



## 160 To Be Strong

After Oscar Bennett's funeral, life seemed to resume its relentless march forward. 1

The entire country was still abuzz with the news of the canceled wedding ceremony between Amelie and Liam. It was the talk of every social circle, but given the tragedy that had befallen their family, most people were smart enough to hold their tongues, recognizing the delicacy of the situation. After all, Liam and Amelie were already married; the wedding ceremony was just a declaration of that union.

But for Liam, the loss of his grandfather had left a gaping wound in his fragile heart.

Almost a week had passed since he said his final goodbyes to his grandfather, and yet he had not left the bed, consumed by grief.

The once vibrant, determined man had been reduced to a shell of himself, utterly heartbroken and sunk deep in a pit of depression.

Amelie stayed by his side for as long as she could, offering him every ounce of support she



had. But the weight of her responsibilities finally caught up to her. The world did not stop, even for grief, and in the end, she was forced to leave Liam's side to manage the Diamond Group on her own.

"The seven o'clock meeting was canceled, Mrs. Bennett," Austin said quietly as he peeked inside Amelie's office. He offered her a somewhat awkward smile; it was clear that he was nervous.

Amelie lifted her eyes from the computer screen, her voice robotic and noticeably tired.

"Thank you," she responded with a nod, "This leaves me with enough time to finish reviewing these reports. You may go home now, Mr. Hall; it's been a long day."

She returned her focus to the screen, her fingers resuming their steady rhythm on the keyboard. But Austin lingered in the doorway, reluctant to leave just yet.

He cleared his throat, stepping further into the room, and added somewhat timidly. "Uhm... I'm sorry, Mrs. Bennett, I know it's not my place, but you've been working almost nonstop for the last few days... I'm afraid you might collapse at this



point. Let me help you, please. It is my job as well."

Amelie's fingers stilled, her eyes narrowing for a brief moment as she stared at the document in front of her, though her focus had long since drifted away.

Austin wasn't wrong—she was exhausted. The kind of exhaustion that seeped into her bones, that made every movement feel like an enormous effort. There were moments when she feared she might actually drop dead if she allowed herself to even leave this chair.

But the alternative—the thought of stopping, of allowing herself even a moment to think about something other than work—was terrifying. She had seen what grief had done to Liam, how it had consumed him completely, and she couldn't allow herself to fall into that same abyss.

*"The feeling is not foreign for me as well,"* she thought as her mind drifted back to the year both Richard's parents passed away.

She remembered how broken her ex-husband was and how many months it had taken him to finally collect himself back to the man he used to



be. With years, he was finally able to let go and move on but the bitter feeling of loss would occasionally press on both of them even now.

*'I didn't have time to process my own loss when my parents died, thankfully--I guess--I was too young to be able to understand my loss to its full extent. Liam has been strong way too many times for others... He needs someone to be strong for him now.'*

Yes, her husband needed her to be strong, to keep things together. If their roles were reversed, she knew he would do the same.

Letting out a long, weary sigh, Amelie closed her tired eyes and rubbed them, trying to ease the ache that had settled behind the lids.

A soft whining noise caught her attention, and she lowered her gaze to the plush ottoman beside her desk, where Captain Pantaloons, late Oscar Bennett's beloved dog, was curled up on his velvet pillow, half-asleep.

A faint smile tugged at Amelie's lips as she reached over to scratch behind his ear. The small gesture of affection brought a tiny flicker of relief back into her heart. She then looked up



at Austin, who was still watching her, standing awkwardly next to the exit.

"It's time for his walk," Amelie said softly. "Would you take him to the nearby park for me, please? And then maybe... you could grab something to eat for the two of us, and we can share the workload?"

Austin's face lit up with an emotion that was both excitement and relief. He nodded enthusiastically, moving quickly to scoop up Captain Pantaloons, who responded with a sleepy wag of his short tail.

"Of course, Mrs. Bennett," Austin said, cradling the dog gently. He mumbled something about the pup getting chunkier, which drew a genuine, albeit brief, chuckle from Amelie.

"I'll bring back something delicious for dinner," he promised, already heading for the door.

As Austin left the office, Amelie leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes again, the exhaustion weighing heavily on her. The quiet of the room was a stark contrast to the relentless noise inside her mind, and before she knew it, she had drifted off, surrendering to the comfort



of much-needed rest.

She opened her eyes to a soft knock on the door, her heart skipping a beat as she realized she had dozed off.

Her head felt heavy, and for a moment, she struggled to remember where she was. Natalie's voice came from the other side of the door, calm yet persistent. "Mrs. Bennett? Mr. Einar Ingvarsson is here to see you."

Amelie's eyes widened in surprise as she glanced at her watch. It was nearly eight. Why would Einar come to see her so late?

Wiping the remnants of sleep from her eyes, she quickly smoothed her hair and cleared her throat, trying to compose herself before declaring,

"Please, invite him in."

