

The Billionaire's Baby Bargain Chapter 1

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Chapter 1 A Bad Proposal

Anxiety gripped my heart, squeezing it until I thought I would puke or pass out. I glanced at the mirror in the break room. A tangled web of purple and black pulsated over my head as I held the phone to my ear.

He's not going to answer, Lily muttered, but I ignored her.

When I was about to give up, Robert answered the phone with a gruff "Hello?" "Hi, honey. I'm so sorry to bother you, but I just wanted to remind you that the cruise is tomorrow. We have to be at the port by 5 PM," I said cheerily, fighting past the lump in my throat.

"Yeah, yeah. Tomorrow at 5. Listen, I have to go," and before I could say anything else, he hung up, leaving me with the sound of a woman's husky laugh ringing in my ear.

Who the hell was that? Lily demanded, but I was just as much in the dark as she was.

Probably just a customer at the bar, I told her. It had to be. I trusted Robert completely.

Still, I put the phone back into my apron pocket with a sigh.

"What did he do this time?" a voice asked from behind me. I jumped and turned to find Cathy glaring at me. I grimaced as I saw the swirling vortex of neon orange above her head. She was extremely annoyed.

"He didn't do anything. He was just busy at work," I said softly, hoping to placate her. But Cathy was very protective of me and didn't like Robert.

"Right. If you can take double shifts for two weeks straight to buy these cruise tickets, the least he could do is give you some of his precious time, Almara" Cathy snapped and I winced. But what else could I have done? It was for his birthday and I had just graduated college. It's not like I came from money either.

"He didn't make me do it. I wanted to. I like doing nice things for the people I care about," I smiled at her, trying to convince her and myself that everything was fine.

She rolled her eyes and clacked her Candy Apple Red nails at me. "Well, I'll be here for you when you get your heart broken. I love you, sugar," and with that she walked back into the restaurant.

I slumped down into one of the chairs, putting my head into my hands. I was really hoping this cruise could turn things around for us. Robert had been distant lately and I wasn't sure why.

We'd known each other since we were cubs and had grown up together. It had turned into a romance when we got to high school and we'd always been super affectionate.

But things had changed once we graduated. We both had our own jobs and couldn't be together as often as we used to. If the separation was the only issue, then being together for seven days on a cruise would surely fix it. I shook my head and straightened my shoulders. Robert and I would get married like we always planned. We would be happy just like my parents. All of our dreams would come true. At least that's what I told myself.

The cruise ship was more magnificent than I could have possibly imagined. It glowed a moonbeam white in the light of the dying sun.

I'd read somewhere in my research for this trip that the owner was the youngest billionaire and the most luxurious room on the ship was permanently reserved for him. Not that I could ever afford it.

People like that basically lived on a different planet. Luxury like this was probably second nature to him, while I had almost worked myself to death just to experience this. But it didn't matter. I had done it out of love. Robert and I were going to have a perfect trip.

The cool wind from the sea brushed my cinnamon brown hair away from my shoulders, revealing the heart-shaped neckline of my emerald green dress. The long sleeves would help fight off the ocean chill, but the linen made it breathable. It was the perfect dress for a cruise and I felt pretty for the first time in a long time.

"Almara! There you are, sweetheart!"

I turned with a big smile on my face, waiting in anticipation as Robert pushed his way through the crowd, his rolling suitcase running over a few toes in the process.

I was happy to see a bright yellow over his head. He was actually excited about this trip.

When he was finally in front of me, a flash of red jolted through the yellow and my smile turned stale. What could I have possibly done to have drawn out that color?

"What are you wearing?" Robert asked, eyes roaming over my body, making my cheeks heat with embarrassment. He didn't approve.

I ran my hands down the dress self-consciously. "I bought it for the cruise. Don't you like it?"

"It's fine, I guess. But look around. You stand out like a sore thumb." He waved his hand to encompass the rest of the cruise guests. Most of the women were scantily clad. My cheeks burned hotter.

"I'll keep that in mind next time," I smiled tightly at him, wrapping my arms around my waist. The momentary joy I had felt was disappearing. Robert grunted his agreement and pulled me along, cutting in front of people to get to the front of the line, ignoring all the angry grumbles that followed us. "Hi! Welcome aboard! We're letting all of our passengers know that we're having a Moonlight Promenade on the second floor of the deck in the ballroom around 9 o'clock tonight. We hope to see you there!" A member of the crew greeted us at the door, handing out pamphlets as we passed by. I inwardly cringed. Robert loved to dance and I had zero rhythm, but I knew we were going to be there. "You most definitely will!" Robert told her as we followed another crewmate to our room.

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The ballroom was beautiful, but I couldn't appreciate it. I was too focused on not spraining an ankle in the ridiculous heels that Robert had insisted I buy at the cruise's boutique. He'd also made me buy a new lemon yellow halter dress with a plunging neckline.

I could feel the lewd stares coming from the male passengers and tried my best to ignore it. I instead focused on Robert and the way that his face was lighting up as he looked around.

"Isn't this great, Almara? When's the last time we went dancing?" He asked excitedly, making a beeline straight for the dance floor where couples already gyrated against each other to the music. I had thought they would play waltzes or something similar, but they were playing club music instead.

"It's been too long," I agreed, but inside I was thinking it hadn't been long enough.

He pulled me against him, arms sliding around my waist as he led me into a sensual dance. I tried my best to keep up, swaying my hips to the beat, but I knew it wasn't a fluid motion. It felt choppy and out of sync.

But Robert didn't seem to mind. His eyes were trained on my cleavage and a healthy dose of pink started spreading through the yellow cloud above his head. Lust. I hadn't seen that color in awhile.

Robert's hands slid lower, giving my backside a healthy squeeze. I jumped and playfully slapped his hands away. Robert gave a low chuckle in my ear and put his hands right back where they had been.

I squirmed out of his embrace, murmuring that I had to go to the bathroom. I wasn't a virgin in any sense of the word, but PDA was not my thing and he knew that. I had to escape and cool down a bit.

When my nerves were under control, I left the bathroom and was immediately greeted with a sight that set my blood boiling. Robert was dancing very

intimately with a strange woman bedecked in jewels. The cloud above his head was a deep pink and so was the woman's.

What the hell? Lily growled, her anger mingling with mine.

I took a deep breath. Robert just likes to dance, I tell her, knowing it would do nothing to placate her.

Right, if that's what you want to call it. Lying to yourself doesn't make it go away. He's not our mate. Leave him.

That was all fine and well for her to say, but I had never been lucky in my life and I knew the chances of meeting my mate were slim. Besides, the wedding planning was already under way. And, most importantly, I loved Robert.

Wanting to avoid conflict and ruining our trip before it even began, I decided to walk outside to get some fresh air.

Resting my arms on the handrails, I looked out over the ocean, enjoying the spray of sea foam on my face.

"Will you marry me?" a deep voice floated on the wind and I glanced over. A man with his back to me was down on one knee in front of a gorgeous woman.

He was wearing an expensive deep blue suit, the matching sapphire cufflinks glittering in the moonlight.

"Arthur, I told you I'm not ready. How many times must I repeat myself?" she asked, red-orange swirling above her head. She walked away, heels slapping angrily against the deck.

The man's cloud turned a deep blue. He was heartbroken and my own heart went out to him.

"As many times as it takes," he whispered before standing. When the moonlight illuminated the man's face, I stared at him in stunned silence. He was the most beautiful man I had ever seen.

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