

Wild Night 331

Chapter 331 Broken

"Where is Lucy?" Jade asked when Tom joined her on the patio, and she didn't see Lucy with him.

"I left her upstairs. She has to make an important phone call," Tom said, and Jade nodded.

"I suppose she is telling her twin brother about his ex-fiancee?" Jade asked thoughtfully since that was the only thing she could think of that would keep Lucy upstairs. Not that she thought Lucy didn't have other important things to attend to, but from the way Tom had said it, she could tell it was an unpleasant phone call.

"Yeah."

"That must be tough. You should have stayed up with her," Jade said, and Tom's brows pulled together.

"Maybe I should have. But lately, I feel like I'm being overly protective of her and treating her like she is too fragile and would break under the least amount of pressure. I figured I give her space to handle this on her own. She loves being independent," Tom said with a shrug, but Jade could tell that he was worried about Lucy.

Jade sighed, "I feel sorry for them both," Jade said, not knowing how she would feel if she was in their shoes. She wasn't even directly involved, yet the mere thought of it made her heart ache.

"Me too. Earlier in the car, you didn't forget your phone with Sonia, did you?" Tom changed the subject since it was making him want to return upstairs to be with Lucy.

Jade flashed him a smile as he joined her in bringing three tables together to form a long table that would accommodate them all, "How did you know?"

"Because I'm your older brother, and I can always tell when you're telling a lie," Tom said with a shrug.

"Yeah. Why do I always forget that? You both looked like you needed to talk, so I decided to give you space since I know that you won't have the privacy to do that until late at night," Jade said, and Tom reached out to ruffle her hair.

"Thanks. It helped."

"Do you want to tell me what you both were fighting about? Or were you both that way because you told Lucy about Rachel?" Jade asked as she draped a floral tablecloth over the tables while Tom spread it out at the other end of the table.

"It wasn't a fight. We just had a lot on our mind," Tom said, not wanting to talk about it. He wanted nothing more than to put it behind him.

"Where is Lucy?" Sonia asked as she and Bryan joined them, and she noticed that Lucy wasn't with them.

"She is upstairs. She will join us soon," Tom said as he moved to arrange some glass cups on the table.

"I get that. But what is she doing?" Sonia asked with concern, and this time Tom paused what he was doing and looked at her.

"She is probably on the phone with Lucas. We agreed that since we will be telling our parents about Anita after dinner, she should talk to Lucas about Rachel first," Tom said, guessing that Lucy had probably already told Sonia about Rachel's role in everything.

"Oh, fuck! I'm going upstairs to stay with her," Sonia said and quickly walked away.

"Her loyalty to Lucy is admirable," Jade said, glad that at least Lucy would have the support of Sonia when she had to break the news to her brother.

"They're her family," Bryan murmured. He wasn't looking forward to the moment they would have to break the news to their parents either. He would really hate to see Lucy's cheerful parents sad.

"Let's get to work, guys," Jade clapped her hands to get the attention of both her brothers, who looked like they would rather be upstairs with Lucy and Sonia than down there preparing for their father's party.

The line was silent for a moment after Lucy's statement as Lucas tried to process the piece of information he had just received.

He knew Rachel's second cousin, Anita Miller. Since Anita was the closest in age to Rachel in the family, they were more like sisters, but Rachel often complained about how her mother always asked her to be more like her cousin Anita who was more composed and organized than she was.

As a matter of fact, he remembered having met her once over the years when she visited Rachel's home, and he also remembered saying hi to her over the phone a couple of times when she spoke with Rachel over the phone in his presence. She was even supposed to be Rachel's maid of honor.

He understood the relationship between Rachel and Anita, but what he could not understand was the connection between Anita and Lucy's scandal.

Although he was angry with Rachel and wanted nothing more to do with her, he believed she must have told Anita about it during a harmless conversation without knowing that Anita had other intentions. He doubted that Rachel could have asked Anita to do something like that. Rachel was clingy and annoyingly possessive, but he believed he knew her well enough to know what she was capable of and not. He didn't think that she would intentionally do something like that to hurt either Lucy or him. Especially not when it was that close to their wedding.

"Luc?" Lucy called softly, wanting to know if he was still there. This was the least of the confession, so if he couldn't take even this one, she might just have to keep the rest of it to herself and risk his anger later.

"I know her. I've met her before at Rachel's place," Lucas explained.

Lucy cleared her throat nervously, "I see! Anyway, I think Rachel must have talked to her about my... About what happened in the past..."

"I'm sorry to interrupt you, but do you know Anita personally? I mean, have you crossed paths with her to make her want to do something like this to you?" Lucas cut in, wanting to know why Anita could have done that.

As far as he knew, Lucy didn't know Anita, and he had never really talked to Lucy about her either since they hardly ever spoke about his relationship with Rachel.

"Kind of," Lucy said as she paced the room.

Hearing this, Lucas felt slightly relieved that he had been right and Anita hadn't done that just because of his relationship with Rachel. It would have been devastating to know that Lucy suffered such public humiliation because of him.

"You remember that time I called to seek your advice?" She asked and stopped pacing when Sonia pushed open the door gently.

"You mean the time you needed my advice concerning your colleague's friend and her driver?" Lucas asked, trying to lighten the mood since it was making him too anxious.

If what she wanted to say wasn't serious, Lucy would probably have laughed. But she was too nervous to be amused, "Yes, that time. Anita was the lady I thought he was in love with," Lucy said, and Lucas listened patiently as she explained how she had gotten close to Anita, who was Tom's employee, and how she had gotten to learn that they had both been involved in a relationship without Anita knowing Tom's true identity. How Anita had ruined the relationship because she thought he wasn't wealthy, and now she wanted him back.

Lucas thought about it as she spoke. He could remember overhearing Rachel's discussion with Anita over the phone a few months back about a wealthy guy she had just met and was seeing, and he still remembered how Rachel had laughed heartily some weeks later when she was telling him that the guy Anita was seeing wasn't as wealthy as he had made Anita believe, and Anita was trying to shake him off politely. So that guy was Tom? Was the world really so small that they all had to cross paths this way?

"Well, I guess it's a good thing that I ended things with Rachel. It seems like everyone in that family is nuts," Lucas said, thinking that was all.

"Yeah. But... There is more," Lucy said in a very small voice. Her hand was beginning to tremble, so Sonia led her to sit on one of the sofas in the room, and Sonia placed an arm around Lucy for comfort.

"What?" Lucas asked cautiously now, hoping that it had nothing to do with Rachel's direct involvement in this.

Although she appreciated Sonia's presence, Lucy was too nervous to sit down, so she stood up and paced around the room as she tried to organize her words, "In the course of trying to find evidence against Anita, Tom hired someone to keep an eye on her, and the person kind of planted a device in her office, so that was how we overheard..." She paused to take in a deep breath.

"Oh, God! I'm sorry, Luc. I'm really sorry about this. I'd rather not tell you, but I know that it is important and I have to tell you. I just hope you won't think..."

"Slow down, Lu. You are making me anxious. Take a deep breath and tell me what is wrong, please," Lucas interrupted. He knew that the only time Lucy talked so much and so fast at the same time was when she was nervous about something, and from the quavering sound of her voice, he could tell that she was struggling not to cry.

"We think Rachel helped Jamie..."

Lucas' heart stopped and almost doubled over when he felt a sharp pain in his heart the moment he heard Rachel's name in the same sentence as Jamie's. He didn't need her to complete the sentence to know what it meant.

"Rachel knew Jamie?" Lucas asked in a strangled voice, unable to get the words out.

Tears gathered in Lucy's voice when she heard the undeniable pain in Lucas' voice, "I don't know. We are not sure. Maybe it's nothing..."

"Don't do that, Lu. Please don't," Lucas pleaded as the first tear dropped from his eyes, knowing that Lucy was trying to make it sound like nothing so that he wouldn't feel hurt even though he knew that she was broken too.

"I'm sorry, Luc..." Lucy's voice hitched, and she broke into a sob. She felt sorry for both herself and her brother, who had been victims of both Jamie's and Rachel's unhealthy affection.

Immediately Sonia took the phone from her, "Luc," Sonia called softly.

"Sony, what is she saying? Why is she crying? Is it true? Did Rachel really know Jamie?" Lucas asked in a shaky voice as confused tears ran down his cheek while he clutched the left part of his chest, which felt like it was going to explode.

"I'm sorry, Luc. We don't know for sure how she could have helped Jamie. But from Anita's end of their phone conversation, it sounded like Rachel assisted Jamie," Sonia explained, and tears rolled down her cheeks as she watched Lucy, who was now sitting on the couch with both legs drawn up, and her face buried in her hands as she cried.

She could also hear Lucas' labored breath as he struggled to speak, "I... I can't talk now..." Lucas was gasping for breath as he hung up the call and let the phone fall off his hand which was trembling as he shook his head in denial, and shut his eyes tightly.

Rachel? The lady he had been in love with for over ten years? Someone he would have sworn with his life was incapable of hurting a fly? She had helped Jamie abduct his sister and had been beside him all these years? No. Rachel loved him. She would never do something as unforgivable as that to him. She wouldn't.

The more he tried to convince himself that all of this was a misunderstanding, the more his brain dug up some details of that time that he had ignored.

He remembered Rachel had kept pressing him to see if he knew who Lucy's prom date was. He had tried to find out from Lucy, but she had said it was a secret, and he had told Rachel so.

He remembered how Rachel had kept insisting that they leave without Lucy that prom night since she said she was waiting for her prom date.

Rachel had been aware that their parents were going out for their anniversary dinner date, so it was possible she had been the one who passed that piece of information to Jamie since even Sonia had not been aware of the dinner date.

He remembered how she had been busy on her phone at some point, and whenever he started looking around for Lucy at the party, she would insist that Lucy was probably busy having fun somewhere, so he should not worry about Lucy and give her his attention instead.

He remembered how she had made sure that his glass was never empty all through the night.

"Oh, God! Please, no! No!" Lucas cried as he raised his hand to his head, wanting to block out these thoughts. His whole body was trembling as different emotions choked him.

He wouldn't have been as broken as this had he been told that Rachel cheated on him. He could even forgive her for that. But something like this? No. He couldn't. He didn't want it to be true. He didn't want it to be true that Lucy had gone through all of that simply because he had been in love with someone like Rachel and had trusted her like a fool.

His head was aching. His heart was hurting. He wanted to scream, but he couldn't. Not when he was struggling to breathe. Maybe it was better this way. He deserved to die for loving and trusting a person like Rachel. If only he hadn't been too trusting, none of that would have happened to Lucy.

Chapter 332 Need

"I think everything is set. The only thing missing now is the celebrant," Jade said with a satisfied smile as she looked around the patio, which had been decorated with colorful ribbons and birthday foil balloons that spelled out 'HAPPY BIRTHDAY DAD' in an arc at the entrance of the patio, such that it would be the first thing Desmond sees when he walks through the door.

On the table, different trays of hors d'oeuvres were arranged, consisting of canapes, toast points spread with foie gras, mini quiche, and jelly tarts. Various

bottles of wines and wine glasses adorned the table, with a transparent flower jar at the center, which contained a mixture of white roses and tulips.

"Good. Excuse me then," Tom said as he quickly walked away and returned to the house. Although he had been busy with the decorations, his mind had been in the bedroom upstairs all through, especially as it was over forty-five minutes already, and Lucy was yet to join them.

"Me too," Bryan said as he followed Tom.

Jade sighed as she sat down. She knew that they were both worried about their girlfriends. She was too. She was at least glad that their parents had all gone out to have fun since somehow she had a feeling that the evening wouldn't be as much fun as they would have all loved it to be for their father. Shit was about to get real for everyone.

"Hey!" Candace greeted cautiously from the doorway, and Jade turned to look at her.

"Hey, Candace!" She called with a friendly smile as she stood and went to embrace her. Although they weren't exactly friends, Jade felt some sort of connection with her, maybe because of how much that case had meant to the both of them two years ago.

She had needed the case to distract herself just after learning about her late boyfriend's infidelity, and she had also pursued it to secure the partnership that her firm had promised if she was able to close the case. She had desperately wanted to be the youngest senior partner in her firm at the time. Candace, on the other hand, had needed her to crack the case so that she, her sister, and her son would be free from Jero.

"I've been waiting for you," Jade said as she broke the hug to look into Candace's face. Although she had been busy with the decorations, she had been expecting Candace.

"I'm sorry I kept you waiting. I was busy doing some laundry, and it took them quite some time to locate me," Candace said with an apologetic smile, "This looks perfect," she said, looking around the patio.

"You are welcome to join us for dinner tonight. Please, have a seat," Jade gestured to a chair as she sat down.

Candace took the seat beside Jade and folded both hands on her lap, bracing herself for the unpleasant subject Jade wanted to discuss with her.

"How have you been enjoying your stay here? I hear my parents have taken quite a liking to Jamal," Jade said, wanting to start with an easy conversation to relax her before talking about Jero.

The way Candace's guarded eyes suddenly lit up with an easy smile showed her love for her son, "Yeah. The feeling is mutual. Last night he asked if he could call Evelyn grandma and Janet grandmum," Candace said, and Jade laughed.

"Really? Why grandma and grandmum?" Jade asked curiously.

Candace grinned, "Apparently, his seven-year-old brain thinks that Evelyn should be called grandma because she appears to be older than Janet. He has always whined about not having grandparents when most of the kids he knows have grandparents to dote on them," Candace said with a wistful smile.

"I'm sure my mother would be more than delighted to hear him call her that," Jade said as she placed a hand over Candace's hand, which was now resting on the table.

"I'm very sorry about Andy," Jade said, looking at Candace with earnest eyes.

"Don't be. I thought about it. I'm sure there was nothing you could have done," Candace said in a resigned tone.

"Still, I want you to know that I'm deeply sorry. If there were something I could have done to stop it without putting her at risk, I would have. But Cassidy was already a step ahead of me," Jade said, feeling slightly embarrassed to admit that.

"As I said, it's not your fault. I should have known better than to leave her behind, regardless of how stubborn she was. Besides, we both know that is not the worst thing that could have happened to her. I believe that she will be fine," Candace said, and Jade nodded, wanting to believe so too.

"Do you think maybe your sister likes him too? I would hate to think I left her to an abuser," Jade said, the one thing that had been troubling her.

"I'm not sure how Andy feels towards him... She never really liked to talk about that part of her life... I always thought it shamed her, and I felt guilty because she wouldn't be living that way if I hadn't gotten in a relationship with Jero," Candace said, staring down at her hands guiltily, "I don't know exactly what happened between them, but I know that Cassidy was fond of her. Did Andy protest? Did she sound scared?" Candace asked a question she realized she should have asked the moment Jade called that night.

Jade shook her head, "No."

"Then it's fine. She will be okay. Before you say anything else, I'll like to say this. I don't care about whatever deal you made with Jero. I'm not taking Jamal anywhere near him..." Candace said, and then she raised a finger to stop Jade from interrupting her.

"You might not exactly understand my decision because you are not a mother yet, but I expect you to accept it. I can't take Jamal anywhere close to that monster. I don't care if he has changed or not. Jamal has only just recently stopped asking for his father. I don't want to go through that phase again," Candace said, making it clear that her mind was made up.

Jade took a deep breath. She didn't need to be a mother to understand Candace's need to keep her son away from Jero, "What about you? Are you going to see him?"

"Let him know that I will see him, but Jamal won't be coming with me. The best I can do for him is give him a photo of Jamal. If that isn't good enough for him, then he can rot in hell for all I care."

"I think I can work with that. I will arrange for us to travel tomorrow if you don't mind."

"Jamal can remain here, right? Just until Jero is locked up again, and you've taken care of the cartel," Candace pleaded. Jamal seemed comfortable in the house with the staff and family, and the environment was safe.

"I will talk to Tom about it," Jade promised.

Away from there, in Tom's bedroom upstairs, Lucy clung to Sonia as she sobbed. She wept not for herself but for Lucas, who she knew was hurting even more than her at the moment. She wished there was something she could do to make him feel better.

"He will be so broken. All this will be too much for him to handle at once," Lucy cried. Lucas had always been the most emotional one between them both, and she knew that he wasn't going to handle this too well.

"He will be fine, Lu. Both you and Lucas will be fine," Sonia assured Lucy as she patted her hair softly.

Lucy and Lucas were the siblings she never had, and seeing them hurt, hurt her too. Even in his death, her half-brother, Jamie, was still making life difficult for those she cared about. Sonia quickly reminded herself that they all couldn't be emotional at the same time. So instead of giving in to her tears and guilt, she raised her head and looked to the ceiling as she blinked back her tears and consoled Lucy.

"He ended things with Rachel. He gave up his job. And now this. He is alone over there with no one to comfort him," Lucy said with a sniffle.

She wished she could go over to be with him, but she knew that wouldn't be a good idea for either of them. Seeing her would only make him feel even more guilty, and then they would both pretend to be okay around the other and keep their emotions hidden.

Lucy raised her tear-stained face to the door when Tom pushed it open without knocking and walked into the bedroom, "I couldn't..." her voice broke, and she shook her head miserably, "I just couldn't say the words to him," she cried, and Sonia stood up to give Tom room to comfort her.

"Sshh," Tom whispered as he sat down and pulled her to himself so that her face was buried in his chest.

Upon seeing Bryan standing by the slightly open door, Sonia walked over to him, and he led her out of the bedroom to give Tom and Lucy some privacy. Once they shut the door behind them, Sonia gave in to her tears, and immediately Bryan gathered her into his arms, "It's okay. Everything will be fine. It's not your fault," he said as though he could read her mind.

Inside the bedroom, Tom kept murmuring words of comfort to Lucy until she was able to pull herself together, and then she pulled away from him to look into his face, "I'm sorry. I shouldn't be doing this. We should be preparing for your dad's party," Lucy said with a sniffle.

Tom brushed away her tears with his knuckles and leaned forward to kiss away the teardrop hanging on her lashes, "You shouldn't apologize. You have every right to cry. And although my dad's party is important to us, it's nothing compared to all of this. We can always have his party next year, but we have to deal with all this now. What can I do to make it better? Would you like to go see Lucas tomorrow or tonight? I could arrange for us to fly over there together, and then you can spend some time with him," Tom offered, his arms still around her.

Lucy shook her head, "No. I'm not sure he needs me right now. I think my parents would want to go to him as soon as I tell them, and I'm not sure I can wait until after the party to tell them anymore. Can you make arrangements for them to leave immediately? I don't think they will be able to stay for your dad's party. I'm sorry," Lucy said apologetically, and Tom shook his head.

"There is nothing to apologize for. I understand, and I'm sure my parents will understand too. I will make the necessary arrangements right away," Tom said as he stood, ready to make the phone call.

He hesitated, "I'm sorry I didn't stay back to be with you when you made the call. I thought you would prefer to be alone," Tom said apologetically, feeling guilty that Sonia had thought it wise to be with her, while he had left her to be alone.

Looking up at him, Lucy remembered something she read somewhere, 'Everyone has their own storm, but if someone is by your side when you're going through one, wouldn't you feel safer?'

It seemed to her that Tom was that someone for her. Being in his arms like this and being comforted by him was different. She felt safe with him, and that was probably why she had been able to tell him about her past. Lucy rose from the couch and embraced him, "I don't prefer to be alone. I feel better when you're with me," Lucy confessed as she held onto him.

Tom's heart fluttered at her words, and he wrapped his arms around her. At least she was admitting that she needed him. He hadn't realized how much he wanted her to need him the same way he needed her, until she said those words.

"I might often forget that I need you because I'm used to being alone. And sometimes I may be too proud or stubborn to admit it. Please hold on to me even when I forget that I need you," Lucy murmured as though she could read his mind.

Chapter 333 Birthday Surprise

"I think the kids are back," Evelyn announced when Adolf parked the limo, and she caught sight of the two cars parked in front of the house, which hadn't been there before.

"Good for them," Desmond muttered disinterestedly as they got out of the car.

"C'mon, Des," Evelyn pleaded, knowing he was still upset. She had caught him staring at his phone countless times like he was awaiting their phone call.

"Let's just go in there, get our stuff, and..."

"I don't know about you folks, but I had too much fun," Andrew cut in before Desmond could finish, wanting them to focus on the pleasant experience they had just shared.

"There is nothing like too much fun. It's been a while since we went bowling. I felt like a teenager," Janet said with a wide smile as her husband took her hand and tucked it under his arm.

"You looked way better than all those teenagers we saw there. You're like fine wine. You look and taste better with age," Andrew whispered for her ears alone, and she giggled girlishly as they headed for the main door.

"I love bowling," Jamal announced excitedly as he slipped his hand into Janet's other hand. He couldn't wait to tell his mom about all the fun things he had done with the adults who kept fussing over him.

"We all do, darling. But I mostly enjoyed the karaoke," Evelyn said with a soft smile as she turned to her husband with amused eyes, "Who knew you still had it in you to sing?"

"Was I supposed to lose my voice because I've grown older?" He asked gruffly, and they all stopped abruptly when the main door suddenly opened from inside, and Samantha stepped outside panting and looking sort of flustered.

"I'm sorry, but you will have to wait at the patio. The fire sprinkler broke. We are trying to clean up the place," Samantha said apologetically, and Desmond frowned. That didn't make sense.

"Was there a fire outbreak?"

"Are the kids okay?" Evelyn asked with a worried frown as she stepped forward.

"They're fine, ma'am. They're at the patio waiting while we clean the house. You can join them there," Samantha said with a shaky smile.

"We should come in and see for..."

"Let's just go over to the patio. I'm sure we can find out what happened from the kids," Andrew interrupted Desmond, suspecting that his surprise was waiting for him on the patio.

Desmond looked unconvinced but nodded his head as he and his wife quickened their pace to go around the house to find out what was going on, while Andrew and Janet smiled at each other knowingly as they followed at a more relaxed pace with Jamal.

"Grandmum Janet?" Jamal called.

"Yes, pumpkin?"

"What does a fire spinka do?" He asked, looking up at her with curious eyes, and Janet laughed softly.

"It's called sprinkler, Jamal. When there is a fire outbreak, it automatically goes off and lets down water to put out the fire," Janet explained patiently.

"Where does the water come from? The sky?" Jamal asked, and Andrew chuckled.

"I almost forgot how curious kids can be around this age. Reminds me of Lucas and Lucy. Growing up, those two almost drove me crazy with their questions," Andrew said, and Janet laughed softly until Jamal tugged her arm to remind her that he was waiting for an answer, and she patiently explained to him.

Ahead of them, Desmond stopped in his track when he rounded the corner and saw the 'Happy Birthday Dad' display, with Jade standing in the center of the arc with a happy welcoming smile on her face, "Happy Sixtieth Birthday, Daddy," she screeched as she ran to him and flung herself at him.

"Jady!" Desmond laughed heartily as he swept Jade off her feet in the same manner Bryan and Tom had done the previous day, and he spun her around in circles.

"Jade!" Evelyn exclaimed happily and then frowned in concern when her husband continued to swirl her around in circles, "You shouldn't do that, Desmond. You're not as strong as you used to be," Evelyn cautioned, and he set Jade on her feet while panting slightly.

"I can never be too old to lift my only baby girl," Desmond said with a happy smile that replaced the annoyance and irritation in his eyes earlier.

"Hey, Mom!" Jade said as she stepped away from her father to embrace her mother.

"You are all bones," Evelyn complained when she embraced Jade, and all she felt were bones.

"Geez! Thanks for the compliment, mom," Jade said with a roll of her eyes as she moved away from her mother to look at Andrew and Janet, who were standing behind her parents with a broad smiles on their faces.

"This is..."

"I know who they are, dad," Jade cut off her father as she flashed them a grin, "I've heard a lot about you, Mr. Perry."

"I hope you only heard good things? And please call me Andrew," Andrew said as she embraced him.

"I must say you look even more handsome and charming than I imagined," Jade said with a charming smile.

"Thanks, Jade. You look lovely yourself, but I'm not surprised. Your mother is an angel after all," Andrew complimented with a grin and then stepped aside to let his wife welcome her too.

"It's good to finally meet you, Jade," Janet said with a wide smile as she embraced her.

"Same here," Jade said as she broke the hug and looked down at Jamal, who was looking at her as though he was trying to figure out something, "Hi, there! Do you remember me?" She asked with a friendly smile.

"You are my mum's friend, aren't you?" Jamal asked thoughtfully, and Jade gave him a nod, impressed that he still remembered.

"Yes. It's nice to meet you again," she said as she crouched in front of him to embrace him.

"Is Grandma Evelyn your mummy?" Jamal asked curiously, and Jade nodded.

"Yes. Grandma Evelyn, huh? I guess that makes me your aunt now, doesn't it?"

"I already have an aunt. You know her. Aunt Andy," Jamal reminded her.

"Yes, I do know her. But, it never hurts to have more than one aunt. It means more adults to spoil you silly," she said with a wide smile that made him laugh as she ruffled his hair.

Jade straightened up and returned to her father's side. She took his hands, "I missed you so much my heart was aching," she said as she led him to a chair, "What took you so long?"

"We were having so much fun that we lost track of time. You could have called me the moment you arrived," Desmond pointed out as he sat down.

"And miss the happy surprise I just saw on your face? Not a chance," Jade said as she sat on his lap like a little girl.

"Aren't you too old for that now?" Evelyn asked as she and the others sat down.

"I can never be too old to be my dad's baby girl," Jade said with a grin.

"What about the others? Where are they?" Andrew asked curiously.

"They got tired of waiting. But I'm sure they will join us soon now that they know you're back," Jade said with an easy smile, hoping that everything was fine upstairs.

"I suppose there was no fire sprinkler incident?" Evelyn asked, eyeing Samantha, who was now standing by the patio door, and Jade blinked at her in confusion before giggling with understanding.

"None at all. I didn't know you guys were visiting Tom until yesterday. I can't believe you guys left me out of all the fun," Jade said with a pout, and her father patted her hair fondly.

"It wasn't fun without you," Desmond assured her dutifully.

"We didn't come for fun. We came because of the news and because Tom wasn't taking my call. Don't worry. We still have our family vacation to plan for. Just make sure you clear out your schedule before then," Evelyn said as she looked around the patio.

"You guys did a good job," she said with approval.

"When did you get here?" Desmond asked curiously as he looked at his daughter with unconditional love in his eyes.

Thinking that it was best to tell the truth at this point, Jade shrugged, "Early hours of yesterday," Jade said, and her parents looked at her with confused surprise.

"You were hiding in the house?" Evelyn asked.

"No. I was at Harry's..."

"Harry? Tom's best friend? Are you seeing him?" Desmond cut in, and Jade rolled her eyes.

"No, I'm not. I had to wait there until your birthday to surprise you..." Jade stopped talking when her brothers and their girlfriends joined them on the patio.

"Happy birthday, Dad," Tom and Bryan chorused.

Desmond glared at his boys, irritated that they had to make him angry all day in order to surprise him like this, "Why did you both leave all the work to Jade?"

"Is that what she told you?" Bryan asked with a scoff as they sat down while Jade giggled.

"Happy birthday, Desmond," Sonia and Lucy joined.

Desmond's eyes softened when his gaze fell on Sonia and Lucy, "Thanks, girls. I suppose you've met Jade?" He asked, and they both nodded before he returned his attention to his daughter.

"I suppose you'll be around for the next couple of days then? Cause I see no reason you had to spend a day at Harry's just to surprise me and not spend that time with me," Desmond said, and Jade kissed his cheek.

"I'm leaving tomorrow to wrap up an important case. I don't know how long it'll take, but I'll visit and spend time with you after it. I promise," Jade said, knowing fully well that despite all the evidence she had against the cartel now, the case could still drag on for months if care was not taken.

While Jade and her father argued about the duration of her stay, the others around the table ate and engaged in small talk as Lucy's parents told them all about their outing and how much fun they had, while little Jamal climbed out of Janet's thighs to sit on Tom's thighs.

Tom looked down at the little boy in surprise, wondering what had prompted him to do that since they both didn't exactly have that kind of relationship, and then he almost chuckled when the kid reached for the tray of canapes closest to him and took a piece of spring roll.

He let the child remain on his thighs as they all continued with the small talk and food. Soon Candace brought in the cake with lit candles, and Jamal shrieked excitedly as he got off Tom's thighs to meet his mother and the cake.

"Happy birthday, Desmond," Jade said with a polite smile as she set down the cake in front of him, and Jade got off her father's thigh to give him room to make his wish and blow off the candles.

"I had a lot of fun, mum!" Jamal told his mother happily as he embraced her legs, and she lifted him off the ground.

"You've had enough fun for one day, now come inside," Candace said, wanting to spend some time alone with her son since she would be leaving him the next day.

"But I've not had any cake yet," Jamal protested, wanting to get down.

"You will have some tomorrow. I'm sure you had lots of candies and chocolates and ice cream. That, my charming young man is enough sugar for one day," Candace said as she held on firmly and walked away with him.

"I think you should tell them now," Tom whispered to Lucy after his dad finished making his wish, and some of the household staff came to clear up the hors

d'oeuvres and appetizers to serve the main dish, while Samantha took the cake to cut it into slices for dessert.

"Is it just me, or our girl doesn't look fine?" Andrew whispered to his wife as he watched Lucy and Tom whispering to each other.

Initially, he had assumed she wasn't eating and was wearing a false smile because she had a misunderstanding with Tom, but watching them communicate, especially with Tom's hand covering hers in a supportive gesture, he doubted that whatever was wrong with her had anything to do with Tom.

"Yeah, I noticed too," Janet whispered back with a concerned frown. After what happened to her, they had learned to be more observant when it came to the well-being of their children and to never ignore even the slightest changes in their mood, "Are you okay, darling?" Janet asked,

"Are you okay, baby? How was work today?" Andrew asked, hiding his concern in an easy smile.

Lucy cleared her throat, "Work was fine. I need to speak with you," Lucy said, and her parents exchanged a look. They knew that by 'you' she meant them since they had raised their kids to always confide in them together, but they were curious to know what it was that couldn't wait until after dinner.

"In private or right here?" Andrew asked with concern.

"In private," Lucy said, looking at Desmond and Evelyn apologetically, but they didn't seem to mind.

"Let's go talk then. Please excuse us," Janet said politely as they stood up, and Janet turned to Sonia when she didn't move.

"Why is Sonia not coming with us? Is this not a family discussion?" Janet asked Lucy, and Sonia stood up immediately and went with them.

"Did something happen between you two? Is everything okay?" Evelyn asked Tom once they were all alone, and Tom shook his head.

"Nothing happened. We are fine. But there is something we also need to tell you," Tom said, and Desmond frowned when he saw the seriousness in all three of his children.

"It's about me and Sonia's scandal, and also Lucy's," Bryan added to get their mother's complete attention, and she dropped the glass of wine she was holding.

"Thanks for letting me cut my cake before bringing this up. You should probably tell Samantha to hold off on serving dinner. There's no need for us to waste the food," Desmond suggested, and Jade nodded as she hurried away to deliver the message.

Chapter 334 Insensitive

Once they were seated in the Den, with Lucy and Sonia sitting in the middle of the couch, while Janet and Andrew flanked both their sides, with Andrew seated beside Lucy and Janet beside Sonia, they looked at both girls.

"What is the problem, princess?" Andrew asked, cupping Lucy's tiny hands in his large hands.

Lucy cleared her throat, "We found out the person behind the scandal," Lucy announced, and immediately Janet's usually calm eyes flashed with anger.

"Who did it? Is it someone we know?" Janet asked impatiently.

"You don't know her. But she is also responsible for Bryan's and Sonia's scandal," Lucy said, and that seemed to annoy both her parents.

"A lady was behind it? The same person? How did you both get to know a person like that?" Andrew asked in disbelief.

"She is Tom's ex-girlfriend. Her name is Anita, and she is Rachel's cousin," Sonia blurted out.

Janet felt goosebumps spread all over her body as she looked from Lucy to Sonia, "You mean Tom's ex-girlfriend was behind both scandals? And she is Rachel's cousin?" She asked, wanting to believe that she had probably heard the wrong thing.

"Yes," Lucy said with a nod.

"Just explain to us what is going on. Although I can see why she would want to mess with you, even though it's crazy. I don't understand what Sonia and Bryan have to do with any of it," Andrew said with a puzzled frown.

Both Janet and Andrew listened patiently as Lucy explained everything to them about how she had met Tom (leaving out the part where she went home with him on the first night) and how he had started out deceiving her and pretending to be broke. If not for the seriousness of the conversation, they both would have had something to say about it, but they were more concerned with Anita's part of the story.

"So because she wants Tom, she has to resort to something as despicable as this?" Janet asked, unable to fathom how a young lady could conceive such wickedness in her heart.

"It's not Tom's fault," Lucy rushed to his defense.

"It would be stupid of us to blame Tom for this, Princess. We don't think it's his fault," Andrew assured her, "What I will like to know is what Tom plans to do about this ex-girlfriend of his. Do we have to be concerned about your safety?" Andrew asked with a slight frown, not liking what he was hearing.

"Of course, we have to be worried! Did you hear her? Any lady crazy enough to go to that length to defame a lady like herself who suffered what our girl suffered is a monster! She is a beast without any emotion or human sympathy," Janet said, and her husband placed a hand on her back.

"Calm down, babe," he said, patting her back.

"How can I calm down?" Janet asked in a slightly raised voice as she stood up, unable to control her fast-rising temper, "Why should I calm down when she did that to my girls? I should find her and give her the sort of spanking her mother failed to give her that made her end up this twisted. Tell me, where is she? Where does she live?" Janet asked angrily.

Andrew stood up and walked over to where she was, "Lu is not done talking to us yet. You should let her finish," he reminded her in a calm voice that belied his own true emotion. There was no need to show them he was boiling with rage.

Who did that Anita girl think she was to mess with his girls in that manner? If it were a man, he would have charged to the man's house or wherever he was and fought it out with him blow for fucking blow. But it was a little girl of his girls age who was messing with them. Maybe he should still take it out on her father, man to man, for raising such a brat.

Janet took a deep breath and let her husband lead her back to the couch where Lucy was still rehearsing how to deliver the real blow to them, while Sonia just watched the scene helplessly, not knowing what to say or do. That was why she hadn't wanted to go with them when Lucy had asked to speak with her parents in private. She felt utterly useless in all of this.

"Go on, princess. Tell us, is Tom making any effort to deal with this? Or should we handle it?" Andrew asked calmly.

"You don't have to be worried. Tom is already handling it," Lucy was quick to assure them, and they turned to Sonia, who nodded in agreement.

"Tom is working on it. We are going to handle it, so you don't have to worry too much," Sonia said confidently, and Lucy went on to explain Tom's plan to them, which relaxed them a bit.

There was nothing they could do that would be more satisfying than what Tom was already working on. The only minor detail left as far as Janet was concerned was giving the evil brat the slap of her life when she met her in court.

"That's okay then," Janet said, thinking that was all, but Lucy stopped her.

"That isn't the only reason I wanted to speak with you," Lucy said, and her parents frowned. There was more?

"What else? Did she do something again?" Janet asked as she stood up from the couch once again to walk off the next bout of anger she suspected was coming.

Lucy exchanged a look with Sonia, pleading with her eyes that Sonia should say it. Sonia took a deep breath, "We just found out that Rachel might have aided Jamie in Lucy's abduction," Sonia said, and Janet abruptly stopped walking as she looked at Sonia.

The room was filled with silence as neither Andrew nor Janet said a word as they each tried to process what Sonia had just said, "Rachel?" Janet asked no one in particular as she tried to make sense of it.

"How does that make sense? They were not even friends, or were they?" Andrew asked Sonia in confusion before turning to look at Lucy, who seemed a little pale.

Sonia shook her head, "I didn't even know they knew each other."

"So, where did you hear such nonsense from?" Janet asked, unwilling to believe it, more for her children's sake than hers.

"It's true. I heard the conversation between her and Anita myself. I mean Anita's end of the conversation. That was how we knew they are related, and Lucas confirmed it..."

"Lucas? You spoke to your brother about Rachel helping Jamie already?" Janet asked in a half yell. Although she didn't mean to yell, she couldn't control it.

"Yes. I..."

"HOW COULD YOU DO THAT? How dare you tell him something like that without talking to us first? Your brother is shattered enough as it is, yet you tell him something like this?" Janet asked in a burst of temper.

"I thought he should know first since it involves the lady he was going to get married to," Lucy explained quietly.

Seeing how his wife's face was turning red from anger, Andrew reached for her arm, "Babe..."

"NO! It was not in your place to make that decision! We are a family, and we could have found the right time and the best way to tell him about it. He is there all by himself, God knows what is going through his head, and you dump this news on him? What were you trying to achieve? To make him feel guilty? He is heartbroken enough without you adding guilt to it!"

"Do you have any idea how I felt when I found out about it myself?" Lucy yelled back as she rose from her seat to face her mother, "Do you think it was easy for me to tell him about it?"

"That is exactly why you shouldn't have said a damn word to him! You should have kept it to yourself until you talked to us! That is what you should have done for your twin brother who is vulnerable at this point! That is what family do! You are the older one, yet you have always been insensitive and..."

"JANET, YOU HAVE SAID ENOUGH," Andrew barked at his wife, annoyed that she was going too far. Although he understood the points they were both trying to make, he also knew that his wife was allowing her worry over Lucas to blind her to the fact that Lucy was also hurting.

"Insensitive? Did you really just say that I'm insensitive?" Lucy asked in disbelief as tears dropped from her eyes.

"Lu, please calm down," Sonia said as she went to hold Lucy.

"You heard her, right?" Lucy asked, turning to look at Sonia.

"Princess..."

"It's fine, dad. I'm alright," Lucy said as she brushed away her tears with the back of her hand, "I packed your stuff already. Adolf is waiting to drive you to the airstrip when you're ready. Tom has arranged for his pilot to take you home to be with Lucas. And thanks for asking, mom. I'm fine," Lucy said, and without waiting for either of them to say anything else, she turned around and walked out of the Den.

Sonia looked from Andrew to Janet, whose body was trembling with a sob, and she hurried after Lucy, not knowing what to say or do. This whole thing was a disaster, and she didn't know who to feel more sorry for.

"I didn't mean to say all of that to her," Janet cried while her husband embraced her, "I'm just so worried about her and Lucas. After hearing all of this, I felt guilty for going out to have a good time while my babies were suffering, and I lashed out at her unfairly. I didn't mean to say those words to her," Janet sobbed.

"Yeah, I know that. And although you owe her this explanation, as well as an apology, you also need a break. Trust me, watching our kids going through all of this is not easy on me either, but we both have to be strong for them. You can't lash out this way at the kids you're supposed to be protecting. Like Lucas, Lucy is hurting too. Being in a relationship doesn't mean she has healed completely, and yelling at her the way you did was uncalled for," Andrew said, torn between chiding his wife and comforting her. He had lost count of the number of times he had told her she was always more emotional than logical.

"I know. I know. I'm sorry."

"You should go and apologize to her while I try to reach Lucas and find out how he is doing. I will join you both after I inform Desmond and Evelyn that we have to leave tonight. Even in her state, she made arrangements for us to go be with Lucas, yet you..." He let his words trail off when Janet glared at him.

"I said I didn't mean that!" She snapped at him angrily before walking away. Andrew didn't know whether to laugh or feel sorry, so he shook his head instead and dialed Lucas' line.

After trying a couple of times unsuccessfully, he gave up and returned to the patio to inform Desmond that they had to leave at once to take care of a family emergency.

Chapter 335 Impromptu Departure

Oblivious to the drama going on in the Den, the Hank family all sat quietly as Bryan broke the news to his mother, "Simon was responsible for me and Sonia's scandal... He leaked the information to the press, and I don't think it's his first time either," Bryan said, and Evelyn eyed him in disbelief.

"Simon? There is no way Simon would do something like that. Not after everything I've done for him and his family," Evelyn said with a confident shake of her head.

Without arguing with her, since her reaction had been expected, Bryan took out his phone and showed her the footage of Simon sneaking into his house to plant cameras.

"The nerve of the rat!" She spat angrily, her eyes sparkling with anger as she watched the help she had personally sent to her son stab her in the back. She was feeling more angry than hurt at the betrayal.

"You mean this whole time he has been the one selling information to the press? I'm going to deal with him myself," Evelyn swore as she looked up from the phone while her husband and kids just watched her vent without saying a word.

This was the type of person she was. She was the type of person anyone would want to have in their corner, her only flaw being that she was usually biased when her children were involved. She was usually a very logical person unless her children were involved, and then she would become more emotional than rational.

"What did he stand to gain by doing this? Just how much money did he receive to do something as despicable as this? Or did he think we would never find out?" Evelyn hissed angrily as she picked up her phone to give him a call.

"He received a lot of money for this particular scandal. Someone paid him for this. The same person that was behind Lucy's scandal," Tom said as he snatched her phone from her.

"We can't let him know we are aware of his involvement in my scandal yet, else he's going to bolt before we get a chance to catch him," Bryan said, while Evelyn just looked from Tom to Bryan in confusion.

"Why would the same person be responsible for Lucy's and Bryan's scandal?" She asked with a frown.

"Not Lucy and Bryan. Lucy and Sonia," Jade corrected, and the couple paused to chew on that piece of information.

"Because Sonia was more affected in the scandal than Bryan," Desmond said to himself thoughtfully as it all began to click in his head. That was the only way it made sense. The only thing Lucy and Bryan had in common apart from Tom was Sonia. Since Tom wasn't directly attacked in the scandal, it meant that Sonia was the common ground in both scandals, especially as her family was also involved in Lucy's scandal.

Evelyn paused as she tried to understand it. "You mean this person has something against Lucy and Sonia?" Evelyn asked in confusion.

"No. It is Lucy she has a problem with, and it seemed she also attacked Sonia just to discredit her so that she won't be able to defend Lucy," Tom explained, and Evelyn

picked up a glass of water and quickly drank from it as though it would suppress the headache which was brewing.

"She? A girl paid Simon to do this?" She asked, and Tom took out his phone to show her the receipt of the payment Anita made to Simon's account.

Evelyn pressed her fingers against her eyes. Seeing the calm manner with which they were presenting all the facts and evidence, she could tell that they had taken their time to process and sort through all of it.

"Who is she? And what problem does she have with Lucy?" Desmond asked curiously after seeing the receipt. Evelyn nodded, urging Tom to answer the question since she was feeling overwhelmed by it already.

Tom patiently explained the situation with Anita to them and went on to play the recording of Anita's conversation with Lisa and her mother earlier that day. By the time he was done, Evelyn had moved from weary to pissed.

"What sort of crazy family is this?" Evelyn asked with disgust, and this time Desmond placed a hand over hers to stop her. Evelyn paused and took a deep breath, "I trust you have fired her already?"

"Not yet. I'm working on something. When I'm done, she will lose everything, not just her job," Tom promised, and from the calm manner with which she said it, Evelyn believed him, so she gave him a nod.

"I'm so glad you had the good sense to end things with her. They are a bunch of classless scum. They better not touch a hair on Lucy's body, else they will have me to contend with," Evelyn promised, and Tom almost smiled at the protective manner with which his mother spoke of Lucy.

"What about Sonia, Mom? Are they allowed to touch Sonia? Or is Lucy your only daughter-in-law?" Bryan asked with a scowl, and Evelyn smiled despite her annoyance at it all, while the others shook their head at Bryan who was still choosing to be petty despite the seriousness of the moment.

"I mentioned Lucy's name only because she is the one they're after, not Sonia. But don't worry. If they so much as get an inch near Sonia, I won't leave them alone either," Evelyn promised, and Tom shook his head at Bryan while hoping that everything was fine with Lucy and her parents.

Desmond sighed, "I suppose this is why Lucy wanted to talk to her parents?" Desmond asked after a while.

"Not just that. We also just found out that the lady Lucas was engaged to is Anita's cousin, and she also aided in Lucy's kidnap," Tom explained, since he had deliberately not played that end of the conversation to their hearing.

"Oh, dear!" Evelyn exclaimed as she raised a hand to her chest and looked towards the patio door, "Do you think they will be okay?" She asked her husband with a worried frown.

"This whole thing is complicated," Desmond muttered with a frown of his own, beginning to sympathize with his kids, who he had been angry at for most of the day without knowing how much they were dealing with. Yet they had even managed to throw him a surprise party.

"I've arranged for Lucy's parents to return home to be with Lucas tonight since she has told him about Rachel," Tom said, and Evelyn's brows dipped.

"She told him that over the phone?" She asked, exchanging a look with her husband. She wasn't sure she liked the sound of that, especially considering Lucas' emotional state when he left the previous day.

"Yes. She had to. And I support her," Tom said, and both Bryan and Jade nodded in agreement.

"I'm leaving tomorrow. I need to wrap things up with Paul at the agency and take care of Simon too so that I can return to resume work at Tom's company," Bryan announced, and his father looked at him in surprise.

"Tom's company? You no longer want to be an actor?"

"Really? You're moving down here?" Evelyn asked, acting equally surprised as her husband since she knew him well enough to know that he would be jealous if he found out that Tom had discussed this with her already and not him.

Tom exchanged a knowing look with his mother before explaining his plan of expanding the company to his father, "And I officially introduced Harry to the board as my Co-CEO today," Tom said, surprising Jade, who hadn't known of it.

"Oh, really?" She asked excitedly and then smiled awkwardly when her father looked at her curiously, wondering why she piped up at the news, "I meant, oh?" She asked more slowly and pressed her lips together, making Bryan chuckle.

Thinking about Harry now, Jade wondered why he was yet to show up as she looked down at the sexy black romper she was wearing. She almost grinned, thinking about how Harry would look at her with disapproval for wearing something so indecent, judging by his standards.

"Harry has a good head on his shoulders. I'm sure he will do well. Who knows? Maybe Jady here might find a place in the company soon and work together with her big brothers," Desmond said, hoping that all three of them would settle in Ludus, that way seeing them would be easier.

"Let's hope that happens soon," Jade as she looked around the table for something to drink, but the glasses were empty.

"By the way, does he have a girlfriend?" Evelyn asked curiously, and Jade shot Tom and Bryan a look to shut them up, and Bryan stifled his laughter.

"Mom, Harry's personal life is his concern, not our business. Let's not be distracted here. Back to the issue on ground, what are we going to do about Simon?" Jade said, changing the topic smoothly before either Tom or Bryan could respond.

Evelyn's blood boiled at the mention of Simon's name, "I will leave with Bryan tomorrow. I will like to be there when you question him. I have some questions for him myself," Evelyn said, and Bryan looked at her with uncertainty.

"We are leaving tomorrow? That's so impromptu," Desmond protested, and Evelyn raised a brow.

"Impromptu for someone who asked me a moment ago to pack our bags, so we return home tonight?" She asked, and all three of their children looked at him.

"You wanted to leave tonight? Why?" Jade asked, and Desmond shrugged.

"I thought you all forgot about my birthday and didn't care about me, so I was going to return home. I get that you all are very busy, but I don't think it would hurt to call often to check on your parents, even if it's just a minute-long conversation. When was the last time we all sat like this as a family? It took a scandal to bring you all together," Desmond said, and Jade looked at him guiltily.

"I'm sorry you felt that way, dad. I love you very much, and I hope you never forget that. I will try to do better, I promise," she said as she reached over to kiss his cheeks.

"I'm sorry. I will do better," Tom promised.

"Me too," Bryan said, and Evelyn smiled at her children, happy they had gotten this out of the way.

"That is settled then. We leave tomorrow with Bryan tomorrow to take care of Simon. Tom, why don't you tell us what plans you have set in motion to put this Anita

girl and her family in their place?" Evelyn asked just as Andrew walked through the patio door.

Chapter 336 Hurt

"Hey, guys! Sorry to interrupt, but something came up, so Janet and I have to leave at once," Andrew said with an easy smile, not wanting to ruin Desmond's party.

Desmond and Evelyn stood up and went to him, "You don't have to butter it up nicely, Tom told us about it already, and I'm sorry to see you leave," Desmond said, with worry lines between his brow.

"Yeah, me too. I was looking forward to letting you win a game tonight as my birthday gift to you," Andrew said with a grin, and Desmond laughed despite himself.

"I'm going to really miss you. Hopefully, we'll see more of each other when we get back," Desmond said since they live in the same city.

"Yeah, we definitely will. Happy birthday," Andrew said before moving his gaze to Evelyn.

"How is Janet?" Evelyn asked with a concerned frown, understanding that Andrew was handling the situation like a man, but Janet would definitely be taking it differently. Mothers were worriers, and no mother would be okay after hearing something like that. Especially considering how she had been so worried about Lucas.

"They're behaving like in-laws already," Jade said in amusement as she watched her parents interact with Andrew.

"Yeah. Tom is a married man," Bryan joked.

"Try not to make jokes like that around Lucy," Tom warned as he stood up to join their parents while Bryan and Jade exchanged a look.

Andrew met Tom's gaze, not seeing any reason to keep it from them since they were now more like family to each other, "She's pretty upset. Upset enough to have upset Lucy too," Andrew said with a sigh.

"That doesn't sound good," Evelyn said, feeling sorry.

"Yeah. They had a misunderstanding, and Janet said stuff she didn't mean, so she has to apologize to Lucy," he said, and Tom excused himself and went in search of Lucy to see how she was doing.

He headed straight for the bedroom, and when he didn't find her there, he tried reaching her on the phone, but she wasn't receiving her call either, so he dialed Sonia's line instead as he walked out of the bedroom.

Away from there, Lucy sat on the balcony, looking straight ahead of her. Even though she understood her mother's concern for Lucas, she couldn't say that she didn't feel hurt by her mother's words. She was hurt and angry that her mother had spoken to her in that manner, whether or not she meant it.

Insensitive? She had not just called her insensitive but had said that she had ALWAYS been insensitive. When had she ever been insensitive? Fine, some days ago, she had told those mean stuff to Lucas when he only just broke up with Rachel and was hurt, but was that enough reason for her mother to say that to her? Was that one occasion the reason her mother had said she had always been insensitive?

"Lu, we both know that she didn't mean any of that. Please don't dwell on it," Sonia said as she looked at Lucy with a concerned frown. Knowing her, Lucy was going to overanalyze all that her mother had said and get even more worked up.

"We don't know that. She didn't just call me insensitive. She said I've ALWAYS been insensitive. Do you know what that means? That it's not the first time she is thinking this way about me," Lucy said with a shake of her head, telling herself that she wasn't going to cry over this.

"You don't know that either. People generally say hurtful words when they are upset. I'm not saying she was right. She lashed out at you unfairly, but please let it go. You need to stand together now, not fight each other," Sonia pleaded.

"I'm not fighting with her. I don't care. She should go and be with Lucas. He needs her more than I do anyway," Lucy said, and to her shame, her voice trembled.

Sonia stood up and went to embrace her, "Lu, don't say that."

"I don't care! I've never needed any of them! When it mattered most, they were not there. Never for once in all these years have I ever blamed them for what happened to me. I never blamed them for not noticing that I wasn't fine. I never blamed them for not being the kind of parents I could run to when I found out I was being stalked. I could have put the blame on them, you know? But I never did. I made excuses for them instead," Lucy said as she swiped at her angry tears and moved away from Sonia, unable to stay still while expressing her anger.

Lucy continued, her gray eyes sparkling with angry tears, "It wasn't their life that was ruined by that one incident. Yes, Lucas is hurt, but I'm hurt too. His girlfriend

may have aided in what happened to me, but I am the one who suffered from it, not Lucas. I am the one who had to take alcohol and sleeping pills just to keep away the nightmares! I'm the one who can't stand seeing anyone in the shadows without thinking of Jamie! I'm the one who can't even stand random strangers staring at me without wondering if I'm being stalked again. I'm the one who now has to face the fact that my twin brother's girlfriend hated me enough to get involved in something like that. All Lucas has to deal with is guilt, but I'm the one stuck with those awful memories in my head. Do you think I won't gladly swap that memory for guilt? Yet, here I am trying to be strong for myself and Lucas, and she dares to call me insensitive! Insensitive!" Her voice hitched, and she broke into a sob.

Sonia sniffled as she embraced Lucy, "Please calm down, Lu. I know you're hurt but please calm down," Sonia pleaded, wondering if she should just give Tom a call.

Thankfully her phone started ringing, and she dipped her hand into her pocket to take it out while still patting Lucy's back with her other hand, "It's Tom," Sonia informed Lucy as she received the call.

Immediately Lucy pulled away from her and wiped her tears with the back of her hand.

"Yeah, I'm with her," Sonia said before offering the phone to Lucy.

"I'm fine," Lucy assured him before he could say a word knowing that he was worried about her.

"You weren't taking your call," Tom pointed out, not bothering to argue her claim. From her voice, he could tell that she had been crying.

"I think I left the phone in the Den," she said apologetically.

"Where are you?"

"At the main balcony."

"Okay, I'm coming over," Tom said, and as he hung up the call, he came face to face with Janet, who had just stepped out of the bedroom where she had gone to wash her face.

She had gone to Tom's bedroom to find Lucy, but when she didn't see her, she decided to splash some water on her face before going to the patio to see if she had returned to join the others.

"Have you seen Lucy?" Janet asked Tom hopefully.

From the look on her face, Tom could tell that she had been crying, "She is on the balcony. Are you okay?" Tom asked in concern.

"I don't know. My emotions are all over the place. I feel like I'm messing up everything. I'm not handling this the right way, and I don't even know what to do. Both my babies are hurting, and I don't know how to help them," Janet said as her eyes filled up again, and Tom embraced her without thinking. He just held her and let her cry.

Janet pulled away as she tried to pull herself together, "Thank you, Tom. I'm sorry I soaked your shirt," Janet said as she brushed away her tears, and Tom reached into his pocket and offered her his handkerchief.

"You don't have to be sorry. I'm sorry about the scandal. You all had to face all of this because of me," Tom said apologetically, knowing that she must have told them about Anita now.

"It's not your fault. That girl and her family are crazy. Besides, Lucas would have married that psychopath if all of this hadn't happened. I'm not happy that this happened or that my babies are hurt, but I'm just..." Janet broke into a sob again and stopped as abruptly as she had started, and used his handkerchief to dry her tears.

"Just promise me I'll get a chance to hit her before you are done dealing with her and her family. I just want to hit her really hard," Janet said, and Tom gave her a nod.

"If you promise to stop crying, I can even promise to hold her in place for you to hit her," Tom said, and Janet smiled.

"I'm so glad that Lucy has a man like you in her life. I'm glad that of all the men she could have had, it is someone like you she settled to be with. It is because you are here for her that we can go and be with Lucas. I feel terrible leaving her alone. I still can't believe I said those awful things to her," Janet confessed, tearing up again.

"Then you should talk to her. The sooner you clear the air with her, the faster you can leave here and go be with Lucas. And you don't have to worry. I'll make sure she's fine while you focus on Lucas," Tom promised.

"I wish it was so easy not to worry. But I'm a mother. Worrying about our kids is what we do for a living. Please take me to Lucy," Janet pleaded, and Tom led her down the hallway.

Once Tom opened the balcony door and Lucy saw that her mother was with him, she turned away from them. Janet's eyes teared up, knowing that she had hurt her daughter.

Tom moved over to where she sat and kissed her forehead, "How are you, sunshine?" He asked as he crouched down in front of her and took both her hands in his.

"I'm fine."

"Your parents will be leaving soon. You should hear her out. Please," Tom added as he kissed the back of her hands.

Although Lucy still didn't want to talk to her mother or look at her, she nodded. She would listen to her without saying a word to her. She had nothing to say to her.

"I'll be outside with the others," Tom said as he leaned in to kiss her lips before moving away.

Taking that as her cue, Sonia stood up too and walked away with Tom, leaving the mother and daughter alone.

"I'm sorry, darling. I didn't mean anything I said," Janet apologized as she went to stand in front of Lucy.

Lucy cleared her throat, "I'm okay. You should leave now so you can get there in time," Lucy said as she stood up.

Janet held Lucy's hand, "I can't leave without resolving this with you. I know I hurt you, and I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said any of that. I was just very worried about Lucas..."

"It's fine. I understand. You can go be with Lucas. I'm fine," Lucy said, struggling with the tears pooling in her eyes.

"No, you're not."

"I said I'm fine, mom! Can you please leave me alone?" Lucy snapped at her mother as she snatched her hand away, "What else do you want me to say to you? Lucas needs you more than I do. So go to him and let me be! I'm trying to be more sensitive..."

"Sweetie, I'm sorry. I really didn't mean that," Janet pleaded as tears dropped from her eyes.

"It doesn't matter whether you meant it or not. You said it, and that is all that matters. I don't hold it against you," Lucy took a deep breath as she tried to keep her emotions in check. She hadn't planned to say anything, so why was she speaking so much? It wasn't necessary.

"I'm okay, mom. I'm fine. You don't have to feel sorry anymore," Lucy said and walked away before her tears could fall.

Chapter 337 Tom's POV

As Sonia walked down the hallway with Tom, she cast a glance at him, contemplating if she should talk to him or not about Lucy's marital decision.

She knew that it wasn't really her business and she should stay out of the couple's relationship, but she thought he might be in need of someone else to talk to about it.

He needed to talk to someone who knew Lucy, at least, and had both their best interest at heart. She wanted to assure him that Lucy loved him, regardless of her decision not to get married. And she wanted to know his thoughts on Lucy's decision before talking to Lucy again since Lucy was yet to tell her how they resolved it in the car or if they had resolved it.

"I'm sorry..." Sonia started, and Tom who had been walking beside her silently as he thought of Lucy's sad eyes, turned to look at her in confusion.

"Are you talking to me?" He asks, wondering who the apology was meant for.

"Yes."

"What are you sorry about?"

"Lucy told me about your misunderstanding earlier. I caused it," Sonia said, and Tom looked at her with a puzzled expression, wondering how she could have caused it when she hadn't even been at the mall with them.

"How? What did you say to her?" Tom asked calmly as he led her into the Den instead of returning outside to join the others. Neither of them sat down. Instead, they stood, facing each other as they talked.

"Well, the thing is, the issue of marriage came up while we were talking at her office earlier this morning. And when she insisted on not wanting to get married as she had always said in the past, I kind of reacted wrongly since I thought dating you meant she had changed her mind about marriage. I think she felt pressured by me, and that was why she had to bring it up the way she did. I'm sorry," Sonia explained, and Tom nodded in understanding.

"It's fine. I will appreciate it if you don't talk to her about it anymore or pressure her about it next time either. Just let her do things at her own pace. It's better for us that way," Tom said, and Sonia looked at him curiously.

"What about you? What do you plan to do about it?"

"Nothing. As I said, I'm going to let her do things at her pace. I'm sure none of this is easy on her. Lucy is someone I deceived just to have her in my life. It's a miracle that she still loves me and wants to be with me despite all of that."

"Does that mean you are willing to let her have her way? You will just date her without getting married to her? For how long before you decide to move on?" She asked cautiously, and Tom shrugged.

"I'm hoping she will change her mind. But even if she doesn't, it won't change the way I feel about her. If she could give up wanting to be single to be with me despite my screwups, then maybe giving up the idea of having a family with her shouldn't be too much of a sacrifice."

Seeing the confusion on Sonia's face, he went on, "I'm not saying I have given up on the idea of marriage. I'm just trying to keep my mind open to the possibility of not ever getting married. If that's the only way I can have Lucy in my life, then I will find a way to adjust to it. She has given up something for me, so I should be able to do the same for her. It's compromise," Tom said with a rueful smile.

"You do realize that she doesn't want to have kids either, right?" Sonia pointed out, wondering how Tom would be able to live with something like that. She knew that there were men who didn't mind, but she didn't see Tom as one of such men.

She loved Lucy very much, and she cared for Tom too, even if Lucy would always be her priority. He wasn't just Lucy's boyfriend to her. He was also Bryan's brother, so she had to look out for them both, and to do that, she wanted to make sure Tom understood what he was getting involved in so that things wouldn't be hard for either him or Lucy. Not forgetting that she was also writing about them, so she couldn't just sit by and do nothing or know nothing.

"What if we were married and she couldn't have kids? Would I leave her? Listen, Sonia. I know you don't understand how I feel about your friend. Even I do not understand my feelings for her most times," Tom said as he went to sit on the couch, and Sonia did the same, sensing that he had more to say.

"I don't think I can explain this, but for me, it was love at first sight. It was like I knew she was mine the moment I watched her walk through the door into the club," Tom said, and Sonia looked at him with keen interest.

She had no idea it was love at first sight for Tom. Lucy had said he caught a glimpse of her checklist, and she had assumed the feelings came after he took her home.

"I was seated there waiting for Anita to come in so I would end things with her and leave, but instead of Anita, Lucy walked in dressed for the occasion but looking so lost and out of place. My eyes were glued to her as she made her way to the bar, and like fate, Sam brought her to sit right next to me. If I tell you I remember every word she said to the barman even before I spoke with her, you'd call me crazy, wouldn't you?" Tom asked, and Sonia just stared at him in disbelief.

"I've been with women in the past. But not once have I ever brought any woman to my home, but with Lucy, it felt so right bringing her here even without knowing much about her. The thought of taking her anywhere else was wrong. I will tell you something crazy... Although I had never said this out loud to anyone, when Lucy lay on my bed that first night and I watched her sleeping so peacefully, I thought of asking her to marry me the next morning when she wakes up, just because I didn't want her to disappear from my life the next day," Tom said.

This time Sonia's eyes widened in surprise, making Tom chuckle.

"I know you think I'm crazy, don't you? Anyway, I'm glad I didn't do that. That crazy move would have certainly sent her bolting out of my life forever," Tom said with a sad smile.

"You wanted to marry her from the first day you met her, and she doesn't even want to get married," Sonia murmured, feeling sorry for him.

She realized for the first time that she had never really thought of things from Tom's perspective or tried to find out why he had been interested in Lucy enough to tell all those lies. She had always written their story mostly from Lucy's point of view, but now she admitted that Tom's viewpoint was just as important. She was going to have to edit the story again.

"If I may ask, why didn't you do it? I mean, since you wanted to ask her to marry you, what stopped you?" Sonia asked curiously.

"I confirmed from Harry that she was our recently transferred director. So I decided that since she won't be entirely disappearing from my life, there was no need to hurry. I wanted to take my time to know her better before asking her to be my wife."

"Let me get something straight. You wanted to propose to her when you didn't know her, yet when you got close to her, you were trying to see if she was a golddigger. Why?" Sonia asked, pointing out the flaw in his logic.

"Not exactly. Pretending to be her driver was to get to know her personally, not to see if she was a golddigger. I didn't exactly think she was a golddigger...."

"If you didn't think so, you would have walked up to her normally and gotten to know her," Sonia countered.

"As Thomas Hank? Her boss? I don't think so. People generally pretend and butter up things when you're as wealthy as I am. I only decided to test her to see if she would fall for the 'CEO' because she gave me a reason to believe she was looking down on me for being a mere driver and handyman, and when Bryan said she wanted me to know of her relationship with you, I thought she might be interested in the CEO. I desperately wanted her to prove me wrong because I didn't think she was that sort of person," Tom explained.

"What would you have done if she had fallen for the 'CEO' then?"

"I wouldn't have been happy about it, but I would have married her regardless because I am in love with her. I understand that it is natural for most people to choose wealth over poverty. Even I would prefer to be rich than poor after all," Tom said with an amused smile now.

"If you know that, why give Lucy a chance when you didn't give Anita a chance?"

"First, I wasn't exactly in love with Anita. Also, she didn't even want to spend any time with me after I told her I wasn't wealthy. Lucy, on the other hand, is someone I'm in love with. And although she did not like that I was a driver or a handyman, she didn't let that stop her from treating me like a friend most of the time when she didn't have her guard up. She even managed to fall in love with me," Tom's eyes lit up as he said that, and Sonia smiled too.

"I know I went overboard in trying to understand her kind of person and get her, but I did all I thought I needed to do to... And then when I found out about Jamie, I realized just how wrong it all was," Tom explained, and Sonia sighed as she tried to process it all.

"Lucy is my soulmate, Sonia. And if what she wants is to stay by my side without officially becoming my wife, I will let her do so. It will be difficult for me, I know it. But Lucy is my only chance at love," Tom said, and this time Sonia teared up.

"I'm glad I had this conversation with you. Thank you for loving my baby the way you do," Sonia said tearily as she embraced him. Glad that she had been right to have trusted him.

Now she didn't have to worry so much about Lucy ruining her relationship with Tom. He deeply loved her and was mature enough to handle things.

Tom sighed, "What is it with all the ladies crying on me today? I can't offer you my handkerchief. I already gave it to Janet," Tom said, and Sonia laughed as she pulled away.

"I love you, Tom."

"Unfortunately for you, I'm taken," Tom said with a wink, and she laughed again.

"I'm taken too. So I will have to settle for a secret affair," Sonia said, and Tom chuckled.

"Talking about a secret affair, I hope this conversation can remain between us? I would still like to see if she can change her mind," Tom said, and Sonia smiled.

"Sure. I would like to see her change her mind. One of my secret desire is to help her plan her wedding as the maid of honor and watch her walk down the aisle," Sonia said with a sigh.

"Mine is to see her with a big baby bump. I can clearly picture it. Twin girls," Tom said, and Sonia laughed aloud.

"I've been looking all over for you. What are you both doing here?" Bryan asked irritably from the doorway, glaring at the both of them like he had caught them cheating on him.

"Oh, no! He finally caught us in the act, baby. What are we going to do? I guess it can't be kept a secret anymore. Go and tell him it's over baby," Tom said dryly as he kissed Sonia's cheek, and laughter bubbled out of her as she went to meet Bryan while Tom looked around until he found Lucy's phone.

Chapter 338 No Party

After leaving her mother on the balcony, Lucy went straight to Tom's bedroom, wanting to be alone for a moment to catch her breath and put her emotion in check.

She shut the door behind her and walked into the bathroom. She stood in front of the mirror and stared back at her reflection for a moment.

She wasn't usually the confrontational type. She really hated misunderstandings and confrontations such as this, so why had she lost her temper and spoken so harshly to her mother?

Surprisingly it was the first time she was really showing an outward emotion and talking about her repressed grievance against her family, which she had always kept to herself, buried inside somewhere. In fact, she thought she had gotten over the feeling of hurt.

Although she would never say it out to her family, a part of her blamed them for what happened to her. Yes, it wasn't their fault that Jamie had been a lunatic who abducted her, and although it might be unfair of her to blame them, she thought her parents had been too absorbed in their jobs and themselves to even notice that anything was wrong with her.

She had made several excuses for them, even when Tom had asked how her parents could not have noticed the changes in her following her discovery that Jamie was stalking her, but deep down, she knew they had been too careless. Even when she was barely eating as well as she used to during family mealtimes, no one had noticed.

And when she stopped joining them in the living room to watch the soap opera, they usually viewed together as a family whenever she wasn't at Sonia's, no one had asked why. They had been too focused on themselves.

She had desperately wanted one of them to notice and try to find out what was wrong so that she could confide in them, but no one had noticed. Lucas had been all about Rachel, and her parents had been all about each other and their job. She had felt so neglected, and the only person who had been there with her all that time was Sonia.

Maybe she was being unfair by blaming them, but she couldn't help it. She had been seventeen years old. Her parents could have done better. She hated that her mother's careless words had set it all off in her head, and try as she might to calm down, she couldn't stop the bitterness and anger that was making her stomach churn.

She turned on the faucet and let the water run in the sink before splashing some on her face. Just as she reached for a towel to dry her face, she heard the bedroom door open, and so she walked out of the bathroom.

She forced a smile when Tom walked further into the bedroom while looking at her.

"Don't do that, Lu," Tom said with a shake of his head as he studied her wet face, and she looked at him with questioning eyes.

"Don't do what?"

"Don't force a smile. Please don't pretend to be happy around me when you are not. You can do so with others if you want, but never do that around me," Tom said as he stopped in front of her.

Lucy sighed. How did she always forget that even though they had only known each other for such a short time, he knew her so well? "How can you tell the smile is forced?" She asked as he lifted her chin so she would look into his eyes.

"When it comes to you, I can tell every nuance of expression and subtle tone of voice," Tom said, and Lucy felt her heart flutter.

Her mood slowly lifted, and she smiled genuinely. This was her own person. With him, she wouldn't have to ever worry about keeping things to herself because whether or not she opened her mouth, he could just tell when she wasn't okay.

"I'm lucky to have you, am I not?" She asked, and Tom shook his head.

"I'm the one who is lucky to have a gem like you," He said as he took the towel from her and dried her face.

"I thought you said you'd be outside with the others?" She asked when he finished, and she turned away from him to check her reflection in the mirror.

"I was going to do that, but then I ran into your mom once again. Seeing that you were done talking with her, I decided to bring your phone to you," Tom said as he went to stand beside her and left her phone on the dressing table.

"How are you feeling now?" He asked as he met her gaze in the mirror.

"Much better."

"Good. They will be leaving soon, so don't keep them waiting," Tom said as he turned to leave.

"You are not going to ask why I was upset with her?" Lucy asked, and Tom paused by the doorway.

"I will prefer you tell me about it yourself, but if you want me to ask, then it will be after we have seen them off. So hurry," Tom said and walked away without waiting to get a response.

Although he was curious to know exactly what her mother had said to upset her, he didn't want her to talk about it and get even more upset than she already was with her mother before seeing them off. He already figured that whatever her mother had said must have hurt her feelings profoundly, and it wouldn't be resolved so easily.

As he walked down the hallway, his phone beeped with a notification to let him know that someone was at the gate. He paused and pulled it out to see who it was that was visiting his house so late in the evening and needed a pass to get in.

A puzzled frown creased his brow when he saw that Harry's car was parked in front of the gate, and Harry was just seated there.

Like his cars, all of Harry's cars were authorized to pass through the gate without hindrance via the automatic number plate recognition installed on the gate. So why was Harry just seated there? He relaxed a bit when he looked closely at Harry and noticed that his lips were moving like he was talking to someone. It seemed like he was on a call.

Meanwhile, inside the car, Harry had a slight frown on his face as he pressed a finger to his temple, "Dad, are you really at my apartment?" He asked, not sure whether to believe his father or not since it wouldn't be the first time his father would be pranking him.

"Weren't you the one who suggested that I pay you a visit? I told you I was going to take you up on your offer, didn't I?" Aaron asked his son dryly as he looked at the table which he had set for dinner. It had been a while since he last ate with his boy, and he couldn't wait to see him.

"So you are really at my apartment?" Harry asked, torn between joy at seeing his father after such a long time and frustration that he had to turn back now that he was finally at the gate after spending most of the evening contemplating making this drive.

It had taken him quite some time to make up his mind to honor Jade's invitation and drop by Tom's place for their father's party. Not that she was the reason he had decided to stop by after all since the last thing he wanted was to put himself through the torture of seeing Jade again. He didn't like the idea of saying farewell for the third time in one day.

Maybe this was a sign that seeing her again before she left was a bad idea. He could save himself the torture now and just turn back whether or not his father was telling the truth.

"Do I need to take a photograph beside your refrigerator to convince you that I'm here? By the way, one of your bedrooms smells flowery like a female was here. Are you seeing someone?" Aaron asked, and that was all it took to convince him to make a U-turn.

"You are really here?" Harry asked excitedly, "When did you get here? I'm on my way home now. What do you want me to get you for dinner?" Harry asked, and his father chuckled happily when he heard the excitement in Harry's voice.

"I already fixed dinner. Just get yourself here in one piece before the meal gets cold," he said before hanging up.

Immediately after the call ended, Harry dialed Tom's line since he knew that Tom would have been notified of his presence at the gate.

"Why did you leave without coming in? Don't tell me someone is holding a gun to your head in that car?" Tom asked when he received Harry's call.

Harry grinned, "Yeah. And he let me have my phone for a minute just to let you know that you are a dumb ass."

"What a waste of your final words. You will be greatly missed, my dear friend," Tom said, and Harry chuckled.

"You don't have to worry about missing me. I will be taking you with me. I love you too much to let you live without me," Harry assured Tom who turned when he heard Lucy's footsteps.

"Keep your love to yourself. Why did you leave? Did something come up?" Tom asked seriously now.

"My dad just called to let me know he's around. So I had to make a U-turn..."

"Oh, that's great! Let him know I will drop by to see him tomorrow after work," Tom cut it.

"I'm sorry I have to miss the party. How is it going over there?" Harry asked curiously.

"Don't worry about not being here. You are not missing anything. There is no party."

"No party? Why?"

Tom quickly explained the situation to Harry, and he let out a sigh when Tom finished, "Maybe I should have come in to say hello since your folks will be leaving tomorrow," Harry said, contemplating if he should just turn back.

"They're not dying, just traveling. You can see them some other time. Go home to your dad," Tom urged him.

"Alright then. See you tomorrow," Harry said before hanging up. He briefly contemplated calling to let Jade know that he wouldn't be coming because something came up, but he decided against it.

It was possible that she had invited him without really expecting him to show up, and he was the one reading too much meaning to her request. She would probably not even notice his absence. Why would she? He was just the boring uncle Harry to her, after all.

Chapter 339 Don't Lie To Him

"I guess the vacation is over. I had a swell time with the lot of you," Andrew said as he stood by the car with his wife, where Adolf was waiting to take them to the airport.

"This wasn't a vacation," Janet said, elbowing his side. They had come to be here for Lucy because of the scandal but had ended up spending time with Tom's family after all.

"Then we should plan a family vacation for us all. Preferably at a time when all the kids will be available like now," Evelyn piped up, thinking that it would be great to spend time with them all again.

"Yes, let's do that," Desmond nodded in agreement.

"I think Christmas would be the best time for such a family vacation. What do you think?" Sonia suggested, thinking that it would fit into her story perfectly.

"Christmas is still so far away," Desmond complained.

"Maybe. But hopefully, Lucas would be fine by then so he can join us, and we would have taken care of that brat, Anita, and everyone else we need to handle," Sonia pointed out.

"That's correct," Janet said with a nod.

"Jady, is that okay with you? Do you think you'll be available for a Christmas vacation?" Desmond asked Jade hopefully.

Jade smiled at him, "I should be. Let's hope I can wrap up this case by then," Jade said, and Evelyn turned to Bryan.

"What about you, Bryan?"

"I will try to leave that period work free. Tom is now my boss, after all, so I'm sure he won't mind," Bryan said with a grin.

"What about you, Sonia?"

"As long as I'm there, she will be there, right baby?" Bryan said, and Andrew rolled his eyes.

"Let the girl speak for herself, Mr. Lover boy," Andrew said dryly, and the others laughed when Bryan scowled at him.

"Let the boy be, Andy," Janet scolded.

"I'm the one that suggested Christmas. Besides, I work remotely, remember? So I will definitely be there with Bryan," she said with a grin, and Evelyn smiled.

"Good. Now let's hope that Tom and Lucy will be able to free up their schedule too," Evelyn said with a satisfied smile, thinking about how great it would be to spend the holidays together.

"Do you think maybe we can include Harry too? He has been working so hard," Sonia said, and before Jade could respond, Evelyn nodded in agreement.

"Sure. Harry is already a part of the family anyway," Evelyn said, happy that Sonia was wise and thoughtful enough to include Harry.

"Okay. Christmas it is then. I'm looking forward to it already," Andrew said as his gaze moved to the door which just opened. He was relieved to see Lucy coming out with Tom.

"Sorry we took so long," Tom said as they got to where the others stood.

"Princess," Andrew said as he looked at Lucy apologetically, and she smiled at him as she embraced him.

"Take good care of Lucas, and make sure he doesn't leave your sight unless, of course, he's coming to be with me," Lucy said, and Andrew nodded as he kissed her forehead.

"I'm sorry about earlier," he said in a low voice, but she shook her head.

"It's fine, dad. Let's forget about that," Lucy said as she stepped away from him to say goodbye to her mother.

Janet still had a guilty expression on her face even though she was glad that Lucy had come to see them off. "Have a safe trip, mom," Lucy said with a smile as she embraced her mother.

"I love you, baby," Janet said as she patted Lucy's hair before letting her step away.

"As much as I hate to say this, I'm going to miss you," Bryan said, and Andrew chuckled as he clapped him on the shoulder.

"You didn't have to say it aloud, boy. I know you will. You can't know me and not miss me," Andrew said with a smile tinged with arrogance, and Bryan scowled at him.

"I wasn't referring to you. I was talking to your wife," Bryan said, making them laugh as he stepped forward to kiss Janet's cheeks.

"Ever heard of the phrase two shall become one? You were definitely talking to me, my boy, and you just kissed my cheek too," Andrew said as he rubbed his cheeks, and this time even Bryan laughed at the funny comeback.

"You do too much, Andy," his wife said in amusement.

"Sony girl," Andrew said as he looked at her with a fond smile, "Make sure you take care of yourself as always. And for my sake, try not to give Bryan an easy time," he said as he embraced her.

"I vow never to," Sonia assured him with a grin as she pulled away from him to embrace Janet.

"I barely just said hi, and now I have to say bye. I didn't even have enough time to fall for your charms," Jade complained with a pout, and Andrew grinned.

"Don't worry. You still have another chance to fall for my charms. I will definitely sweep you off your feet when next we meet again," Andrew promised as he embraced her while his wife said goodbye to the others.

"Thank you for everything, Tom," Andrew said as he shook hands with Tom, "I believe I don't need to tell you boys to take care of my girls," Andrew said, looking from Tom to Bryan and then back again.

"You don't need to," Tom assured him before Bryan could come up with a smart response, and with a nod, Andrew held out the car door for Janet to get into the car.

"Wait!" Candace called out breathlessly as she ran out of the house carrying Jamal, who was crying, and Janet turned back to look at them.

"You didn't tell us you were leaving tonight," Candace said with a slight frown, even though she knew they didn't exactly owe her an explanation.

Jamal had grown fond of them during the little time he had spent in their company, so she expected them to have at least said goodbye to the kid that considered them as some sort of grandparents.

She had been reading him his bedtime stories when Samantha sent one of the housekeepers to inform them that Janet and Andrew were leaving, and Jamal had insisted on seeing them.

"We are sorry about that. It's an impromptu departure. Something urgent came up at home, so we had to leave," Andrew told Candace apologetically as he ruffled Jamal's hair.

Candace let Jamal down, and he sniffled as he embraced Janet, "You were not going to say goodbye?" he asked as he looked from her to Andrew with hurt in his eyes.

"I'm sorry, darling!" Janet said with a distressed frown as she bent forward and carried him, balancing him on her waist. She had been so worried about her kids that she had forgotten about Jamal.

"When are you coming back?" Jamal asked, and Evelyn stepped forward to take him from Janet when she looked at him helplessly.

"We don't know yet. But I'm sure we can always work out something with your mom for you to visit if you miss them too much. Now no more tears, pumpkin. Say goodbye to them like a big boy," Evelyn said as she brushed away his tears with her thumb.

"You can visit us whenever you want, and I'll take you bowling and get you lots of that sweet stuff you love," Janet promised as she kissed his face, and Evelyn took the kid from her.

"I will miss you both," Jamal said as he looked at Andrew.

"We will miss you too, kiddo," Andrew said with a small smile and patted the kid's back.

"Make sure you call me when you arrive. And don't forget to give my love to Lucas," Evelyn said with a wave at them as they got into the car.

They all stood there watching and waving until the car disappeared from view, and then they all turned to return inside.

"It's past his bedtime now," Candace said as she took Jamal from Evelyn, "Say goodnight to everyone, Jam," Candace said, and once the kid did so, she returned inside the house ahead of them.

"What now?" Desmond asked no one in particular.

"Since we've gotten all the unpleasant topics out of the way, let's celebrate your birthday!" Jade said with a wiggle of her body, and when the others agreed, they all returned to the porch.

"Bryan, can you please ask Samantha to serve dinner? And you, Tommy, excuse me for a minute," Jade said once they got to the porch and the others started to sit down.

Tom stepped to the side with Jade, while Bryan glared at her before going to do as she had requested.

"What's up?" Tom asked curiously.

Jade pulled her ear as she looked at him, not knowing how to present her request, "I'm still in need of your help," she said apologetically.

Tom's face was carefully blank as he looked at her, "What an interesting opening statement. Get straight to the point, Jady," Tom urged her.

"Candace wants Jamal to remain here when she leaves with me... Wait! Just let me finish," Jade said before Tom could interrupt.

"The kid's father is a dangerous criminal, and I can assure you that he won't be winning any father of the year awards. He asked to see Candace and Jamal before he would help me close my case, but she doesn't want her son anywhere near him. She is willing to go with me only if Jamal can stay here. This is the only place she believes he would be safe," Jade surmised as best as she could.

"Doesn't she have any family relations she can send the kid to? Wouldn't she feel better if her family is watching over her kid in her absence rather than a bunch of strangers?"

"She's an orphan," Jade said, hoping that would strike a chord of sympathy in Tom while also leaving out the fact that the only person she had who was family to her had been kidnapped by a sexy drug lord.

Why did that suddenly make her think of Massimo? Hot!

Tom pinched the bridge of his nose, "For how long will she be gone? And who is supposed to watch after him in her absence? We both know I will be going to work, and you know the others are traveling back tomorrow," Tom pointed out, referring to their parents, Bryan and Sonia.

"I'm sure Samantha and the others won't mind. I will ask them just to be sure. I just wanted to get your approval first," Jade said, and Tom sighed.

"Fine. Just make sure she writes a list of the dos, don'ts, eats, eat nots, or whatever else the kid needs," Tom said, making Jade smile at him as she stretched and kissed his cheek.

"Thank you, Tommy. You're so dependable," Jade said as she tucked her hand under his and led him back to join the others.

"Harry was here a while ago," Tom said conversationally, and Jade stopped to glare at him.

"And you're only just mentioning it now? Why didn't I see him?" Jade asked, and Tom chuckled.

"Relax. I didn't see him either. He didn't even drive through the gate. He said his dad is in town, so he had to go home," Tom explained.

"Oh, yeah!"

"Oh, yeah? You were aware that his dad was around?" Tom asked curiously.

"Yeah. I met him at Harry's apartment when I went to get my stuff. You can't let Harry know I met his father, though," Jade warned.

"Interesting. Care to share what you both discussed?"

"Nothing serious. I told him who I was, and he asked after you, and then I grabbed my stuff and left," Jade lied, feeling too embarrassed to mention that she had been snooping through his best friend's bedroom and had been caught in the act by the man.

"Are you in love with him, Jade? Or are you just curious about him? Or maybe you are infatuated with him because you spent the last couple of days with him," Tom asked with serious eyes.

Jade sighed, "I can't exactly say that I'm in love with him. I like him, no doubt, and I am undeniably attracted to him. He seems like a very decent guy, and he is different from other guys I know. So let's just say I like him enough to want to pursue a romantic relationship with him," Jade said with a shrug.

"I see. I think I'm going to really enjoy watching you both. Just do us both a favor and don't let him know you are interested in him in that manner yet," Tom suggested, and Jade raised a brow.

"Why not?"

How could he explain this to her without telling her about his discussion with Harry? That was his private business with Harry, and he couldn't tell her about it, the same way he wouldn't tell Harry about his conversation with Jade.

He believed that if she told Harry she liked him immediately, he would continue to do his best to avoid her because, for his weird reasons, he didn't want to date his best friend's younger sister even if it was crystal clear that he was liked her. So maybe the best way to get him to face his feelings and push him to accept them and act on them was to make it too hard for him to resist.

"Just trust me on this, okay? I'm not saying you should stop talking to him or anything. And I'm not asking you to lie to him about anything either. Harry hates lies..."

Jade winced, and Tom narrowed his eyes, "You lied to him already?"

"Kind of. I was hoping to tell him the truth tonight when I see him. And please don't ask me what I lied about," Jade said, and Tom just looked at her without saying a word for a moment.

"Do me a favor. Tell him the truth. And please don't lie to him next time, and don't mess with his emotions. Before you rush to point out that I lied to Lucy, I know so already, so do not waste your breath. Just don't do that to Harry," Tom advised, and Jade nodded.

"Are you both going to stand there and talk all night, or will you join the party?" Evelyn called to them as she dished the food.

"We are coming," Tom called back to her as he walked away from Jade.

"I will tell him the truth," Jade promised as she followed him.

Now all she had to do was figure out a way to tell him the truth without revealing that she was interested in him.

Should she do so over the phone tonight or just stop by his office and tell him the truth before leaving? How would he react?

After they were done with dinner, Jade encouraged their father to unwrap the gifts they had gotten him. Lucy quietly excused herself and went upstairs to get him the gift she had gotten him.

"Dad, you know you can request anything else you want too, right?" Tom asked, and Desmond smiled happily over the rim of his wine glass as he took a sip of his favorite wine.

"I know. Thank you. You kids have done more than enough already," Desmond said before reaching to unwrap the wristwatch box.

When he was going about it too slowly, Evelyn, who was dying with curiosity to see what they had gotten him, reached over to help him tear off the wrap, but Desmond slapped her hand off, "No touching," he warned, and the others around the table laughed just as Lucy returned.

Thankful that no one was looking her way, she subtly hid her gift behind her as she sat down beside Tom.

"It's a Patek Philippe watch," Desmond announced with an even broader smile as he looked from Tom to Bryan and then back to the wristwatch in awe. He was a lover and collector of wristwatches, but this was going to be the most expensive wristwatch in his collection.

"Thank you, boys," Desmond said, and Bryan shot Jade a smug smile since she had kept insisting that there was no need to get him such an outrageously expensive wristwatch when he would likely not even recognize its worth whether or not he was a collector.

Jade rolled her eyes at Bryan, "Really, dad? Thank you, boys?" She asked with a scowl, and he chuckled.

"Give your brothers some credit, Jady. I know you don't have an eye for things like these, but they do, so they deserve some accolades. And thank you too, princess. I'm sure you didn't leave it all entirely to them," he added with a grin as he gently lifted the wristwatch from its box and put it on.

"How much did that cost?" Lucy whispered to Tom in awe as she eyed the wristwatch. Working in the fashion line, she knew enough about brands to know that this wasn't cheap.

"Some thousands of dollars, I would say," Tom said, and Lucy winced as she threw her gift under the table, making Tom chuckle.

"Don't do that. I'm sure he will appreciate it," Tom chided as he reached for the gift, but Lucy held his arm.

"If you embarrass me, I won't ever forgive you," she warned, and Tom shook his head as he reached for the bag regardless of her warning and placed it on her lap.

"Dad, unwrap your other gift," Bryan urged him when he saw that Desmond was wasting so much time checking out the wristwatch.

Desmond carefully returned the wristwatch to its box before picking up the other wrapped box. He carefully unwrapped it while Evelyn watched impatiently.

Once Desmond exposed the content of the second box, he smiled happily once again, while Evelyn glared at her children, "I can't believe that instead of you encouraging your dad to quit this dangerous habit, you went ahead to buy him this as a gift. You do know that this isn't good for his health, right?" Evelyn asked with displeasure.

"Give us a break, mom. Every one of us is going to die someday, whether or not we are smokers. Allow the man to enjoy himself," Bryan said, and Evelyn angrily threw a piece of cake at him.

"Don't you dare spit out that nonsense to me!"

"Calm down, Eve. You said one cigar a day. I'm not going to smoke all of these in one day," Desmond reminded her softly since he understood that she was only concerned about his health.

"Still, they should have known better," Evelyn insisted, but with less anger this time.

"I love the gifts. Thank you," Desmond said with a happy smile just as a yawn escaped from Evelyn.

She picked up her phone and was surprised to see that it was almost midnight already, "It has been a long day. I need to retire for the night now, especially as we will be leaving in the morning," she said, and Bryan smiled happily, knowing that they were not going to be doing any silly singing or dancing as Jade had planned.

"Yeah, you should do that. I will stay out here for a while before joining you," Desmond said with a grin as he held the cigar box to himself.

"You are not smoking tonight!" She reminded him as she stood up and snatched the cigar box from him, "Join me in the bedroom when you are ready," she said before bidding the others goodnight and going inside.

"We should head in too," Sonia said, giving Jade a pointed look, reminding her that they were supposed to continue their conversation from where they stopped.

"Yeah, we should," Jade said with a grin.

"Tom, if you're not feeling too tired, let's continue our game from yesterday before we retire for the night," Bryan suggested, and Tom smirked at him before turning to Lucy.

He kissed the side of her head, "I will be in the bedroom after I'm done with him," Tom said before standing up to leave with Bryan.

As the others stood up to leave, Lucy remained seated, "Are you not coming with us?" Sonia asked curiously.

"I will join you shortly," Lucy said, wanting them to leave before she would give the gift to Desmond.

"Alright. I will be in Jade's bedroom," Sonia said as she left with Jade.

Now left alone with Desmond, Lucy contemplated the best way to present her gift to him while Desmond watched her curiously. Perceiving that she wanted to speak with him, he decided to talk first.

"How are you feeling, Lucy?" Desmond asked as he looked at her.

Lucy cleared her throat and smiled at him, "I'm okay. I saw this while shopping earlier, and I thought you might like it," Lucy said in a rush as she placed the bag on the table and pushed it across to him.

"You got me a gift?" Desmond asked in pleasant surprise as he picked up the bag and looked into it.

"It's a memory foam slippers. It helps to keep your feet warm and comfortable..."

"I know what it is," Desmond cut in with a wide appreciative smile.

"My dad liked it when I got it for him, and since I've not seen you on it before, I decided to get it. I don't know if it will fit though," she said, still feeling somewhat nervous.

"I'm sure it will fit. Thank you very much, Lucy. I love it," Desmond said, and as though to prove it to her, he took off the sneakers he had been wearing before and put them on.

"I'm glad you do. Happy birthday once again," Lucy said with a relieved smile as she stood up, ready to return inside.

"If you are not in a hurry to get back inside, do you mind keeping this old man company?" Desmond asked before she could leave, and she sat back down.

"You are not exactly old. Sixty is not old," Lucy pointed out.

"Tell that to my wife. Ever since she clocked sixty last year, she has been going on and on about how old we are getting," Desmond said, and Lucy looked at him in surprise.

"She is older than you are?"

Desmond smiled when he heard the surprise in her tone, "Why do you sound so surprised?"

"I don't know. Maybe it's because she just doesn't seem like the type who would marry someone younger than she is, even if it's just by a month," Lucy said, and Desmond chuckled.

"You seem to understand her personality quite well. I can assure you that she has changed a lot now, compared to how she was when we first started. Apart from the age issue, I had a difficult time convincing her to be with me since she didn't even want to get married back then. You can't imagine my amusement whenever I hear her bugging our kids about getting married now," Desmond said in amusement, and from the way he talked about his wife, Lucy could hear his affection for her in his tone.

"She didn't want to get married? Why?" Lucy asked since she couldn't understand how Evelyn, who looked so homely and motherly, could have ever considered not getting married.

"Her background. She had a rough time growing up. Her family was dysfunctional in every sense of the word, and she was scared that she would end up becoming like her mother or marrying someone like her father," Desmond explained.

"That must have been tough," Lucy said with a sigh, trying to reconcile this part of Evelyn she was hearing about to the woman she knew.

"It was. It took me four years to convince her," Desmond said, and Lucy blinked at him in surprise.

Four years? That was the same time it would take to get most college degrees. Patience must run in their family line, Lucy mused.

"I think you are like my wife in many ways," Desmond said, making Lucy wonder if Tom had told him about her decision not to get married.

"Why do you think so?" Lucy asked curiously, and Desmond shrugged.

"Because I see her younger self in you most times when I look at you. And I think maybe she sees it too," Desmond said, and Lucy sighed.

"Are you still mad at your mother?" Desmond asked, changing the subject so abruptly that Lucy blinked at him in surprise since her brain was yet to finish processing what he had been saying.

"I don't know what your mother said to you, but I hope you can forgive her for it," Desmond continued without waiting for a response.

"Did she tell you what she said?" Lucy asked, and Desmond shook his head.

"I didn't ask. There was no need to ask since she was sad and regretted it. I'm certain that all of this is not easy on you right now. We don't expect it to be. But you will feel better if you don't add anger at your mother to the list of things already weighing on you," Desmond said, and Lucy's eyes teared up.

"Being a parent is difficult. We have to be responsible for both ourselves and our children. Often times as parents, we set unrealistic standards for ourselves. We want to be everything and do everything for our children without understanding that there is a limit to the things we can do for them. We are scared too. We get scared of making mistakes because we know they won't only affect us but our kids too. Your mother might be older than you, but inside she is still just a person like you, saddled with the responsibility of being responsible for herself and you too. So forgive her for not being perfect and not being able to say the right things or be there for you as you would want her to," Desmond said, and Lucy felt tears roll down her cheeks.

Desmond stood up and went to sit on the bench beside her as he draped a hand across her shoulders to console her, "Let it out, dear. Cry it out as much as you want, and resolve whatever it is you need to resolve within you. And when you are done, forgive your mother. Forgive her for being human."