

Wild Night 321

Chapter 321 Jewel Box

Once Lucy was sure that Tom wasn't following her, she picked up a shopping basket and walked around the store in search of the section where feminine hygiene products were displayed. Once she located it, she took out her phone and dialed Sonia's line.

"After chasing me out of your office, I guess you are not too busy for me now, huh?" Sonia asked dryly once she received the phone call, and Lucy laughed softly.

"Yes, I'm not too busy for you right now. Quick one, my period is coming soon, and I need to get something for it. Do you think I should go for tampons or a menstrual cup?" Lucy asked as she inspected the items in front of her.

"Oh! How did I almost forget that my baby is no longer innocent? Her girl hole is no longer sealed," Sonia said with a giggle, and Lucy hissed in embarrassment.

"Bryan had better not be anywhere around you, or I'm going to kill you," Lucy threatened.

Sonia laughed, "Don't worry, he isn't here. Personally, I prefer tampons. But since we are not sure yet if you will be comfortable with the idea of having anything else other than a joystick inside you..."

"Please, no dirty talks. Can you just go straight to the point?" Lucy pleaded in embarrassment as she looked around her, trying to ensure that no one else could hear what Sonia was saying.

Sonia laughed softly, enjoying her friend's embarrassment, "You can start with tampons. If you're okay with it, then you can use a cup," Sonia suggested and then cleared her throat when Bryan, who had been using the convenience room, returned.

"Is there anything else?" Sonia asked, wanting to know if she should excuse herself or remain where she was.

"No, that's all. You are at the apartment next to mine, right?"

"Yeah. That's a weird way to describe your boyfriend's apartment."

"Whatever. We will be heading there soon. See you," Lucy said as she hung up the call.

"You are Lucinda Perry, right?" A feminine voice suddenly asked from behind her, causing her to jump back in shock.

"Oh, I'm sorry! I didn't mean to startle you," the young lady said with a burst of awkward laughter, "It's just that I saw you earlier when you walked in, and I thought you looked familiar, but before I could walk up to you, you got busy with your phone call so I couldn't approach you. I had to circle around while waiting for you to finish. I hope you don't mind?" she asked apologetically.

Lucy forced a smile, "I don't. And yes, I'm Lucinda Perry. Have we met before?" She asked as she looked at the young lady who seemed like a teenager, not sure she knew her from anywhere.

"Oh, not at all! I'm Sidney. My twin sister and I watched your interview over the weekend, and it was really touching. She bawled her eyes out," the girl said, and Lucy smiled awkwardly, not knowing what to response to give.

Was she supposed to say, 'Oh, yes, it touched me too'? Or 'Thanks. I'm glad you both were touched'? Or Just ask if she belonged to the category of people who had judged her before hearing her side of the story? Lucy wondered as she just stood there staring at the young girl and waiting for her to either leave or say what else she wanted.

"If it's not too much to ask, can I get an ulsie?" She asked, and then laughed when Lucy blinked at her in confusion, "Sorry. I mean like a selfie. I'd like to take a photo with you. My twin sister will go crazy with envy if I show her the picture," she explained excitedly, and Lucy looked around cautiously.

"Sure," Lucy said with a forced smile and stood still as the girl took out her phone from her purse. The girl stood beside her and captured several photos of them before stepping away from her.

"Thank you very much. We are rooting for you and your relationship with the wealthy CEO. You look way more beautiful and classy in person, by the way," the young girl said with a wave as she walked away with a wide smile while looking at the photo she had captured.

Lucy's brows were pulled together as she watched the young girl round the corner and disappear. This was weird. Although she knew that a lot of people had seen the interview, did that make her a celebrity? Was she going to now be faced with having people walk up to her this way? This wasn't the kind of lifestyle she liked or wanted. She preferred to live low-key, not like Sonia, who loved to get lots of attention.

She was snapped out of her thoughts when her phone started ringing, and she quickly received the call from Tom, "You are taking longer than expected. Do you

need help?" Tom offered, already tired of the attention he was receiving from people around.

"I'm sorry. I'll be out soon," Lucy said apologetically as she quickly grabbed two boxes of tampons and dropped them into her shopping basket, and then she hurried to the section where shower gels were displayed.

She picked up two bottles of shower gels and added them to her basket, and as she headed for the counter, she stopped when she walked past the section where some male items were displayed, and her eyes caught on a pair of memory foam slippers.

She contemplated whether or not it would fit him before picking it up and dropping it into her basket. She looked around to be sure she had gotten all she wanted before going to join the little queue by the counter.

As she stood there waiting for her turn, she noticed several eyes were on her, but as uncomfortable as it made her feel, she tried not to let it bother her too much and just looked ahead of her.

Once it was her turn, the cashier gave her a polite smile as she placed the basket on the countertop.

"What is the cost of the items?" Lucy asked as she extended her debit card to the cashier when she finished scanning the items.

"Your husband left his card. He said you should bring it with you when you're done," she said with a polite smile as she returned Tom's debit card to her along with the bag containing her purchase.

Husband? Lucy opened her mouth to tell her that Tom wasn't her husband but snapped it shut and just smiled at her instead before walking away with her purchase. There was no need to make a big deal out of it. She could understand that Tom's action could have prompted the lady to make such an assumption. Besides, she didn't know what Tom could have said, and she didn't want to embarrass him.

As she walked out of the store, she looked around for Tom, and when she didn't find him, she dialed his line to find out if he was waiting in the car.

"Where are you?" She asked immediately after he received the call.

"Inside the jewelry shop beside the department store. Are you done? Where are you?"

"I'm done. I will just meet you there," Lucy said as she returned to the jewelry shop she had just walked past. Her heart skipped a beat when she looked through the glass door of the jewelry shop in time to see Tom dipping a tiny jewel box into his pocket, and she quickly moved away from there.

"I'm coming out now," Tom said as he hung up and walked out of the jewelry store.

"I hope I didn't keep you waiting?" Tom asked when he saw her standing between the jewelry store and the department store.

Lucy shook her head, "No, you didn't."

"Let me carry that," Tom offered as he reached for the shopping bag, but Lucy shook her head.

"Don't worry. I got it," Lucy said, holding on to the bag tightly, and Tom raised a brow in amusement.

"I know you well enough to guess what you went to get. Relax, I'm not going to look into the bag. Just let me carry it to the car," Tom offered, and Lucy reluctantly let go of the bag, and he took it from her.

"You didn't have to leave your card," Lucy said as she returned his card to him.

"I know I didn't have to. I wanted to. You can hold on to the card," Tom said as he walked ahead of her, and Lucy watched him for a moment before following.

Noticing that she was walking behind him, without turning to look at her, he extended his right hand to her, and Lucy grabbed his hand as she walked beside him.

As they walked hand in hand, they both noticed that a lot of people were staring at them, and Tom noticed one or two persons taking snapshots of them, but neither of them said anything until they got to the car.

The only thing on Lucy's mind was what she had seen earlier. What did he go into the jewelry shop to purchase? What was in that box? She really hoped that it wasn't what she was thinking. She would really hate to disappoint him.

"Jewel? Are you okay?" Tom asked, turning to spare her a glance as he drove when the silence between them had dragged on for a while.

Lucy cleared her throat, "Yeah. I'm fine."

"Are you sure?" Tom asked, unconvinced.

"Yes," Lucy said with a forced smile.

"I know when your smile isn't real. Did I do something wrong? Is this about what we discussed earlier?" Tom asked, concerned that maybe she had recalled some other lies he had told her or stupid stuff he had done in the past and was upset.

"No. It's not that. I'm fine," Lucy said, and Tom sighed.

Sensing that he was worried about her, Lucy turned to look at him after a minute, "A young girl approached me while I was shopping earlier. She wanted to take photos with me," Lucy said, and Tom looked at her.

He didn't need to ask if she had accepted since he knew her well enough to know that she wouldn't say no to such a harmless request. "Is that what is bothering you?"

"That is part of it. Different people were staring at me, and did you notice the looks we received?" Lucy asked with a slight frown, thinking that it was probably better to focus on this than on the other stuff that was bothering her.

"Yeah, I noticed. Don't worry too much about it. Hopefully, things will settle back to normal soon, and everyone will forget about our existence," Tom said, even though he highly doubted that things would go back to normal.

He had received his fair share of attention earlier as some ladies who had recognized him had tried to flirt with him until he had no other choice than to go into the jewelry shop.

He hated the attention just as much as she did since he also preferred a low-key life. And he knew that he wouldn't have been in a hurry to reveal his identity had it not been for the nonsense stunt that Anita had pulled. Now he had to deal with a lot of unnecessary attention.

"You are Thomas Hank. I don't think anyone will forget about your existence," Lucy said, and Tom sighed.

"Since you know that, can you try to adjust to the attention for my sake?" Tom asked, and this time Lucy sighed.

"I will try."

"Good. So what is the other thing?" Tom asked, and Lucy looked at him in confusion.

"What other thing?"

"You said this was part of what was bothering you. What's the other thing? Or is it more than one?" Tom asked, and Lucy bit her lower lip as she tried to think of how to address the subject.

For both their sake, it would be best if she told her thoughts on marriage before he thought of proposing to her. She would love to save them both the embarrassment and misunderstanding.

"I don't want to get married to you."

Chapter 322 All-or-nothing

The car was filled with deafening silence following Lucy's declaration. Tom's expression didn't give away whatever he was thinking as he continued to drive, and he didn't bother to spare her a glance.

While Lucy was thinking that it had come out wrongly and she should apologize and explain herself properly so that Tom wouldn't misunderstand her, Tom, on the other hand, was wondering what could have possibly prompted her to make such a statement. He understood that what she meant was that she didn't want to get married, and it wasn't about him. Still, he couldn't understand why she brought it up this way.

"I am sorry that came out wrongly."

"I never said I wanted you to marry me," they both said at the same time and turned to look at each other.

For some reason, Lucy couldn't help feeling hurt by his response. Although she didn't want to get married to him, why would he say something like that to her? He wasn't thinking of making her his wife? Even though if he proposed to her, the answer would be no, she still expected him to at least desire marrying her. Was she being unreasonable?

Neither of them said a word to each other until Tom parked the car in front of her apartment and turned off the car's ignition.

Lucy unbuckled her seatbelt, ready to get out of the car, but Tom stopped her, "You are going to leave just like that?" Somehow Tom felt like the table had been turned following his response. It seemed like she was the one who was upset with him now when he should be upset by what she said. The only difference was that she had apologized.

"Is there anything more you want to say? I said I don't want to get married to you, and you said you don't want to get married to me either. That pretty much settles it. I don't see what else we need to talk about," Lucy said coolly, ignoring the ache in her heart as the words left her lips, and Tom shook his head.

"Are you being serious right now? You make such an announcement, and then you want to leave without talking about it?" Tom asked, trying not to sound as annoyed as he was beginning to feel since he didn't like how she was going about it all.

First of all, he had not brought up any issue about marriage because he understood that she probably wasn't thinking in that direction yet. Still, for reasons best known to her, she had chosen to explicitly spell it out to him that she didn't want to get married to him, and now she was upset because of what he said? What had she been expecting him to say?

Lucy said nothing but didn't make any more attempts to get out of the car. She remained in her seat with both hands folded in front of her as she looked outside her window while she waited for him to say whatever it was he wanted to say.

"Did my mom or anyone say anything to you about marriage?" Tom asked the first question on his mind, since it was his mother who had been going on and on about settling down.

"No."

"No? Then did I say or do something to pressure you?" Tom asked, trying to understand her.

"No."

"So, where did that come from?" Tom asked in confusion as he stared at her.

Lucy turned to look at him, "I don't see any reason why we are still talking about this when you have already said you don't want to get married..."

"Can you stop saying that? I never said I didn't want to get married to you," Tom interrupted.

Lucy turned to him, "You said..."

"I know what I said. What I meant was, I never asked you to marry me in the first place, yet you said you didn't want to marry me. Where did that come from? Did I propose to you without my knowledge? Was there something I did that made you feel that you needed to spell it out to me in such a way? Or is this because I left my card with the cashier?" Tom asked, looking at her with serious eyes.

Lucy sighed, "I admit that I shouldn't have said it in that manner. It wasn't my intention to be rude. I'm sorry."

"Do you want to break up?" Tom asked since it seemed to him like Lucy was edging away from his questions.

Lucy's heart skipped a beat, "Break up? Why? You want to break up with me because I don't want to marry you?" She asked, her heart racing as different thoughts ran through her mind.

"No. I don't want to break up with you. I'm asking if you want to break up with me because I don't understand you right now or what is going on in your head. I am trying to understand you right now, but I don't understand you. So tell me, did you say that because you want to break up with me? Is that what this is about? Is everything getting to you so much that you want a break from me? From our relationship? Do you need space?" Tom asked without taking his eyes away from her.

Tears gathered in her eyes as she shook her head. She wasn't sure if she was going about this the right way, but one thing she knew was that she didn't want to ruin her relationship with him. He made her happy, and she loved him dearly.

"No. That is not it, I swear. I really love you, Tom. I don't want to break up with you. I was worried that you might be thinking about marriage, and I didn't want you to get the wrong idea, so I thought I should let you know before you do anything," Lucy said as a tear dropped from her eyes.

"The cashier called you my husband, and then I kind of freaked out when I saw you in the jewelry shop with a jewel box earlier," Lucy confessed, and Tom's brows arched.

Listening to her, Tom could understand how an overthinker like her could have processed it all in her head and then blurt out something like that, "First of all, I never told the cashier or anyone else for that matter that I was your husband. I only described your appearance to her and asked her to use my card for the payment and give the card to you," Tom said before reaching into his pocket.

He took out the jewel box and opened it to reveal a pair of gold cufflinks, "I was receiving too much unwanted attention as I hung around waiting for you since I thought you were going to be quick. When I couldn't hang around anymore, I took your advice to window shop. I saw these cufflinks in the jewelry shop, and I bought it," Tom explained.

Lucy shut her eyes as a flood of embarrassment washed over her. Now she felt silly for assuming that he had bought an engagement ring. Besides, taking a closer look at the box now, it didn't look as fancy as a ring box, "I'm sorry," Lucy whispered.

"There is nothing to be sorry about. I'm crazy about you, Lu. I'm completely head over heels in love with you. I'm an all-or-nothing person; hence I am unable to stop myself from holding back in expressing my love to you, but that does not mean I'm unreasonable. I haven't forgotten how you used to feel about men and being in a relationship. I wouldn't be so stupid as to propose to you or talk about marriage so soon when we just barely started dating," Tom said, and Lucy opened her eyes slowly to meet his gaze.

"I'm sorry, I should have known better. I misunderstood and just thought you wanted us to get married..."

"Don't be sorry. The only thing you misunderstood is the timing. I had no intention of raising the subject of marriage any time soon. That does not mean I don't plan to make you my wife. I'm not going to tell you that I don't want to marry you just to make you happy. I will be lying to both myself and you if I say something like that. And I promised not to lie to you anymore, so I won't," Tom said, looking into her smoky gray eyes.

"But I really don't want to get married," Lucy said, and Tom nodded.

"You've made that clear, but I also really want to get married to you. So, since neither of us is thinking of breaking up, we will need to figure out a way around what we both want. For the time being, let's focus on the reason we are here and continue with this conversation later in the day when we are more relaxed. Is that okay?" Tom asked, and Lucy gave him a nod, relieved that he was taking it well.

"Yeah," Lucy said, and they both got out of the car.

"I'm sure you'll need some time alone in your apartment. I will head to mine. Let me know when you are ready to leave," Tom said as he locked the car.

"Sure. Thanks. Please ask Sonia to come over," Lucy said before turning to leave.

Tom watched as she walked away, and then he called out to her, "Jewel?"

Lucy turned to look at him questioningly as he approached her with slow and deliberate steps, "I am not letting you go, Lu. I don't know how we are going to make this work, but we will have to find a way," Tom said as he kissed her forehead, and butterflies fluttered in her belly as she watched him walk away.

Chapter 323 Snooping

"What? You are joking, right? It has got to be a sick joke!" Sonia said in disbelief after Lucy told her about Rachel's involvement with her abduction and Rachel's relationship with Anita.

"I wish it was," Lucy said with a shake of her head as she looked around her closet, contemplating what to take with her to Tom's house. She had no idea how much longer her parents were going to be around, and there was no way she could return to her apartment and leave them at Tom's house. She also couldn't ask them to leave either.

"You mean Rachel was involved with Jamie? And now Anita? And she had the guts to want to marry, Luc? How callous can she be? I swear by my tits, I'm going to tear her apart when I see her," Sonia promised, and Lucy's lips twitched with amusement as she paused to look at Sonia.

"Your tits?"

"You know how much I revere my tits," Sonia said with an easy smile, glad that Lucy could still find the humor in what she said despite the seriousness of the conversation.

"Wow! This just goes to show that stupidity and entitlement are hereditary. Have you told Lucas about this?" Sonia asked with a concerned frown, and Lucy shook her head as she leaned against the closet door while looking at Sonia.

"No. I wanted to talk to my parents first."

"No. I don't think that is a good idea. You should talk to Lucas and then he will decide whether or not he wants your parents to know about it. Your parents are the ones you should keep this from, not Lucas. This is a woman he was engaged to for chrissake, Lu! I don't think he would want to be the last to about this after everyone else has heard about it. Talk to him first before you tell your parents," Sonia said, and Lucy pursed her lips as she considered it.

"I was going to tell my parents first because I'm still contemplating whether or not to tell him about it. He's already so broken by the breakup. He is going to feel very hurt and then guilty..."

"You do realize that nothing stays hidden forever, right? How do you think Lucas would feel if he finds out that you kept something like that away from him? There is no doubt that he is going to feel really pained when you tell him about it, but he will get over it eventually as you will too. But if you keep it away from him, you will hurt him twice as much when he eventually finds out. He will feel hurt by Rachel's betrayal, and yours too," Sonia said, and Lucy nodded.

"I think you have a point. Sometimes you can be so wise..."

"I am always wise, bitch! You are the one who is too slow to keep up with my wisdom," Sonia said with a grin, and Lucy laughed softly as returned her attention to her closet, and picked out a couple of office wears.

"Why do you bother to do this when you can easily shop for new clothes? I'm sure Tom wouldn't mind releasing his money card," Sonia said as she watched Lucy fuss over the clothes from the comfort of the bed.

"First, because I love my clothes. Secondly, I mind even if Tom doesn't mind. This is about me, not Tom," Lucy said as she walked over to the bed with a couple of work clothes.

"Yeah. You are miss independent after all," Sonia said as she watched her best friend.

"Yes, I am. I told Tom about not wanting to get married," Lucy announced as she carefully laid out the clothes on the bed.

Sonia tilted her head to the side as she watched Lucy, "Did we not just discuss it this morning in your office?"

"Yes. Why?" Lucy asked, wondering why Sonia was asking her that instead of asking her how the conversation with went.

"I'm wondering when you had the opportunity to raise such an important subject between then and now. Please don't tell me you told him that on your way here? Or did you tell him at work?" Sonia asked, and Lucy nodded.

"We talked about it in the car," Lucy said as she went to her dressing table and opened a drawer to take out her jewelry box.

"What? C'mon, Lu! I know you are new to the whole relationship stuff, but that isn't the kind of conversation you should be having when you are both..."

Lucy turned to face Sonia, irritation flashing in her gray eyes, "What is wrong with you?" She asked, cutting Sonia off.

"What?" Sonia asked, confused.

"Can you stop giving me relationship lectures and just listen when I'm talking to you? I already raised the subject and talked to him about it, so your lectures right now aren't necessary. Maybe if you hadn't gone on and on about marriage this morning, I wouldn't have misunderstood his actions or raised the subject like I did when I did. So please stop!" Lucy said, and Sonia pressed her lips together and raised both hands.

"Okay. Go on. I'm listening."

Lucy said nothing for a moment as she sat on her dressing stool, and looked into the jewelry box that contained her stylish, but inexpensive jewelry. "I told him I don't want to get married, but he says he wants to get married," she said as she took out three pairs of earrings.

"Am I allowed to speak now? Or should I just keep quiet and listen?" Sonia asked, and Lucy tried not to roll her eyes.

"I said don't give me relationship lectures, I never said be mute."

"Great. My mouth was already itching to speak. I don't want the summary version of your conversation. I want the details. What happened?"

Lucy turned to look at her, "You are not going to include this in your story, are you?" She asked suspiciously.

"I will change a couple of things, I promise," Sonia said, reasoning how she would change the way Lucy's character in her novel would present the subject to Tom's character. She would rather a discussion like that happens in the bedroom, probably after an hour of intense lovemaking.

Lucy drew in a deep breath before going on to tell Sonia about all that transpired between her and Tom, "...he says we will find a way around it. Do you think there is any way we can reach a compromise without both of us getting what we want?" She asked, and Sonia rolled her eyes.

"You said you don't want relationship advice from me," Sonia reminded her.

"I'm not asking for a lecture. I just need your opinion. Both my heart and stomach are jumping at the thought of having this conversation again with him later, and I need to be objective when the time comes," Lucy said, unable to hide her worry.

"You should relax."

"I can't. I love Tom. I don't want us to break up, and I don't want to be selfish either. But I really don't think I can do this marriage thing..." Lucy said, and Sonia raised a brow.

"Can't or won't?"

Lucy shrugged, "Both have always meant the same to me."

"Then perhaps it is time for you to learn to distinguish between them. Can't is a matter of lacking ability, and won't is a matter of lacking willingness," Sonia said as she rose and walked over to where Lucy was seated by the dressing table.

"I understand that this whole thing is not easy for you, Lu, and I'm sorry that I pushed too hard this morning. You didn't need that. You don't need the pressure from me or anyone else for that matter. I'm both happy and grateful that you have a man as thoughtful and considerate as Tom in your life who loves you so much. I'm confident that you will both figure this out and work something out, I trust you, and I trust Tom," Sonia said with a confident smile as she brushed a hand over Lucy's hair.

Once Jade arrived at Harry's apartment, instead of going straight to the guestroom where she had spent the last two nights to pick up her bag, Jade decided to look around Harry's apartment before leaving. By apartment, she meant his bedroom.

It still surprised her that he had never been with a woman before. She couldn't wrap her head around the fact that a full-grown, wealthy, and good-looking man like him had never been with a woman. She had been with just Todd since he was her first love, and she had given in to having sex with him after much persuasion on the night of her twentieth birthday.

She paused when something else occurred to her. Did that also mean that he had never kissed a woman before? Was that possible? Kissing wasn't the same as sex, was it? Or was the kiss they had shared the previous night, his first kiss? Her heart fluttered at the thought of giving him his first kiss, and she raised her finger to touch her lips as they curved in a smile.

Although she knew that she was snooping and invading his privacy, she was too curious about him to care. Her conversation with Sonia earlier had ignited a kind of longing within her for him, and since she couldn't see him physically, she wanted to feel close to him in other ways. She wanted to know him better and understand him more.

As she pushed open the door that stood between her and his bedroom, her lips curved of their own volition when she stepped inside and saw the state of his bedroom. As expected everything was in its place. Harry was a meticulous man, she thought as she walked further into his bedroom.

His bed was laid out so straight that it called to her. She stifled the urge to lay on the bed and inhale his scent, as that would be creepy even for her, and she knew that

even if she decided to give in to the urge, it would be next to impossible for her to straighten the bedspread the same way she had met it. Then Harry would definitely know that she entered his bedroom.

She walked around the bedroom like an inspector, hoping to find something that she didn't already know about him. Hopefully, something that would tell her that he was interested in her.

She walked over to his bedside table when she noticed two photo frames sitting on it, facing the bed. She leaned forward as she picked up both frames, and her heart felt heavy when she saw that one of the frames was a picture of a beautiful young lady. She studied the lady's face, and something about her seemed so familiar, but Jade couldn't place her fingers on it.

The lady had honey-brown eyes like Harry's, and her hair was a mass of curly gold hair. Her eyes were gleaming with laughter, and her lips were curved with an infectious kind of smile with dimples flanking both sides of her cheek. She looked so beautiful and of life.

Jade didn't need anyone to tell her that was Harry's mother. The resemblance between them was striking, and maybe that was why the woman seemed so familiar. She couldn't imagine how much Harry must miss the mother he never met to have her photo by his bedside.

Her gaze moved to the other frame in her hand. It was the photo of a very attractive-looking middle-aged man with Amber eyes. He was holding a fishing rod and scowling at the camera, even though his eyes were gleaming with laughter, and the corners of his lips looked like he was struggling not to smile.

"I thought I heard someone come in," a deep masculine voice spoke from behind her, causing Jade to spin around in surprise.

Her mouth dropped open in surprise when she gazed into the same pair of Amber eyes she had just looked into in the photo.

Great! What a nice way to meet the senior Mr. Jonas for the first time.

Chapter 324 Aaron Jonas

Jade appraised the senior Mr. Jonas, as he did her too. He was dressed in a blue-striped shirt and black chinos trousers, and he was barefooted. He looked big, robust, and comfortable. He seemed like the kind of man you would feel safe in his company even without knowing his name. The man didn't look like he spent a lot of time in the gym, although his skin was tanned like he spent a lot of time outdoors.

He looked very handsome too, and although Harry had inherited some of his mother's facial features like her eyes and dimpled smile, there was no doubt that he had gotten some of his good looks from his father too. Like the straight nose, the full lips, his bushy brows, and his hair too.

Although Harry's rich black hair was inherited from his father, the senior Jonas' quiff-styled hair was beginning to sprout some gray hair at the temple. His well-groomed beards were already gray, and it all added to his sexy zaddy look. Perhaps she could trade the son for the father? She thought, amused.

'What a way to think about the father of the man you're interested in,' Jade chided herself.

"I promise, I wasn't stealing from him," Jade said, for lack of anything better to say.

"I promise, I wouldn't mind if you were. I'm sure Harry wouldn't mind losing a possession or two either. Seeing how you could get into his apartment so easily, I'm sure it's not your first time here," Aaron Jonas said as he eyed the lovely lady who was standing beside his son's bed with both photo frames in her hands.

He knew his boy well enough to know he wouldn't let just anyone into his home. Hence he was curious to know who this beauty was and why she was in his son's bedroom. Seeing how she was holding the frames, he could easily have assumed that she was there to clean, but there was nothing about her that suggested she was a cleaner. Not her clothes, and definitely not the confident aura she exuded.

From his tone, she sensed that he was jumping to conclusions about her relationship with Harry, so she decided to clear the air quickly, "It's not what you think..."

His eyes twinkled with humor, "It's definitely not what I think. If it were, you would be holding a cleaning rag and probably wearing an apron," he said, and Jade felt laughter bubble within her.

"Besides, I doubt that you would go for those frames first if you were here to steal," he said, directing his gaze to the frames she was still holding.

Jade's lips curved with an awkward smile as she glanced at the photos in her hand. Okay, so how was she going to explain snooping through his son's bedroom when she wasn't in a relationship with him and she wasn't a cleaner? "I was looking for something..."

"I hope you find it," Aaron said with a straight face as he stepped forward, offering her a hand, "I'm Aaron Jonas. Harry's father. I'm sure the frame would have told you that already," he said, and Jade dropped the frames gently before taking his hand.

"I'm Jade Hank, Harry's friend. It's a pleasure to meet you in person, Mr. Jonas," Jade said and watched as the man's eyes lit up.

Hank. That explained it. "Oh! The intelligent beauty. The pleasure is all mine. And please call me Aaron," he said as he shook her hand. His face beamed with pleasure, telling her he meant every word he said.

The intelligent beauty. So Harry had said something to his father. She was curious to know exactly what he said and when. "I didn't know you were in. I was just going to..."

Aaron waved off her explanation, "You don't have to explain anything to me. Whatever happened in here, stays here," he said, making a zipping gesture on his lips, and if Jade wasn't already in love with the man, she fell in love with him.

"Thank you," Jade said, feeling more relieved and grateful than embarrassed since she had no idea how she was going to explain herself. She was glad that he was the one who caught her snooping and not Harry.

"If you have found what you were searching for, do you mind sharing a glass of wine with me?" He asked, and Jade smiled once again.

"I would love that," Jade said as she walked out of Harry's bedroom with his father.

He led her to Harry's bar and poured white wine into two glasses before handing a glass to her, "So you're Tom's sister, the lawyer?" He asked as he sat down on the barstool next to her but turned in his seat so that he was facing her.

"The one and only," Jade said with a grin, and Aaron chuckled.

"Harry told me about you the first time you met," Aaron said, a smile playing on the corner of his lips, and without taking his eyes away from her, he sipped from his glass of wine.

Hearing that, Jade's curiosity was aroused, "I'm tempted to ask you what he told you," Jade confessed as she sipped from her wineglass, and his smile broadened as he dropped his glass of wine on the counter.

"The same way I'm tempted to ask you what you are doing in his apartment and searching for in his bedroom."

"But you said I didn't have to explain anything to you," Jade reminded him as she sipped from her wineglass.

Aaron nodded, "Of course, you don't have to. The same way I don't have to tell you what he told me either," he said with a sly smile, and Jade giggled as she watched him with interest.

"Are you suggesting that we trade secrets?" Jade asked, looking at the man whose eyes were glittering with mischief.

"I wouldn't dare say that to a lawyer, would I?" He asked with an innocent expression as he picked up his glass and raised it to his lips.

She laughed softly this time, "I actually stopped by to pick up my bag. I'm on my way home. I was curious to see what his bedroom looked like. Hence I was there," Jade said, and he narrowed his eyes thoughtfully.

"Oh! I'm glad. For a moment there, I thought you found out about the money he embezzled to buy me a house, and you were in his bedroom to get evidence against him," he said, and Jade looked at him with a confused frown, thinking he was serious, and then she giggled when she realized that he was pulling her legs.

This man! "You got me there for a moment," Jade said, and he grinned.

"How come your bag is here, yet you don't know what his bedroom looks like?" He asked, and Jade smiled in understanding as she raised her glass to her lips once again.

She set down the glass, "I spent the last two nights here. He let me stay in his guestroom, so I don't know what his bedroom looks like."

Aaron knew she was telling the truth since he had moved around the bedrooms to see if there was anything new once he arrived, and he had noticed the bag and feminine cosmetics in one of the guestrooms, "And you slept in the guestroom?"

From his tone, Jade could tell he was hoping she had slept in Harry's bedroom, "With the lock in place."

Aaron looked at her for a moment, and she didn't miss the disappointment in his eyes, "Am I assume that you chose to stay here because something is stirring between the two of you, or did your brother suddenly run out of bedrooms in his mansion, so you had to find an alternative place to stay? Perhaps he decided to

convert his mansion to one of his luxurious hotels?" He asked with such a straight face that once again, a laugh bubbled out of Jade.

She realized that she was laughing and smiling a lot within the short time she had spent in his company. Harry's father seemed to have withheld humor during the gene transfer. Or maybe Harry had it but just didn't show it when he was with her. She reasoned when she remembered his interaction with Lucy the previous day.

"My dad is at Tom's. Today is his birthday, and I'm supposed to be the birthday surprise," Jade said, but Aaron did not buy it.

"And neither you nor your brother thought that a hotel would be safer for you instead of the house of such a gorgeous single man? You guys must trust my son a great deal. Now I feel like I did a very bad job raising him," he said, slapping his face dramatically, but Jade could see the humor in his eyes even as he said it.

"You should be proud. You raised a gentleman," Jade said before downing the remaining content of her glass.

"There are times I wish he weren't so gentle. A woman like you shouldn't feel so safe around him," Aaron muttered under his breath, and Jade's laughter rang out.

"So, what did he say to you?" Jade asked curiously.

"Seeing how curious you are to know what he thinks of you, am I to assume that you are interested in him?" Aaron asked, deliberately evading her question.

"I thought we were trading secrets, and it was your turn to answer my question, not ask me more questions?" Jade asked, and Aaron shook his head.

"When did I ever agree to trade secrets with you?" He asked with false confusion.

Jade's mouth rounded in a silent O as it dawned on her that Harry's father had tricked her into telling him what he wanted to know without returning the favor.

"You sly old man," Jade hissed, and Aaron chuckled.

"You had both just finished speaking that night when I called him. He was very impressed. Not just by your beauty, but by your brains too," Aaron said, not wanting to go into the details of his conversation with his son.

"And you still remember that after over four years?" Jade asked, surprised.

Aaron's lips twitched, "Harry isn't the type to talk about girls. He barely shows interest in them. You are the only girl he has ever talked to me about, so how do you expect me to forget that?" Aaron asked, and Jade leaned forward with interest.

"Do you think he likes me?" Jade asked hopefully.

Aaron angled his head as he considered her for a moment. Although he wanted Harry to get into a relationship, he trusted Harry enough to know that if Harry were interested in Jade, he would get around to telling her about it eventually, and if he was holding back, then he must have his reasons.

"Do you think he likes you?" Aaron asked without answering her question once again.

Jade pursed her lips, "I don't know. Maybe."

"Do you like him?"

"It's hard not to like him, considering how well you raised him," she said, and Aaron smiled as he raised his glass to his lips.

"I don't know about him, but I like you. I can see why he found you interesting," Aaron said after a while.

"I like you too," Jade said with a grin, "So when did you get here? Is he aware that you are around?"

"No. I am here to surprise him, so I hope you can keep our meeting to yourself, at least until he sees me," Aaron said, and Jade gave him a nod.

"Sure. Whatever happens in Harry's absence stays there. I should get my stuff before he gets back from work," Jade said as she slid off the barstool.

Aaron gave her a nod as he watched her walk away. He stood up when she returned a moment later with her bag and walked up to her.

"It was nice meeting you, Aaron," she said as she leaned forward and pressed her lips to his cheek. Even though she had met him less than thirty minutes ago, she felt at home with him.

"The pleasure is all mine," he said with a pleased smile as he reached for the bag.

"Don't bother yourself on my account. I can manage," she assured him.

"I hope I get to see you again sometime," Aaron said as he followed her to the door.

"I hope so, too. Take care of yourself," Jade said as she opened the door and walked away.

Chapter 325 Overthinking Or Not?

Now that Tom was alone in his bedroom, he had more than enough time to ponder on the issue Lucy had raised in the vehicle. Although he had tried his best to appear calm and unbothered so that she wouldn't be more upset than she was, he was more worried about the issue than he had let on.

Lucy didn't want to get married. His heart contracted at the thought, which completely contrasted with everything he had ever wanted. Right from when he was a kid, he had always thought about getting married and being a strong and reliable husband and father like his own father. He had worked as hard as he could to attain success because he wanted his future wife and kids to live in comfort and luxury. He had worked hard to build an empire so that he would be able to give his family all his time and attention when the time came. Family meant everything to him.

Initially, when he had met her for the first time, he had thought she didn't want to get involved with men because she lacked experience in that area and was just closed to the idea because she was a workaholic. And then, after she told him about Jaime, he had thought that her awful experience was the reason she had been avoiding men, and he had somehow come to believe that now that she was with him, she was getting over it. He had planned to take things slowly with her until he saw that she was ready for them to get married.

He had thought that it would be a case of later, not never, for her. And that was because he had assumed that since her mind about relationships had changed, naturally, she wouldn't mind getting married. But now, hearing her say it to his face. Telling him that she never wants to get married to him. That had cut right through his heart more than he cared to admit because not only did he want to make her his wife, but he also wanted to have kids with her, and she didn't want any of that.

What then did she want? To just be in a relationship with him like this forever? Or to date him until she gets tired of him? Because he knew he could never get tired of loving her.

Even though he knew there were people in such arrangements who didn't want marriage and were doing well in their relationship, it didn't make sense to him. It would never make sense to him.

That sort of arrangement wasn't for a person like him. He believed strongly in family and craved a family of his own. He wanted a wife and children around him who

he would love, care for, provide for, commit to, and be responsible for. That was all he wanted. That was what he had always dreamed of until Lucy had come into his life and had become the only woman whose face he pictured when he thought of his wife. He didn't want just any woman to be his wife. Lucy was the wife he wanted. How often had he looked at her and imagined her, ripe and soft, with a rounded abdomen, carrying the life they created together? How was he going to make this work out? He wondered as he combed his restless fingers through his hair and paced around his bedroom.

He knew that he could easily decide to just shrug it off and relax since a couple of weeks ago, she hadn't even been interested in being in a relationship with the opposite sex. Yet, here she was, in a relationship with him now. It would be too easy to tell himself that if he could make her fall in love with him, then he could as well make her want to be his wife. But he wasn't arrogant enough to believe something like that, and he couldn't dismiss her concerns so easily or remain with her based on the assumption that she would eventually change her mind and get married to him. That wouldn't be fair to her, and it definitely wouldn't be fair to himself either if she never changes her mind, Tom reasoned.

A breakup wasn't even an option since for him, it wasn't a mere matter of just getting married to anyone for necessity but marrying the person who made his heart flutter. And that person was Lucy. It wasn't a matter of just seeing just anyone ripe and round with his baby in her abdomen. He wanted to create life with the one person who had become the essence of his life. He wanted to watch their creation grow within her and see her aglow with the transformation. It was Lucy's face he wanted to see beside him in bed first thing every morning and last thing at night. So he was more than a little bit bothered that she didn't want all of that with him.

He replayed their entire conversation in his head, and although she had said she loved him, and he believed her, doubts were beginning to crawl out. He was beginning to question himself. He wasn't sure how much she loved him or how much longer she would stay with him. Did she even want to live with him? Did he even know what she wanted, or had he just been doing what he pleased this whole time, while she had been going along with it for his sake, just like the whole sex stuff? Was that what these past weeks have been about? He knew he shouldn't be having such thoughts, but he couldn't stop himself.

He had been the one chasing her relentlessly from the first moment he laid eyes on her, and maybe he was doing too much. He realized that along the line, he had begun to treat her like an egg or a delicate china set that he expected to crack if he didn't handle carefully, and although it wasn't a bad thing, but maybe that wasn't

what they both needed since it was beginning to take a toll on him, and possibly on her too. Perhaps it was time he relaxed and just allowed her to come to him willingly without any pressure.

"What's up?" Bryan asked, cutting into his thoughts as he suddenly opened the bedroom door without knocking.

Tom put on a bland expression as he glanced at him, "Nothing serious. Sup?"

"Must be serious if your hair is standing like that. I do that with my hair too, when I'm worried. I guess it's a Hank thing," Bryan said, eyeing Tom's hair which bore testament to his restless fingers as he walked further into the bedroom.

"Just trying to figure out stuff. What about Jade? When is she getting here?" Tom asked, changing the subject.

"Soon. I believe. Unless she has decided to toss us under the bus and just spend some more time with Harry. I'm traveling back tomorrow to settle a couple of things with Paul. Although Jeff is handling them already, my presence is needed," Bryan said, changing the subject as he sat on Tom's gold padded vanity stool.

Tom's brow arched, "You need my permission to travel?" He asked, and Bryan grinned.

"You're going to be my boss soon, aren't you? I should start practicing how to be accountable to you," Bryan said, and Tom scoffed.

"Let me know if he tries to make things too difficult, and I'll take care of it," Tom said, and Bryan made a hats-off gesture.

"Sure, boss brother!" Bryan said, and Tom's lips twitched at his brother's silliness.

"Let's tell mom about Simon tonight. We've put it off for long enough," Bryan said, and Tom glanced at him in surprise.

"I almost forgot about him," Tom said with a sigh as he pressed his fingers against his eyes.

"Of course, you have a lot on your mind. Simon should be the least of your worries," Bryan said with understanding.

"We can talk to her after the party," Tom said with a sigh.

"And just so you know, I'm taking the case to court separately. I'd love to deal with Anita from my end while you do what you will from your end," Bryan said, and Tom massaged his temple.

Between work, his relationship with Lucy, and dealing with Anita, he didn't know which was stressing him more at the moment, but his head was beginning to spin, and Anita was the last person he wanted to think about.

"I already told you the plan. Stick to it. It would be best you bid your time until I take down the shields around her. Her family is related to the country's chief justice. If you sue her now, I'm sure they would pull every string to dismiss the case, and then they will know I'm coming for them. Why don't we let that be the final straw after I deal with her family? We can sue her separately. That way, she would be too busy going in and out of different courtrooms to have time to find another job after I fire her," Tom said, and Bryan nodded.

"I will wait. Just don't take too long. I'm not as patient as you," Bryan said as he got off the vanity and headed for the door.

He hesitated by the door, "You don't want to talk about what is bothering you?" He asked, and Tom shook his head.

"It's nothing I can't handle. Thanks," Tom said with a small smile. He really hoped that he would be able to handle it all properly.

"When you're done brooding, you can come take a look at the stuff we got for dad, and then we can wrap them together. Jade and Sonia insisted we wrap the gifts ourselves. They called it a loving gesture or something," Bryan added with a roll of his eyes that told Tom he thought the idea was silly before walking away, but not without seeing Tom's lips curve.

Once he was alone, Tom went to stand in front of the mirror. Maybe he was just overthinking all of this, and nothing good ever came from overthinking. He needed to get a grip on his emotions for both his sake and Lucy's.

Chapter 326 Tension

As Bryan walked into the living room, the doorbell rang, and he walked over to open the door. He raised a speculative brow when he saw Jade standing there, "For a moment there, I thought you decided to just get married to your precious uncle Harry and forget about our existence," Bryan said, making a face as he mimicked the tone she had used that morning when she referred to Harry as 'uncle Harry'.

"I knew it was a bad idea to tell Tom that I like his best friend in front of you. Perhaps you would have felt better if it was Matt that I wanted to bonk?" She asked as she dumped her bag at his feet and brushed past Bryan, whose eyes were beaming lasers at her.

"Is the reasonable Hank brother back from work yet?" Jade asked as she carelessly dropped her handbag on the couch and looked around the apartment.

"If he is the reasonable one, what does that make me?" Bryan asked as he picked up her bag and shut the door at his back.

"Do you really need me to spell it out?" Jade asked without sparing him a glance, "Tommy, are you in?" Jade called as she walked into the kitchen to see what it looked like.

"You are lucky you are related to me by blood, else, I would have strangled you," Bryan hissed as he dumped her bag on the couch, and Jade giggled, enjoying the exchange of words.

"Are you sure we are related by blood? Sometimes I have doubts..." Jade said and cackled with laughter when a crumpled paper ball hit the back of her head. God! She had really missed getting on his nerves.

"Is this the best you can do? I think you are a coward who is scared to strangle me because you know dad and mom will kill you," she said and shuddered with laughter as she quickly shut the kitchen door when she heard Bryan's quick footsteps.

"Why don't you open the door, smart mouth, and let's find out who the coward is?" Bryan taunted.

"I have nothing to prove to you or anyone else. You bully. TOMMY! If you are in there, come out here and save your helpless baby sister from this bully," Jade cried at the top of her lungs, making Bryan double over in a fit of laughter, and Tom, who had been folding his clothes in the bedroom, came out when he heard Jade's cry for help.

"You should be ashamed of yourself, Bryan Hank," Tom chided, mimicking their mother's tone when he saw Bryan standing by the kitchen door with the broken walking stick of the former house owners as he waited for Jade to open the door.

"Oh, Tommy! My hero is here! You're my lifesaver," Jade said dramatically as she opened the door and quickly ran to hide behind Tom, embracing him from behind.

"Coward," Bryan muttered as he went to sit on the couch, and Jade took the opportunity to look around the house.

"This place doesn't look bad. Maybe I can move in here when I take Harry's offer," Jade said when she returned to the living room.

"Just some hours ago, you said you might, and now it is when. Very smooth transition," Bryan observed.

"Let her be, Bryan," Tom chided like the dutiful older brother he was.

"How did you manage to live in here, Tom? It's so old-school. I would have to redo the decor to suit my feminine taste," Jade said thoughtfully, completely ignoring Bryan as she went to sit beside Tom.

"Or you could just move into your bedroom in Tom's mansion. He never said he was letting you stay here," Bryan countered, thinking that it wouldn't be a bad idea for Jeff and Mia to share the apartment since it was a two-bedroom apartment.

"Yeah. Why don't you just braid my hair into pigtails and add shiny pink ribbons for effect?" Jade asked dryly.

"Not that it wouldn't look good on a brat like you," Bryan called back.

Jade ignored him and focused on Tom, "How was work today?"

"Work was fine. I'm glad that you finally decided to join the company," Tom said with a small smile to relax her.

"Does that mean I can have this apartment? I don't suppose you are going to keep living here now that you have gotten Lucy," Jade said, and Tom shrugged.

"You can have this or any other apartment of your choice when you're ready. I'm taking my personal stuff with me today," Tom said, and Jade beamed a smile at him as she leaned forward to press her lips to his cheek.

"You have always been my favorite brother, did you know that?" she said with so much fondness that Tom laughed while Bryan scowled at her.

"If you're done gold-digging, let's wrap dad's gifts. I will get them," Bryan suggested as he stood up to get the items from the dining table where he had placed the gifts.

"What gifts did you get him?" Tom asked, welcoming the distraction.

"We got him a box of expensive Cuban cigars, his..."

"A box of cigars? Mom is not going to like that," Tom interrupted Jade.

"Chill. She allows him to smoke a single cigar per day. And this isn't about mom, remember? It is dad's birthday. The man likes to smoke, so he should be allowed to enjoy the best of cigars," Bryan said as he returned with the wristwatch and cigar and dropped them on the table.

"We also got his favorite wine and an outrageously expensive wristwatch," Jade concluded as she picked up the roll of wrapping paper and scissors and started to cut it.

The three siblings worked together, with Jade calling out instructions to both Bryan and Tom until they successfully wrapped the two boxes, "Well done," she said with a smile of approval.

"By the way, I think we should still do something special. What about we sing him a song? I could dance while you both sing," Jade suggested, and once again, the brothers exchanged a look of disbelief.

"For Christ's sake, Jade! We already got him gifts. You insisted we wrap the gifts ourselves to give them a special touch, and we did. We arranged for the cake and food and will be spending the evening with him singing the traditional happy birthday song. What other song do you want to sing?" Bryan asked, and Jade raised a brow.

"There is no gift we can give him that will ever be good enough. What have we not gotten him already over the years? Let's just make it special for him by showing him how much we love and cherish him," Jade pleaded, "If you like, I can sing, and you both can dance," Jade suggested with a grin.

"No! I'm going to hate you for life if you make me embarrass myself in front of Andrew!" Bryan protested, and Tom chuckled.

"Suck it by, Bryan," Jade said, patting his cheek.

"I can see why dad adores you," Tom said with a fond smile as he ruffled Jade's pixie hair. He wanted to have a daughter that would be this devoted to making him happy. Wasn't this one of the highlights of life?

"Everyone adores me. Duh," Jade said with a sassy smile, and Bryan raised a brow.

"I definitely don't belong to the class of everyone who adores you."

"You actually top the class. That's the only class you have ever topped in your miserable life," Jade said, and Tom chuckled as Bryan threw what was left of the wrapping paper at her.

Watching his siblings bicker reminded him once again why he wanted a family of his own. He wanted to watch his kids bicker and fight over nothing like Bryan, and Jade almost always did when they were in the same room. They acted like they couldn't stand each other, but he knew how much they loved themselves and enjoyed

their banters. He enjoyed watching them as he knew he would enjoy watching his kids too, he thought with a deep sigh.

"Are you okay, sweetie? You don't look fine."

"How can you tell?" Tom asked.

"Because I can read you like an open book, and you've been sighing an awful lot too. Want to share the problem?" Jade asked with concern, and Bryan also looked at Tom curiously.

"Nah. I am not in my best mood, but it's nothing to worry about," Tom assured them.

"What is keeping Sonia and Lucy? We should start getting ready to leave. It's a wonder mom hasn't called to scold me already for failing to wish dad a happy birthday before leaving the house. Did she call either of you?" Bryan asked, looking from Tom to Jade, and they both shook their heads, equally surprised that their mother hadn't bothered to call either of them yet.

Jade sighed, "Dad probably asked her to. I'm sure by now he thinks we forgot his birthday," Jade deduced sadly.

Just then, the doorbell rang, and Tom stood up, "I guess they're here. You can get the door while I get my stuff," Tom said as he walked into the bedroom, leaving Bryan, who went to get the door for Sonia and Lucy.

"I hope we didn't keep you guys waiting?" Sonia asked as she let Lucy go in ahead of her.

Bryan took Lucy's suitcase from her, "I was just about to send a search party," he said as he stole a kiss from Sonia before shutting the door.

"Hi, Jade!" Lucy greeted as her eyes unconsciously roamed the room in search of Tom.

"I hope you were able to do everything you needed to do?" Jade asked as she watched Lucy. Something about Lucy interested her. She felt like Lucy was a kindred spirit. Someone she understood.

"Yes, thanks," Lucy said, wondering if she should go into the bedroom to meet Tom or wait for him to come out.

"Hey, Jade! Welcome to the neighborhood of love," Sonia grinned at Jade, and she grinned back.

"Thanks. I think I'm going to move in here. I guess I will be Lucy's neighbor," Jade announced cheerfully, making Lucy look at her curiously.

Before Lucy could respond to Jade's statement, the inner door opened, and Tom walked out with a heavy designer backpack, "I guess we are all ready to leave now," he said, and he let his gaze settle on Lucy before smiling at her. Lucy let herself smile back even though she could somehow tell from his eyes that everything wasn't okay.

Both their hearts contracted painfully as they gazed at each other. Although neither of them wanted to lose the other, none of them was willing to give up on their choices either. They both wanted each other but in different ways. They wanted different things from each other, and deep down, they both knew that this was one of those times that love wasn't going to be enough. They were going to need more than love to resolve this.

"Yes. Let's go before dad disowns us all," Bryan suggested as he picked up both Lucy's and Jade's bags and headed for the door.

Jade picked up her handbag and walked outside with Sonia, who was telling her how she couldn't wait for them to settle down so she could tell her more about her and Harry.

"You are giving this apartment to Jade?" Lucy asked cautiously when they were alone, and Tom shrugged.

"I don't think I need it anymore," Tom said, feeling his heart ache as he watched her fumble for something to say. This whole thing wasn't supposed to be a big deal. He had no idea why his heart was making such a big deal out of it.

Lucy nodded, "Yeah. We can either spend time at your real house or mine," Lucy said, watching him. Waiting for him to say something. Anything that would reassure her that they were really good, and she was only imagining the tension between them.

"Yeah," Tom said with a nod as he held out a hand to her.

"Let's go," he said, and she placed her hands in his, and they both walked out of the house.

"Are you joining us, or you're going with Tom and Lucy?" Bryan asked as he carefully placed Jade's bag and Lucy's suitcase in his trunk, and Tom passed him his backpack too so that all the bags would be in the one car.

"I think I will go with my reasonable brother," Jade said, sticking her tongue at Bryan as she followed Tom.

"Brat. I hope Harry never spares you a glance," Bryan called out to Jade as she got into the other car with Tom and Lucy, causing Jade and Sonia to laugh, but neither Lucy nor Tom heard the joke. They were both lost in their thoughts.

Chapter 327 Tension (2)

Jade didn't need to be a relationship expert to know that everything wasn't okay between the two people she had chosen to share a ride with.

Seated in the back seat of the car, she looked from one to the other, and it was painfully apparent that Tom and Lucy were not okay. Although they didn't look like they were fighting, they didn't seem like they were entirely at peace either.

It wasn't like they had said anything to each other to make her feel the way she did, no. On the contrary, neither of them had spoken a word to each other since Tom started driving. And although silence didn't necessarily mean there was trouble in paradise, since she didn't expect them to become chatterboxes simply because they were in love, this wasn't one of those comfortable silences between couples. Even she was feeling very uncomfortable by it, and she was reluctant to speak as she doubted that either of them was in the mood to be engaged in a conversation.

Since she had spent time with Bryan and Sonia earlier in the day and had gotten a glimpse of the nature of their relationship and how crazy they were about each other, she had wanted to do the same with Tom and Lucy, but the atmosphere in the car was taut.

She couldn't help wondering what could have transpired between them to put Tom in the foul mood she had noticed he was trying so hard to hide from Lucy. Merely by observing them, she could tell that the dynamics of their relationship seemed utterly different from Bryan's and Sonia's, who seemed like the type to fight and then have a hot makeup sex. On the contrary, these two looked like they were scared to fight with each other. Like they were tiptoeing around the other's feelings.

If she had noticed this earlier, she would have gone along with Bryan and Sonia and given these two privacy to trash out their issue, whatever it was. Or maybe it wasn't too late to leave them, she thought as she looked ahead to see if Bryan had sped off or if he was still driving slowly ahead of them.

"Oh, shit!" Jade swore dramatically, and Tom glanced at her through the rearview mirror while Lucy turned to look at her.

"What is wrong?" Tom asked with concern.

"My phone. I gave it to Sonia, and I forgot to take it back. I need to make an urgent phone call. Can you signal Bryan to stop and maybe pull over?" She asked, and Tom shrugged as he honked three times and pulled over.

Hearing the signal from Tom, Bryan glanced at his rearview mirror, "Why are they stopping?" Bryan asked as he also pulled over.

"Thanks, Tommy. Never mind me, I will just go with them. Sorry for the trouble," Jade said with a bright smile while Tom watched her as though he could see through her as she got out of the car and hurried down to join Bryan.

"Is something wrong? Did you have a fight with your favorite brother and get thrown out?" Bryan asked as Jade opened the passenger door and got into the car.

"You wish. Something is up between those two. I figured they need space," Jade said with concern, and Sonia's brows pulled together.

"Why do you say so?" Sonia asked, worried.

"It's just a feeling. I could be wrong. I just don't think they're fine," Jade said, and Bryan nodded as he started driving again while Sonia prayed that Jade was wrong and everything was fine between them.

Inside Tom's car, Lucy kept twisting and untwisting her hands on her lap. She couldn't help feeling very nervous now that they were alone once again. Her heart kept contracting, and her stomach continued to churn.

She wanted them to talk things through, but this wasn't the time or the place for them to have that discussion. She couldn't let herself be impulsive and raise the subject again as she had done earlier since that was what had put them in this mood. What could she do or say to lighten the mood? She wondered as she stole a glance at him.

At that exact moment, Tom turned to spare her a glance, and their eyes met. Lucy quickly looked away, and Tom returned his gaze to the road. After a brief moment, he reached out and placed a hand over her hands and patted it to calm her, and Lucy looked into his face.

"Have you called to reject their offer yet? I mean the foundation," Tom asked, and Lucy shook her head.

"Not yet. I will do that tomorrow. I didn't want them to think I turned down their offer too quickly without thinking about it. If I take some time, they will respect my decision more," Lucy said, and Tom's lips twitched.

"I see. I was thinking about it. Maybe you should accept their offer," Tom said, and Lucy stiffened.

"Why? I thought we already agreed that I wouldn't take it? Didn't you say that you didn't want me to do it, so why are you changing your mind?" Lucy asked, trying to block the thoughts that were running through her mind.

She did not want to think about it and start making assumptions. She wanted to hear from him and understand what he was saying.

"It has nothing to do with our other conversation," Tom was quick to assure her as he lifted his hands from her suddenly still hands. He sensed that her thoughts were likely going wild already.

"Okay. So what is it about?" She asked, looking at him expectantly, glad that they were having a conversation.

"I spoke with Harry about it after you left," Tom explained.

"After I left where?"

"After lunch," Tom explained and went on to tell her Harry's suggestion, "I think it's a good idea, and you should accept the offer while I do my best to deal with them," Tom said, and Lucy pursed her lips.

"Was that the reason you asked if I had made up my mind on it earlier? Why didn't you just say so?" Lucy asked, and Tom shrugged.

"I didn't know how you were going to take it. And I needed to give it some more thought. I think it's safer for you to take it," Tom explained, and Lucy's brows creased as she gave it some thought.

"Will I have to resign from the job after you have handled Anita and her family?" Lucy asked, thinking about a scenario where she would enjoy the job too much and not want to quit.

"It's your choice. You are free to do whatever you want to," Tom said, and his heart twisted painfully at the thought. As painful as it was to utter those words, that was the truth. It was her life, and he couldn't tell her how to live it or what to do. If he could, then he probably would have asked her to change her thoughts about marriage and marry him when she was mentally ready, but that wasn't within his power.

Lucy looked at him. Although they were talking about a different subject, she felt that his statement had an underlying meaning.

Did he mean that she was free not to get married? Of course, she knew that she was free to do that, the same way she knew that he was free to get married as he wanted, even if with someone else. But that wasn't what they both wanted, was it?

"So I should call to let them know I'm accepting their offer?" Lucy asked after some time, and Tom nodded.

"Yeah. You can do that. I will meet with them tomorrow."

"Alright. I will do that tomorrow then. Thank you," Lucy said politely, and Tom sighed inwardly.

"This is awkward," he muttered under his breath, not liking the sudden scarcity of topics to discuss.

"What? Did you say something?" Lucy asked curiously.

Tom spared her a glance and then pulled over to the side of the road and turned to face her, "What are we doing, Lu? I don't like this. I don't like the way I'm feeling right now. I don't want to feel this way!" Tom said, feeling very frustrated.

Lucy looked at him with apologetic eyes, glad that he was no longer hiding his feelings from her like he had been doing, "I'm sorry. I know it's my fault that you feel this way. I should have known better than to bring it up when I did and..."

"Don't apologize. Whether you brought it up when you did, or years from now, I would still feel this way. I know I'm not handling this as you probably expect me to. I know I should handle it differently and reassure you and not feel this way..."

"Tom, no one said you are supposed to handle this in any particular way. You have every right to feel the way you do," Lucy said softly as she reached out to touch his hand.

"I know. And I also know I said we should talk about this later when we are both relaxed, but I don't think I can wait until then. My heart feels tight. I feel like a heavyweight is sitting on my chest, and I need to get it off, or else my mood is going to ruin dad's party for everyone, and I really don't want that," Tom confessed, and Lucy leaned over to embrace him.

"I'm sorry, Tom. I know I caused this, and my heart feels heavy too. I love you so much, Tom, and I never meant to hurt you or myself. What can I do to make you feel better? To make us feel better?" Lucy asked, and Tom pulled away to look into her face.

"Do you really want me to tell you what you can do to make me feel better? Or are you just asking?" He asked with a playful glint in his eyes, making Lucy's lips twitch in amusement.

"This is serious, Tom. Stop joking around," Lucy chided since she could guess what he wanted to say.

"Yeah. You're right," Tom said with a sigh.

"I want to know, Lu. Please tell me what you want. What do you want from me? From this relationship?" Tom asked, the playfulness out of his eyes now.

Chapter 328 One Year

"Do you really want to talk about this right now? Right here?" Lucy asked, looking into Tom's eyes while making wild gestures with her hand to remind him that they were by the roadside.

"Yes, I want to. I'm not sure I'm ever going to be relaxed enough to talk about it later unless we talk about it now. So please tell me, Lu. What do you want?" Tom asked with pleading eyes, and Lucy sighed as she took off her glasses and rubbed her eyes.

"Honestly? I'm not sure I know what I want anymore," Lucy confessed, and Tom felt the first stirring of hope in his heart.

"You don't know?"

"Marriage has never been in my plans. I've never thought nor dreamed of getting married all my life. All I've ever wanted was to work, make a name for myself and live alone traveling around the world at my leisure. Maybe get a pet, and hopefully have a niece or nephew, or both to dote on. I've never thought of marriage, so I don't know," Lucy said, and Tom nodded.

"Being in a relationship was never in your plan either, was it?" Tom asked, and Lucy shook her head.

"It wasn't."

"But here we are, right?"

"It's different. Being a teenager I didn't mind relationships but not marriage. I still don't think marriage is something I can do."

That was something that Tom couldn't understand. Her parents were wonderful, and he had watched them interact long enough to know that they were crazy about

each other, so what could have possibly made her decide that she didn't want to be married?

"Why? What are you scared of, love? Do you think getting married to me will stop you from achieving your dreams? You can still work, make a name for yourself, travel the world, own whatever pet you want, have nieces and nephews to dote on. I can't stop you from doing any of that. The only difference is, you will be doing all of that with me in the picture. Sharing your joyous and sad moments with me. Can't you do that?" Tom asked, and Lucy's brows pulled together in distress.

"I don't know."

"So does that mean you plan to break up with me in the future? Because even if you don't get married to me and you just decide to date me, I will still be in the picture," Tom said, and tears of confusion gathered in Lucy's eyes.

"I don't want to break up with you, Tom. I'm not sure about how I feel right now. I don't know if I'm going to change my mind on this subject like I've done by being in a relationship with you. It's all still too soon," Lucy cried, burying her face in her hands.

Tom felt slightly relieved. If she was just saying she didn't want to get married to him because she had never thought of getting married, and not because there was any tangible reason for it, then there was hope that he could convince her otherwise.

"What about kids? How do you feel about kids?" Tom asked as he reached for her hands, and pulled them away from her face and kissed her palms.

Lucy shook her head, tears rolling down her cheeks as she looked into his eyes, "I'm not sure I want kids either."

This was going to be tough, Tom thought as he used his thumb to wipe the tears on her cheeks, "Will a year be enough for you to make up your mind on what you want? I mean you can take a year to think about it and be clear on what you want. All you have to do is promise to keep your mind open to the possibility of marriage and kids," Tom pleaded.

"A year?" Lucy asked in confusion. That sounded like they were postponing the inevitable to her since they were still going to have to face this issue after a year.

"Yes. I understand that this is all too sudden. So let's just focus on enjoying our relationship for the time being. You can tell me if you want to be my wife or not a year from now," Tom suggested.

"What if the time comes and I still don't want to get married?" Lucy asked, and Tom shook his head.

"What if the time comes and you want to get married?" Tom asked, countering her thoughts, "Let's not focus on what ifs. I don't want us to ruin our precious moments together because we are worrying about the future. The past hour has been awful let's put it behind us. Now that I know your thoughts on marriage, and you know mine too, let's leave it at that and give it a year. Who knows? I might be the one not wanting to get married anymore by the end of the year," Tom said on a lighter tone, and Lucy gave him a wobbly smile.

"Okay. On your dad's birthday next year we will have this discussion again. For now let's go home, we are keeping the others waiting," Lucy said, and Tom look away from her to see that Bryan had also parked in front of them.

"I love you very much, Lucinda Perry," Tom said as he leaned forward and kissed her softly.

"I know. And I love you too, Thomas Hank," Lucy said with a happy smile, feeling relieved.

"Good. I feel like the weight has been lifted off my chest. We can go home now," Tom said before signaling to Bryan with a honk that they could leave.

"I think they're ready to leave now," Jade said when she heard Tom's signal, since Bryan and Sonia were too busy necking in the front seat to hear it.

"It was smart of you to give them space," Bryan said as he pulled away from Sonia and started the car.

"Of course. They needed to talk. I hope they were able to resolve their difference," Jade said, while Sonia took out her phone to chat with Lucy to find out what was going on.

"Who knows? Maybe they just needed to make out," Bryan said with a grin as he resumed driving.

"Nah. Tom is more decent than you are. He won't make out in public," Jade said in Tom's defense, and Bryan hooted with laughter.

"You don't know your favorite brother as much as you think you do after all," Bryan said with a smirk, and turned to look at Sonia who was yet to say a word but she seemed to be busy with her phone.

"What? Why do you say that? Did he make out in public?" Jade asked curiously, placing her head between the two front seats to look at Bryan.

"Something like that. I don't know what dirty thing he was doing to Lucy yesterday, but she was making strangled moans while we were all gathered together in the Den, and everyone assumed the sound was coming from Sonia and me."

"Naturally," Jade said as she hooted with laughter, "I can't believe that our gentleman brother would do something like that in public though. It sounds more like something you would do," Jade said in amazement.

"You had better start believing that maybe your darling gentleman brother isn't as gentle as he appears," Bryan said with a proud smile as he stepped on the gas pedal.

Once they arrived at Tom's mansion and got out of the car, all three of them waited for Tom and Lucy to join them.

By the time Tom and Lucy got out of the car, they were both laughing hard as Tom narrated his experience at the mall to Lucy, and how he wished she had been there to grab his ass like she had done in front of Cora after work.

"We may have to be going out in disguise now. I'm glad I haven't thrown away my costume yet. I will get some for you. Maybe a pink hair," Tom suggested.

Lucy laughed softly, "You should probably get me a purple moustache too. I'm going to be disguised as a male. How about I just apply as your male personal assistant?" She said, making Tom laugh as he reached into the backseat of the car to take out the bag containing the stuff Lucy had bought earlier at the department store.

Sonia, Bryan, and Jade felt varying degrees of relief as they watched the couple laughing happily, "All is well with their world again. I guess we can expect more moans tonight at the party," Bryan said as he went to open the car's trunk to take out the bags.

Tom placed a hand around Lucy's waist as they joined the others. Once they got to where Bryan was standing with the bags, Tom took his backpack and Lucy's suitcase from Bryan, "I suppose you guys can bring in the rest stuff?" He asked, and without waiting for a response he led Lucy to the door, leaving the rest of them to bring in all they had gotten for their dad's party.

"I'm suppose to carry a bag, but Lucy is going in without carrying anything?" Sonia asked incredulously. Not only had Lucy not responded to her texts earlier, she had been staring at Tom the whole time that she had barely looked at her. Oh, Wow! What a best friend.

"She's carrying the man's heart in her hands, and he's carrying her stuff," Bryan said with a chuckle, while Sonia eyed the bags.

"Well, I'm carrying your heart too in my hands. Jade isn't carrying anyone's heart yet, so you both can come in with the bags," Sonia said as she hurried after Tom and Lucy, leaving Jade who was glaring at her and Bryan who was laughing in amusement.

"You know your girlfriend is crazy, right?" Jade asked, making him laugh even more.

"That's an understatement. She is actually very crazy," Bryan said with a grin as he handed Jade her duffel bag, "If only Harry was here, I'm sure he would have offered to carry your bag like Tom did for Lucy," Bryan taunted, and Jade hissed at him.

"Take the rest of the stuff in yourself," Jade said as she picked up the wrapped box of wristwatch and walked away.

Chapter 329 Dinner Preparations

"Where did they all go?" Tom asked Samantha with a concerned frown after he dropped his and Lucy's bags in the bedroom and returned downstairs, but there was no trace of their parents.

Samantha shrugged, "They didn't say. They just seemed pretty excited to go out, and your mother asked Adolf to drive them in the limo. They took Jamal along with them," She said, and Tom exchanged a look with Lucy.

"Did you tell your dad about the surprise?" Tom asked, and Sonia, who had just joined them, gave Lucy a questioning look.

"You told him that your dad asked us to remind them?" Sonia asked incredulously, eyeing Lucy like she was a traitor.

"Yes."

"No," Lucy and Tom said simultaneously, and Sonia rolled her eyes at Tom, who was trying to cover for Lucy.

"She didn't need to tell us. She only confirmed what we already knew. We are smart enough to figure it out on our own. Maybe if just one of you had reminded us, it would have been less suspicious than the both of you doing it at around the same time after speaking with Andrew privately," Tom told Sonia, and she rolled her eyes.

"If you were that smart, then you wouldn't have forgotten your dad's birthday in the first place," Sonia said with a tsk, and Jade, who just joined them, laughed while Samantha and Lucy struggled to keep a straight face.

Tom scowled at Sonia, "In case you missed it, your boyfriend is the least smart amongst the Hank siblings," Tom fired back, and this time both Lucy and Samantha joined in Jade's laughter since the joke wasn't at Tom's expense.

"And that proves my point," Tom said, pointing at Bryan, who was walking in their direction, hugging the bag containing the bottle of wines to himself and using his chin to balance it while also carrying the two bags containing all the snacks they had gotten, and from the looks of him some of the snacks had fallen out of the bag, and he couldn't wait to set it all down.

"What proves what?" Bryan asked as Sonia took the bags of snacks from him.

"Carry all of that alone proves that you are not very smart. Because if you were, you would have come in with just Jade's duffel bag and asked any of the household staff to bring in the rest stuff from the car," Tom pointed out, and Bryan scoffed as he dropped the bag of wine on the dining table, while Samantha retraced his steps to pick up whatever must have fallen out of the bag on his way in.

"Yeah, I'm the same not very smart brother you asked for advice on how to woo your girlfriend," Bryan said dryly, and Lucy looked at Tom while Sonia snickered at him.

"Yeah, the same advice that almost blew up in my face..."

"No, brother. It wasn't my advice that almost blew up in your face. I never asked you to lie to her. I may not be smart, but I'm not a liar. Right, baby?" Bryan asked Sonia.

"You're smart, baby, and you're definitely not a liar, my love," Sonia said with a grin as she kissed his cheek, and Tom eyed the both of them irritably.

"Tom isn't a liar, and I'm sure whatever advise you gave him must not have been very good either since you obviously didn't advise him to tell the truth," Lucy said in Tom's defense, and Tom smiled at her.

Sonia and Lucy scowled at each other while Bryan and Tom glared at each other. Jade, who had been enjoying the banter, shook her head, "C'mon, children. No fighting!"

"Nobody is fighting. It's just a harmless... debate," Tom said, and Bryan scoffed.

"Oh, wow! A couples debate, I wish I wasn't so single so that I could join in," Jade said dryly.

"I doubt that Harry would have anything interesting to say if it's not about work. You called him boring after all..."

"Harry is not boring," Jade and Tom snapped at him simultaneously, and Bryan shook his head.

"It is no wonder that Tom is your favorite sibling. All three of you are boring," Bryan said, and without waiting for their response, he looked around, "So why is the place quiet? Where are mom and dad?" He asked curiously, reminding them of the reason they were all standing there.

"Samantha said they all went out," Tom informed him before turning to Lucy, "So? Did you tell your dad anything about our plan? Maybe he found a way to take them out of the house so that..."

"No, I didn't say anything to him," Lucy said before Tom could finish, and he gave her a nod.

"When did they leave the house?" Jade asked Samantha, who had returned to join them.

"Sometime around Eleven, I think," Samantha said.

"Does that mean they went out to celebrate his birthday? Without us?" Bryan asked, and Jade pursed her lips thoughtfully.

"I think so. This is probably for the best. Let's organize the place and freshen up before they get back," Jade suggested, clapping her hands to get them started.

"The cake and food are ready, I hope?" Tom asked Samantha.

"Yes, sir. Everything is ready," Samantha said with a polite smile.

"And I can trust that Adolf isn't aware of the surprise plan?" Tom asked since he had counted on the fact that Samantha and Adolf were always at loggerheads before entrusting her with the secret.

"I made sure he didn't come anywhere close to the kitchen," Samantha said, and Tom nodded in approval.

"We can have dinner out on the patio, right?" Jade asked, and Tom gave her a nod.

"Patio?" Lucy asked, realizing that there were still so many parts of the house that she was yet to see. She hadn't even thought that there was a patio.

"Yes, the patio.

I think it'll be more intimate if we all sit outside and enjoy the evening air," Jade explained, considering that Lucy was asking because she didn't hear her correctly.

"You don't have to worry about setting the table. We will set the table ourselves," Jade assured Samantha before looking around, "Where is Candace?"

"She is in the guestroom, Miss Hank. Your parents wanted her to go with them, but she insisted on staying back," Samantha explained, and Jade nodded.

"Please send someone to let her know that I'm here now," Jade said as she took off her shoes, "Let's meet down here in ten minutes to set the table. I need to get out of these clothes," Jade called to the others as she headed for the stairs.

"I didn't know the house had a patio," Lucy whispered to Tom as they both headed upstairs to get out of their work clothes.

"I will give you a tour of the place tomorrow," Tom promised as he took her hand.

Once they got into the bedroom, Lucy walked into the closet with the shopping bag and discreetly transferred the tampons into her box before returning with the bag.

"What is your dad's shoe size?" Lucy asked as she took out the shower gel from the shopping bag and placed it on the dressing table before going to drop the shopping bag on the bed.

"I think he wears a size ten," Tom said thoughtfully as Lucy came to stand in front of him with her back to him. And as though he had been trained to do it all his life, he reached for the zipper of her dress and unzipped it to reveal her white lace bralette and matching pant.

"Thanks," Lucy said as she stepped away from him, "I think this will fit him," she said as she took out the memory foam slippers from the shopping bag and showed it to him.

"You got my dad a birthday gift?" Tom asked, surprised and pleased by the gesture as he admired the slippers.

"I got a pair of these for my dad two years ago, and he really loved them. I think your dad will like it too. What do you think?" Lucy asked as she returned the slippers to the bag and shrugged off her dress.

"I think I'm jealous of my dad," Tom said, and Lucy laughed as she stepped out of her office dress and placed it in the laundry basket.

Tom watched her in surprise since she didn't seem embarrassed as she usually was to take off her clothes in front of him. He didn't comment on it and just followed her movement with his eyes as she walked into the closet to find something to wear.

"No need to be jealous. Don't worry. I promise to get you something better on your birthday," she called out to him, "What do you think I should wear?"

"Something comfortable. I could give you one of my t-shirts," Tom offered as he walked into the closet to join her.

"Why haven't you taken off your clothes yet?" Lucy asked when she raised her head and noticed that he was still fully dressed, apart from his shoes which he had taken off the moment they walked into the bedroom.

"Because I'm waiting for you to do it. I told you it's your duty to undress me until you can look at my naked body without feeling embarrassed, remember?" He said, and she raised a brow.

"You said you would undress me too, but I just did so myself," she pointed out.

"I could take off your undies if you want me to, but what I can't assure you is that we will make it downstairs in time to set the table with the others," Tom said with a naughty smile, and Lucy laughed.

"And you believe I have more self-control than you do? Take off your clothes," Lucy ordered as she unzipped her suitcase and took out a black mini jean skirt and a floral patterned t-shirt.

"That sounds hot," Tom joked, and Lucy giggled.

"What is going to be hot is your sister's temper when she gets there before you. Join us when you're ready," Lucy said as she walked out of the closet with her clothes in hand and went to dress up in front of the mirror.

She was glad that she and Tom had been able to put the unpleasantness of earlier behind them. Now the major thing on her mind was how she was going to tell Lucas about Rachel.

She was going to have to tell him about it at some point that evening, as she doubted that she would find the courage to tell him about it if she kept it to herself for much longer.

"Are you okay?" Tom asked as he stepped out of the closet, already dressed in a white t-shirt and jean shorts, while she was just buttoning her t-shirt.

"Yeah. If you were Lucas, would you want me to tell our parents about Rachel first before telling you?" Lucy asked curiously.

"The wise thing would be to tell your parents so that you all find a way to tell him about it as a family, but the best thing for him would be to tell him about it first. I'm not sure I would appreciate it if either Jade or Bryan went behind me to tell my parents something about you," Tom said, and Lucy nodded.

"So I have to tell Lucas about Rachel before telling my parents," Lucy said, and Tom nodded.

"We could just tell our parents together at the same time. Why don't you stay back and give Lucas a call right now? Then we can tell our parents about Anita and Rachel after dinner tonight?" Tom asked, and Lucy shook her head.

"It can wait. I have to join you guys in setting up..."

"It shouldn't wait. I will do your share of the work. I'm sure the others will understand. Just give him a call right now, and join us when you are done," Tom said as he leaned forward and pressed his lips to her forehead before walking out of the bedroom.

Chapter 330 Resignation

Lucas sat on the edge of the bed he had spent most of his childhood with his face buried in his hands as he thought about his life.

Submitting his resignation letter had been more difficult than he had thought possible. The hospital's medical director had refused to accept it and had insisted that he give him a proper explanation for his resignation.

"You are one of my best doctors. I would be crazy to let you leave," the medical director had said, throwing Lucas' resignation letter in the trashcan as he got off his seat.

"I understand how you feel, Dr. Drew, but I'm sorry, my mind is made up," Lucas said apologetically.

"No, you don't understand! I'm retiring by the end of the year, and I was going to hand over to you. How can you just quit? How can your mind be made up? You asked for some time off, and I gave it to you. If you need some more time off, then you can

have it, but I'm not letting you go, Lucas. You are not just a doctor here; you are also my friend," Dr. Drew insisted even though he was old enough to be Lucas' father.

Lucas was almost tempted to tell him that playing tennis with him in his spare time hardly made them friends. But that would be too rude considering that it seemed like the man actually considered him a friend. He had always thought the man invited him to play tennis with him because he was bored.

"I can't continue to work here," Lucas insisted.

"Why? What is wrong? Did you get a better offer? Is there something I can do?" Dr. Drew asked, looking at him with such concern in his eyes that Lucas started to feel guilty.

"It is not you. And this has nothing to do with getting a better offer either. I'm just done here. I'm done with this phase of my life, don't you get it?" Lucas asked in a half yell, and Dr. Drew took a closer look at him when he heard the frustration in his voice.

"Are you okay? Are the wedding plans stressing you out?" He asked when he noticed Lucas' bloodshot eyes.

"No. It's not the wedding. The wedding is off. We are not getting married anymore," Lucas said, making Dr. Drew move away from his desk.

"You are not getting married anymore? Did Rachel break up with you?" He asked in surprise since he knew that they had been dating since their high school days.

"Are you okay?" He asked as an afterthought thinking that Lucas was heartbroken because Rachel dumped him.

Lucas took in a deep breath, "I ended things with Rachel. Her father got me this job and..."

"Is that it? So you are quitting because you broke up with her? Did you think I'm going to fire a young doctor of your caliber because you had a fallout with your fiancée, and my friend wants me to fire you? You think I gave you this job just because of your relationship with my friend's daughter?" Dr. Drew asked incredulously.

"It doesn't matter. None of that matters. I don't want any ties with her or her family. I don't want them to think they made me who I am. I don't want to ever have to feel like I owe them. I'm deeply sorry," Lucas said with a shake of his head.

"Even if you've made up your mind, you will have to give at least four weeks' notice as stated in our agreement. Not that I can ever replace a doctor of your worth,

but I will need time to get someone to take over from you. What about your patients?" Dr. Drew asked, and Lucas shook his head once again.

"Take a good look at me, Dr. Drew. Do you honestly think that I'm in the state of mind to handle any case at the moment?" Lucas asked, and without waiting for Dr. Drew to say anything else, he gave him a polite bow and walked out of the office.

Somehow, before he got to his office, news had spread all over the clinic, and two female nurses and a male nurse were waiting for him outside his office.

"Dr. Perry, is it true? Are you really leaving us?" One of the ladies asked as he approached.

"It's true. I know it is sudden, and I'm sorry. But I have to go," Lucas said as he walked past them into his office, not willing to be drawn into another emotional confrontation since he could already see the tears gathered in the eyes of one of the nurses who he knew had a crush on him.

As he packed his belongings into a box, there was a knock on his office door, and he took a deep breath, "Come in."

The door opened, and his heart broke when a lady wheeled her twelve-year-old son, who was his patient, into his office, "Dr. Perry..." The child's voice broke when his eyes fell on the box which was partially filled with Lucas' personal effects, and tears gathered in his eyes.

In his misery, he had forgotten about most of his patients, "Denv," Lucas called softly as he went around his desk to meet the child who had been his patient for the past two years.

"Please don't leave," the young boy begged as tears flowed down his cheeks.

"Please don't do that," Lucas pleaded as he crunched down in front of the kid and brushed away the kid's tears with his thumb.

"Why are you leaving, Dr. Perry?" The kid's mother asked, sounding equally emotional.

"I need a break. I need a change of environment. I'm sorry," Lucas apologized.

"What is going to happen to me?"

"Dr. Drew is going to take care of you, and then you will be all better and go back to doing what kids your age do," Lucas said, trying to sound cheerful.

"But I don't want Dr. Drew. I don't want any other doctor. It's you I want. Where are you going to? Maybe mom can bring me there so that you can continue to treat me and make me feel better," the little boy cried, and Lucas knew that he needed to leave before other patients got hold of the news.

"I'm just going to travel for the time being. I'm taking a break from work. You know what you can do?" Lucas asked as he straightened up, and the kid shook his head.

"You can always call me whenever nurse Abigail comes with the big needle you fear so much, and even though I won't be there to hold your hands physically, you will hear my voice and know that I'm with you," Lucas promised.

"Always?" The kid asked, and Lucas nodded.

"Always," Lucas promised, and then he leaned forward to embrace the child before stepping back, "I have to leave now before the other patients start trooping in. If I have to give every one of them my contact line to reach me, then I might not be able to receive the call of my favorite patient when Nurse Abigail comes with the big needle," Lucas said as he ruffled the kid's hair playfully, and the kid gave him a wobbly smile.

"I'm going to see you again, right?" The kid asked hopefully.

"Sure. As long as you receive your treatment and don't give the next doctor a hard time, we will definitely see. Now return to your ward," Lucas said before glancing at the kid's mother.

"Take care of him. And don't worry, he is in safe hands here," Lucas assured her, and she wiped her tears as she embraced him before wheeling her son out of his office.

Now seated on his bed, Lucas felt a shudder run through his body as he thought about his job, his colleagues, his patients, and the life he loved but had to give up so that he could cut ties with Rachel and her family. For the first time since he broke up with her, he had a deep feeling of sadness, and before he knew it, he began to sob uncontrollably.

He slid off the edge of the bed and sat on the floor as he wept. He didn't know how long he sat there crying until he heard the sound of his phone ringing.

He ignored it at first and just went to the bathroom to run some water over his face. He looked back at his reflection in the mirror and sighed when he noticed the five o'clock shadow on his face.

He felt exhausted. He was emotionally, physically, and psychologically drained. He wanted nothing more than to just be left on his own. He wanted to sleep. He was going to head over to the apartment he shared with Rachel the next day to pack up his personal stuff. She could have the furniture and whatever else. All he wanted was his clothes and his peace. He craved peace the most at the moment.

As he returned to the bed, he picked up his phone, which had started ringing again for the third time, and he cleared his throat when he realized that it was Lucy before receiving the call, "Sup?" He asked, trying to sound more cheerful than he felt. If at all there was anything in his life to be joyful about at the moment.

"How are you feeling now, Luc?" Lucy asked in concern, after making up her mind that she would keep the information away from him if he sounded the least bit weird.

"Exhausted. I finally cried. Rachel came over to the house earlier, and I handed in my resignation letter today. It was pretty tough," Lucas confessed.

"Rachel was there? What did she want?" Lucy asked, torn between her anger at Rachel and her sadness for Lucas.

Lucas decided not to tell her that Rachel had broken in through the kitchen window, "To make up. But I made it clear that I was done," Lucas assured her.

"Alright. Your boss, what did he say about your resignation?" Lucy asked curiously.

"He tried to convince me not to resign, but I didn't give in. Anyway, I'm done with that. It's all behind me now," Lucas said, trying to make light of it so that Lucy wouldn't know just how affected he was by it all.

"I'm so sorry, Luc," Lucy said; her heart felt very heavy as she listened to him. More than anything, she wished she didn't have to break this news to him and add to all that was happening in his life at the moment. Just how much could a man take at once? How much could Lucas take?

"You don't have to be sorry. I'm fine, I assure you. I just need to take some time off to myself, and I can assure you that I will be fine," Lucas said confidently. Not only to convince Lucy but also to convince himself that the ache in his heart would stop and he would feel better sometime soon.

"I hope so. I really hope so," Lucy said with a sigh.

"How are mom and dad? I'm going to move my stuff from the apartment I shared with Rachel tomorrow. I will leave them here before traveling."

"Have you made up your mind on a place you're traveling to?"

"Not yet. When it's time, I will know," Lucas said.

"Alright," Lucy said as the little coward in her head suggested that she accept what he was saying and hang up the call. But she couldn't. Her heart was beating really fast as she tried to organize the words in her head.

"Did you just call to check on me?" Lucas asked, suspecting that Lucy wanted to say something.

"Uhm, no," Lucy said and shut her eyes tightly as she tried to summon all the courage she could to say what needed to be said.

"What is it?" Lucas asked, his guards up when he heard the weariness in her voice. He didn't know how but could tell that whatever she wanted to say wasn't going to be good.

"We found out the person behind me and Sonia's scandal. Her name is Anita Miller. She is Rachel's cousin," Lucy rushed to say.