I took a deep breath to stay calm, and suddenly the questions escaped from my mouth one after another, unable to stop myself. It seemed like I was taking it out on him.

"I want to know... why? What do you intend? What do you want, Alexander Lancaster? I understand that you have always admired Leonardo Doinel and his prestigious and important

fashion company, but buying Vincent's shares? You know that he is the most important piece in the company, and you..."

I wanted to keep reproaching him for his foolishness, but he interrupted me while looking at me calmly, as if I was being unfair, as if I was the bad guy in all this. That was what I saw in his eyes.

"Don't get upset, Sarah. Look, it's the only way I can help without you saying no, thinking about what the media will say. And I understand that you don't want to mix personal with business, but I want you to know that I couldn't care less about what they say about you or me. Don't think that by buying the shares, I will take any unwarranted privileges. I just want to help you save the company. Doinel is your inheritance, it belongs to you. It wouldn't be fair for you to lose what your family has built because of a psychopath and his crazy mother. If I have the opportunity to help get your company back on track, believe me, I will do it without hesitation."

His sincere words destabilized me for a moment, dissipating the uncertainty that had settled in my chest.

Alexander scrutinized me with his gaze, taking a few steps towards me, fearing my reaction. But the truth was, I had no reason to be defensive, on the contrary, they were all putting their grain of sand to quickly and effectively overcome all the problems, and I was the only one limiting them.

"We are a team, right?" His hands sought mine, and in a matter of seconds, his warm fingers intertwined with mine, giving me the security I had lost. I took a moment to nod my head in response to his question, and he smiled, nourishing my soul.

"As the team we are, I will always support you. I will be there for you and our child through thick and thin, in sickness and in health. You can be sure of that. This time, I will do it right."

The certainty with which he said that filled my chest with serenity. Despite the dark moment I was going through, he wasn't just saying it for show, he was showing that he meant it.

I didn't take long to respond with a genuine smile. Alexander understood everything and enveloped me in an embrace that I didn't know I needed until I inhaled his scent with closed eyes, feeling the warmth of his body, feeling the calm I had lost with such bad news.

"I trust you, partner."

Chapter 118 The Dubois nightmare is ending part 2

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I never imagined that taking over Doinel would be so overwhelming, not because of the problems the company was going through, but because of the workers who were alarmed when they found out about the situation.

Panic filled the hallways, everyone feared losing their important positions. But I was doing everything possible to prevent that from happening, and today, I had the most difficult task of all, calming them down.

There was already a set date for the collaboration with Innova and LC, along with the new collection from Doinel. That was why I needed the staff to remain calm, because we had a lot of work and time was not on our side.

Furthermore, knowing that Mrs. Dubois had still not been captured had me on edge. That woman was a criminal, she was dangerous and could be hiding anywhere in the world. I feared that at any moment she would try to harm any one of us for exposing her in that way. I couldn't wait for her to finally pay for all the damage she caused.

"Officially, I am a partner and investor of Doinel..."

Alexander entered the office with Vincent, and I sighed when I saw the transfer documents in his hand, before turning my gaze to the city traffic through the window. It was already a done deal, Alexander would be associated with my company. I wanted to believe that I was doing the right thing, that this wouldn't backfire. I wanted to believe in him.

"Are you alright?"

Was I alright? What a good question.

Despite Paul being captured and the company being returned, the problems continued to haunt us.

"I am." My response was not convincing at all. He knew very well what was going through my mind.

We had discussed it all week after a long day of work. And no matter how much he encouraged me, I was afraid of doing everything wrong and losing the company. I had a great responsibility in my hands. The last thing I wanted was to disappoint my parents, who had put all their trust in me. "In five minutes, I will face the staff."

"Then we've arrived just in time. I'll go get Abby." Vincent left without saying anything more, appearing expressionless. However, I knew that selling his shares had affected him more than he had imagined.

"Sarah, everything will be fine. You have nothing to fear. The strategies will work, and besides, I'm a partner. My finance team is preparing a good strategy for the new collection. Don't worry,

okay? Now you just have to think about the words you will say to those people who are afraid for their positions."

I nodded my head, although I wasn't completely convinced by his words of encouragement. Still, I took a deep breath, imagining the company free of problems. That was my goal, and I would do everything in my power to achieve it.

"Excuse the interruption." Jack appeared behind Alexander with a folder in his hand, and I looked at him, waiting for him to speak.

"Everything is ready."

Those three words gave me strength. It was time to take control of my company.

"I'll be there in a second, thank you." I responded to Jack with the confidence I had almost lost seconds ago, when I overthought the situation. I received the folder he handed me with the emergency collection projection.

I glanced at Alexander to follow me, and he understood immediately. With a firm and determined step, I headed towards the reception area where all the Doinel staff was gathered, waiting for good or bad news. I wasn't lying when I said that their faces reflected concern for the future of their positions.

The executives were already waiting for me, so without hesitation, I stood securely in the space they had prepared exclusively for me, with Alexander by my side.

"Go ahead, you will do great." Alexander whispered next to me. With that, the words began to flow smoothly and confidently, addressing the employees who were looking at me expectantly.

"Good morning, everyone. I have called you all here to make an important announcement and put an end to some rumors. As you already know, Paul Dubois' fraudulent presidency has caused nothing but problems for the company. I won't lie to you, Doinel is going through an economic crisis at the moment. However, I want to inform you all that I, Sarah Doinel, will be taking control of the company as the new President. Just because we're not in our best moment doesn't mean that you will lose your jobs. This company functions thanks to each and every one of you who have worked hard to show why you're here, and I couldn't be happier about that."

I felt a great relief as I saw the worry on their faces slowly diminish.

"Considering the problems we are facing, I want to inform you that there will be an emergency collection launched together with the collaboration. There was no set date before due to Paul's lack of commitment, but now we have it, and it will be in two weeks. That's why I need everyone's collaboration to make it a success, because our success is yours. Can I count on you all?"

It didn't take long for everyone to give me a positive response, and I immediately smiled, satisfied with my team's commitment. This was a new beginning, because the company was back in good hands. I didn't expect it, but soon the applause resounded throughout the place, letting me know that I had managed to keep them calm without any problem.

I knew that everyone was going to cooperate for the good functioning of the company.

My encouraging speech continued, introducing Alexander as the new partner of Doinel and giving a brief summary of the projected strategies.

My cellphone started ringing in the pocket of my jacket and I cursed to myself for not putting it on silent before starting to speak. Still, I ignored the call, but I was forced to answer when it rang for the third time, completely interrupting me. At least I had already informed the most relevant information.

"Answer the call, it may be important. I will finish explaining the financial strategy." Alexander offered when he noticed that my phone was ringing incessantly. I apologized to the staff before stepping away to answer the call.

It was my lawyer, yes, it had to be something important.

"Good morning..."

I didn't even have a chance to greet properly when he spoke.

"Ms. Doinel, good day and sorry for interrupting. I'm calling to inform you that Mrs. Dubois has been arrested outside the Doinel villa."

Hearing those words brings my soul back to my body.

The Dubois nightmare is ending.

Chapter 119 Flirting and insinuations.

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The trial against the Dubois was getting closer and I couldn't be more satisfied about it, but even though justice was finally being served, Abby was the one truly affected, although she didn't show it, and it was understandable.

Her mother and brother, her own family, were in preventive custody awaiting sentencing and of course, my lawyers were working hard to get the maximum penalty for all their crimes.

The only consolation she had was knowing her father was innocent. In fact, upon learning about the criminal and atrocious acts of her family, he felt so disappointed and ashamed that he ended up handing over the Dubois shares to the only person who hadn't let him down, Abby.

Mr. Dubois didn't want to be involved with the Doinel family in any way, and it was only out of shame. He felt responsible for what his wife had caused.

"Ms. Doinel, the show begins in ten minutes, the models are ready, but I can't find Monica and she'll be opening the Lancaster Collection runway."

I left the champagne glass I was drinking to calm my nerves on the table upon hearing Alexander's assistant's words, and let out a tired sigh.

This couldn't be happening, they should all be ready in the dressing room, finalizing the details for the runway. This woman had done nothing but give us headaches.

"Alright, Cristina, I'll go look for her personally, she'll be back in the dressing room in a few minutes. Go back to the team."

Cristina nodded in response to my order and hurried back to her work.

I looked at the time on my wristwatch, and indeed, there were ten minutes left to start the collaboration show. I had no choice but to go find Monica, and when I found her, I would give her an ultimatum.

I wasn't in a condition to tolerate anyone who wasn't committed to their work. This show was crucial for the future of Doinel and, therefore, the future of hundreds of workers.

I didn't take long to find her, but before reaching her to reprimand her for her lack of commitment, I stopped abruptly when I realized she wasn't alone.

Her companion? Surprisingly, Alexander.

I stood behind the curtain that separated the hallway from the farthest room from the event. I made my best effort to remain as quiet as possible. The only sound was my irregular breathing, and obviously, only I could hear it.

With that, my alarms went off, but I wouldn't do anything reckless. I focused on listening to the conversation they were having, as if I were waiting for any word to make me realize I made a mistake by letting my ex-husband back into my life.

"Please, Mr. Lancaster, nobody has to find out, it will stay between us."

I furrowed my brow at the flirtatious tone of that woman, and my fists automatically clenched at my sides. I didn't know exactly what they were talking about, nor did I know if the conversation

had been going on for a while. However, it was more than evident that they weren't talking about business.

"Especially, Ms. Doinel, I promise I won't cause any problems for her. It'll be our adventure, we'll have a great time. Look at me, I'm young, beautiful, and I can please you in many ways that Ms. Doinel surely can't."

My mouth opened in surprise at her direct words that made everything clearer than crystal clear. I had the urge to confront her directly for basically calling me old and boring, but I restrained myself because I wasn't going to make a scene minutes before the show, and certainly not over a man.

"Miss Monica, how do you want me to tell you no? I'm not interested in an affair that isn't with Sarah, let alone with you, no matter how young and beautiful, as you say. I only have eyes for one woman. Did you know that you're risking your job with this? Believe me, I have every intention of firing you for your lack of ethics and professionalism. If you brought me here under false pretenses just to make advances, let me tell you that you're wasting your time."

Alexander's icy response made me loosen the clenched fist at my sides and dissipated the desire to enter the room and make a fool of myself.

Alexander was stopping her in her tracks and giving me my place.

"Don't resist, I know you want this as much as I do and..." The insistence of that woman exasperated me and apparently Alexander too, as he silenced her with a voice colder and more indifferent than could send a chill down anyone's spine, but it only made me smile with satisfaction.

"I don't want anything that comes from you, get it together, limit yourself to doing your job for which you are being paid and stop wasting time. If you keep insisting on the matter, I will be forced to terminate your contract."

Alexander gave her an ultimatum, and if it wasn't because her participation in today's event is irreplaceable, he would have already fired her without mercy.

"If you have nothing more important or intelligent to say, I kindly ask you to leave. The show is about to start and you shouldn't be here. If you don't disappear from my sight in five seconds, I won't hesitate to fire you for the boundaries you have crossed, I assure you that no one will object to your dismissal."

I alarmed immediately because that meant that at any moment, one of them would leave the room, and the encounter would be inevitable. I had to leave before they realized my presence, making as little noise as possible.

"But..."

"ONE, TWO..."

Nerves took over me, and I did the first thing that came to my mind. I took off my high-heeled sandals and ran as if my life depended on it, retracing my steps, I took a breath when I was near the dressing rooms, and after making sure that neither Monica nor Alexander had caught me, I put on my sandals while catching my breath and returning to normal.

"Nothing happened here."

"But what are you doing, are you running away from a serial killer or something?"

Fuck.

I was elated by the fright I had when I realized that Julian witnessed the show I just gave. And I exhaled when I saw his amused face.

They say there is no perfect crime.

"You saw nothing, this never happened." I said, glancing at the hallway, expecting the presence of one of the people involved in that conversation I accidentally overheard, and I could see Monica approaching with an angry face. But when she saw me, her expression changed, the corners of her lips curved slightly, forming an almost nonexistent smile, as if she had achieved a great feat.

This did not look good.

"Miss Monica, you should be in the dressing room. We don't pay you to walk around the hallways as if you were at home. The show is about to start, and you are the only one missing."

I couldn't help but speak without tact, it had sounded so rude on my part that Julian took a step back as if the place were about to explode.

Even so, Monica didn't erase her expression of arrogance, she gave me the fakest smile I had ever seen in my life and continued on her way to the dressing room without saying a word, ignoring me as if my words had no weight for her, as if I had spoken to a wall.

With that, she confirmed that she had something up her sleeve, and I was going to find out.

"Ok, that was intense. Is something going on? You come from the same place as her, and... Oh!" Julian left the words hanging in the air as if his mind had cleared, while his gaze was fixed behind me.

"Sarah, what are you doing here? The show is about to start. "

Chapter 119 Flirting and insinuations part 2

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Alexander's voice made me turn around, and I understood why Julian had an expression as if he had just finished solving an imaginary puzzle.

I couldn't even lie because everything was more than clear. He saw me running as if I were fleeing from the same place where an arrogant model appeared, and a minute later, Alexander arrived with a serious face and a hint of nervousness.

He might think, after such a spectacle, that Alexander was fooling me around with that model, but he was far from reality. In any case, I shouldn't have to clarify the matter, my personal life was not his concern, no matter how much he was a partner and a friend.

"I can ask the same." I replied, unable to avoid the coldness in my words, but I retracted immediately because it wasn't the right time to talk about what I witnessed.

"We should all be in our places, after all, it's the launch of our collaboration. I'll be waiting for you."

I did not expect any response from either of them and I walked towards the table reserved for the representatives of the brands involved in the collaboration.

I took a breath to focus on what truly mattered, not letting anything distract or disturb me. Today, I would see the fruits of the hard work of the past few days.

"Wait, I'll go with you." Julian said, accompanying me to the table we would share. In complete silence, we arrived at our destination. I thanked him with a smile when he pulled out the chair for me and sat down next to me after unbuttoning his suit jacket.

"I don't mean to intrude, but it seems like you saw something you didn't like and that's why you were running barefoot."

I looked at Julian expressionlessly, but quickly plastered a fake smile on my face as the flashes of the journalists' cameras began to appear.

"Julian, I don't mean to sound rude, but I won't talk about the subject with you. My personal life is none of your business. I didn't see anything, and neither did you. Let's enjoy the results of our collaboration." I spoke only for him to hear, as even though there was background music for the event, I didn't want anyone to overhear our conversation.

"You're right, I apologize for intruding into your private matters. I was just concerned to see you running like that... I'm sorry, I didn't see anything. Anyway, let's focus on the runway. That's why we're here today, to enjoy the success of the collaboration of the year."

Julian showed no signs of being affected by my words. On the contrary, his face was adorned with a sincere smile as his gaze focused on the stage where the models would appear, showcasing the designs of each fashion company. Somehow, he managed to infect me with his positive vibe.

This only made me realize that, although it wasn't my intention, I treated him unfairly.

"In any case, I appreciate your concern."

Julian turned his gaze back to me and gave me a smile that reached his eyes, relieving the discomfort I felt in my chest from the way I spoke to him. I returned the smile, which lasted no more than two seconds, as Alexander arrived at the table and sat down next to me, placing himself in the middle of us.

"What a lovely work environment." Alexander murmured near me, and I looked at him with a raised eyebrow. He had some nerve saying that.

"I feel the same way." I replied, and with his look, I knew he already imagined what I was referring to. He didn't have to think too much to realize that I knew he had been alone with Monica, as they both left from the same place, one after the other. Nevertheless, he only gave me a genuine smile. In his gaze, I could decipher that there was nothing to fear, and that was true. Alexander never entertained Monica's failed flirtations and insinuations.

"We'll talk about it after the event ends." Alexander spoke with confidence and winked at me just as the presenter's voice resounded throughout the hall, signaling the start of the fashion show.

I focused all my attention on the presentation, leaving aside any topic that could distract me from what was most relevant at this moment. I didn't miss the smallest detail of the runway, and at the same time, I glanced at the potential clients.

The reaction was truly positive to the collection presented by each company. We were not mistaken in collaborating with Innova and LC. They did an impeccable job alongside Doinel. Despite the adversities, the results were favorable.

I smiled satisfied with the good reception from the public, but my smile was replaced by a serious expression that concealed the nerves of presenting Doinel's first independent collection under my leadership and in record time.

I had no doubt about Patrick's talent. His designs have always been on trend. It's no wonder he's been a key piece for the success of Doinel. But this was a different occasion, being a last-minute collection. It was the most important collection that would define the future of the company. Everything had to go perfectly.

My heel began to relentlessly tap the floor beneath the table. The nerves were attacking me more than ever as I watched the first model with Patrick's design. One after another, the Doinel garments were showcased, and it was impossible not to discreetly observe the guests. Some exchanged words without taking their eyes off the stage, and I took a deep breath seeing others nodding their heads, satisfied with what they saw.

I stopped moving my leg when I felt Alexander's hand on my knee and his fingers caressed the skin that was exposed by the opening of my dress, as if he wanted to calm my anxiety. I gave him a fleeting glance for that and he gave me a smile that conveyed tranquility.

Okay, I need to calm down and enjoy Patrick's great work.

I turned my gaze back to the stage, but an unusual movement made me look towards the models' dressing room exit. One of the models hurriedly came out and I recognized her immediately.

Monica.

It took me two seconds to decide whether to stay at the table and enjoy the show or if it was a good idea to find out what she was up to.

"Excuse me, I'll be back in a moment." I apologized to the pair of men seated at the table, as I got up from my seat and when I was about to go to the place where Monica disappeared, Alexander's hand stopped me.

"Is something wrong? The show is not over yet."

I swallowed the irritation that was beginning to arise from his interruption to my plans and I just smiled at him as if nothing was happening.

"I need to go to the bathroom, nerves got the best of me." I easily lied, and although he didn't seem very convinced with my answer, he let me go on my way.

With hurried steps and ignoring the people who intended to approach and greet me, I reached the same room from before where Monica's voice came from, away from the noise of the event.

This eavesdropping wasn't my thing, but it was the only way to get answers regarding unusual events that were detrimental to me or my loved ones.

After seeing Paul's true face, I couldn't afford to trust just anyone and even less let opportunities pass by to unmask people.

"And do you think I haven't tried hard enough? He's reluctant, he doesn't give in easily."

Monica fell silent and I knew she was talking on the phone. I immediately related it to her failed flirtations. With that, I knew she was receiving orders from someone, so I did the first thing that

came to mind, record her conversation just like Alexander did with Paul and Rachel's conversation.

"I'm not so sure about what you said about 'once is always'. He doesn't give me the slightest opening and believe me, I've been very direct. My task is complicated because he only has eyes for his ex-wife... Don't be an idiot, I can have whoever I want in the palm of my hand, but... You're asking too much and I haven't seen my first payment... I don't give a shit if you're in prison and if you lost the power of the company that was never yours, I'm not interested. You want results, I want my money, I'm not risking even my career for nothing."

I covered my mouth with both hands, preventing the gasp of surprise from escaping and exposing me.

That precise revelation only pointed to one person who matched the details that Monica had just revealed, and everything was starting to make sense, my suspicions were true.

The person behind Monica's behavior, with the sole objective of causing more harm, was Paul.

Chapter 120 Your choice.

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I returned to the table naturally, just as the show ended. I made sure that Monica hadn't noticed my presence or heard the conversation where her bad intentions and Paul's plans were exposed, despite him being behind bars.

Suddenly, I remembered the day Paul was arrested. He was talking to Monica behind closed doors in his office, and I interrupted them. I still remembered Paul's words to her, and everything started to make sense.

"I hope you understood. Do your job well and don't give me any more problems. Otherwise, don't bother coming to make your cheap excuses because you will be fired immediately. Is that clear?"

But of course, he was upset because Monica wasn't delivering results. That meant the plan had been in motion longer than he had imagined.

Was he not going to give up?

After greeting some executives and thanking the audience for their presence, and introducing Alexander as the new partner of Doinel and myself as the company's president, I made the decision to confront Monica.

I wasn't afraid to confront her, even though she was working for such a dangerous man. I was going to put her in check because I wouldn't allow them to continue hurting my loved ones or me. It was time to take control of my own life.

"I apologize, I have something to do." I apologized to the guests who approached to congratulate me on the successful launch, and I walked determinedly toward the dressing room.

I gripped my cell phone tightly as if I were afraid of losing it at any moment, losing the evidence recorded in it that exposed her.

"Sarah, where are you going? Some of my New York guests want to speak with the president. They're interested in doing business with Doinel."

Julian's voice stopped me when I was just a few meters from the dressing room door, and I exhaled the air I hadn't realized I had been holding while thinking about the right words to use.

"I can't attend to them right now. Abby and Alexander can handle the matter perfectly." I quickly replied, wanting to cut the conversation short and continue on my way. But Julian's look of confusion made me realize how rude I had been at the table, and he just smiled, as if my words didn't affect him at all.

"Sorry, Julian, I'll be with them in a second. I have to do something first."

"Alright, I understand. I'll go back to them and..." Julian's words hung in the air as a couple of models came out of the dressing room, almost unnoticed by us, if it weren't for the topic of their conversation.

"Are you serious, Monica?" The redhead asked incredulously, unaware that Julian and I were nearby. However, I noticed that Monica noticed our presence, and the corners of her lips curved slightly before she responded to her companion.

"I'm dead serious, Romi. My romance with Alexander Lancaster is clandestine. We have a great time together. I give him what his ex-wife can't, and he's just using her to benefit from her company and power. We're talking about Mr. Leonardo's living heir, of course he won't let the opportunity slip away."

My cheeks heated up listening to shameless Monica shouting about her romance with Alexander.

If I didn't know what was behind all of this, I would have probably exploded. But everything was clear. Paul wanted to do the same thing he did years ago with Rachel, but this time I didn't fall so easily.

"Sarah, if you want, we can go and..."

I saw Julian's clear intention to take me away from that place, thinking that the conversation would affect me. It seemed like a nice gesture on his part, but I interrupted him, shaking my head

and giving him a slight smile filled with confidence, leaving him confused and worried about the situation, which perhaps for him was proof of Alexander's infidelity, considering that he had seen both of them coming out of the same place.

For anyone who had no idea what was behind all this, it would be more than evident, but they were far from reality.

"I will talk to Monica and we will go wherever you tell me." I interrupted, and he stood frozen in his place, not knowing exactly what he could do now to avoid such a conversation, but he had no choice but to stay and observe.

"You command, I'll be nearby if you need anything."

I nodded my head, giving him a grateful smile before he took a prudent distance, where he would be close enough but far enough to not witness what I was about to do, and without further ado I approached that woman who couldn't stop spewing nonsense from her mouth, pretending not to notice my presence.

"Ms. Romi, if you have nothing to do in this area, I ask you to leave." I spoke with a cold voice, taking Romi by surprise, and she paled at my arrival, it seemed like she was about to faint at any moment.

"Yes, Ms. Doinel, sorry for the inconvenience. Let's go, Monica." Romi stumbled clumsily and quickly took Monica's arm, who had a look of arrogance, to pull her away and disappear in less than a second, but I stopped her before they even took a step.

"I only gave you the order, Romi. Monica stays." I said firmly, causing the poor woman who was innocent in all this to tremble slightly, and I looked directly at Monica, who looked defiant.

"Of course! Goodbye, Monica." Romi immediately let go of her companion's arm, as if it suddenly burned her, and disappeared as quickly as possible, getting rid of a situation in which she had nothing to do, the only thing she was guilty of was being a gossip.

Monica didn't care at all that her companion left her alone, on the contrary, something told me that she had been waiting for the right moment to be alone with me, and now that we were, she wasn't going to waste the opportunity.

I crossed my arms as I looked at her indifferently, holding back her expression of arrogance that didn't disappear for a second, but I was going to wipe it away in an instant.

"Monica, I need to talk to you woman to woman." I spoke as calmly as possible because the last thing I wanted was to make this problem bigger than it already was. I would do everything nicely, unless she showed reluctance.

"Oh! I'm sorry, this wasn't the way I wanted you to find out, but..."

I let out a dry laugh. Did she really think I bought the whole story? Even if I didn't know her true intentions, it wouldn't make sense.

"What are you talking about, Monica? I'll go straight to the point because the truth is, you're very bad at lying. I'll give you the opportunity to tell the whole truth, everything that is hidden behind your flirtation with Alexander. I want to hear it from your own mouth." I interrupted her, leaving her frozen, but she masked it with a confused expression, pretending not to know what I was talking about.

"I'm sorry, Ms. Doinel, I don't know what Mr. Alexander would tell you to get out of this or what excuse he would come up with, but he's not as innocent or as saintly as he appears, he has reciprocated my feelings. You have no idea how much it hurts me to be the one to tell you this, but we couldn't help the chemistry between us." She spoke with such confidence and acted as if she was hurt for getting involved in the relationship.

But my amused expression didn't change at all, and it seemed that nerves were starting to affect her, I could see it in the constant playing of her fingers.

"Ah! He reciprocates your feelings?"

Monica nodded her head more times than she should have, and I let out a tired sigh, she wouldn't be foolish enough to cooperate right away, so I had no choice but to take this to the next level.

"So, the lipstick on his shirt is yours? The hidden messages and calls, the secret evening outings, it's all thanks to you." I lied about the events, playing with her mind before debunking it. I could tell from her eyes that with that, her nerves dissipated and the confidence she had almost lost returned.

"Yes, and you don't know how much I regret it, as I told you, it was inevitable, I could even say that we are in love. I admit my guilt, but he is also to blame. They say that a leopard never changes its spots."

Just as I had thought, Monica used the false events I gave her to make her story sound believable with "evidence" in hand.

"It's you, it has been you all this time, so these audios must be yours."

Without thinking twice, I took out my phone and played the recording of her conversation with Paul, pretending to be affected by learning such a thing.

Chapter 120 Your choice part 2

Chapter 197 - Divorced Heiress

Then, her victorious expression vanished when she recognized her voice, yes, but the conversation was not with Alexander. She recognized the words used in that call and her face immediately lost color. Her gaze reflected fear of being discovered by me, by her future victim, by the person she was supposed to destroy under Paul's orders.

"I'm not so sure about what you said, 'a leopard never changes its spots.' You don't give me a chance, believe me, I have been very direct. My task is complicated because he only has eyes for his ex-wife... Don't be foolish, I can have anyone I want in the palm of my hand, but... You are asking for too much and I haven't seen my first payment... I don't give a damn that you're in prison and that you lost control of the company that was never yours, I'm not interested. You want results, I want my money, I'm not risking my career for nothing."

She knew that I already had the certainty that the person she was talking to was Paul, and that they were talking about Alexander and referring to me as his ex-wife.

I put my phone in my bag when the recording ended and looked at her calmly, waiting for her to say something, to defend herself or to deny everything as she did at the beginning.

"I... I. That's not... not." Monica couldn't even complete a single sentence, her face was as pale as milk, as if she had seen a ghost. Before it was Romi, but now it was her who wanted to disappear from the face of the Earth.

"Is everything clearer now? I know everything, Monica, you don't need to keep lying, and I know that Alexander hasn't given you a single chance because I saw it, I saw how he ruthlessly rejected you over and over again. I was there when he threatened to fire you if you kept insisting, are you going to deny it?"

There was nothing she could do to escape the situation, she was completely exposed and, of course, she was trembling in fear, not only because she had been unmasked but because I had evidence that she was working for a criminal awaiting trial. Her career was in danger for a few dollars that she would never receive from the ruined Paul.

"Obviously, you're not going to say anything about it, but I will. Today, I'm in a very good mood because of the launch, so I'll give you two options. One, continue with Paul's plan, ruin your career by following the instructions of a criminal, and don't expect him to pay you a penny because obviously he won't, can't you see it? He's broke, without a single penny. And option number two, confess everything you know and leave Doinel in a good way, with your career intact, without any memos and with a pristine resume. You know me for being good, don't make me show you how I can be bad. It's your choice."

I was giving her an opportunity to leave everything as it was, but to disappear forever from our lives. I wasn't going to ruin her career or life if she showed genuine remorse for what she was doing. She would have to be very foolish not to accept such an offer. She wouldn't be harmed despite her futile attempts to portray Alexander as the cheater he has never been.

Monica didn't have to think too much, she immediately snapped out of it and with trembling hands, she responded.

"Paul offered me two million dollars to get close to Alexander, charm him, and make him make decisions that would harm the entire Doinel family. I would greatly benefit from this by ending up with a successful and wealthy businessman. This is not a complicated task for me, but in this case, it was different. Mr. Lancaster never gave me any chances, on the contrary, every time I approached him, he told me to focus on work and that our only dealing was professional. The task was impossible until the last minute." Monica confessed everything with teary eyes, but not a single tear escaped.

In a way, I understood that she felt trapped, afraid of losing her modeling career by following the orders of a man who would never fulfill his promise to pay her that amount of money. He had nothing to give. I looked at her with pity for what she was capable of doing for easy money, for surrendering so easily to the idea of the possibility of being Alexander's partner and taking advantage of it, not only would she get two million dollars, she would also keep the golden goose, as if she had won the lottery, but she did not achieve any of her objectives.

Another victim of Paul.

"I expect your letter of resignation on my desk, your career will not be affected. I appreciate that you chose the best option for yourself, that you confessed, but I don't want to risk having people who work for Paul close to me, you are a risk to my family and my company. The fact that you have spoken now does not assure me that tomorrow they will plan something worse." I explained in the best way the risks that I am not willing to take and a couple of tears slid down her cheeks.

Monica nodded, accepting her fate and without saying a word, she left through the same place that her colleague left a few minutes ago.

I took a deep breath, trying to feel more relieved now that Monica was gone, but that didn't mean that Paul would be satisfied, something inside me told me that he would continue trying to harm the Doinel family and I didn't know what to do to stop him.

"That was very generous of you, you show me every time that you have a big heart that doesn't fit in your chest." Julian's voice exalted me and I looked at him not knowing what to say.

"Did you hear everything?" I asked without knowing what was going through his head and he nodded in response. This was not a conversation that I would have liked him to hear, but I couldn't do anything about it.

This world is full of bad people, why be one more?

Chapter 121 Sentence.

Chapter 198 - Divorced Heiress

The emergency launch was a great success, just like the collaboration with Innova and LC, the results have been favorable for Doinel.

Similarly, L&J was growing rapidly, which was very beneficial for better results, adding to that the capital injected by Alexander as an investment partner and the royalties from the collaborating companies.

Although everything was going as planned, the financial chaos continued, but at least we managed to recover enough to support three more collections that should be as successful as they had been for many years. It was the only viable way to avoid cutting staff and make everyone's effort worthwhile.

Of course, it would be worth it.

I said goodbye for the last time to Tristan, who insisted on wanting to go with his parents and not stay with Maga, but this time I had to firmly say no as an answer.

Today was the day of the trial against the Dubois, and my son could not attend. I wanted him as far away as possible from those people, no matter how well guarded they may be. It wasn't a place for my son.

"I still think you shouldn't have let that climbing harpy go so easily. Who assures you that she didn't run to tell everything to Paul? And now they must be planning something bigger and more detrimental to all of us. If I had her in front of me, I would have stripped her bare with my own hands and then left her lying in a police station along with the recording, she would have been perfect for the trial." Abby said, still upset about letting Monica go without any punishment.

"She ended up collaborating by confessing Paul's plans. I highly doubt she will contact him again. He hasn't given her a cent and won't give her any either. His accounts are frozen, he has no way of buying people as he has been doing for years. I wouldn't gain anything by stripping him with my hands, and her statement wouldn't carry much weight in the trial. What was she going to say? Paul ordered me to end Alexander and Sarah's relationship. That's nothing compared to Paul's crimes. Monica is just a model, I don't consider her a threat to all of us." I responded for the umpteenth time as we walked towards the car where Alexander and Vincent were waiting for us.

"You're impossible, really. I just hope you didn't make a mistake by letting her go." Abby said, annoyed by my response, before getting into the back seat of my car.

Despite the doubts, I had the feeling that Monica had learned her lesson and wouldn't contact Paul again, unless she just wanted to waste her time waiting for a payment that would never come. I remained silent throughout the journey, drumming my fingers against the steering wheel and ignoring the conversation between Alexander, Abby, and Vincent.

"I can't wait to hear when they're sentenced to life imprisonment. They deserve to spend the rest of their lives locked up and rot in jail." Abby spat venom against her family as she got out of the car, as if she didn't have the same blood running through her veins, as if they didn't share the same last name or as if they were just strangers, mere criminals, and admired her strength.

"What time does it start?" Vincent asked, looking at his watch and after seeing the time, I responded.

"It will start anytime now." I said, realizing that we had arrived just in time for the trial. I had to hurry, I didn't want to miss even the slightest detail.

I linked my arm with Alexander's and walked quickly, feeling the nerves bubbling in my system. I just wanted this nightmare to end, to have them sentenced and not have to know anything more about Paul and his mother.

We arrived just in time, because as soon as we entered the courtroom, the judge ordered to begin with the case.

I stayed silent in my seat, listening carefully to the accusations of my lawyers, and I was surprised to see familiar and unfamiliar faces as witnesses.

With each testimony, I could understand who they were. Each and every one of the intermediaries that the Dubois hired to commit a crime.

The hitman with whom Rachel blackmailed Alexander. The mechanic who tampered with my parents' jet. The notary who helped Paul with the papers for the transfer of company shares. The kidnappers that Mrs. Dubois hired years ago to kidnap me when I was a child.

A couple of criminals who followed Paul's orders to make more people who interfered with his plans disappear. And to everyone's surprise and the misfortune of the Dubois, lawyer Richman, who handled all the legal cases of the family, presented evidence of illegal and fraudulent processes.

At this point, I was completely perplexed, I didn't understand what was happening, my head was a sea of confusion, I had no idea where the witnesses for each crime came from and how each one recounted the events so precisely, some with evidence in hand, despite the passing years.

Did my lawyers achieve all of this?

The Dubois' defense became increasingly ridiculous in the face of such compelling evidence, the direction of the trial was clear.

"I want to call my last witnesses to the stand." Said my lawyer, and I felt relieved and confident that his last witnesses would give as good testimonies as all the previous ones; he was doing a great job.

"Mr. Leonardo Doinel and Mrs. Joelle Doinel." He announced. My heart stopped upon hearing those names, and I couldn't move a muscle. My breathing became erratic, as if I had just finished running a marathon, and in the next moment, my heart started pounding strongly in my chest.

I focused all my attention on the witness stand, eagerly awaiting the familiar faces I had longed to see since I thought they were dead. It couldn't be that I misheard. No, I knew what I heard. They called my parents.

A genuine smile adorned my face as I saw my parents approaching the stand. The lump in my throat made it hard to breathe, and tears of happiness escaped my eyes. It was them, they were alright, they were here, they were back.

I could see the reaction of the accused when they saw my parents. The mother and son looked at each other in disbelief, and understandably so.

They swore that my parents were dead, even though their bodies were never found. I felt a hand squeezing my leg, and without looking, I knew it was Alexander, conveying his support, even without uttering a word.

The lawyer began a series of questions, and for a moment, I stopped hearing the rest of the world.

I only wanted to hear the voices of my father and mother.

I needed it.

Chapter 121 Sentence part 2

Chapter 199 - Divorced Heiress

"We have known the Dubois family for many years. Mrs. Dubois wanted me to cancel my marriage to run away with her, even though I never gave her any hope of starting a romance. I wouldn't trade Joelle for anything in the world." My father testified, and I smiled through tears. That was how I remembered my parents, demonstrating every day how lucky they were to have each other.

"I thought that would be the end of it, but it wasn't. Years later, when my daughter Sarah Doinel was a child, they attempted to kidnap her. When they failed, we hid her from the outside world to

protect her, not knowing that the enemy was closer than we imagined. But since they didn't try anything else against us, we let our guard down. Mrs. Dubois was the mastermind behind the kidnapping of my daughter."

"Objection." The Dubois' lawyer objected to my father's statement, but the judge overruled it, allowing my father to continue his testimony.

"It was only years later that she, along with her son Paul, orchestrated a plan to ruin my daughter's marriage with businessman Alexander Lancaster. In this way, Paul would have the opportunity to marry her and claim the Doinel fortune, an inheritance that Mrs. Dubois assumes belongs to her.

"This plan set off a series of events that nearly ended the lives of my wife and me, manipulating a private plane to crash thirty minutes after takeoff. While we were presumed dead, we took action on our part.

"With the help of my lawyers, we sought out all those involved in the Dubois' crimes to give their testimonies and planned the capture of Paul, who tricked me into signing over my shares and then vanished, taking illegal possession of a company that already belonged entirely to my daughter, Sarah Doinel. Not satisfied with that, he embezzled from the company, leaving it nearly bankrupt. The evidence has already been presented." My father concluded his testimony and was invited to take a seat in the courtroom.

The Dubois family followed every move he made with their eyes until they sat four seats ahead of me. The desire to go to them and embrace them was overwhelming, but I held back because the trial was not yet over.

"It is time to deliver my verdict." The judge announced, and the courtroom fell into complete silence, awaiting the maximum punishment for these suit-clad criminals.

"Considering the evidence and investigations against Paul Dubois, all his accounts have been frozen, especially the overseas accounts that received substantial sums of money in the name of Doinel Enterprises. The money will be returned in its entirety to the sending company. Additionally, all the money obtained during his fraudulent tenure as President of Doinel will be confiscated, along with everything acquired under his name, and handed over to the legitimate President, Sarah Doinel."

I was petrified to hear the judge's words, his decision was like a ray of light in the midst of darkness. It was like a big boost after hitting rock bottom.

"The money would return to Doinel, covering every financial inconsistency and saving it from bankruptcy. Everything was getting back on track." I thought.

"I can't believe it, Doinel is back on top. Take that, you miserable one, you don't have a cent left." Abby celebrated quietly by my side, and Vincent gave her a slight nudge to keep her composure.

"The court unanimously declares a guilty verdict against Paul Dubois, he is found guilty of the crimes he is accused of and is sentenced to thirty-five years in prison without parole. And Margaret Dubois is sentenced to fifteen years in prison without parole." The judge announced. Hearing the sentence, I felt inexplicably relieved, as if all the weight on my shoulders had disappeared with a snap.

Abby threw herself at me to hug me, but I knew it wasn't in a celebratory manner. Although she denied it, this situation affected her. It wasn't easy for her to witness the judge sentencing her mother and brother, let alone see the officers take them away in handcuffs, ruined.

I wrapped my arms around Abby while keeping my gaze on Paul, who looked at me in the coldest way as he was escorted by the officers.

Despite seeing him like that and having the certainty that he would no longer be a problem for us while locked up for perhaps the rest of his life, I felt uneasy about that look that didn't convey anything good.

After four hours in the Dubois trial, we walked out into the hallway, still celebrating this great achievement. Finally, the Dubois would pay, and we would never have to see their faces again.

However, I couldn't fully concentrate on that because my eyes kept searching among the people for the faces of my parents. I was anxious for them to come out once and for all so I could give them the hug I had saved for so long.

My heart skipped a beat when I saw them coming out, linked arm in arm. Immediately, I let go of Alexander's hand and ran towards them, embracing them with my arms and inhaling the scent emanating from their bodies, the exquisite fragrance of each one that I would remember even if I had amnesia. Their warm arms enveloped me, making me feel safe, complete, and utterly happy.

I had so much to say to them, but the words got stuck in my throat along with the knot that prevented me from breathing normally. Tears escaped from my eyes one after another, and I closed them to engrave in my memory the sensation of that embrace that made me feel at home.

"Darling, we're back, and this time to stay." My mother was the first to speak, her voice choked and perhaps a tear adorning her cheek.

"You have no idea how much we missed you, my Sari, you and Tristan, we missed you so much. I'm so proud of you, of everything you have achieved." My father's voice so close made me break down in tears, and his arms held me tightly.

I owed everything to them. Without their help, I don't know what I would have done. Perhaps Paul would still have the power over Doinel, perhaps L&J wouldn't have had good outcomes, perhaps...

No. I wasn't going to think about what could have happened because the past didn't exist. This was reality.

Doinel in my hands, L&J thriving, Paul and his mother in jail, and my parents back home.

That was how it should be.

"Thank you for never abandoning me. I missed you." The words barely came out of my mouth after my tears ceased, but they were very understandable. I stepped back to look at them carefully, storing every detail of their faces in my memory.

"We would never abandon you. You are our reason for happiness. If you're okay, we'll be okay." My mother spoke with such tenderness that I felt like a child.

"We have so much to talk about, so much to sort out." My mother said, looking behind me with complicity, and soon I knew that what she wanted to talk about was not just the time we were apart but something more.

"Mr. Leonardo, Mrs. Joelle, I'm so glad you're back and that you've returned safely." Alexander approached with a smile to greet my parents and extended his hand to shake my father's hand. But the latter took him by surprise, pulling him into a hug, patting his back.

"I think you already know what I mean." My mother finished saying just for me to hear, and she winked at me before joining in the embrace with Alexander.

So, I stood still in my place, silently observing Alexander who looked happy while talking to my parents about God knows what, because I had stopped listening to them since the moment my mother dropped that on me like a bucket of cold water that made me come to my senses.

There was nothing to worry about except myself, my life, my family, Tristan, and his future. I had focused so much on the problems that overwhelmed me, robbing me of peace, that I had put everything else on the back burner.

With the return of my parents, I realized it was time to take control of my life. And yes, I was becoming more certain that I wanted to share my life with that man I fell in love with, the first man in my life, my ex-husband and the father of my son.

Today more than ever, I was certain that Alexander Lancaster was the man I wanted to spend the rest of my days with, to build our family, take care of Tristan as it should have been from the beginning, and grow together in our professional lives.

We lost a lot of time thanks to people who wanted to hurt us and the disappearance of my parents made me realize that no one knows when it will be their turn to disappear and not have the same luck to return.

Why waste more time?

Chapter 122 Postponed surprise.

Chapter 200 - Divorced Heiress

After the most exhausting days, in which I worked tirelessly in both companies, I was able to find some time for my parents to see L&J and the progress we have made since the launch of the first collection, which, to this day, continues to be a success.

My parents admired the facilities of the company that was dedicated to them; I didn't miss the opportunity to introduce them to the small work team with which we started, but with great effort, we have achieved excellent results in a short time.

Words were not necessary to know that they were proud of what I had accomplished since they disappeared, despite the stormy moments and the days of anguish due to their absence, but I understood that if it weren't for them, if they hadn't made the decision to disappear to search for all the witnesses and accomplices of the Dubois on their own, perhaps the sentence would have been lesser, although I was not satisfied with the final verdict.

"Sorry for the interruption. Sarah, I need to talk to you." Abby appeared in the middle of the conversation with Zafiro, who was showing my parents the designs she was working on for the next L&J collection.

I gave Abby a warning look because it was not a good time to interrupt. I wanted to spend time with my parents and at the same time, I was interested in taking a look at the designs before the board meeting.

"Abby, this is not a good time. I will let you know when I have some free time. I have a lot to show my parents." I replied with a forced smile and apologized to my parents with a single glance. They looked at my friend with curiosity and amusement as she seemed desperate to tell me something.

Surely my parents missed her; anyone would.

"I'm sorry, Mr. and Mrs. Doinel, Zafiro, your work is excellent, you're fantastic, but this can't wait, Sarah." Abby insisted, with no intention of waiting another second to talk to me. However, at this moment, I didn't want to miss my parents' reactions to every detail of L&J.

I opened my mouth to make my friend understand that I wouldn't leave my parents alone, but my mother spoke, making me swallow my words.

"Honey, don't worry about us. We'll spend some time with Zafiro. She's truly a fascinating designer. You can attend to Abby. And Abby, darling, you look beautiful and radiant." My mother's genuine smile made it clear that she wouldn't mind if I left them alone for a moment. However, my plan for the day was to spend as much time as possible with them.

"Mrs. Joelle, thank you very much. Although I haven't been feeling good lately, I think I'm going to get sick. You look younger every time I see you. You need to give me the secret to eternal youth." Abby replied to my mother's compliment, who burst into laughter at my friend's antics and approached her as if they were going to spend the entire afternoon catching up on all the news.

Wasn't this supposed to be urgent?

"At some point, I'll give you my secret, but dear, you should see a doctor to rule out any illness."

I rolled my eyes and looked at my father and Zafiro, who were amused by the sudden conversation between the two women.

"Well, I guess you'll have plenty of time to catch up on all the beauty secrets. Abby, didn't you have something to tell me?"

My friend's eyes widened as if she had remembered important information, and she nodded her head.

"Mrs. Joelle, later I'll invite you for a coffee so you can give me your secrets. With your permission, I need to talk to Sari." And as if she hadn't just entered a conversation, she pulled my arm to quickly and carelessly drag me towards the exit of Zafiro's workshop, causing my head to spin to the point of feeling like vomiting at the door. I had to resist to loosen her grip that was hurting my arm and to slow down the pace at which she was taking me.

"Abby, please, be more careful. I'm not feeling well."

Abby abruptly stopped when we were in the hallway that led to the offices and looked at me with concern in her eyes.

"I'm sorry, I couldn't control myself. Are you ok? What's wrong? A moment ago, you were fine."

I took a moment to recover from the sudden dizziness Abby caused and looked at her with an unfriendly face.

"Did you not see the way you pulled me out of the workshop?"

Luckily I didn't stumble in the middle of the road.

"You're an incurable crazy person. I'm fine now, just tell me what's so urgent that you have to say." I spoke when the urge to vomit subsided and I fanned my face with my hand in an attempt to make the dizziness disappear completely.

"This is not the right place, the walls have ears, we'll go to your office." She replied before resuming the walk, this time without laying a hand on me, and I preferred it that way, I didn't want her to carry me again as if I were fleeing from the devil himself.

I let out a sigh and without further ado, I followed her at my own pace, not wanting to experience that discomfort again.

I barely set foot in the office and Abby was already closing the door before making sure there was no one in the hallway who could hear our conversation.

"Please, can you tell me what's going on?" I asked as I sat in my desk chair to finish recovering, and Abby pulled a brochure out of her purse that I recognized all too well.

It was the cruise I had my eye on to surprise Alexander, but I hadn't been able to make a reservation because of our busy schedules managing the companies.

What was Abby doing with that brochure?

"I have everything prepared, tomorrow you will go on the cruise with Alexander, Tristan will stay with your parents and with me, of course, the companies will be in Vincent's hands. Where can you find a better friend like me?"

I opened my mouth in surprise at the audacity Abby had just said and took the brochure she left on the desk in my hands, smiling from ear to ear as if I were very proud.

Couldn't she have consulted me before doing such a thing?

Tomorrow I had three meetings with Doinel executives and my presence is mandatory.

How was I supposed to finish solving the problems of the company my father left me while he was still alive?

She has witnessed the amount of work I have had lately and what I still have left to be able to plan well in advance the cruise where I would take an important step.

"Sometimes I wonder how many screws are missing in that head of yours. It is impossible for me to attend the cruise, I have a lot to do these days and I cannot be replaced by Vincent when it's me who must make decisions and sign documents that cannot wait for me to go on vacation while Doinel is still struggling with the problems it faced. I appreciate your kind gesture, but..." I left the word in the air feeling a sharp pain in my head that made me close my eyes tightly and a heat that quickly rose through my whole body.

I heard Abby's voice as if she were on the other side of the door, I couldn't even understand what she was saying, I could only hear the rapid beats of my heart and the last thing I saw was her panicked face approaching me, before everything turned dark.