

185 A Short Break

Liam had never been good at hiding his frustrations, and lately, they seemed to cling to him like a shadow. 1

He had not been sleepwalking for quite some time now, and even though therapy had started to help as well, the stress that hung over him made it all the harder to break free. Amelie saw the wear in his eyes, the tension in his shoulders, and finally, she decided that enough was enough.

The deal with Einar's company had been a looming weight on both of them, but Amelie put her foot down and took control, insisting she would manage the negotiations herself, using the help of the Castillo family.

Liam had protested, of course, but he knew that when his wife made up her mind, there was nothing that could stop her. She had a way of setting her jaw that made him—everyone—fall in line.

Liam had even admitted to his therapist, half-laughing, half-serious, that Amelie's serious face was the scariest of all her expressions.

Amelie sat in bed, her face buried in a novel, while Liam climbed in beside her, his head resting on her thighs as he hugged her waist.

"Let's go away for a few days," he murmured in a gentle voice, but there was an undercurrent of pleading that tugged at the woman's heart.

Without looking up from her book, Amelie answered somewhat absentmindedly, "Away? I don't think we can afford to do that right now. Work has been piling up, and the Christmas charity banquet is practically knocking at our door. I need to start preparing."

"Exactly!" Liam said, a little more whiny this time as he snatched the book out of her hands, forcing her to meet his eyes. "Soon, we are going to be even busier. This is the perfect time for us to take a break while we still can. My therapist said that spending quiet time with you helps, you know... with everything." He paused, his lips curving into a small pout. "And since we didn't even have our honeymoon, I think it will do us both good."

Amelie looked into his stormy gray eyes, the soft lines of worry etched around them, and her seriousness began to melt.

Liam's therapist had said the same to her: that Liam felt calmer when they were together, that their bond was a key part of his healing. And if she were honest with herself, she needed the break too. The constant pressure of work, of managing the company's intricate deals, and caring for Liam had worn her thin.

She smiled down at him, brushing a lock of his dark hair from his forehead. "You know what? You are right. Work has been hard, and I want to help you with your therapy."

She paused, thinking for a moment. "Angelina Castillo is having a birthday party at her family villa by the beach. I was going to decline the invitation because the weather's getting cold, but maybe a little celebration won't hurt. We can head to your villa afterward and stay there for a few days."

Liam's face lit up with excitement, his eyes sparkling as he wrapped his arms tighter around his wife's waist, burying his face in her stomach.

"That's amazing! I'm so glad you agreed to it!"

But suddenly, as if struck by a thought, he pulled back quickly, his expression filled with intense worry. "Wait... maybe I shouldn't hug you so tightly. What if you're already pregnant?" 1



Amelie burst into laughter, shaking her head as she patted him gently on the head. "Don't worry, Liam. A little hug isn't going to hurt me."

His eyes instantly softened as he rested his head back on her thighs, and for a moment, they both just sat in the quiet of the evening, wrapped in the shared warmth. 1

In the cold, darkened room of another home, Samantha sat in a rocking chair, her gaze fixed on the falling snow outside. The winter wind howled softly, brushing against the windows, but her mind was elsewhere—far from the serene scene before her.

Her hands rested on her swollen stomach, her baby due in less than two months. She shifted uncomfortably, a heavy sigh escaping her lips as she glanced at the clock on her phone.

It was well past midnight, and Richard still hadn't come home. The late nights had become more frequent, and she hated that she was left waiting, unsure of what state he would return in. 2

'I told Kyle I'd handle the ballerina,' she thought, furrowing her brows. 'But how? What can I do that wouldn't make things worse? I agreed to his



scheme with the company's shares because I didn't want to drown in debt... but who knows what that will mean for me in the end.'

She stared out at the snow, her thoughts growing even darker. 'I have to be careful now. Richard had become unpredictable, and I can't trust him not to throw me away once the baby is born. I have to keep Kyle on my side, no matter what. I need him as a backup.'

Richard had once been her lifeline, her security, but now? Now, he felt like a threat. She couldn't afford to lose him, but she couldn't fully trust him with her future either.

The door creaked open downstairs, and Samantha tensed, her heart skipping a beat as she listened to Richard's footsteps echo through the house. She stood slowly, her hand still on her stomach, and moved toward the bedroom door.

'I'll give Kyle the shares,' she decided. 'It's the only way to keep him close. As long as I can keep him by my side, I'll have a way out if Richard tries anything.'

She knew she was walking a dangerous line, but what choice did she have? With the baby coming and her position more precarious than ever, she

had to secure her future.

"What are you doing in the dark?" Richard's voice rang in her ears, suddenly pulling her out of her musings. "You should be asleep by now. Don't harm your health."

'Drunk again,' Samantha's brows knitted together in annoyance.

She took a step forward, stretching her arms to offer her husband a hug, but Richard only shook his head and headed straight for the bed.

"Angelina Castillo's birthday party. We are going. Make sure to be on your best behavior." 1

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