

TSBMMOUS 91

Chapter 91: She Paid Him Back With Her Life

Brian had been sitting in the entertainment club, drinking as much as he could, but he was still sober. Anna came in and quickly took his glass away.

“Brian, you must stop drinking.”

Because of Ayla, he had been drinking here every single night, so the wound on his arm wasn't getting any better. He didn't take any medicine nor did he dress his wound.

All he did was drink and smoke till he passed out.

If he carried on like this, his body would eventually give up on him.

Leaning against the sofa, Brian said, “What are you doing here? I'm not drunk.”

Right now, he just wanted to forget everything.

Unfortunately, it didn't seem like he could do it.

“I know you're not drunk, but you've drunk so much, and that wound on your arm is serious. How long do you plan to go on like this? When you gave up on looking for her that day, didn't you convince yourself that she was dead?”

Obviously, Anna could see the despair and dejection in his eyes.

Even if Ayla wasn't there, she couldn't seem to take her place.

No matter what she said, Brian wouldn't listen to her. He didn't say anything else.

It was he who pushed Ayla away.

That woman had always been afraid of him, so she never dared to admit how she felt for him.

He was the one who kept pushing her into desperate situations.

When it was three in the morning, Anna finally drove him back to the villa.

“Anna, you can go home! Jaime will pick me up tomorrow morning.”

Brian stood on the balcony of the second floor, looking at the backyard.

It was her favorite place to stay, and it was also the same place for her to miss the baby he had killed.

Now, he had truly lost everything.

He had never cared about anything since he was a child, but now that he had lost her, he finally realized that he wanted to keep her by his side.

Through Lucas' care, Ayla quickly recovered and her wound had healed.

She was finally able to get out of her bed for a walk, but he still didn't permit her to move around too much.

“Lala, you’re awake.”

Lucas entered her room and noticed that she was standing in front of the window absentmindedly.

“Well, the weather is good today,” Ayla said calmly as she turned to him.

“In that case, let me take you out for a walk!”

Lucas grabbed a coat and put it on her.

Carefully, he helped her go downstairs and walked her towards the garden.

There, she sat on a chair, basking in the sun.

“Mr. Collins, thanks for saving my life.”

In all honesty, he wasn’t fond of her strange behavior these days, but he didn’t want to force her.

He wanted to give her enough time to accept him.

“When you thank me like that, it makes me feel like an outsider.”

A bitter smile appeared on Lucas’ face.

He and Ayla had met a little later than Brian.

Was that the reason she hadn’t developed any feelings for him?

‘No! He was a man, willing to fight to the end to get what he wanted.

“I didn’t expect that I’d survive,” said Ayla.

Her despair was taking away her motivation to live.

“You will always survive.”

Lucas felt it was lucky that his boat had sped up on time.

Otherwise, he wouldn’t have been certain of her survival.

‘Could I? Could I really live a peaceful life after everything that has happened?’ Ayla thought inwardly.

Sadly, her heart now belonged to Brian, and it could no longer be redeemed.

In silence, they sat together.

A servant made two cups of tea and served it to them.

“Lala, have some mild tea. Strong tea isn’t good for your wound.”

He was going to consider every aspect of her comfort and recovery.

Ayla didn’t refuse. She reached for the cup, but the moment she held it, her hand suddenly lost its strength.

The cup fell to the ground, shattering into pieces. She began to tremble, and her face turned pale.

“Lala, are you okay?”

Lucas could tell that her drug addiction was taking effect, so he held her tightly in his arms.

“No! Don’t touch me! I might end up hurting you!”

Gradually, Ayla’s grip on her consciousness faded. She knew that it was because of the drug addiction.

Even if she survived this endeavor, she would still suffer for the rest of her life because of this drug.

Lucas picked her up.

“You’ll be fine.”

Then, he took her back to her room.

“Does it hurt?”

“Ouch! It hurts!”

Ayla huddled up because of the pain, but Lucas kept holding onto her.

“You’ll be fine. Just endure it.”

Even though he was the one who said those words, even he, himself, couldn’t believe them.

The relapse caused by her drug addiction would just become more frequent and serious, but he couldn’t use any drug to relieve her pain.

If she took any more of those drugs, it would only speed up her death. He wanted her to live for a long time.

Moments later, Ayla fainted due to the pain.

Lucas embraced her. She was suffering because of him.

This all happened because he trusted Tatum too much.

Back then, no matter how she would’ve despised him, he should’ve appeared to save her from her fate.

He helped Ayla lie down on the bed and tucked her under the quilt, hoping that her pain would soon dissipate.

He would rather bear all of that pain than see her suffering like this.

It was already afternoon when she finally woke up.

Noticing the anxiety in Lucas’ eyes, she said, “I’m fine.”

Although her voice was weak, she still tried to smile to ease his pain.

“Yes, and you’ll still be fine in the future.”

Lucas stared into her eyes, nodding firmly.

However, Only Ayla, herself, knew that her body was nearing its end.

Eventually, her life would be drained from her little by little as the relapse from the drug consumed her.

Meanwhile, Brian and Jaime were sitting in a coffee shop.

“Mr.Clark, Tatum has hidden himself.We’ve already dealt a lot of damage to him last time.I’m sure he won’t do anything bad to us for now,” said Jaime.

Although, he believed that saying all of that was a little too late.

If it weren’t for Ayla, Brian wouldn’t have attacked Tatum so soon.

“It’s too late,” Brian said, sipping his coffee.

He had tasted enough bitterness after losing the woman he loved.

“Mr.Clark, do you still miss her? I heard that you had let go of Arlene.Will you also let Clayton go?”

Jaime was worried about Brian.

Because of being a successful businessman, he must be ruthless and mustn’t show any signs of hesitation nor weaknesses.

Unfortunately, Ayla became his greatest weakness.

Jaime prayed that he wouldn’t have to face such a terrible predicament again.

Brian put down his coffee and said, “She paid with her life.”

What he meant was that he no longer cared about his grudges against Clayton, and no hatred was more important than Ayla’s death.

His wretched hatred was paid with two lives.

One was his unborn child’s, and the other was Ayla’s.

At this point, Jaime didn’t say anything else.

Eventually, Brian would forget all about her, and he would be back to who he must be in the future.

Later that day, dressed in black, Anna came into Brian’s office while he was busy at his desk.

“Brian,” she greeted.

“You’re here.Have a seat! I still need half an hour.”

He just raised his eyes to glance at her for a moment, then he went back to his work right away.

“I’ll wait for you to finish.”

Anna came here because she received a call from him.

He had asked her to accompany him to the charity auction. He must've gotten over Ayla! At the charity auction, Brian and Anna arrived, hand-in-hand.

On such an occasion, running into Hayden and his wife, Toby, and Molly was a norm.

"Mr. Clark, long time no see. Isn't Mrs. Clark with you today?" asked Hayden.

There was a reason he asked that question.

He had heard that something had happened to Ayla before he could find out more about her origins.

"No, she isn't," Brian replied indifferently.

Hayden paid far more attention to her than he did.

He remembered when Jaime told him that Hayden was conducting a thorough investigation of Ayla's life.

Chapter 92: Their Broken Promise

Brian held Anna close to his body as he looked at Hayden and his wife, then turned to Toby and his wife.

There was no more need for him to hide anything.

Besides, he wanted to see how they would react.

"Something bad happened to Lala."

He didn't have to explicitly say what happened to her.

Those words were enough to verify the rumors that had been spreading recently.

After all, Hayden was an experienced and well-informed man.

It didn't even faze him when he heard what Brian said.

On the other hand, Toby was shocked.

Something had actually happened to Lala.

The last time he saw her, she was with Lucas.

But when he heard Brian confirm the news so calmly, it confused him.

Looking at Toby, Molly asked, "Are you worried about her?"

It had been a long time since they had last seen each other.

However, when Brian mentioned Ayla out of the blue, it felt like a stone was weighing down her chest.

Toby shook his head.

"No, I'm not."

He wanted to forget what must forget, but he was having a hard time doing that.

After the brief conversation, Anna and Brian went to their seats to sit down.

“Brian, it seems that Mr. Smith cares about Miss Woodsen a lot.”

It never occurred to her that so many people cared about Ayla.

“Don’t mention her anymore.”

It wasn’t because Brian had moved on from her; it was because he didn’t want to hear her name anymore.

Ayla was the thorn in his heart that he could never remove.

Anna nodded in response.

Although she understood that it didn’t mean Brian had moved on from Ayla, she would rather have his attention all to herself.

If that woman was no longer there, she would be able to stay by his side forever.

Soon, the charity auction started.

Brian sat there, bidding for every item at a high price.

Looking at him, Hayden noticed the strange changes in his behavior.

Holding his hand, Anna said, “Brian, stop bidding.”

To her, it was obvious what he was thinking.

He was buying all those things he didn’t even want for such a high price just so he could donate more money.

Was this his way of atoning for his sins? It was absolutely unnecessary.

However, she still felt bad for him.

Ayla had changed him so much.

“That sapphire necklace I just bought is for you.”

Brian had always been generous to Anna.

After he bought the sapphire necklace for nearly ten million, he gave it to her and wore it around her neck on the spot.

At that time, Molly also wanted to have the necklace.

Sadly, Brian had taken it away.

When he put the necklace on Anna, all the media reporters aimed their cameras at them.

“Honey, isn’t it terrible for a man to change his mind so easily?”

Molly said this because she wanted to know whether Toby had changed his mind. She wanted to confirm whether he still loved Ayla, or her, his own wife.

Brian might have loved Ayla, but he was still a man whom many women dreamed of having. It was only natural that he wasn't so devoted to her.

Now that Ayla was gone, he still managed to show his affection to Anna, and even gave her such a valuable sapphire necklace.

"Molly, are you worried?"

Toby looked at her intently.

He owed this woman so much.

Had his mind changed or not? Ayla had disappeared, and there was no information from Brian after he scoured through the island for several days.

Anyone in Brian's position would eventually give up the search and forget her, wouldn't he?

"I trust you," said Molly.

She had loved him her whole life, so she tried her hardest to keep him by her side.

Toby embraced her, but said nothing.

Meanwhile, Ayla was sitting on the balcony of the second floor.

The villa she was staying in was located in the suburban district.

It didn't stand out that much, given that it was surrounded by several luxurious villas, but it was comfortable.

Lucas was busy today.

When she went downstairs by herself, she saw that the servant had placed a newspaper on the tea table.

She casually took it and flipped through its pages.

Seconds later, she saw that the headline was about Brian.

There was a photo of him and Anna, looking affectionately at each other.

The necklace around her neck was eye-catching.

Without her in the picture, Brian and Anna would be happy.

But she didn't understand why he had agreed to meet Tatum back then.

There was no need for them to meet again.

It was good that he never got her back.

Perhaps that was the last time they would ever see each other for the rest of their lives.

Ayla had been staring at the photo for a really long time.

Eventually, Lucas came in and saw her staring at the newspaper absentmindedly.

He deliberately told one of the maids to put it there, so that when she saw the headline, she would finally give up her love for Brian.

And soon, her heart would belong to him.

"Lala." Lucas walked towards her.

"Why are you reading that? Just stop looking at it."

Ayla allowed him to take the newspaper from her hands.

"I'm fine. I've already known that this is how things would end up."

In reality, her heart was aching. She had believed that her love for Brian wasn't this strong, but she never expected that she couldn't forget him.

Gazing into her eyes, Lucas said, "If you want to see him, I can drive you there. You can look at him from a distance."

It was a difficult thing to forget someone.

The more she remembered him, the more likely Lucas would fail to earn her love.

For now, he had to take a few steps back in order to move forward.

Over the past few days, the drugs that had been injected into her body took effect several times.

"No, that's not necessary."

Ayla shook her head. She didn't want to see him anymore.

In everyone's eyes, she no longer existed.

Lucas held her in his arms.

"Are you disappointed, Lala? From now on, I'll always stay by your side."

He decided that he would never let her go because he wanted to be with her for a lifetime.

"From now on? How long do you think I still have left to live?"

A bitter smile appeared on Ayla's lips.

"No matter how long it could be, I'll stay right by your side," Lucas promised.

However, if Tatum found out that she was with him, there was no way that he would let them go.

And if she found out about his relationship with Tatum Green, would she understand and forgive him? He had done everything to hide that fact from her because he didn't want to lose her.

Brian hadn't gone home to his villa for several days.

He had been staying at his office all this time.

There were too many things in his home that reminded him of her.

The flowers she had placed in the living room had now withered.

He had told Maria to throw them away already.

"Brian."

Anna entered his office.

"How about we have dinner together tonight?"

Looking at her, he said, "Let's go to the club together "Why don't you get some rest tonight? I heard from Jaime that you haven't slept for days."

She didn't want him to be stressed out because of being too miserable. If this was his way of forgetting Ayla, how could she help him?

"I'm fine," Brian said with a faint smile.

At night, in the bustling entertainment club, Toby appeared.

"Mr. Clark, can we talk?"

Moments later, he and Brian were sitting face to face in a private room.

"Do you want to talk to me about Ayla?"

He was well aware that Toby was having a hard time forgetting her as well.

"Is there really no news about her? Is she dead?"

It took Toby a lot of guts to ask those questions.

"I refuse to believe that she's dead," Brian remarked.

Until now, he still thought the same.

"But she fell into the sea and there haven't been any leads to her whereabouts, right?" Toby replied.

Toby had done everything to inquire about her whereabouts.

The thought that she was truly dead horrified him.

Brian drank the entire contents of his glass in one gulp.

"She did fall into the sea, but I never managed to find her body."

“It’s all your fault! You should’ve let her go. If you had just released her, she wouldn’t have suffered like this, and we wouldn’t have lost her!”

Toby hated Brian to the core.

This ruthless, cruel man was the one who made Ayla suffer the most.

“Mr. Brown, please don’t forget that you’re the son-in-law of the Smith family now. There are certain things and people that you shouldn’t concern yourself with.”

It was true, Toby need not meddle with Brian and Ayla’s affairs, let alone judge them. What she said to him was still vivid in Brian’s mind. The reason she dove into the sea was for him.

“No matter what happens between me and Lala in the future, my love for her won’t change. You are a heartless man. There’s no way you’d understand the bond that we’ve shared since childhood. Back then, we hardly had anything. The only things we had were our sincere love, and our deepest commitments to each other,” said Toby.

He believed that the relationship they had was the most meaningful of all.

Chapter 93: He Gave His Love To Lala

“You’re the one who didn’t stay true to your promise to Lala!” Brian exclaimed, while pointing accusingly at Toby.

Feeling the anger rolling off his body, he kept his steely gaze trained at Toby.

Toby was rendered speechless as Brian’s words rang true in his ears.

‘I did break my promise to Ayla, ‘ he thought regrettably.

However, it was undeniable that between the two of them, Brian hurt her the most.

“There’s no excuse for what I did. I know that and I’m truly sorry for her. But you seem to forget that you caused her so much pain too,”

Toby managed to say.

At that, Brian stared at him, his eyes a mirror of questions.

“Lala loves you so much she couldn’t bear to leave you,” he continued.

Falling in love with someone wholeheartedly was no easy feat for a woman, but once she did, she would love that man deeply for as long as she could endure.

Reminiscing the past, Toby could still remember how Ayla decided to leave everything behind for the man she truly loved.

Like the selfless woman she was, Ayla made sure he would be fine despite her leaving.

“You and Molly have my blessing, Toby. I’m letting you go so you can be happy with her,” he recalled Ayla saying.

Toby's words pierced through Brian's heart like a double-edged sword.

It dawned on him how much Ayla chose to give up just to be with him.

"You see, she chose you over me. She loved you so much and gave you all that she has, yet you did nothing but cause her pain. I will never forgive you for this! You missed your chance at having that one true love for wasting what she did for you. Now you lost her and you will pay the price," Toby vehemently said, as he left without a backward glance.

At that moment, Brian began to realize Ayla's efforts and sacrifice to keep the baby back then.

After he forced her to have an abortion, she demanded a litigation procedure out of sheer desperation. She gave up the hope to become a mother.

A drunk and wasted Brian was sprawled on the lounge when Anna arrived at the private room.

It was a first seeing him this way, since he knew how to control his drinking.

'Toby must have said something to make him drink this much, ' Anna thought disapprovingly.

"Brian, you have drunk too much. Let me drive you home," she said calmly as she held Brian by his upper arms.

Anna was trying to get him up the seat when his warm solid arms went around her slim waist and held her tightly.

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry!"

Brian cried out.

Being drunk didn't help at all.

Memories of his difficult conversation with Toby still weighed him down and he mistakenly thought of Anna as Ayla.

Anna knew he was thinking about Ayla but she couldn't find it in herself to refuse him. She was willing to be a substitute.

When their lips met, she could taste a hint of spice from the wine he had been drinking.

"Forgive me," he muttered while keeping his lips close to hers.

Anna could only manage a slight nod as fresh tears wet her expressive eyes and streaked her supple cheeks.

Knowing he was still in love with a dead woman hurt her.

She had loved him for so long and she only wished he could love her back.

"Brian," Anna replied softly, her voice a tad louder than a whisper.

She would think of the consequences later, but on that night, she would be willing to do anything for him.

The next morning, Brian woke up and found himself lying in the bed of the lounge with Anna closely beside him.

He tried hard to remember what happened last night but his drunkenness made everything a blur.

Anna immediately attended to him, her voice laced with concern.

“Brian, how are you feeling? Do you have a headache?”

Brian shook his head and replied, “I’m sorry. I drank too much last night.”

He let his eyes roam around Anna’s body and the bruises were evident on her delicate skin.

He knew immediately that he lost control.

“I’m perfectly fine. Don’t worry about these bruises,” she assured him.

Anna knew she could have refused and said no if she didn’t want it to happen, but she chose not to.

Her love for him made her willing to do anything for him.

Without a word, Brian gathered his clothes and started getting dressed.

Anna didn’t want to waste this opportunity so she stood up and embraced him from behind.

In a decisive voice she pleaded, “Brian, Ayla is already dead. Let me be with you and make you happy. You deserve it! I’m willing to be her substitute.”

Brian stilled and thought of what she said.

He hadn’t slept with any woman since Ayla disappeared.

Last night was an accident, fueled by strong emotions and heaps of liquor.

Should he allow it to happen again? He knew he wouldn’t be capable of loving anyone else after what happened with Ayla.

“Should I keep Anna and let her be with me for as long as possible?” he pondered.

He turned around and faced her.

“Anna, you don’t have to tie yourself up with me. You can choose the life you want. One where you won’t have to settle for being second.”

Brian pushed her away to break free from her embrace.

“You’ve always done so much for me and I don’t deserve it.”

“No, don’t shut me out! I’m willing to do this for you. Even if you won’t love me back, give me a chance to make you feel my love. I have always loved you,” she declared passionately.

Anna’s feelings for him grew stronger over the years. She wouldn’t dare give up over his words and risk not having a chance at being with him finally.

Brian gazed at her fondly and insisted, “I have held you back for many years.

It's about time that you choose your own path and think about your future."

Undeterred by his dismissal, she continued, "I don't care about the future. I've only had eyes for you ever since we met. I couldn't possibly want anyone else but you."

For Anna, her world revolved around him.

She owed him her life so living and dying for him didn't sound so bad after all.

Ayla's death devastated Brian and she witnessed how painful it was for him.

Anna would rather fall into the sea instead of Ayla, if it meant he wouldn't have to feel that kind of pain again.

That was how much she loved Brian.

She would always put him first.

With his resolve melting at Anna's fervent words, Brian held her in his arms tightly again.

"But I don't have it in me to love you or anyone else anymore," he repeated.

He never thought he'd fall in love before but that changed when he met Ayla.

He knew that this great love would also cause him the greatest pain.

That was why he couldn't bring himself to love again after what happened.

Anna completely understood where he was coming from.

"I don't need you to reciprocate my feelings. Just give me a chance to love you the way you deserve to be loved." She said all this with utmost certainty.

She'd never been surer of anything in her life than at that moment.

"What if I destroy her eventually?" Brian thought about this possibility too, but with her clear determined eyes looking up at him, he couldn't deny her anymore and finally relented.

Ayla was sweating profusely as she curled up on her bed.

The sharp tingling from her bones spread like wildfire all over her body.

"It hurts too much!" she cried.

She didn't know if she could handle this agonizing pain any longer.

For twice each day, she endured the painful torture that rendered her weak every time.

Despite the pain, dying was the last thing on her mind.

She still wanted to see Brian happy with his life.

“Perhaps he and Anna would get married soon, ‘ she thought.

But unless she was sure that he truly found happiness, she wouldn’t think of quitting just yet.

Every time she went into relapse, her mind would be flooded with all things about Brian.

She missed him terribly.

He was sometimes tender with her while always ruthless to others.

Although there were times when his dominance and indifference would surface, she was lucky enough to see his soft vulnerable side too.

Ayla had to roll out of bed and down to the floor. She couldn’t bear the pain at all.

Hearing the noise from outside, Lucas rushed into the room and found her face twisted in agony.

“Lala,” he called.

He helped her up carefully and leaned her against his broad chest.

Willing her to relax, he patted her back repeatedly.

“Lala, hold on. It’ll be over soon,” he reassured her in a calm soothing voice.

Ayla kept crying, her tears cascading down her frail face.

“It hurts, Lucas. What should I do to make it stop? It hurts too much.”

Full of sympathy for her, he replied, “I’m sorry you have to go through this. I’m right here with you. It will pass eventually.”

No amount of assurances could ease her pain right now.

‘It’s all my fault. I should’ve protected her from this, ‘ he thought guiltily.

“I don’t want to die. I really don’t want to die,” she repeated, her voice etched with fear and helplessness.

Ayla clutched his sleeves tightly.

She wanted to live on for much longer, as she wanted to see more of Brian even just from the magazines or TV.

“You will be fine. I know you will be.”

It was clear to Lucas that although Ayla had only been injected twice, the effect of the drugs had already spread to the bone marrow.

As long as she tried her hardest to endure it, the pain would fade eventually.

Ayla couldn’t handle the pain anymore and fainted after nearly an hour of torture.

In the past month, she lost weight drastically.

If this went on further, he couldn't guarantee that she'd be able to hold on until the drug addiction was cured.

It was already noon when she woke up.

Lucas positioned himself beside her on the bed and took her in his arms.

"Lucas," she called softly.

"Are you feeling better now?" he asked.

He constantly feared that her condition would become fatal.

Each time she woke up, he felt a great sense of relief, especially upon hearing her voice no matter how weak it was.

"Yes, I'm fine."

Ayla smiled warmly at him, her radiant face much different from when she doubled over in pain hours ago.

Looking out the window, she felt comfortable when she saw the sun rays.

It meant that another day passed and she was able to survive.

'Live one more day, ' she kept it as a mantra in her mind.

With all that she'd been experiencing, this humble goal seemed like the greatest one she had to attain yet.

"It's better for you to lie down and take some rest," Lucas said to her.

After helping her get settled on the bed, he went out of the room and fetched the food that the servant prepared.

It was unclear how long she could keep going.

Her body had grown even weaker each time her disease relapsed.

Still, she didn't want to disappoint Lucas for all that he had done for her.

That was why she always managed to finish the food despite the struggle.

Lucas gazed adoringly at Ayla while she ate.

With her being relaxed like this, he believed everything would be fine in the future.

The comfortable silence was interrupted by the sound of the phone ringing.

It was Tatum on the other end.

"I have to answer this call. Enjoy your meal," Lucas said.

Ayla simply nodded and he went out of the room to take the call.

Alone with her thoughts, she knew Lucas had already done a lot for her.

She could also see how she seemed to be dragging him down with her.

'Do we have to keep going like this?' she asked herself.

Chapter 94: It Was A Long Separation .

Ayla got up from the bed and went to the study.

Meanwhile, Lucas was standing in the study, talking on the phone.

Little did he know that the door wasn't firmly closed.

"Dad, I'm not gonna go back right now. I'll go when I want to go back. You don't have to force me."

Tatum had lost everything because Brian successfully foiled every one of his plans, so he needed to ask for Lucas' help.

In truth, Lucas wasn't opposed to the idea of going back, he was just concerned about Ayla.

If she weren't suffering from the drug addiction right now, he might consider coming back.

And considering the fact that Tatum was the one who made her suffer, Lucas bore a bit of grudge against him.

No matter how much Tatum had helped him in the past, he was still the one who had hurt his beloved woman.

"No matter how busy you may be, you can still find the time to come home, Lucas," said Tatum.

"I said I'm not going back. End of discussion," Lucas said, turning his head towards the window.

"Besides, this is all your fault. I need some time to adjust."

"It's not my fault. I never wanted Ayla to die. I just wanted Brian to give into my demands!"

Tatum I explained. However, Lucas refused to listen to him.

"I'm gonna hang up now. I have some things to do."

Hurriedly, he dropped the call because when he turned around, he saw that Ayla was there.

"Lucas, if you have things to do, you should go back. You don't have to stay with me all the time. It's no big deal!" she said with a smile.

During the past month, Lucas stayed by her side almost every minute of every day, which made her feel guilty. She didn't want to impose on him.

"Lucas, I'll take good care of myself. And when I get better, I'll leave."

"No!"

He felt so bad when he saw the look on her face.

There was no way he could allow Ayla to leave on her own.

She would just end up suffering even more.

Besides, he had the capacity to provide the woman he loved with a life of comfort. Ayla wasn't sure whether she could survive or not, so she thought that Lucas should just leave and forget about her.

She had something she wanted to do, and it was to see Brian's face every now and then.

This was good enough for her.

As Lucas stared at her, he realized that she didn't love him, but she was immensely grateful to him.

Eventually she would want to leave him and return to Brian's side.

However, before that could happen, he must gain her love. No matter what might happen to Ayla in the future, he wanted her to be his woman and his legal wife.

At Lucas' insistence, she decided to stay in the villa, and he chose not to go abroad at this time.

One day, he would avenge his family, but now was not the time.

For him, Ayla's safety and health was the most important thing.

He had lived in the shadow of the past because of years of bearing hatred in his heart.

And now, he had changed; all because of Ayla.

He wanted to feel this faint warmth; a warmth that only she could give.

Molly walked into Toby's office, wearing a disappointed look.

"Honey."

"What's going on?"

He was currently preoccupied with his work.

He hadn't forgotten about Lala, but he prayed that she was still alive somewhere in this world.

"I went to the hospital today, but they said that I'm still not pregnant." Molly sat beside him. She had always dreamed of having a baby, but alas, she couldn't get pregnant.

It was all because her menstrual cycle was in disarray, and every time she visited the hospital, she would just end up becoming more disappointed.

Toby stood up and walked to her side.

"Molly, thinking about having a baby is putting you under a lot of stress. If you feel bored staying at home, perhaps you can go out to work."

A baby? There was no way he would have a baby with Molly while Lala's life was still in danger! Hearing what he said, Molly felt a bit comforted.

After all, he wasn't disappointed in her.

He was a man who adored children, and yet she couldn't provide him with a child after so long.

The doctor said that she couldn't get pregnant because she was too stressed, so she needed to relax.

"Okay. Then I want to be your assistant. Is that okay?"

Molly majored in management, but she wasn't fond of working.

She had hoped to become a competent housewife, but she knew nothing.

There were so many servants in their home, so she never really needed to learn house work.

With a smile, Toby replied, "Sure. You can do anything you want."

There were many secretaries in his office, so she wouldn't be the only one.

Perhaps she could stay with him, so that he could divert her attention from having a baby.

After walking out of the company, Brian sat in his car, while Anna was seated in the back seat.

"Brian, I have prepared your luggage."

"Thanks." He smiled at her.

He was going on a business trip for a month, so he permitted her to come with him.

In a black car nearby, Ayla was sitting in the back seat and watching them.

Was he going somewhere? Did that mean she wouldn't be able to see him for a long time? Because of that, she felt disheartened.

When Brian's car drove away, Ayla turned her head.

Tears started rolling down her cheeks.

Although she wished Brian happiness, seeing them together was still breaking her heart.

Never did she imagine that she would love him so deeply.

Ayla opened the door, got out of the car, and stood at the pavement.

Meanwhile, Brian was looking out the window, but he didn't see her at all.

This time, they just passed each other by, but little did they know that this would be a long separation.

"Will you be happy? You have to live a happy life!"

She didn't have the courage to approach him and say that she was still alive.

Although Brian said that he didn't need a child, he just didn't want her to have a child, so that Anna could give him one.

Stepping out of the car, Lucas looked at Ayla, and said, "He's far away now."

He noticed that her heart was aching and that she was longing for Brian, so he wanted to take her away. Ayla wiped away her tears.

"In the future, I won't cry anymore."

Tears were a sign of weakness.

After going through so much pain, she should be able to bear anything, so she wasn't afraid anymore.

Now, she had more than enough courage to withstand anything.

After that, Lucas took her back to the car.

"You've been out for a long time today. I'm worried your body might not be able to bear it."

Ayla had been waiting outside Brian's office for over two hours, but she only saw him for a brief moment, watching as he entered his car with Anna and left with a smile on their faces "Okay, let's go!"

Now that she had seen Brian, it should be enough for Ayla. She wouldn't have any more regrets.

From now on, she was going to live her own life.

No matter how far she was away from him, she would still end up missing him. However, she might not even live that long.

Back at the villa, Ayla sat on the sofa.

"Lucas, are you leaving?" Lucas was reluctant to leave because of her.

Even if she kept telling him to leave, he always refused.

She thought of him as a dear friend now, so she would stay by his side. She would follow him to anywhere he went for the rest of her short life.

"Don't you want to leave?" Ayla's question took him aback.

Even if he wanted to leave, he wanted to bring her along with him.

However, she was unwilling to go out for the past couple of months.

The reason she said she wanted to see Brian today was because she wanted to leave this city.

"Even though I'm unwilling to leave, I still don't want my life to end here." Ayla looked at him intently.

"Will you help me?"

It didn't matter where she might end up in, all that mattered to her was leaving this place.

This place was full of her painful memories, and she wasn't going to let her life end in pain here.

Nodding vigorously, Lucas said, "Of course! No matter where you wish to go, I'll take you there!"

Chapter 95: He Was Unforgettable To Her

A young lady was walking along a busy street of Milan in Italy. She was over dressed a little due to the cold.

She was in a green base shirt and a gray skirt, a pair of silky black stockings that was underneath to protect her legs from the cold and a pair of high heeled boots to show off her style.

To finish it off, she had a light beige coat and a purple scarf that covered her fair neck.

The slight wind that was present brushed past her, blowing her long hair slightly with it. The slight smile on her face made her look more elegant when she walked through the streets.

A few men had even catcalled her though she had ignored them all.

The young lady was none other than Ayla.

She sauntered into a coffee shop.

It was time for her afternoon tea time and being a caffeine lover, she needed a cup of coffee accompanied by that piece of tiramisu that she loved.

She came here every day for an hour and looked out of the window at the people who came in the coffee shop and left it.

She also looked up at the sky and watched the clouds shape into different shapes that she always tried to figure out while thinking of her future life after all that she had gone through in the past.

In short, this was her new favorite spot.

She had come to Milan two years ago to start a new life.

For the first year here, she had been suffering from the relapses of the drug addiction, and she had thought that her body would never recover.

Never in her wildest imagination did she expect that she could recover all of a sudden.

She would never forget that stormy day. She had stayed indoors in the small apartment that she had rented out with the little money that she had been left with.

Lucas had insisted on renting the apartment across from hers so that they could become neighbors.

That day, her hourly employee had left.

The pain in her body was less excruciating so there was no need to call Lucas.

She recalled that, that day was special for Brian for it was his engagement party to Anna. She had never expected that the couple would take this long to finally get engaged but here the day was when she was finally going to witness the long awaited event.

Brian was still that same handsome man with cold features, although he looked like he had lost a lot of weight.

She looked at him on the screen and her gaze couldn't avert away from his interlocked hands with Anna's.

Brian was a famous man but since she left Antawood, this was the first time to see him on media.

'Perhaps, my being here is the reason why I've not heard of news about him all these times?' she thought to herself.

But, he was Mr.Clark, a world famous man.Even if she was in Italy, there should've been news about him.She could only tell herself that maybe no news was good news.

Now that she finally see him again on TV, she only felt pain in her heart.

The tightness in her chest made her feel ill.

The air she took in felt like razor blades cutting her insides.

The ache in her heart made her wish for death as she read the news that had popped up on TV, the news of Brian's engagement ceremony.

While looking at the smile that had cracked up on his lips, she huddled up in her bed, bearing the pain that was becoming more intense by the minute.

She thought she could die without regrets after witnessing his happiness.

When Lucas had dropped by her apartment later that day, she had already fainted on the floor.

She had bitten her lips with her teeth causing them to bleed out.

The look on Lucas' face showed that he was heartbroken.

'How much pain she must have endured before she fainted, ' he thought sadly.

Lucas had rushed her to the hospital, and miraculously, she had suffered no more relapses since that time.

She had changed; her body had filled up.She was no longer skinny! After a year, she had stopped working the part time fashion designer job she had found.She instead joined school so as to improve her skills and perfect them to topnotch which she succeeded for one of the best and largest fashion companies had offered her a job.

She had changed her name too.

Everyone called her by the name Wenny now.

To most people, Ayla was dead.

Lucas was the only one who knew her real name.

This particular afternoon was a warm one.

The sun that was shining brightly made her feel warm all over and happy too.

The light smile on her face was a result of this.

Walking back to her apartment, she saw Lucas who was leaning on her door.

He was in a black suit and his features showed how exhausted he was.

“When did you get back?”

Ayla smiled as she stood in front of him. “I just got back and I wanted to see you,”

Lucas replied as he threw the cigarette b**t away that he had been smoking.

He had gone to Thailand and had stayed there for a month.

Even with the distance between them, he had been worried about her being all alone.

“I’m fine,” Ayla replied, the smile on her face never faltering.

“Come in and have a cup of coffee!” she offered.

They were neighbors after all and it wasn’t new to her when Lucas had dropped by to check up on her.

He had most of his meals and coffee in her house and she didn’t mind at all.

They were just friends and they weren’t in a relationship yet.

Lucas didn’t want to force her; he wanted her to love him back willingly.

The two sat on the lounge chair on the balcony.

Lucas held a cup of fragrant coffee in his hands while Ayla held a glass of clear water instead.

“Have you been working recently? I called but no one answered.”

Lucas was aware of the fact that Ayla didn’t like to use her cell phone, and she seldom took it with her when she went out, so he only called the landline number that was in her apartment.

Ayla nodded, “Yes. There will be a show next month. I have several clothes to prepare.”

It wasn’t her own fashion line but since she was a beginner, doing this was going to help her career a lot.

“But don’t work too hard. You have lost some weight recently,”

Lucas commented.

He felt sorry for her.

But at the same time he was proud of the achievements she had accomplished.

Her progress was slow but still, she had done it without a doubt.

Ayla touched her cheek and stated, “I haven’t lost weight.”

“No matter how bad the situation is, I’ve not suffered as much as compared to the previous year,” she mumbled.

“Lala,” Lucas whispered.

He reached out and held her hand, with deep affection in his eyes.

Ayla withdrew her hand.

She couldn’t accept the love Lucas offered her.

In the past two years, she hadn’t pointed it out though in everything that Lucas had done for her, she saw how deeply the man had fallen for her.

“You still can’t accept me? Why can’t you forget him?” he questioned, his voice barely a whisper.

Lucas seldom mentioned Brian in front of her, but it had been so long, so she should have forgotten him.

“I have nothing to do with him now,”

Ayla replied though her tone wasn’t the same.

Brian and Anna had been engaged, so she and Brian had no connections.

Moreover, her relationship with Brian had long been broken two years ago.

Lucas walked up to her and held her in his arms.

Looking at the scenery below the balcony, he whispered only for her ears to hear, “From now on, I’ll be with you and I’ll love you, okay?”

He hoped to see her nod. He had been waiting for her in the past two years.

“Why me?” she questioned.

Ayla broke off of the embrace and looked at him and uttered, “You know my past very well. So, I don’t want to...” She trailed off and looked away from him.

He had been so good to her, but she didn’t deserve him.

Women were always single-minded, she was no exception, for her body and heart had been given to Brian.

Even if she could not be with Brian, she could not be with another man.

Lucas leaned his forehead on hers. She could feel his breath fan her face.

“No! I don’t care about what you have been through. The past is in the past. I love you, so much!”

He confessed his feelings out to her.

Ayla shook her head to disagree with him.

Her heart belonged to another and there was nothing that would come out of this relationship if she said “yes” to him.

“I will only hurt you!”

She always felt that she was an ominous woman, because wherever she went, the people around her would be unfortunate.

That was also one of the few reasons why she had decided to not get too close to Lucas during the past two years.

"I'm not afraid of that. You should know that my love for you has gradually grown during the past two years," he muttered out; his heart yearned for her to say "yes" to him.

He leaned forwards and placed his lips on hers.

He gently kissed her as all of his insides screamed at him and at the same time he hoped that she would not push him away.

He had been patient for long and finally, this was his chance to be with her.

"Lala, don't refuse me!" he whispered as he finally broke the kiss.

He leaned forward and lifted her from the floor only to carry her in bridal style to her bedroom.

"Lucas...Don't do this..." she whispered.

She did not want to go through this, not now and not with him Ayla's words made him stop.

He looked at her, but she couldn't tell the exact expression on his face.

"Lala, I'm telling you the truth. We can get married right away. Isn't it good for us to be a legitimate couple?" he inquired.

If she needed reassurance, then, marriage was the best option at the moment.

He set her back on the floor and leaned forward to kiss her. He rolled his tongue in her mouth to deepen the kiss.

She knew that he hadn't been with any woman in the past two years.

This man was simply desperate and that was another reason why she couldn't be with him.

Chapter 96: Unconditional Love

Ayla's protests were in vain as she was trapped in Lucas' strong arms.

"Lucas, please stop. We can't do that! No!" she murmured.

Subconsciously, she resisted his approach towards her.

In the past two years, nothing had changed between them.

She still couldn't give him a place in her heart.

She didn't love him and that was the bottom line.

"Lala, you have to forget him, okay? You are a mere footnote in the history of his life. How can you still love him?"

For two years he endeavored to make her forget Brian. He was becoming impatient.

The last time he had met Brian, he saw that although he was still with Anna, their relationship was more of a business partnership.

Their engagement too was just a social spectacle.

This was cause for concern.

Ayla was no longer some pauper. She could have anything her heart desired. She shook her head.

Whether she chose to forget Brian or not was her personal matter.

It did not concern Lucas. She simply couldn't accept him.

"Lala, talk to me!"

A salty, astringent taste spread around his lips.

"Lucas, if you want me to feel indebted to you for all that you did for me these past two years, then take my body! Objectify me to your heart's content! If not, then leave me alone!"

She could never repay him for all that he had done for her.

If all he wanted was her body, then he could claim it.

She had lost so much that nothing mattered to her anymore. Her words echoed in his mind.

Did he still have to end up forcing her after two years of pursuing her? This was not what he had bargained for! She pulled up her clothes and said, "Lucas, you are well aware of my checkered past. I am no angel. My health is deteriorating and I am unable to conceive. I can never be a mother. My being with you will only bring you more misery."

He felt and understood her pain.

She had shared everything with him.

There were no secrets.

What stunned Lucas most was her revelation that she could not have a baby.

"Was it because of him?"

He sank into stunned silence for a while.

Ayla stared at the vastness outside then clarified, "No. It's my choice."

The loss of her baby had filled her with fear.

Lucas gazed at her and said, "I don't care. I love you more than life itself. It doesn't matter if we don't have children."

Like Brian, he didn't care.

But that was the reason for their breakup, anyway.

Ayla shook her head sadly, "But I care."

If she loved a man, all she hoped was to have a complete family with him.

But since she couldn't give birth now, she didn't want to love anyone anymore.

Lucas held her hand and said, "You are still so stubborn."

He was acquainted with her stubborn disposition so he was unprepared to give up so easily.

He had waited patiently for two years and didn't mind waiting a little longer.

Over the past two years, Brian had sprung back on his feet.

He had achieved one success after another and his businesses had entered the global market.

With his diligence, he had made strides in his career and tested new areas of business.

Because of what Tatum had done to Ayla, Brian had lost interest in transaction of drugs.

Jaime was the only person who could help him around it.

Anna entered with a document.

Over a year ago, she was promoted to special assistant to Brian.

Managing the entertainment club was not her only job.

Now she could work more closely with Brian.

"Brian, here is the paraphernalia for this morning's meeting. There is a meeting in the multi-functional hall on the third floor of the City Project Conference Center at 3 o'clock this afternoon."

"Yes, I know." Brian had become an international icon in business.

He was manipulating the markets in most spheres. He now had his eye on acquiring the rights for the road development project of Antawood.

Securing it would see him singing all the way to the bank.

It didn't bother him much.

He was pretty confident of the outcome.

"Brian, I've heard from a very reliable source that the Smith Group has also placed a tender for this project,"

Anna informed him.

Over the past two years, the Smith Group offered strong competition to the Clark Group.

They purposefully tendered for the same projects.

Both groups appeared to be equally pitted against each other.

Brian knew that he would suffer no losses.

Toby, on the other hand, was determined to challenge Brian at any cost.

He was unconcerned. He knew that Toby was doing this for Ayla.

“It’s not unexpected that the Smith Group would tender for this project.”

The Smith Group had expanded its business as a result of the competition offered by the Clark Group.

In spite of this, they were not developing as well as the Clark Group.

“Brian, if the Smith Group steals this project from right under our noses, will we spare them?”

She didn’t want him to concede to Toby yet again.

Brian put down his pen and looked at her.

“Don’t worry. They don’t have the power to execute that yet.”

She looked at his calm, over confident disposition. This very attitude was responsible for the company scaling such great heights!

“Oh, by the way, there is a fashion show being held by Starlight Fashion Hub, a fashion design company in Milan, Italy, next month. If you are free, it would be great if you could represent us.”

He had received the invitation earlier but did not confirm his attendance due to lack of time.

But it also did not seem right for him not to attend since they were always so co-operative.

“Aren’t you going?”

Anna only preferred going overseas if Brian accompanied her.

But the new product launch of the Starlight Fashion Hub in Milan was equally important to bolster the clothing company of the Clark Group.

“I’m not sure. You go ahead and plan your schedule.”

He had neglected to attend these high profile social events over the past two years.

Mainly because his work was his priority.

Anna nodded.

“Okay. I’m leaving now.”

Brian looked at her apologetically.

“I’m sorry that I have swamped you with a ton of work recently.”

A year ago, his engagement to Anna was a farce to give the gossip columnists something to rave about.

In the end, he set Anna free to pursue her own happiness.

However, she chose to remain faithful to him.

Anna smiled.

"I sleep peacefully every night.

Shall we go back together this evening? I'll ask Maria to prepare dinner."

When the meeting ended at half past five, it only seemed appropriate to head straight home.

After a moment of hesitation, he nodded in agreement.

Maria was not at all surprised to see them return together.

Anna lived alone in Brian's big villa now.

She would always call in advance and inform Maria when they were coming home together.

They enjoyed a sumptuous dinner.

The meal reminded Brian of Ayla's cooking.

He detested her cooking and waved it away rudely in the past.

Today, he savored the same dishes and his heart was filled with mixed feelings.

"Mr.Clark, these are all your favorite dishes."

Maria noticed that his mind had wandered off.

Since Ayla's accident he hadn't laughed at all.

Neither had he lost his temper.

"Okay."

Brian nodded, "You may leave now."

Anna tried to replenish his plate.

"Brian, have a little more! You have lost a lot of weight recently."

It had been more than two years but he still couldn't erase Ayla from his mind and there was no space in his heart for Anna.

Brian ate without presence of mind.

After a few nibbles, he put down his chopsticks and drank some wine.

Anna wanted to utter something but she resisted the temptation.

Two years was just not enough for him to get over Ayla.

Chapter 97: She Didn't Want To See Him Now

Ayla was completely immersed in finishing her design draft. Once done, she eagerly presented it to Linda, the company's design department director.

"Director Linda, I just completed my design. I would love for you to take a look," she informed her as she handed the draft over.

Linda reluctantly accepted the design but didn't bother to go over the drawings.

"I'll put it aside for now. Boss said she would come and pick it up herself today," she said dismissively, her tone implying an utter dislike for the employee.

Linda thought menacingly, 'You're a pathetic undergraduate who has nothing to prove yet.' Ayla being hired with a competitive salary was merely because of their boss.

What irked Linda the most was how this girl quickly climbed up the ladder.

Within a few months, her designs could already compete for high-caliber fashion shows while Linda painstakingly worked for it for over half a decade.

"Alright, I see. I'll go back to my workspace then. Let me know if there's something I should improve on and I'd be glad to revise it," Ayla replied politely.

She had no clue as to where Linda's hostility was coming from.

It was never Ayla's intention to threaten her in any way.

She was only doing her job as a designer and no matter what happened, Linda would always be the 4 director.

"Go ahead!" Linda almost shouted with annoyance.

She wanted her out of the office immediately.

There was no sense letting her meet the boss.

Ayla stepped out of the office and proceeded to sort out some documents for work. She didn't stay long though, since she still had afternoon classes to attend.

As she alighted from the elevator, she came face to face with an elegant woman donning a sleek beige suit.

Her queen-style handbag and tasteful makeup added to her alluring charm.

One would not think she was over 40 as her lovely face radiated a youthful glow.

"Boss,"

Ayla managed to greet the woman, although she was still a bit intimidated by how fashionable she was.

"Wenny, what's with the rush? Why are you leaving early? Do you want to go upstairs and have a little chat?"

Yareli Evans invited her warmly.

The kind gesture made Ayla smile but she had to decline, "I would love to but I still have a class this afternoon. I only dropped by to give my draft to Linda."

Yareli was of Chinese descent.

Fifteen years ago, she founded the Starlight Fashion Hub in Italy.

From her humble beginnings, she exerted hard work and dedication which made the company grow significantly.

Now, it was recognized as Milan's most prestigious fashion and design house.

"Oh, you have classes this afternoon? How about going out for lunch together? It's still early and we can squeeze in some time," Yareli suggested.

Her years in the business made her a good judge of character.

She could sense something good in this designer, and that was why she wanted to get to know her better.

Ayla was actually not in a hurry but she didn't want to interfere with her boss's work.

However, it also didn't feel right to turn down her offer twice.

"I just don't want to take up too much of your time. Would it be okay?" she asked politely.

"That's nonsense,"

Yareli shook her head, an amused smile painted on her face.

"I'll go upstairs for a bit. You wait here," she instructed.

Ayla finally agreed and poised to wait by the elevator just as she was told.

Once out of the building, Yareli drove to a nearby Italian restaurant together with Ayla.

She couldn't help but be amazed when her boss ordered pasta while speaking in Italian.

"Ms. Evans, do you prefer Italian food? Have you always known how to speak Italian?" she asked curiously.

"Yes to both of your questions. I've been here for almost twenty years and I've gotten used to their way of life."

Not wanting to alienate Ayla, Yareli smiled fondly at her and considered, "If you prefer Chinese food, I can take you to a good Chinese restaurant next time."

"No, it's my turn to treat you for lunch next time!"

Ayla offered happily, a wide grin stretched across her face.

The two women had a worthwhile lunch together.

She was fascinated with her boss's countless stories from back in her day.

In the middle of their conversation, her phone rang and it was Lucas on the line.

He was inviting her out for lunch to which she replied, "I'm already having lunch with my boss. Let's have dinner tonight instead!"

Ayla completely forgot that she was supposed to go out for lunch with Lucas today.

She offered dinner to make amends.

To her relief, Lucas agreed graciously, "Okay, I'll pick you up after school."

Despite the spoiled lunch date, he knew how much Yareli appreciated Ayla, so he didn't say anything against her.

'I hope Ayla would have a bright future under her mentorship and guidance,' he thought.

"Is he your boyfriend?" Yareli asked pointedly when Ayla hung up the phone.

"No," Ayla shook her head.

Everything about her future was uncertain.

Repaying Lucas with love was out of the question.

"I'd rather stay with the man who loves me than lose him all my life." Yareli spoke softly.

A touch of melancholy laced her voice and her expressive eyes turned misty.

Ayla chose to remain silent at that moment.

She didn't know much about Yareli yet, but the sudden change in her boss's demeanor implied a deeper story.

All she heard was that she was single and hadn't been married. She worked hard in this foreign country alone.

'Perhaps our sense of familiarity could be coming from being both Chinese,' Ayla concluded.

Looking back, Ayla remembered when she and Yareli first met.

She braved joining a design competition then.

Yareli was impressed with her skills and that was how their acquaintance began.

With their lunch finished, Ayla went to school to attend her class.

From a distance, Yareli stared at her retreating back as her eyes welled up with tears.

It had been so long since she lost her beloved child.

Despite her efforts, no reliable news surfaced.

It pained her to think that maybe it was about time to accept that her child was dead.

It was the day of the much-awaited design exhibition of Starlight Fashion Hub.

Everything was going the way it was planned.

Lucas wouldn't miss the special event as he wanted to be there to support Ayla.

"Lala, how do you feel? Will you be nervous?" he asked, his voice full of concern.

"I'm not nervous," she replied confidently.

Although Ayla only had three sets of design to present, she didn't feel stressed because Yareli gave her consideration.

With this, Linda became green with envy.

She produced five sets of design yet Ayla was the one gaining their boss's favor.

Meanwhile, Anna and Brian made a business trip to Milan together.

"Brian, Milan is the center of fashion right now. Let's stay here for a few more days!"

Anna gushed with a voice full of excitement. She finally convinced Brian to join her.

"Well, for the cooperation with Starlight Fashion Hub, the contract must be completely signed," he stated with finality.

Brian had a good relationship with Yareli, and that was why she decided to entrust the Clark Group with the sole agency.

As efficient as ever, Anna confirmed, "No problem. I've called Ms. Evans and she already agreed."

Anna chose to deal with these matters as much as she could.

Brian was working hard enough and she figured doing these tasks for him would help keep some weight off his shoulders.

The striking couple walked towards the fashion show together.

Lucas spotted them almost immediately.

To say he was stunned was an understatement.

'Why are they here? What will happen if they meet her?' he worried.

Lucas quickly returned and informed Ayla, "Lala, Brian and Anna just arrived here. Do you want to hide?"

His voice filled with urgency.

He didn't want Ayla to see them, but it would be best if she knew what was happening.

With that, Ayla gasped in shock and shook her head repeatedly, "I don't want to see them."

There was no need for them to meet her.

"I might cause them more sadness if they saw me," she thought painfully.

What confidence she had at the start of the event was dwindling already and she didn't know if she could stay here any longer.

"Then I'll take you away."

Lucas was like her knight in shining armor at that moment, ready to rescue her when she was in trouble.

Together, they sped through the flurry of people around them and headed backstage before turning left towards the exit.

Once he was sure that no one could see them, Lucas asked, "Will you regret it?"

He turned around to get a good look on her face and see her reaction.

Perhaps she was still harboring some feelings for Brian.

Ayla didn't speak for a long time.

She didn't know how to answer him but she shook her head eventually.

"I don't want to see him now," was all she could say.

She fled the country back then and settled here so she wouldn't have to see Brian.

What was the point of doing all that and building herself back up if she would subject herself to seeing him again?

"All my hard work and sacrifice would be for nothing" she reminded herself.

Shaking her out of her reverie, she heard Lucas say, "Let's go!"

He held her securely in his arms and guided her towards the waiting car.

"Yareli, I'm sorry I had to leave early. I wasn't feeling well," she informed her boss through the call.

"Wenny, it's a pity that you can't attend such an important event today," Yareli said regrettably.

A lot of media and press were present at the event and it was the perfect occasion to introduce Wenny to the public.

Increased visibility would be good for her career in the future.

Ayla could hear regret in Yareli's voice. She was also disappointed with how things turned out that night. She prepared for quite a long time for it and she wasn't able to enjoy at all.

"I'm sorry, Ms. Evans. How about next time? I would let you be for now. I'm sure a lot of people would want to talk to you. I'll be fine eventually," she assured her.

After hanging up the phone, Ayla breathed a sigh of relief knowing she got away on time without Brian seeing her.

When Ayla dropped the call, Yareli turned back to Brian apologetically.

“It’s a shame that I wasn’t able to introduce you to Miss Wenny. She’s our newly-hired designer.”

“Ms. Evans, this designer that you’re talking about must be very talented,” Brian inquired with an easy smile.

His interest with women had long been gone now.

“Of course, Wenny has three amazing sets of design tonight. If you like them, you can order more sets. Miss Anna, I believe they would fit you like a glove,” Yareli said as she vouched for Wenny’s talents, her heart swelling with pride.

“Ms. Evans, your taste has always been impeccable,” Anna said with clear admiration for the woman.

“And I must say you’re getting lovelier each time, Miss Anna. Let’s go! The fashion show is about to begin. You should get the best view so please sit in front,”

Yareli eagerly said as she led the couple to the exclusive VIP section.

“If you want, you can order more sets of clothing,” Brian told Anna once they were settled in their seats.

She had only worn plain suits in the past one year.

He hadn’t bought her clothes for a long time, but he knew she deserved to be pampered.

If she liked anything from the sets now, he would make sure that she knew she could have them.

Touched by Brian’s generous gesture, Anna affectionately embraced his arms.

“Brian, you know I could care less about the clothes as long as I have you,” she said, her voice as soft as a petal.

‘Your heart, that’s all I want,’ she thought as a wave of sadness coursed through her.

Of course he couldn’t give her what she really wanted, but she was in no position to push him. For now, she’d just have to wait and be contented with what he could give.

Chapter 98: Wait For Your Love

Brian didn’t say anything. If he couldn’t make her happy, he shouldn’t give her false hopes. However, he allowed Anna to hold onto a bit of hope in deference to her persistence.

Two years had not erased his love for Ayla, and neither was Anna’s love for him.

Anna was wearing a light purple evening dress, and he was wearing a black suit.

At the dinner party after the fashion show, the two of them were the highlights of the evening.

Yareli kept staring at them, and said, “Mr. Clark, I’m so glad that you could come.”

There was a faint smile on her face.

With the development of Brian’s major cross-industry venture across the world, the partnership of their two companies would also develop further.

Yareli had chosen Ayla to be the domestic designer sent by Starlight Fashion Hub.

“You’re welcome, Ms.Evans.It’s my honor to attend such a high-caliber fashion show,” Brian said with a polite smile.

“By the way, Ms.Evans, those last few sets are quite good.Are those your new designs?” asked Anna.

Coincidentally, Linda came over.

Anna’s words displeased her.

Yareli had arranged Ayla’s works to be the show’s finale to attach great importance to Ayla herself.

“Did you like them, Miss Anna? But those clothes were designed by our new intern designer.The style might be great, but the colors don’t match well.”

Based on Linda’s tone, she was obviously envious of Ayla.

“Is that so? Well, everyone has different tastes, right?”

Anna rolled her eyes at Linda.

Despite having met several times, they still hadn’t gotten close to each other.

“You do have a unique taste, Miss Anna.”

Linda grabbed a glass of wine from the waiter’s tray.

“Ms.Evans, has Wenny left already?”

She was worried that Wenny might steal her thunder.

A good fraction of the attendees were amazed by Wenny’s design, which made Linda feel bad.

“Wenny’s not feeling well, so she wasn’t able to attend, ” Yareli replied.

“Anyway, please attend to Mr.Clark.” She didn’t have the time to look after so many guests.

“Ms.Evans, carry on with your work,” Anna said to her.

She then looked at Brian and said, “Brian, why don’t we take a seat over there?”

After they had seated themselves, he started drinking.

“Brian, please don’t drink too much.”

Anna could tell that something was bothering Brian ever since they got here, and there was only one reason he could be this unhappy.

Meanwhile, Ayla was sitting in the car as Lucas drove her to the riverside.

They stood by the river, letting the cold breeze of the night blow past them.

She didn’t have to say anything for he understood how she felt.

Brian's presence had deeply upset her. She had chosen to avoid him because she still loved him, and she knew that she still hadn't moved on from him.

As she stared at the river, Ayla crossed her arms. She had believed that after two long years, seeing Brian wouldn't affect her so much, but alas, her heart was racing. She felt uneasy, terrified, and her heart was in disarray because of him.

Brian and Anna attended the company's fashion show.

He only accompanied her to take a look.

Over the past two years, Ayla hadn't paid much attention to any news about him.

Sadly, she still hadn't forgotten him.

"Lala." Lucas took off his coat and put it on her.

"You might catch a cold," he said.

Brian's abrupt appearance made Ayla restless because she still loved and cared about him.

She was truly a faithful woman.

Back then, she was even willing to surrender her life for him.

Even if he never said that he loved her, she was still fiercely loyal to him.

"How is he, Lucas?"

It took a lengthy silence before Ayla finally mustered up the courage to ask Lucas about Brian.

'With Anna's help, Brian is probably living a good life.'

"He's still with Anna."

This meant that they were on good terms.

Although Lucas didn't have to explicitly say it, his words still saddened Ayla.

"I see. Then he should be fine," she said casually.

When she was in the Clark family's villa, Anna and Brian had a special relationship.

Anna even warned her not to hurt him if she didn't love him.

However, when Ayla finally fell in love with him, they got separated, and their child got aborted.

However, her love never wavered, so she wasn't afraid.

She was brave enough to love, and she boldly proclaimed it.

She wanted to let Brian know how much she loved him, but in the end, her confession was what drove her further away from him.

It was a lie when she said that she wasn't hurt.

When Tatum had locked her up in his villa, her freedom had been taken away and every day she suffered in pain. Despite all of that, she never felt desperate because her heart and her love for Brian kept her going.

"You still love him, don't you?"

Lucas could tell by the tone of her voice that she still loved him, and it broke his heart.

After all these years, she still hadn't accepted his love.

"Lucas, did you know? Sometimes, I thought that if I had never been adopted by the Woodsen family, if my father never forced me to marry Brian, and if I had left with Toby, perhaps everything would've been different."

Ayla had been thinking about a lot of things. She was an abandoned child. She didn't have any parents.

Before she could even understand anything, her foster mother, Marlene Evans, died.

All she could remember about her was that Marlene had been very good to her.

That woman always carried her around and lulled her to sleep.

But later on, after Marlene died, she was thrown to the backyard and a servant looked after her.

Other than being permitted to go to school, she was basically a servant and was tasked to do a lot of housework.

She even had to wear Arlene's old clothes.

At school, even though she was the Woodsen family's daughter, Ayla only ate simple vegetables and stale bread, while Arlene enjoyed delectable meals.

There was a major difference on how they were treated, but Ayla never once complained.

She always felt grateful and fortunate enough that she was alive.

Looking at her, Lucas said, "Lala, no matter how painful the past is, it's all over. In the future, I'm going to give you a good life. I promise. Do you trust me?"

Ayla smiled.

"I'm lucky to have met you, and I believe that you'll be happy someday. But...I can't give you that happiness."

Lucas was a good man, but she wasn't a good woman.

She felt that she didn't deserve him.

"But I think you're the greatest happiness in my life. I can't love any other woman besides you."

He had even believed that he wasn't capable of falling in love with another woman.

In those painful years, he surrounded himself with so many women, but he never fell in love with any of them; Ayla was the exception.

She didn't even care who he was, and she never wanted to be his woman nor his wife.

She was vastly different from all the women he had ever met.

Her loyalty to Toby in the past might've been caused by her desire to cling to her childhood, but it was different with Brian.

It was the kind of love that only men and women shared.

And on the other hand, the only thing she could give to Lucas was friendship and gratitude.

Ayla opened her arms and threw herself into his arms.

"I'm afraid that I can't," she said.

She could never forget Brian, nor could she forget her child that didn't even get the chance to live.

And so, she couldn't promise Lucas that she could love him.

"I can wait, Ayla. I'll wait until you finally have room for me in your heart, okay?"

He could never force her to do anything.

Perhaps it was because he never forced her that he could gradually touch her heart, and shift her love towards him and not on Brian.

Under the dim streetlight, they embraced each other tightly. The light caused their shadows to stretch onto the flat road.

Chapter 99: It Was Her

After the dinner party, Brian and Anna strolled along the street as people passed by.

Holding his arm, she asked, "Brian, are you going back tomorrow?"

In all honesty, she didn't want him to leave yet.

If the company hadn't called, he might've stayed to accompany her to see the new designer before going back.

However, he delegated her the responsibility of overseeing the cooperation. "What's the matter? Don't you think it would be great for you if you stayed here for a few more days? You should take some time to relax."

Even though he felt nothing for her, he was still kind to her.

Their relationship remained the same throughout all these years. Anna didn't say anything.

Without him, no matter how beautiful the scenery was, it would still be empty.

As they stood by the river, they weren't that far away from Ayla.

But because the light was dim, they couldn't recognize each other.

For some reason, as Brian stood there, he felt an oddly familiar feeling.

But when he looked around, he saw nothing. Ayla leaned sideways then looked back at Lucas.

"We should go!"

She had received a call from Yareli, saying that today's fashion show and dinner party were both successful.

She also told her that they would arrange a meeting with the person in charge of the domestic partner company. Lucas and Ayla went to the car next to them.

Brian noticed her familiar figure.

"Ayla?" he murmured as he ran towards them.

Anna thought that she had just misheard him. Brian watched as the car drove away, fading from his sight. He didn't even get to see the license plate clearly.

After chasing it for a long time, the car eventually took a turn and disappeared.

"Brian, are you okay?"

Anna caught up with him, panting in exhaustion. "I saw her," he responded, catching his breath as he stood on the street. She pulled his arm and shouted, "Brian, you're mistaken. That can't be Ayla. She died two years ago!"

Why couldn't he just forget Ayla after all this time? During the past two years, whenever he saw anyone that remotely reminded him of Ayla on the road, he would try to chase them.

But each time, he just ended up being disappointed. Leaning against a lamppost, Brian thought, 'Yes, Ayla is dead. She died two years ago...'

Despite that fact, he refused to give up. He never saw her corpse.

She was just missing. "Brian, enough! You've done too much for a dead woman."

Anna had had enough of seeing him like this. She would rather be in pain than to keep watching him be this miserable all the time. As he looked at the direction where the car had disappeared to, Brian shook his head helplessly, and said, "Let's go."

'Was I really just mistaken? How could Ayla even be here?' Standing in front of him, Anna remarked, "Brian, just forget her! Why can't you just move on from someone who doesn't even exist anymore! If you keep this up, you'll never get any better!"

Brian was having a hard time forgetting Ayla.

And even though she loved him, she still couldn't forget about Toby.

Anna believed that Ayla didn't deserve Brian's love.

He decided not to say a word and just keep on walking. He hadn't gone to the backyard of his villa ever since she disappeared.

The mound with the wooden sign also brought up old wounds for him.

Back then, he was so cruel that he killed their child.

He didn't even dare to accept that woman because he was adamantly against falling in love with anyone.

For the rest of the night, Anna wasn't able to sleep. Brian was going to take the six AM plane.

She wanted to send him off at the airport.

Over the past two years, she stayed by his side, but he never learned to love her.

Not once did she feel desperate or disappointed. The engagement ring on her finger was just as she had expected.

Even though it was all an act, she took it seriously, so she wore this ring with pride all the time. Never had she once taken it off.

Sitting in the back seat of the car, Brian stared at Anna's tired face.

"Anna, didn't you sleep well last night?"

Judging by the dark circles under her eyes, she didn't even get a minute of sleep.

"How about you?" she asked in response.

These past two years, Brian barely slept well.

After he saw the woman who resembled Ayla last night, he would have more sleepless nights.

Meanwhile, Ayla was sitting on a sofa and reading a magazine.

She didn't have classes today, and her appointment with Yareli was in the afternoon, so she had a lot of spare time.

Lucas knocked on her door. "Lala?"

"Lucas, aren't you going to the company today?"

Then, she asked him to enter.

He had brought her some food.

"I just went out for something, and I just happened to buy your favorite cake," Lucas said with a grin.

He was in a chipper mood because he knew that Brian had returned to A City, leaving Anna to stay for a few more days. Ayla took it from him.

“Thank you.”

The two of them sat face to face on the balcony.

Looking far away, she began to eat the cake and drink coffee.

For some reason, she had grown to like pure coffee now.

Perhaps it was due to the bitterness of her previous life, coffee was no longer as bitter in comparison.

Later, Yareli drove Anna to a coffee shop.

“Miss Anna, these clothes are being marketed by our company this time. I think they suit you very well. I hope you won’t dislike them.”

She had prepared some clothes that were perfect for her size, and these clothes were the highlights of last night’s fashion show.

“Thank you, Ms. Evans.”

Anna didn’t pretentiously refuse her, and just graciously accepted her offer and thanked her for it.

“You’re welcome. Our new employee, Wenny, is brimming with potential. For this cooperation, I want her to work in your company. What do you think?”

Yareli had arranged this to provide Wenny with a chance because she had high hopes for this new designer.

Anna stared at the elegant and fashionable evening clothes in the bag.

“They’re incredible. Now I really want to meet this Miss Wenny.”

If only she had known that Wenny was actually Ayla, she might hope that their paths would never cross.

Moments later, Ayla entered the coffee shop, heading straight into the private room.

“Wenny, you’re finally here! Have a seat,” said Yareli.

“I’m so sorry, Ms. Evans. I got stuck in a traffic jam just now,” Ayla said apologetically.

“It’s fine. Come on in. Let me introduce you to our company’s newest partner, Miss Anna of Clark Group,” she enthusiastically announced.

When Anna turned her gaze towards Ayla, the two of them were petrified. Her face turned pale in an instant.

Perhaps the familiar figure that Brian saw last night was really Ayla!

“Do you know each other?” Yareli looked at them while they were in a daze.

It was obvious that they had met before.

A smile appeared on Ayla's face.

"Yes, I've met her before. But I haven't seen her for over two years."

It not only surprised Ayla, but also Anna.

Anna had believed that Ayla died two years ago.

But now that she had appeared before her, it left her feeling helpless.

If Brian found out that Ayla was actually alive, all the efforts that Anna had exerted to gain his love would be in vain.

She didn't want to lose him that way.

"That's good then! If you know each other, then it'll be easier for all of us to cooperate in the future," Yareli remarked.

Both Anna and Ayla were now against Yareli's idea of cooperating.

Ayla didn't want to have anything to do with Brian and the Clark Group.

On the other hand, Anna didn't want her to return to Antawood, nor did she want Brian to know that this woman was still alive.

"My name is Wenny." Ayla introduced herself to Anna.

"So, you're the Wenny that Ms. Evans keeps praising all the time! I never imagined it would be you." Anna stared at her intently.

Those two long years changed Ayla so much.

She now looked more mature, confident, and charming.

However, Anna had been obsessing over Brian for the past two years, and in turn, the stress had deteriorated her beauty, both physically and mentally Ayla shook her head.

"I haven't graduated yet. I'm sure Ms. Evans is just exaggerating. Ms. Evans, I don't think I'm qualified to go to Antawood and be in charge of our cooperation with the Clark Group," she said to Yareli.

Chapter 100: Unexpected Meeting

Yareli was taken aback by Ayla's request. She had thought that it would be more convenient for them to cooperate because they already knew each other. But now that she had refused, it only meant that she wasn't willing to do this.

"Wenny, can't you reconsider?"

Yareli believed that Ayla would regret it if she didn't seize this opportunity.

"Ms. Evans, you do know that I'm still studying so I can't go back to A City yet. I suggest you choose someone else. I'm afraid that I'm not capable of such a great responsibility on my own. I think Linda would be more suitable for this than I am."

In reality, Ayla didn't need to go to school anymore. She was able to work full-time. She was just making up an excuse not to go back to A City.

Yareli looked at her and persuaded her, "Wenny, please think twice about this. I think you're the perfect candidate for this job!"

If Ayla wasn't going to take this job, she'd rather not assign it to anyone else.

Anna looked at Yareli, and said, "Ms. Evans, may I have a word with Miss Wenny alone?"

"Of course."

Yareli had arranged for them to meet, and considering the fact that the two of them had already known each other before, there was no need for her to stay.

Perhaps things would turn out better after they had spoken.

Once Yareli had left, only Anna and Ayla were left in the room.

"I never imagined that you'd be here. It's so unexpected," said Anna.

"To tell you the truth, I was also surprised."

At that time, the only detail Ayla knew about was that the partner company of Starlight Fashion Hub would develop a business in Antawood.

It never crossed her mind that it would be the Clark Group, and that Anna would be their representative.

Perhaps this meant that there really were some people that were hard to avoid running into.

Last night, Lucas took her away from them, but today, facing Anna was inevitable.

"I think you're already aware of my relationship with Brian, right?" Anna glanced at the ring on her finger.

It was a beautiful and brimming diamond ring.

Naturally, Ayla also looked at it. She had initially thought that she wouldn't care about it.

A year ago, she was heartbroken when she found out about their engagement.

But after a painful struggle with heartbreak, she eventually got over it.

She had believed that it could no longer hurt her, but in the end, she still felt pain.

"I do know, and I congratulate you for it." Ayla tried to conceal her pain with a faint smile.

"Thank you. Without you in the picture, Brian and I have been so happy,"

Anna reluctantly remarked. She was a selfish woman. She had hoped that Brian would be hers for the rest of her life.

As long as Ayla didn't show up again, her relationship with him wouldn't change.

Glancing at her, Ayla replied, "That's why I can't go back to Antawood. Just consider me dead. I can't go back, and I refuse to go back."

Escaping might be the better option for her.

There was no way she would go back there.

"I didn't mean for you to go back there. I won't tell Brian that you're alive, and I won't tell him that you're here in Milan. I think you understand why I'm doing that, right?" Anna said bluntly.

Ayla shouldn't have returned to her and Brian's life.

"As long as you love him and the two of you are happy, that's good enough for me. I have nothing more to do with you two. So please convince Ms. Evans that I can't be in charge of this cooperation,"

Ayla responded.

If she went back to Antawood, eventually, she would run into Brian one way or another.

Anna couldn't see any nuances of emotion on Ayla's face.

This woman had changed so much after two years.

She was no longer the same powerless and submissive woman she once was.

After leaving the coffee shop, Ayla didn't take a car.

Instead, she slowly walked towards her apartment.

Seeing Anna didn't just leave her uneasy, it left her heartbroken.

Upon seeing Ayla walking along the street, Lucas honked the car horn to get her attention.

"Hi, Lala!"

"What are you doing here?" She looked at him in surprise.

"I'm here to pick you up."

Lucas was aware that she had a meeting with Yareli in the coffee shop today, so he came to pick her up.

He knew that she didn't like taking a bus or a taxi.

After sitting in the car for a long time, Ayla broke her silence.

"I saw Anna just now."

"Did she say anything to you?"

As a matter of fact, he wasn't worried that Brian would find out that Ayla was still alive because Anna loved him.

That woman probably wouldn't tell him that she ran into Ayla today.

She would just pretend that it never happened.

"She didn't say anything noteworthy. I don't want to go back to Antawood and I don't want anything to do with the cooperation project with the Clark Group."

Ayla turned her gaze towards the window.

It turned out that Brian's sudden appearance wasn't just a coincidence.

It was actually related to the partnership between Starlight and the Clark Group.

Pulling over, Lucas said, "You don't want to see him? But this is your chance. Are you really willing to give it up?"

He didn't want her to see Brian, but he also didn't want her to ruin her future.

"It doesn't matter. I just don't want to go back to that sad place. It reminds me of too much of my painful past."

Ayla looked at him with a faint smile on her lips.

"If you want to go back, I can come with you. You have to remember that you're Wenny now, not Ayla, right?"

Over the past two years, Lucas ensured that she was safe and sound.

And even if she returned to Antawood, he would still take care of everything for her. Ayla shook her head.

"I'm still Ayla. Nothing has changed, and I'm still heartbroken."

Meanwhile, Yareli refused Anna's proposal to replace the designer.

In her mind, Ayla was the best designer for this project.

And so, Anna was left with no other choice but to contact Ayla for help again.

"Miss Anna, what can I do for you?"

Ayla and Anna were sitting face to face in a coffee shop again.

They had met each other so many times, but they still kept each other at arm's length.

"I've spoken to Ms. Evans, and she said that you're the only designer she'd want to work on this project. As much as I hate for you to go back to Anita Wood and stop you from meeting Brian, I'd rather not hinder his career because of my selfishness. You have to accept this project and go back!"

Anna's attitude softened.

It was true that Brian's career needed to be established little by little, and she would do anything for it to happen.

Shaking her head, Ayla responded, "You, of all people, should know that this isn't the right time for me to appear in Antawood."

Indeed, her reemergence in Antawood would cause problems, and she wasn't willing to go anyway.

"I am aware of that, but I'm fully responsible for this cooperation. I'm the only one you need to talk to and meet. You wouldn't have to meet Brian at all!"

It took Anna so much courage to make this decision.

It was a big risk and she was trying her Juck.

Still reluctant, Ayla said, "I need some time to think about it."

The truth was that she was still afraid that the worst could happen, so she was still hesitant to do it.

Anna stirred her coffee.

"I will give you three days to decide. After that, I have to go back to Antawood. If Ms. Evans speaks to Brian directly, I think by that time, even if both of us don't want it to happen, you're bound to meet with him."

This was what worried Anna the most.

No matter what happened, Yareli and Brian's partnership would definitely proceed.

Even though Brian hardly cared about this project, since he had already reached an agreement, he probably wouldn't let it go that easily.

"Three days?"

The only choice Ayla had right now was to run away again.

However, doing so would let Yareli down after she had given Ayla her trust and mentored her for so long.