

The Wife You Buried Is Back from Hell

Chapter 20

Danielle lowered her gaze, feeling the warmth in Kirsten's concern.

She took a steadying breath. "No, I'm fine. I've just finally come to my senses."

Kirsten let out a sigh of relief on the other end of the line, though worry still lingered in her voice. "Really? If anything's wrong, promise you'll tell me."

Danielle offered a small, wry smile. "Don't worry. If I ever run into trouble, you'll be the first person I drag down with me."

"You should have divorced him ages ago. Glad you finally see it for what it is," Kirsten grumbled, launching into a familiar tirade.

Listening to her friend's rambling complaints, Danielle couldn't help the gentle smile tugging at her lips.

Hand in hand with her daughter, she walked beneath the bright blue sky, the sound of her best friend's chatter humming from her phone.

It struck her then—sometimes happiness really is that simple.

In her last life, she'd been so consumed by Alexander that she'd overlooked all the good things right in front of her.

—

After hanging up with Kirsten, Danielle arrived at the restaurant where she'd agreed to meet Gian.

They'd reserved a private room.

Danielle got there early, waiting in the quiet, her thoughts tangled with worry about facing her old mentor.

The door opened. Mr. Hawthorne walked in with Gian.

Danielle stood, holding Niki's hand. "Professor Hawthorne."

It had been years since she'd last seen him. He looked older now, gray streaking his hair at the temples.

Mr. Hawthorne offered no reply.

Danielle drew a slow, bracing breath, her heart twisting. Of course. She'd forfeited the right to call him "professor" long ago.

That right was something she'd thrown away herself, without hesitation.

She pressed her lips together and leaned down to Niki. "Say hello to Grandpa Hawthorne."

Niki's greeting was sweet and polite. "Hello, Grandpa Hawthorne."

The little girl's soft voice and sparkling eyes instantly melted the stern lines of Mr. Hawthorne's face. He couldn't help but smile, ruffling Niki's hair as he looked at Danielle. "Your daughter's a real sweetheart."

With both Alexander's and Danielle's good genes, Niki was almost doll-like in her prettiness.

Gian spoke up. "Professor, let's not just stand here—let's sit down and eat."

If Gian hadn't been there to keep the conversation going, Danielle honestly had no idea how she would have managed to face Mr. Hawthorne.

The fact that Mr. Hawthorne was willing to share a meal with a "thankless" former student like her was, in itself, more than she'd ever expected. She'd thought he'd never want to see her again.

"Time flies," Gian reminisced, "I still remember when you were just a fiery, stubborn kid, always trying to steal food off my plate. Now your little girl's already this big."

He smiled fondly, thinking what a shame it was that Danielle had walked away from it all back then.

Mr. Hawthorne's expression remained stern. He let out a cold snort. "Yes—she was willing to give up everything for a man."

He glanced at Niki and kept any harsher words to himself; no need for a child to overhear.

Danielle turned to her daughter. "Niki, could you ask the waiter to bring a pot of Earl Grey for Grandpa Hawthorne and Mr. Atwood? And pick whatever drink you'd like for yourself."

"Okay!" Niki chirped, skipping out of the room.

Once she'd gone, Mr. Hawthorne fixed his gaze on Danielle. "Gian tells me you're planning to get divorced—and looking for a job in the field again?"

Danielle nodded, lips pressed together. "Yes. But I gave up my master's and doctoral studies before, so it's not easy to find work now."

She'd learned firsthand that in today's world, degrees opened doors. Even with her experience at The Davidson Group, most employers didn't care.

"I saw your résumé," Mr. Hawthorne said. "You don't meet the hiring requirements for our department."

Danielle wasn't surprised by his rejection, nor did she have the nerve to beg for his forgiveness.

Sensing the tension, Gian jumped in quickly. "Alright, you two haven't seen each other in ages—let's not talk about unpleasant things. Let's eat."

—

Meanwhile.

After asking the waiter for the tea, Niki wandered over to the drink cooler, scanning the selection.

Just then, Alexander and his group entered the restaurant, running into her.

Liam spotted Niki and clicked his tongue. "Persistent, aren't you? Even at lunch, you have to follow us. If Danielle's trying to engineer a 'chance encounter,' she's not exactly subtle about it."

Niki noticed there was only one bottle left of a certain drink—must be really popular. She reached for it, only for someone else to beat her by a split second.

"Yes! This is my favorite!" Raffy exclaimed, holding the bottle up and grinning at Niki. "Thanks for opening the fridge for me!"