

## Wild Night 851

### Chapter 851 Showtime

The private jet touched down on the tarmac of Ludus International Airport at precisely 2:17 am on a crisp Friday morning.

Henry Rosewood, impeccably dressed in a tailored black suit and a silk tie that shimmered even in the dim hangar lights, emerged from the aircraft, his expensive shoes clicking on the tarmac.

The air held a damp chill, a stark contrast to the dry heat of Husla he'd just left behind. But the coolness did little to dampen the fire burning in his eyes.

He was finally here. Finally in Ludus. Finally, he would get his hands on Vanessa, the disobedient wife who had dared to make a fool of him.

She had dared to defy him. The audacity of the woman! Running away like a frightened child when he wasn't done punishing her yet. But that game was over. She was back within his grasp, he thought with a smirk etched across his face.

This time around, there would be consequences— public and private. He, Henry Rosewood, wouldn't allow such insubordination to go unpunished. He would teach Vanessa a lesson so severe it would leave an indelible mark, worse than the ones he had left on her back.

He was going to make sure everyone saw her as a crazy woman and no one would believe a word out of her mouth. She would have no one on her side. All she would have would be him. She would be at his mercy and beg for her life, but he wouldn't forgive her. Never.

Not after she dared to embarrass and humiliate him so publicly ten years ago. Whenever he thought about how she had ignored him that night and treated him like a nobody, his blood boiled afresh.

She had looked down on him because she thought she was from a wealthy home and she had everything. And that was why the first thing he took from her was her family's wealth and turned her father into his puppet.

She was going to spend the rest of her life paying for that singular act. No one was permitted to be arrogant or cheeky around him. He had the exclusive right to arrogance.

With a predatory glint in his eyes, Henry strode towards the waiting car and the moment he got in, he turned to the driver and the other man seated in the front seat with him.

"So? What did you find?" He asked coldly.

He had asked them to dig into Mia's life in the last three years and to uncover every single thing she had done in the period she was away from him. Who she met, what she ate, what she wore, where she slept. He wanted to know all about her life.

"She started working for Bryan Hank twentytwo months ago. There is no much information about her life before then. She lives a pretty lowkey life in a lowkey neighborhood. She goes to work daily and..."

"Any relationships I should know about?" Henry cut in, uninterested in the mundane details.

"According to her neighbors, she has never entertained visitors. Although they said she goes out late every evening and comes back in the early hours of them morning..."

Henry's brows shot up, "Where to?"

"They said she seemed to be the partying type and she was always so colorfully dressed," he said and Henry's lips curled with disgust.

"She always bought takeouts..."

"I'm not interested in that," Henry said and the P.I frowned.

"But you asked me to..."

"I know what I asked. I wanted you to work hard for the money I'm paying you, that doesn't mean I'm interested in all the details. What about the nonentity she has been cohabiting with? Hasn't he ever visited her?" Henry asked and the P.I shook his head.

"No. They said she has never entertained a visitor. And from my investigation, it seems they are not in any special relationship and only started living together when Bryan moved to Ludus," he said and Henry nodded.

"I see. So, did you keep an eye on him to find out where she was and if he would lead you to her?" He asked and the P.I shook his head.

"It was impossible to. They have an extremely nosy neighbor who seems to be the watchdog of the neighborhood. It seems like she spread word around about our presence in the neighborhood, and it made it impossible to hang around there for long enough to monitor his movements."

"Excuses. All I hear are excuses," Henry said with displeasure.

"I'm sorry my service..."

"Save the apology. It's useless," Henry said dismissively.

Now he had to go with his option B. Thomas Hank. He needed to know where Vanessa was hiding presently, and he hoped that Tom had found her.

He couldn't believe that Tom had dared to question him the last time. Thomas Hank was lucky that he was too busy trying to find his wayward wife, else he would have punished Tom for daring to think he had an opinion in his business. And the second reason he had forgiven Tom was because, like a good boy, he had agreed to do his bidding.

Now it was time to see if Tom had done as he requested or if his trust in Tom had been misplaced.

He hoped for Tom's sake that Tom had found Vanessa, since he didn't want to have to spend unnecessary time here, trying to find her.

If Tom failed to provide her immediately, then it would mean that Tom had disappointed him, and he never took disappointment too well.

Without wasting a moment, Henry pulled out his phone and he dialed Tom's number, ignoring the uncharacteristic act of calling someone at such an ungodly hour. Tom was a pawn in his game, and pawns needed to be reminded of their place.

Away from there, across the city, the shrill ring of the phone sliced through the quiet of Tom's bedroom. He jolted awake, his heart hammering in his chest.

A glance at the bedside clock confirmed his worst suspicions – 2:22 am. Who on earth would be calling at this ungodly hour? He mused as he fumbled for his phone on the nightstand, squinting at the screen in the dim light.

Then he saw the name flashing on the screen– Henry Rosewood. The sleep drained from his body like water down a drain. This couldn't be good.

Lucy stirred beside him, a frown creasing her forehead at the sound of his voice. "What is it?" she mumbled, her voice thick with sleep as she turned on the lamp at her side of the bed.

Tom held up a finger, silencing her, and answered the phone. "Mr Rosewood?" he said, his voice betraying none of the apprehension churning in his gut as he glanced at Lucy, who sat up in bed, her eyes wide with alarm.

She had expressed her fears and concern over dealing with Henry Rosewood, but they had also agreed that they couldn't leave Mia to face him alone.

"Mr. Hank," Henry's voice crackled through the receiver, devoid of any pleasantries. "Have you managed to locate my wife?" Henry asked, his tone laced with a dangerous edge

Tom gritted his teeth, annoyed that he had called him at such an ungodly hour to ask him such a question.

"Yes. She is safe..."

"Where is she?" Henry cut in.

"Right here in my house. I wanted to keep..."

"Excellent," Henry said, a hint of satisfaction in his voice. "Then perhaps you can be of further assistance. Send me your address immediately. I will be there in a few minutes to collect her."

Tom stared at the phone, "Collect her? Are you in Ludus already? It's barely three in the morning..."

Henry wasn't interested in arguments. "The address, Mr Hank. And make it snappy. It's best you don't let her know I'm coming," Henry warned, and with a click, the call ended.

"Don't tell me he has arrived and wants to come over at this time to get her?" Lucy asked, and Tom sighed.

"He wants me to send him my address. I really hate this guy. The more I talk to him, the more my hatred for him grows. If Mia wasn't so adamant about doing things her way, I would really have loved to deal with him my own way," Tom murmured while Lucy quickly got out of bed.

"You are not dealing with anyone your own way. Mia's way is safer. I will go inform Mia and the others that Henry is coming over while you give Harry a call. You should send him the address. Don't give him any reason to think you are on Mia's side else you're going to blow it," Lucy said as she pulled on her sleeping robe and headed for the door.

The moment Lucy got to Bryan's and Sonia's bedroom, she knocked on the door, "Bryan? Sony? Henry is in Ludus, and he is on his way over to pick Mia," Lucy announced as she knocked, knowing that they would realize it was an emergency and come out fast.

Although they had all been expecting him to get here on Friday, none of them had thought he would choose to come at such an ungodly hour.

The door opened, "He is coming over right now? Does he know what the time is?" Bryan asked as he pulled the door open.

Sonia had wanted to get the door, but he had asked her to let him get it so she could get some rest.

"Right now. He just called Tom. I'm going to ask Mia to get ready," Lucy said, before heading down the stairs to the guest room.

Down in the guestroom, Mia lay snugly next to Jeff who was cuddling her, and the moment Lucy knocked on the door, both their eyes opened.

"Mia?" Lucy called softly, and goosebumps broke out over Mia's skin.

"Henry is in Ludus," Mia said and Jeff frowned as he glanced at the clock in the bedroom since one of the lamps had been left on.

"You can't be so sure," Jeff said but while he was still speaking, Mia got out of bed and went to answer the door and Jeff followed.

"He just called Tom. He is on his way," Lucy said and Mia turned to look at Jeff.

"At this hour?" Jeff asked incredulously.

"That's the kind of person he is," Mia said just as Tom, Bryan, and Sonia joined them.

"Shouldn't you dress up..."

"No. If I do that he is going to know I was waiting for him. He would get more satisfaction in dragging me out of the bed in my sleeping robe. He likes the element of surprise," Mia said and then looked at each of them.

"You all can't be out here when he gets here, or else he is going to suspect that something is up. Only Tom can be out to greet him, and maybe Lucy as the lady of the house..."

Lucy shook her head immediately, "I would rather not say hello to him," she said, not wanting to begin her day by seeing such a creepy person.

"Good. It's all settled then. We've been through the plan a couple of times. You all can relax. I will be okay. I promise," Mia said, holding Sonia's gaze.

Sonia embraced her, "You had better be fine. Call me any chance you get, Mia. And if you need my help, do not hesitate to let me know. I will come running..."

"Who is going to let you go running in your state?" Bryan asked, cutting her off.

"Don't call her. Call me. I will run faster. I'm not pregnant," Bryan said and Sonia scowled at him while the rest of them laughed, despite the tension in the room.

"He will be here in any moment. You can say your farewells," Tom said and returned upstairs, and Lucy followed him after embracing Mia.

"You can't be in this room when he gets here," Mia told Jeff after they were left alone.

"I know," Jeff said, gazing at her.

"I will be okay. Don't worry. I will make sure I find a way to bring you in," Mia said and Jeff arched a brow.

"How do you think you'd be able to do that considering your relationship with him?" Jeff asked and she shrugged.

"I will use his weakness. His ego. Don't worry. I will make it happen," Mia promised and Jeff took a deep breath as he cupped her face in his hands.

Mia's breath hitched, and her bravado faltered a little under Jeff's touch. His hands were warm and gentle, a glaring contrast to the brewing storm.

Their eyes locked, a silent conversation passing between them. In that quiet moment, unspoken words hung heavy in the air – worry, gratitude, a flicker of something more.

"Be careful, Mia," Jeff murmured, his thumb brushed a stray strand of hair from her cheek, a gesture both intimate and comforting. "Don't let him break you."

Mia leaned into his touch, seeking a moment of comfort in the chaos. "I won't," she whispered back, her voice barely audible.

Their gazes remained locked, and then he leaned closer, the space between them shrinking.

Then, before either of them could overthink it, Jeff closed the gap, and without warning, he dipped his head, his lips meeting hers in a soft, lingering kiss.

The kiss was unexpected, yet undeniably tender. It was a brush of lips, a promise of something more held in check by the circumstances swirling around them. It was a kiss filled with unspoken promises and a fierce protectiveness. A kiss that held the weight of the unknown future and the feelings simmering beneath the surface.

Mia melted into the kiss, a wave of warmth chasing away the chill of apprehension. It was a goodbye, a promise, and a spark of hope all rolled into one.

As they pulled apart, a breathless silence descended upon them. Jeff's forehead rested against hers, his chest rising and falling with a ragged breath.

"Remember, Mia," he murmured, his voice husky with emotion. "We're in this together. No matter what happens."

Mia nodded, unable to trust her voice to speak. Her heart was overflowing with a mix of gratitude and a newfound yearning. The sound of footsteps on the stairs ripped them apart.

"I will see you soon," he murmured, his voice husky.

Mia nodded. Taking a deep breath, she forced a smile. "You go. I will handle him."

"He's approaching the gate," Tom announced from the doorway without bothering to knock.

A hint of worry lingered in Jeff's eyes. One last lingering glance, and then he picked up his phone and backpack and walked out of the room, shutting the door behind him.

"Showtime, Mia," she whispered to herself as she went back to bed, knowing that the next time the door opened, it would be Henry walking in.

The screech of tires against gravel announced Henry's arrival before Tom even reached the front door. He threw it open just as Henry emerged from a sleek black car, his face an unreadable mask under the harsh porch light.

"Mr. Rosewood," Tom greeted, his voice neutral. "Come in."

Henry strode past him, a whirlwind of expensive cologne and an air of barely contained menace. Tom shut the door with a soft click, the sound swallowed by the heavy silence that settled in the wake of Henry's entrance.

"Where is she?" Henry demanded, not bothering with pleasantries. His eyes darted around the living room, searching for any sign of Mia.

"She is in her room sleeping," Tom said, "I didn't inform her of your coming," Tom said, as they had agreed he would.

Henry smiled with approval, "That is smart of you. Show me to her room," he ordered.

"I prepared a room for you. You might want to get some sleep and see her in the morning..."

A scoff escaped Henry's lips. "Don't play games with me, Mr Hank. I came here to see my wife, not sleep. You wouldn't dare keep my wife from me a moment longer," he warned.

"Your wife?" Tom echoed, a dangerous edge creeping into his voice. "She hasn't been your wife for a long time, Mr. Rosewood..."

"That doesn't change the fact that she is my wife. I'm sure if you were in my shoes, sleep would be the last thing on your mind when you've been away from your wife for three years because you thought she is dead," Henry said, and Tom pretended to think about it for a moment.

"You're very correct. I'm sorry for not thinking about it," Tom said, and Henry shrugged.

"It's fine. People rarely think about anything these days," he said, his tone condescending, "Will you show me to her bedroom now?" Henry asked, trying his best to stay calm.

"Why don't I go get her..."

"No. That won't be necessary. Show me to her bedroom and I will wake her up myself," Henry insisted and Tom nodded.

"Come with me then," Tom said, and Henry followed as Tom led him to the guestroom.

The doorknob rattled, a jarring sound in the quiet tension of the room. Mia held her breath, feigning sleep, the covers pulled up to her chin.

The door opened, and a sliver of light sliced across the room, followed by the unmistakable silhouette of Henry. A wave of nausea washed over her, but she pushed it down, and forced her eyes to stay shut, focusing on the steady rise and fall of her chest, mimicking sleep.

The moment Henry turned on the light in the bedroom and shut the door behind him, goosebumps erupted on Mia's skin, a primal reaction to his nearness.

As he approached the scent of his cologne, a sharp, musky blend, filled the air. It was a smell that instantly transported her back to a time she desperately wanted to forget, triggering a deep sense of fear,

He stood beside the bed for a moment looking down at her, the silence thick enough to suffocate. Mia could practically feel his predatory gaze scanning her, searching for any sign of awareness.

Finally, she felt his weight press down on the mattress as he sat beside her. Mia didn't flinch. She knew any reaction, any sign of consciousness, would only embolden him. Silence, she decided, was her best weapon.

"Well, well," he drawled. "Look who we have here," His voice was low, laced with amusement that sent shivers down her spine.

Her skin crawled when his fingertips brushed her cheek, sending a jolt of revulsion through her.

Mia remained still, her heart hammering a frantic rhythm against her ribs as she waited patiently for the perfect moment to begin her performance.

"Don't make me wake you up, darling wife," Henry purred, a cruel edge creeping into his voice as he grabbed a fistful of her hair.

Mia's eyes flew open, and she gasped dramatically when she looked into his face, "Henry," she breathed fearfully, and his lips curved in a satisfied smile, pleased with the fear he could hear in her voice.

"How did you find me?"

"Come on, wife, did you really think you could hide from me forever?" He asked with a smirk.

"How did you get in here? What are you doing here?" She asked, trying to look as shocked and scared as possible.

"Mr Hank! Somebody help!" Mia yelled, sounding desperate.

"That is no way to welcome your beloved husband whom you haven't seen in what? Three years?" he said sweetly as he let go of her hair.

"What do you want, Henry?" she asked in a shaky voice as she scrambled out of the bed, putting some distance between them.

A smirk played on his lips. "Oh, how dramatic," he said, amusement dancing in his eyes. "Don't you play the innocent with me. You know exactly what I want. You and I are going home," he said as he rose from the bed.

"Home?" Mia shook her head. "That house has never been my home. I'm not going anywhere with you."

Henry's face hardened and he raised his hand to hit her, a reflex Mia knew all too well and as if struggling for control, he shut his eyes and dropped his hand. "Don't be difficult, Nessa. This will be easier on everyone if you just cooperate."

"Cooperate?" Mia repeated, her voice rising slightly. "You mean let you control my life again? Let you isolate me from everything and everyone I care about? Never. I would never have faked my death to be rid of you in the first place if I was going to come back to you."

Henry's face contorted in rage and he took a menacing step closer. "Don't test me, Nessa," he warned, his voice dropping to a low growl. "You know what I'm capable of."

"I also know what you are afraid of," Mia countered, meeting his gaze head-on. "You are afraid of the truth coming out. You're afraid of everyone finding out the kind of monster you truly are. The kind of man who whips his wife and beats her up leaving all sort of scars on her back. Sign the divorce papers, Henry, and no one will ever have to know the truth about you," Mia said and Henry laughed. A deep rich laugh that bubbled from inside him.

"Afraid? I fear nothing, Vanessa. Do you think any sane person would believe the words of a crazy woman? Even your own father confirmed it that you are insane..."

"You made him do it! I know you made him say that," Mia said and Henry scoffed.

"What difference does it make whether I made him do it or not? No one knows that. No one cares. As far as the world is concerned, you are a mad woman, and no one would take your ramblings over what I say," Henry said smugly.

"Why are you doing this to me, Henry? Why?" Mia cried and the humor disappeared from his eyes.

"Why? I haven't done anything yet. But I can promise you, Vanessa, that I'm going to make you pay for daring to make a fool of me. You will pay for running away from me. If you thought your life was a living hell before now and something worth running from, I'm going to make it even worse now," he promised in a voice that sent shivers down her spine.

"Please, Henry. Please forgive me for whatever I've done and leave me alone," Mia pleaded.

"Save your tears. Right now, you are going to follow me out of here without any of this drama. You can either follow me quietly or I will take you out forcefully and then your punishment will be increased. Because of the love I have for you, I advise you to go with me quietly. I would hate to have to treat you like a real crazy woman," he advised.

"What does that mean?" She asked fearfully.

"You will find out if you don't do as I have said and come with me quietly," he promised.

Taking a deep breath, Mia met his gaze, "Why are you doing this to me? You don't even love me. Why not just move..."

"Shut up and come with me! I won't ask nicely again," He growled ferociously and Mia swallowed and nodded.

"Alright. Let's go," she said and he gave her a warning look.

"No drama, Nessa. When we get out there, put up your best smile and say goodbye to Mr Hank. Do not give him any reason to ask me any silly questions else I'm going to make you regret it," he warned, and she nodded.

"I will get my stuff..."

"Don't. You won't be taking anything from here with you. Your little show here is over," Henry said and tears gathered in Mia's eyes.

"You should at least let me take my phone. I should say goodbye to my friends..."

"You never said goodbye to me when you left, so why should be worry about saying goodbye to a couple of nobodies? We've wasted enough time. Let's go," he ordered.



"Can I at least change out of my sleeping clothes into something more decent?" She asked, drawing his attention to her sleeping robe.

"No. You look perfect in that. When we get to the plane, you can change into the clothes I got you," he said and Mia nodded dutifully as she headed for the door.

As they stepped into the living room, they found Tom seated there, waiting for them, and when he heard their footsteps, he rose.

"Mia..."

"Mrs Rosewood," Henry corrected and Tom gave him a polite nod.

"Mrs Rosewood, I had no idea you were married..."

"Well, now you know. We will be on our way now. You will be rewarded for the role you played in our reunion," Henry said, and with his hand on Mia's lower back, he urged her to move.

"Mr Hank..."

"My wife would love to thank you," Henry said without letting Mia finish, and he applied pressure on her lower back, warning her not to say anything silly.

"Let Bryan and Sonia know that I've left, and I'm sorry I couldn't see them," Mia said and Tom gave her a nod and followed as Henry led her outside.

Tom watched as the driver jumped out and held open the door for them, and he watched as they got in and the car drove off.

Once the car disappeared from view, Jeff, Bryan, Sonia, and Lucy, who had been listening in on the conversation going on in the bedroom while waiting in the Den all trooped out.

"He is a mean bastard," Bryan said, his face contorted in anger. He really wished they didn't have to let Mia leave with a man like that.

"Why can't we just use the recording we got? Isn't that enough to expose him? She made him say a lot of things. Those should be considered as evidence, right?" Lucy asked with a concerned frown.

"It won't be enough. If we want to put an end to him, we need more. This is only the first of many," Tom said and Jeff scowled.

"This plan better works, else I might kill him myself if he does anything to her," Jeff said in a very cold voice before walking away from the others to the guest room which Mia had just vacated.

"I hope Mia will be fine," Sonia said as she brushed away the tears on her cheeks.

"We will make sure of it. We already put things in motion," Tom assured them and placed an arm around Lucy who was hugging herself.

"Let's go back to bed," Tom said, and Lucy shook her head.

"I don't think I can go back to sleep now," she said, and Sonia nodded.

"Me too," Sonia said, and Bryan sighed as they all returned into the Den to find a movie to keep them occupied while they waited for morning to come.

Jade stirred in her sleep when she could no longer ignore the beam of sunlight streaming through the bedroom blinds and disturbing her sleep.

As she opened her eyes, a smile bloomed on her face when she realized what day it was. Today was the day. Today, she and Harry were finally starting their long-awaited vacation, she thought as she stretched, the excitement bubbling in her stomach a tangible force.

She rolled over, expecting to find Harry beside her, but the space next to her was cool and empty. A slight frown creased her forehead, but it was quickly erased by the thrill of the day ahead.

Her suitcase, meticulously packed days ago, sat by the door like an eager puppy, brimming with anticipation for the adventures to come. She couldn't wait to see all that Harry had planned out for them.

Jade threw off the covers and hopped out of bed naked. Without giving much thought to it, she picked up Harry's nearest tshirt and put it on before padding out of the room and down the hallway.

Even before she got to the living room, she could hear the rhythmic click-clack of keyboard keys and the scent of freshly brewed coffee led her to the source – Harry.

There, hunched over his laptop at the dining table, was Harry. His brow furrowed in concentration. The sight brought a smile back to her face.

This hunched-over-laptop pose reminded her of her very first sleepover at his apartment

She had woken up this way to see him busy on his laptop.

Back then she had no idea that she was going to fall so helplessly in love with this amazing man. Or maybe that was when she started falling, she mused as she recalled how he had helped her organize all the evidence Cassidy had gathered, and then he had proceeded to make her coffee just the way she loved it. His attention to details had caught her attention then.

Sensing her presence, Harry glanced up, his eyes meeting hers. The frown melted away, and a lazy smile spread across his face, they type that could light up a room.

"Good morning, goddess," he said, his voice warm and husky. He held out a hand to her, and she readily took it, the familiar spark leaping between them.

"Good morning, you workaholic," she teased, as she let him pull her onto his lap "What's got you glued to your screen so early? Shouldn't you be packing or something? Our flight is in a few hours," she said as she picked up his mug of coffee and drank from it.

Harry chuckled, "I packed already. You made sure of it. But this can't wait. I'm trying to finalize a couple of acquisitions in Husla. Thought it best to get it done before we leave."

Jade's smile faltered slightly. Husla. Henry. "Oh. By the way, did you receive a call in the middle of the night? Or was I dreaming?"

"I did. Tom called to let me know Henry showed up to get Mia."

"In the middle of the night?" Jade asked incredulously.

"Some time past three to be precise," Harry said and Jade scowled.

"I can't believe he is that mannerless. Who does he think he is to barge into someone's home at such an ungodly hour? Well, he is lucky Tom is cool," she said and frowned when Harry grinned.

"What?" She asked, and he chuckled.

"My fierce baby," he teased, and she giggled.

"I'm being serious," she said, and he nodded.

"Me too," he said and she glanced at his laptop.

"So, what were you saying about finalizing an acquisition? Have you been able to acquire any of the companies? And how did it go with Mia?" She asked, but Harry closed his laptop and cupped her face in his hands.

"Hey," he said, his voice gentle. "Let's not dampen our spirits by talking about any of that this morning. We're finally leaving for our vacation, so today should be all about us. No work, no worries, just you and me. Forget about everything else. Let's focus on unwinding and having fun."

Jade leaned into his touch as she relaxed. He was right. Talking about Mia and Henry would dampen her spirit. Today was supposed to be about their vacation, a chance to create new memories, to solidify the bond they already shared.

"You are right," she said, a smile replacing the frown. "Let's just focus on us. Besides, I have all the plans laid out for our first day – beach, cocktails under the sunset, and then..." she leaned closer, her voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper, "dinner followed by a long walk on the beach... and maybe something else can follow under the stars."

Harry grinned his eyes twinkling. "Now that's the spirit! Sounds like a perfect plan," he said, his voice low and husky. "But maybe we can skip a few steps in between and jump to the last."

Jade laughed, a bubbly sound that filled the room, "Sure. We can do that but only if you can get the stars to show up in the sky during the day," Jade said and Harry chuckled.

"I believe the sun is a big star," Harry said and Jade giggled.

"By the way, are you going to tell me what you were thinking about earlier and why you were staring at me with a grin?" He asked, and Jade smiled.

"Seeing you seated here that way, sort of brought back memories of my first time here," she said, and Harry grinned.

"What did you remember?" He asked curiously.

"You stayed up to help me work on the evidence I received from Cassidy. I was so touched. And then you touched me even more when you remembered just how I like my coffee," Jade said with a soft smile.

"Well, that's not exactly what I remember," Harry said, and her brow shot up.

"What do you remember?" Jade asked with interest.

"I remember not being able to sleep that night because the love of my life was sleeping a couple of feet away..."

"Oh, please. You slept quite well at the hotel and we were under the same roof," Jade cut in.

"It's not the same. Then, we were in a hotel. Now, you were in my house, sleeping on my bed. It felt more personal. I kept thinking about how to promote you from guest to host," he said, and Jade giggled.

"Really?"

"Yeah. Since I was unable to sleep, I decided to do something more productive by helping you sort out your evidence. And then you woke up and walked in, looking all innocent and sexy and I just had to offer you coffee so I could go catch my breath," he said and she grinned.

"I had that much effect on you, huh?" She asked, and Harry shrugged.

"Well, dreams do come through after all. Now you've got what you wanted," she said and he shook his head.

"Not quite. It's not official yet," Harry said and Jade smiled.

"Have you been thinking about my proposal?" Harry asked and she bobbed her head.

"I told you already. The answer would be the same if you ask me today or in five months," she said and Harry cocked an eyebrow.

"And what will the answer be? No?" He asked, and she nodded.

"Of course. Why would I want to marry a man that treats me so good and makes me so happy? Nah. I can't get married to you. I'd rather stay single or maybe just date you," Jade said dryly, and Harry chuckled.

"Alright. I won't bother proposing then. Let's just keep dating," Harry said and Jade scowled at him making him laugh the more.

"Too bad you're going to be stuck with girlfriend benefits all your life. You know,

"You know what? I'm not going to get mad at you. Nah. I won't do that," Jade said as she rose.

"Where are you going?" Harry asked, missing the feel of her body against his.

"Did you forget that you were busy before I got here? Finish up what you're doing while I make a couple of phone calls. Pre-baecation calls," she said with a wink.

"Baecation?" He asked and she grinned.

"You are my bae. Bae plus vacation is baecation," she said and Harry chuckled.

"Then love plus vacation will be location?" He joked and she shook her head as she giggled.

"Jonas, leave me alone and finish up whatever you are doing. I'm not going to let you take this laptop with you when we leave," she warned before walking away.

Away from there, Lucy stared blankly at the computer screen, the words blurring before her eyes. Her mind was far from the unfinished report demanding her attention.

The morning's events still echoed in her head and left a churning unease in her stomach. She couldn't help feeling so worried about Mia, especially after all they had heard Henry say to her.

Would Mia really be okay? Lucy mused, and then tried to push away the worry, forcing herself to focus on the report kn front of her. Work, logic, routine— anything to drown out the unsettling thoughts.

The shrill ring of her phone startled her. Glancing at the screen, she saw it was her mother. With a sigh, she answered.

"Hi Mom."

"Have you seen the news?" Her mother's voice held a tremor of worry.

"News? What news? I haven't seen anything. what's going on?" Dread coiled in Lucy's gut.

"Oh, Lucy," her mother's voice choked up, "it's Rachel... they are saying she... she committed suicide. They found her this morning."

The phone almost slipped from Lucy's grasp. "Rachel? No, that can't be right." Denial clawed at her throat, squeezing the air from her lungs.

Suicide? Rachel? She had been in her office just three days ago. How could she have committed suicide? It was impossible. But the cold knot of dread tightening in her chest spoke a different truth.

"It's all over the news, honey. They found her..." Her mother's voice broke down into sobs.

"Oh my God, Mom," Lucy breathed, her voice barely a whisper. Her mind reeled, picturing Rachel's tear-streaked face, the raw desperation in her eyes. Had she missed something? Could she have done something different?

"This is so terrible, Lucy," Janet said just as Andrew walked into the bedroom.

"For Christ's sake, Jane, I asked you not to call her yet. She is at the office," Lucy heard her father's voice in the background.

"I had to before she sees it anywhere. And Lucas. We have to tell him," Janet said, and Lucy shut her eyes, not wanting to imagine how Lucas would feel about this.

Even though he had ended things with her, she was someone he loved and had loved with for years. Death always hit differently.

"No. We don't have to tell him anything. She was his ex. He ended things with her and left. He doesn't need to know that she took her life," Andrew said, annoyed as he took the phone from his wife.

"Didn't you see the letter she left? She did it because she said she couldn't leave without Lucas!" Janet pointed out.

"That was probably just an excuse. Her family is going through a tough time and Lucas is the reason she takes her life?" Andrew asked and then took a deep breath.

"Hey, Princess. Don't worry about..."

"She was here three days ago. She came to see me," Lucy cut in tearfully.

"About what?"

"She wanted me to help her resolve things with Lucas. She said she couldn't live without him. She begged. She pleaded. I was harsh, dad. I threw her out of my office without even accepting her apology," Lucy cried.

"It's not your fault, baby. Anyone would have done what you did considering all she did..."

"I could have been kinder. Maybe if I had been kinder and shown a little mercy, she wouldn't have had to do that," Lucy cried as a flood of guilt washed over her.

"Kinder? What could you have done differently? Promise to put in a good word with Lucas? Give her Tyler's number or address so she goes see Lucas? Hug her and say you've forgiven and forgotten?" Her father asked as she cried.

"I don't know. I don't know what I could have done, but I know she might not have done this had I not been so harsh," Lucy said and her mother who was listening sighed.

"Why did she have to do something like this and write about Lucas in her letter?" Janet asked in frustration.

Lucy hung up, not knowing what else to say, and immediately she went online to find the news of Rachel's suicide.

It didn't take her long to see it since it was a trending subject, and according to the details, she had left her handbag with the suicide letter in it and jumped off a bridge.

The letter which was short and to the point, read;

[Life has nothing more to offer me. I have lost it all. My love and my family. I can't keep living this way. I don't want to live a day more without Lucas. I love you, Lucas. I hope you forgive me now.]

#### Chapter 854 Regret Is Useless

While Lucy was still reeling over the shocking news and wondering how Lucas was going to take it since the news was bound to get to him, the phone rang again. This time it was Sonia.

"Lucy, have you heard?" Sonia asked excitedly before Lucy could say a word.

"About Rachel?" Lucy asked, wondering if there was perhaps another news she needed to hear.

"Yes! God! I thought today was going to be a bad day after that bastard showed up to get Mia, but I guess it isn't so bad after all," Sonia said, and Lucy frowned.

"Isn't so bad? Are you happy she took her own life? Christ, Sony!" Lucy exclaimed in disbelief.

"What? You're not happy? Okay, maybe not happy, but isn't the air lighter where you are? I mean one less horrible person sharing the oxygen on the earth with us?" Sonia asked, and Lucy shook her head.

"We are talking about a human being, Sony. A human being is dead. She took her life," Lucy said, not pleased with Sonia's insensitivity.

"Exactly! She took her own life. I didn't. She didn't die in an accident. Her death was her choice, so why should I be sad? She wasn't even a good person. You know me, Lu. I don't pretend. If I'm down for you, I'm totally down. And if I'm not, I'm not. I won't pretend to feel sorry or like her now simply because she is dead. Rachael was a horrible person. That bitch was the witch that tried to

come between Lucas and you. Did you forget what you told me she did to Amy's late best friend? I'm not going to act like I'm sad about the news of her death," Sonia said and Lucy sighed.

"I'm not asking you to pretend to be sad. But you can at least not be so excited about it. I told you she was here on Tuesday to see me. Do you have any idea how I feel knowing that I might have pushed her into taking such a drastic decision?" Lucy asked and Sonia rolled her eyes.

"For heaven's sake, Lu. You didn't push her into doing that. Rachel did what she did for herself. She did it because you made her realize that you know all she did. You opened her eyes to the fact that Lucas is never getting back with her, which is true. If she wasn't such a horrible person in the first place, none of this would have happened. But then again, what do you expect when her family is just as horrible? Come to think of it, why didn't she take her life this whole time? Why didn't she come to your office to beg to see Lucas this whole time? Why did she have to wait until her family lost everything? Wasn't it the same Rachel who got your mom arrested? Did she really plan to get back with Lucas when she did that?" Sonia asked, and as she spoke, Lucy thought about all the points she was raising and they all made sense to her.

"You may be right..."

"Not may, Lu. I am fucking right and I know it. You better not feel sorry or blame yourself for shit. If she felt that death would bring her the peace she needs, shouldn't you be happy for her that she has peace now? If you ask me, I think this was her final attempt to get Lucas' attention even in death, and I really hope Lucas doesn't fall for it," Sonia said and Lucy sighed deeply.

"Well, I hope so. I will talk to you later, So. I need to call Lucas. He should hear it from us. You know, prepare him for the bombshell before he sees it online or something."

Ending the call, Lucy stared at the phone, its weight suddenly unbearable. How could she break this to Lucas, knowing how much he had cared for her? The news would break his heart, but the possibility of him finding out through a stranger on TV was too awful to contemplate.

Taking a deep, shaky breath, she dialed Tyler's number, her heart pounding a frantic rhythm against her ribs.

"Sup, LuLu? Lucas just went to bed," Tyler said with a yawn since he too was getting ready to go to sleep. It was late at night already.

"Oh. Alright," Lucy said, feeling sort of glad that she didn't have to break the news to him now.

"Is something wrong?" Tyler asked with concern when he heard the relief in her voice.

"Uhm, sort of. Rachel is dead," Lucy said, and Tyler let out a low whistle.

"Damn! What happened to her?" Tyler asked, surprised by the news.

"It's on the news. She committed suicide, and she mentioned Lucas in the suicide letter. Do you think that maybe you can tell him about it before he hears or sees it from somewhere? I mean, I know he's probably over her, but she is still someone he used to love," Lucy said and Tyler sighed deeply.

"Sure. I will tell him about it in the morning. We just got here a couple of hours ago..."

"Why? I thought you left on Monday?" Lucy asked in surprise.

"Yeah. That was the plan, but something came up," Tyler said, not wanting to tell Lucy that they had changed their plan because Lucas wanted to attend the funeral and make sure Amy was alright and well received.

"Uhm, how is Mia?" Tyler asked hesitantly since he was still feeling bad about what he had caused. He had seen the news about Henry Rosewood finding his wife who was thought to be dead, and that had made him feel even more terrible.

"He came to get her in the early hours of today. Her husband, I mean," Lucy said and Tyler sighed deeply.

"Do you think she will be okay? Should I try to look out for..."

"No!" Lucy cut in quickly, "Do not ever get involved. I'm sure Tom told you not to talk to your colleague about this, right? Keep acting like you are oblivious to everything. That's the only way Mia's plan can work," Lucy said and Tyler raised a brow.

"What plan?"

"I can't share it with you, Ty. Especially because I don't want you to get involved in any way. This whole thing might be dangerous, so stay out of it. I mean it," Lucy said firmly and Tyler nodded.

"Alright. I've heard you. If I'm needed to step in in any way, do not hesitate to let me know, okay?" Tyler said and Lucy sighed.

"Okay."

"How is Tom?" Tyler asked and Lucy shrugged.

"Busy being a CEO," she said and Tyler narrowed his eyes.

"Is that your way of bragging to me that your boyfriend is a wealthy CEO?" He asked in a teasing tone, and Lucy smiled.

"I don't have to brag. It's a generally known fact," Lucy said and then raised an eyebrow when she saw Amy standing outside her door.

"I've got to go now, Ty. Let Lucas know that I called, and please break the news to him," Lucy said before hanging up, glad that she had been able to shift this unpleasant responsibility to Tyler.

The moment she dropped the phone, she signalled Amy to come in. Amy had resumed work by noon the previous day, and was looking much better than she had been in while.

"Is there a problem?" Lucy asked Amy as she walked in.

"No," Amy said, then cleared her throat, her voice hesitant. "It's just that I saw the news about Rachel and I was sort of wondering... is Lucas alright?" She asked, and before Lucy could answer, Amy rushed on, her words tumbling out in a torrent.

"I mean, I know she is his ex. And please don't think I'm being presumptuous, like... like I read something wrong into Lucas's kindness. He was just so nice, and I felt terrible seeing that news. I know Lucas was kind to me, and he mentioned how you suggested he might be leading me on, so don't get me wrong! I'm not... I mean, I don't for a second think he's... in love with me or anything like that. I just... because he was nice, I was worried about him, you know? I'm just... concerned since he was really nice to me."



Lucy couldn't help but feel a bit amused by Amy's rambling. It surprised her that Lucas had told Amy what she said. When did Lucas talk to her? And how could he have told her she said that? Why would he do that? Lucy mused.

"No, no," Lucy cut her off gently. "I understand. It's perfectly okay to be concerned. You don't have to explain any of that to me," Lucy said, offering her a small, tired smile.

"Thanks, for your understanding. So, uhm, how is he doing?" Amy asked still standing.

She was still hoping she would receive an email from Lucas.

"Do you want to sit?" Lucy asked, gesturing to the seat opposite her, and Amy sat down.

"Thank you."

"I haven't actually spoken to Lucas yet. Tyler's going to... to tell him. He was asleep, so we couldn't talk," Lucy explained, and Amy nodded.

"Could you let me know when you hear from him? Do you think... do you think Lucas will be okay?" she asked quietly.

Lucy studied her for a moment, the raw concern in Amy's eyes making her wonder if Amy was really only concerned because Lucas was kind to her, or if she had developed feelings for Lucas.

"I don't know, honestly," Lucy admitted. "They were together for a long time," Lucy said, wanting to see how interested Amy would be.

"A long time?" Amy asked curiously since she had been wondering just how long Lucas had dated Rachel.

Although she had heard about their relationship and what led to their break up from Miley, she did not have any idea how long the two had been together.

"Since high school. They were engaged and going to get married until Lucas broke things off," Lucy explained without going into the details, and Amy's eyes widened in realization.

That would be almost ten years. He had been with her for almost ten years?

"Now I understand," Amy murmured, thinking that she got the picture now, and understood why he wouldn't want to go into any relationship soon.

She also also understand why Rachel would feel so devastated over losing someone like Lucas. He was a catch and it was definitely a huge lose. She would feel shattered if she lost a man like Lucas.

If he didn't love her and had done all of that for her and treated her so well because he was merely being nice, she couldn't imagine how wonderful a partner he must have been to Rachel.

"If you don't mind me asking, when did you talk to Lucas? I mean, when did he tell you about what I said?" Lucy asked curiously.

"At the funeral," Amy said, and Lucy's brow arched.

Was that what Tyler had meant when he said something came up? Or did something come up and Lucas seized the opportunity to show up at the funeral?

"Oh! I didn't know he made it to the funeral," Lucy said and Amy's lips twitched when she remembered what Lucas had said about being there to clear the air so she wouldn't think he was leading her on.

"Well, he thought it was best to tell me to my face that he didn't love me and was only being his nice self," Amy explained and Lucy winced.

"He said that, didn't he?" She asked, and Amy smiled.

"I'm sorry I told him that and made him come to your best friend's funeral just to say that. Put the blame on me," Lucy said and this time Amy managed a small laugh.

"It wasn't that bad," she assured Lucy, "I was happy to see him. I was glad I could say goodbye and thank him too," Amy said and Lucy nodded.

"Well, I'm glad then."

"I see. I, uh... I should probably get back to work then," she said, but made no attempt to rise.

"Is there something else you wanted to say?" Lucy asked, looking at her with interest.

"What about you? Are you okay? I mean, I don't know if you were both ever close. But she was here a couple of days ago and you must be shocked," Amy said, since she had seen Lucy crying earlier, through the glass door.

Lucy drew a deep breath, "I'm shocked, no doubt. And I was feeling somewhat guilty and wondering if there was something I could have said or done that day to stop this from happening. If for nothing, but Lucas' sake," she said and Amy nodded.

"Was? You don't feel guilty anymore?" Amy asked and Lucy shrugged.

"I don't know. She did what she felt she needed to do. I don't think I would have changed anything I said to her. The truth is, even if we turn back the hands of time, I don't see myself hugging her or promising to help her get back with Lucas. So, it's not on me. My regret is useless," Lucy said honestly, and Amy nodded.

"That's true. Regret is useless. You should fix your makeup," Amy said as she started rising to leave, and then paused.

She had been thinking about it since her conversation with Lucas, and it was best she asked now so she would know where she stood with Lucy.

"Can I ask you a question? As a friend?" She asked, and Lucy nodded.

"Sure. Go ahead."

"I just wanted to ask, did you tell Lucas that because you might have a problem with me developing feelings for him or something?" She asked carefully.

"No. Not at all. I have no problem with you having feelings for him or even dating him. I just wanted him to make sure he knew what he was doing and wasn't leading you on," Lucy explained, and Amy smiled as she rose.

"Alright then. Thanks," Amy said, and as Lucy watched her leave, she couldn't help but wonder if Amy had asked her that because she was interested in Lucas.

Thinking about Lucas, Lucy sighed. She hoped that he would be alright. She hoped that he would heal completely from Rachel and move on. He deserved to be happy.

## Chapter 855 Sappy

The sound of a blaring alarm clock jolted Lucas awake. He fumbled around on the nightstand, his hand finally landing on the source of the racket. With a groan, he silenced the insistent beeping.

Although he was still very exhausted from the long flight and his lack of sleep since the last couple of days, he knew he had to get busy if he didn't want to be late for his lectures.

He sat up in bed, blinking away the remnants of sleep before stretching his stiff muscles.

Why did his alarm go off earlier than usual? He mused when he saw it was not seven in the morning yet.

As he glanced around the bedroom, his eyes fell on his suitcase, and then he remembered the reason he had set the alarm earlier than usual. It was so he could unpack and organize his stuff before leaving for his training.

The visit to Ludus had been far more eventful and memorable than he anticipated. From the moment they arrived to the moment they left, it had been filled with drama, and it was funny that Amy was the first person he saw when he arrived and the last too.

It seemed like everything he had done during his trip was directly related to Amy. One would think he had made the trip solely for her sake.

Lucas shook his head, not wanting to start his day with thoughts of her. Before leaving for Ludus, his excuse for thinking of her had been that he was worried about Miley's situation, now that Miley was okay and all had been resolved, he no longer had any excuse to be consumed with thoughts of her, especially not when he had so much to do, Lucas decided as he swung his legs over the side of the bed and reached for his suitcase.

He placed it on the bed, and as he unzipped the main compartment, his fingers brushed against something soft in the pocket of his jacket. He pulled it out and a small smile played on his lips as he unfolded the now slightly crumpled piece of paper. It was the leftover thank you card from the funeral, Amy's email address scrawled messily on the front.

He reread the email address she had scrawled on it, and his lips curved in a smile at the memory of their conversation.

He hadn't expected her to be that chatty considering how teary she had been at the funeral.

He winced slightly, remembering the eulogy Amy had delivered. Her raw emotion had been palpable, and for a brief moment, he had allowed himself to get lost in the memories she'd shared about Miley.

He pictured her tear-streaked face at the funeral, her raw vulnerability, and a part of him wanted to reach out, to find out how she was doing now.

Should he email her or not? He mused, thinking that since he had agreed that they exchange emails, it was only right that he sent her an email.

But then he remembered his conversation with Lucy. Her words echoed in his mind, raising a wall of doubt. Was he just being nice? Or was there more to it? Like he had told everyone, he wasn't ready for a relationship yet, and he meant it.

He sighed, running a hand through his hair. Perhaps he could just send an email, letting her know he had arrived safely and to find out if she has gone back to Ludus. The email would be polite and impersonal, he told himself, but then the memory of Amy's smile, the way her eyes had twinkled when she'd suggested they exchange texts, stopped him.

Maybe it was best if he let it be. If he ran into her in the future, he would simply claim to have lost the email address, Lucas decided even though he knew that would be a poor excuse since he could easily ask Lucy for her contact if something like that happened and he really meant to reach out to her.

Lucas sighed and shook his head when he realized that once again, he was distracted from what he was supposed to be doing and was thinking about Amy when he said he wouldn't do that anymore.

He raised his head when Tyler knocked on the door, then pushed it open gently, "Luke? Are you up?" Tyler asked before his gaze settled on Lucas.

"Yeah. What's up?" Lucas asked as he gazed at Tyler, wondering why he looked sort of pensive so early in the morning.

"Uhm, can we talk for a moment?" Tyler asked, wishing her hadn't agreed to be the bearer of such a news.

"Sure. Is something wrong?" Lucas asked, and Tyler sighed deeply.

"There is something you need to see," he said, then handed his phone to Lucas so he would see the news directly from the source.

Lucas' brows were pulled together in a frown as he took the phone and then gazed down at it to see what Tyler was showing him.

The moment he saw Rachel's picture on the screen, his heart skipped a beat, and then his gaze shot to the caption on the post.

"Rachel is dead?" He asked in disbelief without looking up from the post.

"Lucy called while you were asleep and asked that I let you know," Tyler explained as he sat down on the bed, ready to comfort Lucas and assure him that it wasn't his fault and he shouldn't blame himself.

Lucas said nothing as he read the suicide note and then when he was done he exhaled deeply, "Too bad she chose to end her life this way," Lucas said as he returned the phone to Tyler.

"How do you feel?" Tyler asked, watching Lucas closely.

"How am I supposed to feel? I feel sorry for her that she lived selfishly and also chose to die the same way," Lucas said flatly, and Tyler raised an eyebrow.

"You're not feeling bad or blaming yourself, right?" He asked, and Lucas scoffed.

"Did I do anything wrong that I need to blame myself for? I won't let her control me even with her death. This is her attempt to guilt trip me into regretting the break up. I did what was best for me,

and she has also done what she believed is best for her. It is a shame that she is dead, but I have no regrets. If I was going to regret this, then I wouldn't have cut ties with her in the first place," Lucas said firmly and Tyler let out a sigh of relief.

"Good. I'm relieved you think of it this way. I was sort of worried that you would be broken by this," Tyler admitted.

"Broken?"

"Yes. You were with her for so many years, and she is your first love after all," Tyler said and Lucas nodded.

"I guess so. I'm not saying I don't feel saddened by her death. I'm just saying, it's the same way I would feel if I heard of the passing of a neighbor or an acquaintance. I'm just not broken by it or devastated. I've spent the last couple of weeks detaching myself emotionally from her and I never planned to set eyes on her ever again, so it's all the same to me," Lucas said logically and Tyler nodded.

"That's good then. I will go get ready and leave for work," Tyler said as he rose to leave.

"Now that she won't be bothering you anymore, don't you think you should get a phone? That way your family can contact you easily," Tyler suggested.

"Is that your way of saying you are tired of letting me borrow your phone?" Lucas asked dryly.

"Yes, please," Tyler said and Lucas chuckled.

"Alright. I will. But first let me give Lu a call. Knowing how she overthinks, she is probably blaming herself and feeling bad," Lucas said, worried about Lucy.

"Sure. Bring the phone over when you're done," Tyler said before walking away, and the moment he left, Lucas dialed Lucy's line on video call, knowing that she was probably done with work for the day and was on her way home.

The call connected on the first ring, "Hey, Ty..."

"Why would Tyler be the one calling you?" Lucas asked dryly.

"Because it's his phone and he can call me when he wants to," Lucy said, and then narrowed her eyes.

"Has he spoken with you yet?" Lucy asked, wondering why Lucas looked and sounded like his normal self if he had heard the news from Tyler.

"Is there something he is supposed to tell me? Don't tell me you plan to elope with him," Lucas said, and Lucy rolled her eyes.

"Why would I elope with him when I have a man? He didn't say anything to you?" Lucy asked, wondering if Tyler had forgotten to tell Tyler about it or had left it up to her to break the news to him.

"Is there something I need to know?" Lucas asked, choosing to play ignorant so he would know how Lucy was feeling.

Tyler, that bastard! She couldn't believe he had left it up to her after assuring her that he would tell Lucas.

Taking a deep breath, Lucy decided to tell Lucas about it, "Uhm, well, it's about Rachel," Lucy said, and Lucas frowned.

"What about her? Don't tell me she showed up at your office again," he asked, and she shook her head.

"No. It's not that. It's worse. It's not good news, Luke. She is dead," Lucy said, and then waited for the shock and disbelief, but Lucas merely nodded.

"Hm. I see," he said and she frowned.

"I'm serious, Luke. She committed suicide. She is dead," Lucy said and Lucas nodded once again.

"I heard you the first time," he said, and she narrowed her eyes.

"You knew, didn't you?" She asked suspiciously, and he shrugged.

"Yeah. Tyler told me..."

"You bastard!" She spat, and he chuckled.

"You're my twin, Lu. If I'm a bastard, you are also a bastard, bastard," he said, wanting to lighten the mood.

"Are you okay?" Lucy asked with a concerned frown.

"Sure. Why not? She was dead to me, anyway. So, why won't I be okay? The question is, are you okay? Or are you guilt ridden?" He asked, and she shrugged.

"At first I was feeling very guilty, but I feel better now," she admitted, and he nodded.

"Good. That's why I called. I wanted to make sure you were not feeling unnecessarily guilty. What happened between us and what she did has nothing to do with you, so don't let it affect you," Lucas advised, and she nodded.

"I'm more relieved that you're okay. I was worried that the news might upset you. Mom was worried too," Lucy explained.

"Well, you all don't need to worry. I'm an adult and I know better than to let this get to me more than it should, and you should know better too. She is trying to manipulate our feelings even with her death. Don't let her," Lucas advised.

"Alright. Sure. By the way, Amy was worried about you too," Lucy said, and Lucas frowned.

"Amy? Why?"

"Why else? She was worried that the news would upset you," Lucy said, and Lucas shrugged.

"Well, let her know there is no need for her to be upset. I'm perfectly fine," Lucas said dismissively.

"What?" He asked when Lucy kept staring at him without saying anything.

"Nothing other the fact that I can't believe you told Amy what I said," Lucy said and Lucas frowned.

"She told you I told her that?" He asked and she nodded.

"She also asked if I told you that because I might have a problem with her having feelings for you," Lucy said, and this time his eyebrow shot up.

"She asked you that? Why would she ask you that? What did you say?" Lucas asked and Lucy smiled.

"I gave her my blessing," she said and Lucas eyed her with disapproval.

"What blessing? Did she tell you anything else? What did you both discuss?" He asked curiously.

"So you would go back to her and tell her whatever I tell you? Nah. I'm not telling you anything," she said and Lucas scowled.

"So, why did you bring it up in the first place then?" He asked with displeasure.

"So, you can do with the information what you please. I'm sure you're an adult and can connect dots," Lucy said and Lucas shook his head.

"Whatever. I have to go now. I have a busy day ahead," Lucas said and Lucy nodded.

"Alright..."

"Why are you still at the office by this time?" Lucas asked when he took note of her environment.

"Tom is stuck in a meeting. I'm waiting for him," she explained.

"Why? You can't find your way home without him?" Lucas asked dryly.

"He is my home," Lucy said, and Lucas cringed.

"That sounds weirdly sappy coming from you. I will let mom and dad know you no longer need a room at home, since Tom is your home now," he said and Lucy giggled.

"You're an idiot," she said with a shake of her head and Lucas chuckled as he hung up.

Lucy let out a sigh of relief, glad that Lucas was alright and not as affected by the news as they had all assumed he would be.

## Chapter 856 Predictable

After Tom was done with his meeting, he made his way to Lucy's office where she was waiting for him, and when he got to the glass door of her office, he stopped, and watched as she slept soundly with her head resting on her desk.

He felt a pang of guilt at the sight. He didn't like that he was keeping her waiting this way.

Heaving a sigh, Tom gently pushed the door open. The soft click went unnoticed and when she didn't stir, he realized that she must be deeply asleep. He couldn't imagine how exhausted she must be to be sleeping that soundly in such a position.

Anger, hot and unwelcome, flickered in his chest. Henry. That inconsiderate— Tom stopped himself just short of muttering a curse. The exhaustion etched on Lucy's face was a clear picture of the disrupted night.

Henry, that bastard had disturbed their sleep, after all. They had been unable to go back to bed after Henry picked Mia, and she had only slept for about three hours before the call.

He crossed the room, careful not to make a sound, his gaze lingering on the vulnerability splayed across Lucy's face. This wasn't a safe place to sleep, he thought, a sliver of unease worming its way into his gut. What if it had been someone else who walked in?

The protectiveness swelled, a familiar urge. Should he get her a car and a driver? A security guard? Was that overkill?

Would that be considered as being overprotective? He mused as he gently brushed a stray hair strand from her face, and Lucy stirred.

Tom watched as her lashes fluttered and her eyes opened. The moment she focused on him, her lips curved with a slow smile that spread across her face, chasing away the shadows of fatigue and she sat up.

"You're here," her voice was a husky whisper, but the warmth in her eyes banished the last trace of his annoyance.

"Missed me?" He asked, his own voice soft as he watched her with a loving gaze.

"Like crazy," she said, reaching out to him and he leaned forward and kissed her.

"

"Yup. How was your meeting?" She asked as she rose.

"It was okay. Let's go home. You look exhausted," he said as he picked up her blazer from where she hung it.

"Today seems like two days in one," she said with a yawn as she turned her back to Tom so he could help her wear the blazer.

"Why? Did something happen? Or are you saying that because you woke up too early?" He asked curiously as they both headed for the door.

"Well, I did wake up too early. Rachel is dead," Lucy said, and Tom turned to her.

"What happened?" He asked without breaking his stride as they continued for the elevator.

"She committed suicide," Lucy said and Tom nodded.

"You didn't cry, did you?" He asked and she shook her head.

"I didn't. Why would I?" Lucy asked as they got into the elevator.

"You did," Tom said knowingly, and she scowled.

"I just said I didn't."

"That doesn't sound like my girlfriend. Knowing you, you probably blamed yourself and figured that if you had been nicer she wouldn't have taken her life. And then you worried about Lucas. You must be okay now because Lucas is most likely fine and maybe both him and Sonia have talked you out of your guilt," Tom said, and Lucy glared at him.

"What?" Tom asked, resisting the urge to smile.

"Did you talk to Sonia or Lucas?" She asked, and he raised a brow.

"If I had the time to talk to them would I have kept you waiting for this long?" He asked, and she scowled.

"So what are you trying to say? That you know me very much?" She asked irritably, and he grinned.



"We both know I do," he said as he pulled her to himself.

"So, what? You want an award now?" She asked and Tom chuckled.

"What kind of award would it be?" He asked, wondering why she seemed so irritated.

"A know it all award," she hissed, and he kissed the tip of her nose.

"I don't know it all. I don't want a know it all award. I want a know my girlfriend award. Could you give me that?" he asked just as the elevator door opened.

Lucy rolled her eyes as she stepped out of the elevator leaving him to follow her.

"Why are you annoyed?" He asked as they walked into his office.

"I'm not annoyed. I just don't like being so predictable," she said with a scowl.

"Well, I like it. Being predictable isn't always a bad thing. Besides, I don't think you're that predictable. I was able to guess how you felt because I have taken my time to study and get to know and understand you and how you think. Wouldn't you want to be able to predict me? I would love you to," he said and she sighed as they got into his private elevator.

"I'm hungry," she murmured, and the smile slid off his face.

"What do you want to eat? Can you wait until we get home or should we just stop over at a restaurant for dinner?" Tom asked, and she nodded.

"I haven't had anything to eat all day," she confessed.

"What? Why not?" He asked, and when she gave him a pointed look, he realized it was because he had missed lunch time.

"C'mon, Jewel. You should have gotten something no matter how little," he said with a frown.

"Well, I might have, but I was also upset about the Rachel situation and worried about Lucas, so I lost track of time," she said, and Tom glanced at his watch.

"Let's have dinner before we head home then. We will go to somewhere nearby," he said, making a mental note to make sure they ate before leaving in the morning going forward.

And he would have to ask Adolf to deliver lunch to Lucy going forward, at least until Harry returned and his schedule became less tight. After the last ulcer episode he had witnessed, he didn't want to see it happen again.

As he drove to the restaurant, they filled each other in on the details of their day.

"I'm so glad you have Harry to balance things out with you, else I'm not sure how I would have coped with having such a busy boyfriend," Lucy said as they pulled into the parking lot of the restaurant, and Tom chuckled.

"Coming from someone who didn't want a boyfriend in the first place," he pointed out.

"I may not have wanted it, but now that I have it, I intend to enjoy it to the maximum," she said, and Tom turned to give her a naughty smile.

"It? Or him? Don't tell me you want to do it," he said, and she giggled as they both got out of the car.

"Whatever. You know what I meant," she said, laughing softly.

They walked into the restaurant, a warm buzz of conversation and clinking silverware filling the air. Tom scanned the room for a table, his hand resting possessively on Lucy's lower back.

As they rounded a corner, a woman with fiery red hair and a tight emerald dress practically collided with them.

"Tom!" she shrieked, her voice laced with surprise and a hint of something else. "Oh my gosh, it's really you!" She said excitedly as she threw herself at him.

Tom blinked, momentarily taken aback. "Tricia," Tom said without emotion as he stepped back.

Tricia was the lady he had dated before Anita. They had been together for six months and just when he had thought she might be the right one for him, he found out that the only reason she was cool with dating a nobody like him was because she had a wealthy boyfriend at the side who was sponsoring her lifestyle.

Tricia beamed at him. Her eyes, however, flickered past him for a fleeting moment before settling back on his face.

"Wow, you look way better than you did the last time we were together," Tricia gushed, leaning in a little too close for comfort.

Lucy, who was wondering who she was and waiting for Tom to do the introductions, frowned when she saw how the redhead practically draped over Tom.

"I saw your interview. How could you hide something like that from me when you know how much I love you?" She asked with a sexy pout.

"Hi," Lucy said curtly, her voice leaving no room for misinterpretation.

Tricia's smile faltered for a split second before she schooled her features into a wide, fake grin. "Oh, hello there. I'm Tricia, Tom's... friend. You must be his secretary," She extended a hand towards Lucy, but her eyes remained fixed on Tom.

Lucy met her gaze coolly. "Lucy," she said, taking Tricia's hand in a firm handshake. "His girlfriend. And I'm very sure you know that already since you just said you saw the interview."

The air crackled with a sudden tension. Tricia's smile faltered for a real moment this time, a flicker of annoyance crossing her features. She quickly recovered, though, her gaze flitting back to Tom.

"I must have skipped that part. Girlfriend, huh?" she drawled, her voice dripping with a hint of disbelief. "Well, isn't that something?"

"Yeah. It is. So, you can stop flirting with my man. It's rude to do so in front of me," Lucy said bluntly and a flicker of irritation crossed Tricia's face, but it was quickly masked by a sugary-sweet smile.

"Slow down. I've been there before you. And who knows? Someone else might come after you," Tricia said, but Lucy ignored her and turned to Tom.

"I'm starving. I will go ahead to get a table and order something to eat while you catch up with your... friend," Lucy said, and Tricia smiled.

"Run along then. We don't want you starving. I will try not to keep him from you for too long," she said, and Tom, who had been observing the exchange, finally stepped in.

"That won't be necessary, Jewel," Tom said to Lucy, holding her hand.

He turned to Tricia, "There is nothing to catch up on. It's been nice seeing you again. Take care," Tom said politely.

Tricia bit her lip, her gaze lingering on Tom for a moment longer than necessary. "Sure, of course," she said finally, her voice laced with disappointment. "It was lovely seeing you. Good luck with everything. And congratulations, Tom. You certainly have good taste."

Lucy met Tricia's gaze head-on. "Thank you," Lucy said sweetly.

Tricia's smile faltered again, a hint of pink creeping up her cheeks. She cast a hesitant glance at Tom, who seemed amused by the entire exchange.

Sensing his amusement, Lucy nudged him. "Come on, love," she said, her voice laced with mock impatience. "Let's go get a table,"

Tom chuckled, "Lead the way, Jewel."

With a triumphant smile, Lucy led Tom away. She couldn't help but steal a glance back at Tricia, who was staring after them, a mixture of emotions swirling in her eyes.

Lucy offered a small, satisfied smirk before turning away, content in the knowledge that she had successfully asserted her territory.

Once they got to a table and were seated, Lucy looked at Tom as she picked up the menu, "So, who is she? One of your ex girlfriends? Or an admirer?"

"The ex before Anita," he said casually as he signalled to a waiter who was walking by.

"I didn't know redheads were your type," Lucy said just as the waiter stopped by their table and they placed their order.

"You both seemed awfully friendly with all that hug. For a moment I thought you were going to carry her," Lucy said dryly, resuming the conversation which Tom thought had ended.

"I apologize for that. She can be a bit... much," Tom admitted with a grimace. "But honestly, Jewel, you have nothing to worry about. We haven't spoken since I called off things with her and if you weren't there, I wouldn't have chatted with her for that long."

"Well, I'm not worried. You should try to keep it brief next time whether I'm there or not," she said, and Tom grinned.

"Sure. But if I had done so I wouldn't have had the joy of watching you establish your territory in that manner," he said and she shook her head.

"What is it with you and women anyway? It's like I can't turn my eyes away from you for a moment without some lady trying to flirt with you," Lucy muttered.

"It's not me they want. It's my money," Tom said and she shook her head.

"Nah. When you were just my driver, women looked at you that way too. You're more than just your money. You are goodlooking, you are funny, you are thoughtful. What woman wouldn't want you?"

"Why then did I not find any suitable woman this whole time?" He asked, and she shrugged.

"You were looking in all the wrong places. If you had come to Heden you would have found me sooner," she said with a wink, and Tom laughed.

"Well, I believe I found you at the right time," he said just as the waiter returned with a cocktail for him, and a mocktail for Lucy.

"Well, cheers to right timing," Lucy said, raising her glass to Tom who clinked his with hers.

"Talking about timing, I should check on Harry and Jade when we get home. They should have arrived at their destination by now," Tom said, and Lucy raised a brow over the rim of her mocktail glass.

"Really? They went to somewhere that close?" She asked as she drank from it, and he nodded.

"Yeah. Harry wanted somewhere not very far away so we can easily fly over there for the proposal," he explained before taking a sip from his glass.

"Oh, that makes sense," Lucy said with a nod, "when we go on a vacation, make sure it's somewhere really far away," she said, and Tom chuckled.

"I will keep that in mind," he said as the waiter arrived with their dinner.

"I wonder how Mia is doing," Lucy said after the waiter had left.

"Me too. But let's not worry about it. He won't hurt her. If he was going to, he wouldn't have announced that he was bringing her back," Tom said, and Lucy nodded thoughtfully as she focused on her meal.

## Chapter 857 Till Death Do Us Part

The sleek black resort car glided to a stop in front of the grand entrance of the Oriental Palms Resort, and the chauffeur got out of the car, and went to hold out the door for a very excited Jade and Harry.

As they got out of the car, Harry took a deep breath, the humid air thick with the scent of plumeria and salt. Jade, however, barely seemed to notice the heat. Her eyes were wide with wonder as she gazed out at the breathtaking vista before them.

Jade looked around, her eyes gleaming with barely concealed excitement as she took in the beautiful view of the palm trees which were swaying gently in the warm breeze. They had formed a verdant canopy overhead, casting dappled shadows on the polished marble floor.

Lush gardens, bursting with vibrant tropical blooms, flanked the entrance, their intoxicating fragrance mingling with the salty tang of the nearby ocean.

"I know I haven't seen it all yet, but this is absolutely beautiful!" Jade said, and Harry couldn't help but smile at Jade's infectious enthusiasm.

A bellboy with a smile as bright as the hibiscus flower tucked behind his ear whisked their luggage away, leaving them free to marvel at the resort's breathtaking entrance.

Hand in hand, they walked, following the bellboy's lead. They walked along a winding path adorned with vibrant bougainvillea and fragrant frangipani trees. The air buzzed with the gentle chirping of exotic birds, adding to the peaceful and calm atmosphere.

Harry like Jade, was momentarily mesmerized by the breathtaking view that unfolded before them. The greenish-blue waters of the sea stretched out to the horizon, its surface shimmering like a vast sheet of polished sapphire. Sailboats with billowing white sails danced gracefully on the waves, while powdery white sand, as pristine as sugar, stretched endlessly along the shoreline.

Jade's eyes widened as she took in the scene, a gasp escaping her lips. Her gaze swept across the glistening infinity pool that seemed to merge seamlessly with the ocean beyond, then landed on the charming thatched-roof buildings that housed the resort's luxurious accommodations.

"Harry," she breathed, her voice filled with awe, "it's even more beautiful than the pictures!"

"Yeah. It is," Harry agreed as they continued to follow the bellboy.

Finally, they reached a secluded section of the resort, nestled amidst a grove of swaying palm trees. A discrete sign proclaimed it the "Lover's Lane" section, a promise of intimacy and romance.

"Ready to see our love nest?" he asked, amusement dancing in his eyes.

Jade's head snapped towards him, her eyes sparkling. "Love nest?"

Harry chuckled and leaned closer to whisper in her ears, "We have this whole area to ourself. I want you to be able to scream freely without feeling embarrassed later."

A blush stained Jade's cheeks as her lips curved in a wide grin, "I can't wait," she whispered back, and Harry chuckled.

The bellboy unlocked the door to their suite, and the scene that greeted them was nothing short of breathtaking. Floor-to-ceiling windows offered a panoramic view of the ocean, the turquoise expanse stretching endlessly towards the horizon.

The pièce de résistance, however, was the ceiling which was also made of glass. It kept the scorch of the sun away, but made the room bright enough to not need any artificial source of light during the day, and gave a promise of a wonderful view of the stars at night.

It offered an uninterrupted view of the ocean while ensuring complete privacy from prying eyes.

The tile on the floor was a 3D beach sand design making the room look like they were outside in the open, yet felt like they were indoors. It was both magical and brilliant.

A plush king-sized bed, draped in crisp white linens, took center stage. Directly above the bed was a mirrored ceiling added a touch of playful sensuality.

Harry turned to Jade, and wasn't surprised to see her mouth agape.

Jade's eyes were wide with delight as she took in the room. She walked over to the window, her fingers trailing along the cool glass as she gazed out at the incredible view. "This is all so awesome," she whispered, turning back to Harry with a radiant smile.

"You can contact the reception via the telephone if you need anything. There is an easy to use map in the top drawer of the nightstand. You can find your way around easily using the map. If you do not have any questions, I'd like to be excused," the bellboy said politely, and Harry gave him a nod, permitting him to leave.

Jade's gaze swept across the room, taking in the private balcony with a hammock swaying gently in the breeze, the walk-in closet filled with plush robes, and the sleek marble bathroom.

Jade hurried over to check out the bathroom, "Jonas, come over here," she called, and Harry went to join her.

The tile on the floor of the bathroom was a 3D beach wave design, making it look like the bedroom was the sea shore and you were walking into the waters when you crossed into the bathroom.

A heart-shaped bathtub, crafted from polished white marble, sat in the center of the space, beckoning with the promise of a luxurious soak. Above the bathtub, a whimsical crystal chandelier sparkled, casting a soft, romantic glow.

Jade could imagine soaking in the warm water, bubbles cascading down her shoulders, all while gazing out at the outside view.

Beside the bathtub, a walk-in shower boasted a rain shower big enough for two and dual showerheads, hinting at a shower experience fit for royalty. Situated at the side was a double toilet for lovers. floor-to-ceiling glass wall that separated the bathroom from the bedroom.

"What do you think this is meant for?" Jade asked as she picked up a controller by the washbasin beside the toilet.

The moment she pressed it, the transparent glass wall separating the bathroom from the bedroom became opaque, and they could no longer see the bedroom from there.

Harry grinned, "No privacy unless you want it. I love it," he said and Jade giggled, her laughter, light and carefree,

"Me too. I think the bedroom should have something similar," she said as she returned into the bedroom.

"No, it doesn't. I was told the glass wall of the bedroom lets you see outside, but no one can see inside from the outside incase you forget to adjust it," he said and Jade jumped on the bed.

"I love it!" She screamed happily.

Jade got off the bed and went to stand in front of him, "Oh, Harry," Jade breathed, her voice filled with awe. "This is the most beautiful place on earth!"

Harry watched with amusement as she spun a slow circle, her sundress rolling around her legs like a summer breeze, taking in every detail.

"The bathtub, the view, the bed..." she trailed off, a playful glint in her eyes as she stopped and met his gaze.

Harry, watching her reaction, felt a surge of love and warmth spread through him. All the planning, all the meticulous searching for the perfect getaway, felt instantly validated by the smile on her face.

He had hoped to impress her, but this— this was pure, unadulterated joy. The way her eyes sparkled, the excitement bubbling in her voice, filled him with an immense sense of satisfaction.

He had brought her here, to this paradise, and the joy he saw reflected in her face was all the reward he needed. Her excitement was contagious, a reflection of his own growing anticipation.

Harry, unable to contain his amusement, chuckled. "Seems someone's impressed." He couldn't help but be enchanted by her childlike excitement.

"Impressed?" Jade feigned a dramatic sigh. "You, my darling, have outdone yourself!" She walked towards the veranda, flinging open the glass doors. The scent of salty air and exotic flowers mingled with the warm breeze, further igniting her senses.

Turning back to face him, her smile was radiant. "So, what do you say we christen that magnificent bathtub first?" she purred, her voice laced with a hint of mischief. "A long soak and a little rest before we explore the beach, wouldn't you agree?"

Harry's smile mirrored hers, "That wasn't your original plan," he reminded her.

"Well, you did say the sun is a big star and I can see it from inside," she said with a wink and Harry laughed merrily, "So? Like my new plan better?"

"Love it," he agreed, stepping closer to her. The ocean breeze played with her hair, sending a careless strand teasingly across her lips. He leaned in, brushing it away with a gentle touch. "Anything for my excited goddess," he whispered, his lips hovering tantalizingly close to hers.

With the promise of a luxurious soak and a romantic evening ahead, the start of their vacation couldn't have been more perfect.

Away from there, Mia was seated in the private Jet, and opposite her, Henry sat rigidly in his plush leather seat, a statue carved from granite.

Twelve hours had crawled by, each minute marked by the suffocating silence between them. Mia knew it was a game he was playing, a test of her endurance, a chilling display of his power.

It was a deliberate ploy, a chilling game of cat and mouse where he wielded the silence like a weapon. It was designed to break her, to make her beg for his mercy.

Finally, Henry spoke, his voice devoid of warmth, sharp as a shard of ice. "Did you know," he began, his eyes boring into hers, "that at this very moment, I could open this door and push you out? At this altitude, one push is all it takes. You'd tumble out and plummet to your death. A fleeting speck against the clouds, disappearing into the vast emptiness below. And no one, not a single soul, would bat an eyelid." he drawled, his eyes glinting with malice,

Mia met his gaze unflinchingly. "Do it then," she challenged, her voice a steely whisper. "Push me out. End this charade."

A flicker of surprise crossed Henry's face, replaced by a cruel smile. "No, my dear, Vanessa. That would be too easy, wouldn't you say? Death," he said, savoring the word, "would be too merciful for you. By the time I'm done with you, you'll be begging for oblivion, but it will remain just out of reach. A cruel twist of fate, wouldn't you say?"

Mia refused to give him the satisfaction of fear. "Why didn't you remarry when you thought I was dead?" Mia asked, holding his gaze.

"You mean too much to me to be replaced so easily," Henry said with a smile that sent shivers down her spine.

"I know why you're doing this," she stated, her voice steady.

A sardonic chuckle escaped his lips. "You do? Enlighten me. What pearls of wisdom have you gleaned in your self-imposed exile?" He challenged, a dangerous glint in his eyes.

"You're punishing me because I brushed you off ten years ago at the party, and for not remembering you all these years," she said, her voice steady. "You're mad because a silly teenage girl didn't see what a 'catch' you were," Mia said, wanting to see if it was really true.

The smile returned, wider, crueller this time. A predator savoring his prey. "Took you long enough to figure it out, didn't it?"

"The past three years have been a time of reflection," she continued, her gaze unwavering. "A time to dissect the choices that led me where I am."

"Reflection," he scoffed, "yet instead of seeking forgiveness, you pulled such a silly stunt and made a fool of me. You ran." he sneered.

"For survival. I had to save myself from you." she countered.

He slammed his fist against the armrest, the sudden violence of the gesture making her flinch. "Two strikes, Mia. You brushed me off, and now you ran. That counts as two strikes, wouldn't you say, Mrs Rosewood?" He leaned forward, his voice dropping to a menacing hiss.

"One more, Vanessa. One more strike, and I won't hesitate. Three strikes, and you disappear. Permanently. And your pathetic family... they'll disappear too. You and your leech of a family will vanish without a trace." he declared, his voice dripping with venom.

"You got married to me just so you could teach me a lesson? What kind of life is this, Henry? Why are you living in the past, consumed by a rejection that happened years ago?" Mia whispered.

He ignored her question, his eyes glinting with a chilling certainty as he leaned forward. "When we land, there is only one story to tell. You were rescued from the accident by strangers and couldn't contact us because you didn't remember anything about yourself or your past. Then, a miraculous recovery three days ago, hence the frantic call to your beloved husband. You will play your part, Vanessa. Won't you?"

Mia's stomach churned, but this time, it wasn't fear. It was a cold, steely resolve. She locked eyes with him. In that locked gaze, a flicker of defiance sparked. "I will do as you say, Henry," she agreed, her voice devoid of emotion.

A cruel smile played on his lips. He had her right where he wanted her—trapped, scared, and compliant. But Mia knew better.

This was just the beginning, a new game with different rules. This time, she wouldn't be running. This time, she would fight back.

She understood something Harry and the others didn't understand— It was going to take the death of one of them for this to end. It was a till death do us part relationship.

Exposing him and having him arrested would never be enough. Only death would set her free, and she had no plans of dying.

## Chapter 858 The World Of The Rich And Famous

Laughter filled the cozy dining room on Saturday morning as Candace and Andy watched the playful contest between Aaron and Jamal as they had breakfast.

Jamal was always hesitant to eat his green beans, so Aaron always came up with different fun games to make him eat them.



This morning, it was a game of first to finish everything on their plate grants a wish. And Aaron was smart enough to finish everything on his plate just before Jamal took the last spoon.

"Grandpa, you cheated!" Jamal shrieked, making everyone laugh.

Aaron chuckled, "Don't be a sore loser, boy. Now, it's time for you to grant my wish," Aaron said and Jamal frowned.

"But I don't have anything. I can't give you anything," he said, and Aaron smiled.

"You have a whole lot, boy. You have a wealthy grandfather, a wealthy mother, a wealthy, aunt, and a wealthy uncle. You're the richest amongst us all, don't you know that?" He asked, and Jamal's eyes lit up.

"Really? Am I richer than Tom?" He asked and they laughed.

"When is your obsession with Tom's wealth going to end?" Candace asked and Jamal's brow pulled together.

"What is Obetion?" He asked, making them laugh.

"It means when you want something very much," Andy responded easily.

"Like I want to talk to Dawn?" Jamal asked, and they all laughed.

"When did you become so close to Dawn that you keep wanting to talk to her, anyway?" Candace asked, and Jamal shrugged.

"Lucy likes her. I like her too," Jamal said, thinking about Dawn with a fond smile, "When I grow up and I'm super rich, I'm going to marry her," he said confidently.

"Marry?" Aaron asked, and he nodded his head.

"Yes. I will marry her and we will have a big party. Everybody will be there. And I will buy her a house and a big car," Jamal said, and Candace raised an eyebrow.

"What about me? Will you buy me a house and a big car?" She asked and Jamal shrugged.

"You have a car already. I will ask Matt to buy you a house," Jamal said and they all laughed.

"So, you're not going to buy me anything but you will buy Dawn a house and a car?" Candace asked and Jamal sighed.

"Alright. I will buy you something. Maybe a plane. Because I love you," Jamal said and Candace smiled happily.

"What about me? Are you buying me something?" Andy asked, and Jamal smiled.

"You and mom can share the plane. It will be too big for her alone," he said, and they all laughed.

"I guess I made the right choice in taking Dawn's side when you fought. I don't want to be on bad terms with my futur daughter in-law," Candace said and Jamal nodded.

"You have to be good to her, okay?" He said, and Candace nodded.

"If you're done, can I tell you what I want now?" Aaron asked with a small smile.

"Okay," Jamal said with a solemn expression.

"I want you to eat all your vegetables next week even though I won't be around..."

"You won't be around?"

"Where are you going? Why are we just hearing it now?" Andy and Candace asked at the same time.

"I'm going on a little trip," Aaron announced, his voice carrying an undercurrent of nervousness he hadn't planned on. "To Ludus. On Monday."

Candace's brow furrowed. "Ludus? But Harry just left there for his vacation. Why would you want to go to Ludus?"

Aaron cleared his throat, the excitement dimming slightly. "There's something I need to do there."

"Can I come with you to Ludus? Maybe I can see Lucy and Tom," Jamal asked, excited at the thought.

"You can't, boy," Aaron said gently, "you have school on Monday. Besides, this trip is just for grown-ups." He winked at Jamal. "You know, business and all that boring stuff."

"What kind of business do you have there?" Candace asked with a concerned frown.

"Is it what I'm thinking?" Andy chimed in, "A visit to the prison?" Andy asked, a knowing glint in her eyes.

"Don't be ridiculous, Andy. There's no way he will travel down there to see Sara," Candace said dismissively.

"Who is Sara?" Jamal piped up, ever-curious. He had heard the name a couple of times but he had no idea who that was.

"Jam, this is adult conversation. Go do your assignments in your bedroom. Leave the difficult ones for later," Candace ordered and even though Jamal didn't like how they dismissed him each time they wanted to talk, he rose and did as he was asked.

"You're going to see her, right?" Andy asked after Jamal had left.

"Yes," Aaron admitted.

Candace's scowl deepened, "Why? What for? This is ridiculous, Dad. There's no reason for you to want to go see her. There's no reason for you to want anything to do with that woman. She doesn't deserve it." Candace said with displeasure.

Aaron sighed, "I know she doesn't deserve it, I have a very good reason, Candace. And it's important." Aaron's gaze met Candace's, his expression firm.

Andy sighed, breaking the tension. "Alright, alright, no need to get all dramatic. Maybe Dad just wants to go get closure, right?"

Aaron smiled sadly. "Something like that, Andy."

"Dad, I still don't think this is a good idea..."

"I am still married to her, Candace. I need her to sign our divorce papers," Aaron explained and both Candace and Andy looked at him in disbelief.

"You have remained married to her all these years? Despite what she did to you? To us? Why?" Candace asked, unable to understand Aaron.

"Wow. You're incredible," Andy said, completely awed.

"Whether I divorced her then or now, it doesn't make any difference. I'm going to Ludus on Monday," Aaron said, and Andy's gaze softened.

"How long will you be gone?"

"Just two days. I'll leave Monday morning and be back by Wednesday. Don't want to be away from my family for too long, you know that."

"Can I at least come with you? I don't want you going there alone," Candace said, recalling what Lucy had told her about when they met with Sara for the first time and how Aaron had been affected.

"No. I want to go alone," Aaron said and Candace opened her mouth to protest, but Andy cut her off with a gentle hand on her arm.

"He will be fine, Candace. Let him go."

A wistful smile touched Aaron's face. "Thank you, Andy. I appreciate that."

He glanced at Candace, hoping for a flicker of understanding in her eyes. But her expression was a mixture of concern and disapproval.

He understood her, and could only hope that someday, she would understand why he had to do this now.

"If that's what you want. I can't stop you. Just promise me you will be okay," Candace said as she squeezed his hand.

Aaron squeezed her hand back. "I will be fine."

"Alright then. I need to go get ready for school," Candace said as she pushed away from the table and picked up hers and Jamal's dishes.

An hour later, Candace pulled into the familiar parking lot of the university and stepped out of her car.

As she shouldered her bag and adjusted her scarf, her phone buzzed in her pocket. Glancing at the screen, she saw it was Matt. A smile touched her lips as she picked up.

"Hey, lover," she answered, tucking the phone between her ear and shoulder as she straightened her notes.

"Just checking in, beautiful," Matt's voice filled her ear, smooth as honey. "You all set for your class this morning?"

"Yeah. Just got to school now," she replied as she straightened and held her phone to her ears.

As Candace made her way to the main building, she glanced around, the usual Saturday morning quietude broken by a flurry of activity.

People were walking past her with curious glances, some even offering hesitant smiles and waves. A furrow appeared between her brows.

"Ready to spend the whole day listening to talk about legalese?" Matt chuckled.

Candace felt a smile creep onto her face. "Something like that. You'd be surprised how interesting it can be."

She frowned when a couple of students walking by her stopped briefly, their eyes lingering on her before whispering to each other. A young woman even gave her a shy wave.

"Candace?" Matt's voice pulled her out of her observation. "Everything alright?"

"Hmm? Yeah. Yeah, everything's good... I guess," she added hesitantly. "It's just a bit strange. Why does it seem like everyone is looking at me weirdly?" she mumbled, feeling a flicker of unease.

"Weirdly in what way?"

"I don't know," she confessed, "like they recognize me or something."

There was a beat of silence on the other end of the line. "Candace," Matt began cautiously, "have you forgotten about the interview you did the other day?"

"Interview?" she echoed, her brow furrowing. "Oh, right! But that shouldn't really make me... oh."

Realization dawned on her like a bolt of lightning. The interview, the viral clip about her relationship with Matt and every other revelation she had blurted out. It all clicked into place.

"You're right," she admitted sheepishly. "I completely forgot about that."

Matt chuckled on the other end. "Honey, you're practically a celebrity after that interview. Everyone's talking about you. Welcome to the world of the rich and famous," Matt said in amusement.

Before she could respond, a swarm of activity erupted around her. Microphones materialized out of thin air, shoved into her face by eager reporters. Cameras flashed, momentarily blinding her.

"Ms. Jonas! Ms. Jonas, a word!" a frantic voice shouted over the others.

"Candace, are you and Matt Swift really a couple?" another reporter bombarded her.

"A word about your relationship with Mr. Swift. Are there wedding bells in your future?"

"How does it feel to be dating one of the most eligible bachelors in the nation?"

"What is your present relationship with Sara Walker? Is it true that you paid her a visit recently?"

Her phone call with Matt forgotten, Candace froze, caught in a whirlwind of unexpected fame. She wasn't used to this kind of attention, and her mind raced for an escape route. Just as she felt the beginnings of panic constrict her chest, a broad hand materialized in front of her, shielding her from the barrage of questions and flashing lights.

A tall man stood between her and the throng of reporters, with his back to her, "Excuse me everyone, please step back and give the lady some space," his deep voice boomed.

The reporters, momentarily stunned by the sudden intrusion, fell silent.

Candace peeked around the man's arm and recognized him instantly. It was Samson Sullivan.

The guy from the anniversary party. The one who had said his mother was her professor.

What was he doing here? Candace mused.

"Come with me," he said in a firm voice, and shot a steely glare at the reporters before turning and leading a bewildered Candace through the throng of reporters and into the building.

He led her into an office, and after he shut the door, he let go of her hand and put some distance between them.

"Thank you," Candace murmured as she met his gaze.

"You are welcome. This is my mom's office. You can catch your breath here before going to class," he offered, and without another word, he walked over to the desk and pulled open the drawers, going through it as though he was in search of something.

Candace watched him in silence, wondering why it seemed like he was ignoring it. The first time they met he seemed to have had a lot to say, and now he wasn't saying anything.

Thinking back to their conversation that night, she realized that she might have been somewhat rude to him because of her shame and insecurity. Perhaps he was mad at her.

Before she could say anything, her phone rang and that was when she remembered she had been on the phone with Matt.

"Hey!" She whispered as she received his call.

"What happened? You suddenly stopped talking and there was a lot of noise in the background," Matt asked, sounding very concerned.

"Reporters. I don't know how they knew I'd be here. I barely managed to escape them," Candace said and Matt smiled.

"Sorry about that. I'm glad you're receiving the attention you desperately wanted to avoid, and it's not even because of me," he said with a chuckle.

"It's really not funny," she hissed.

"It is. Talk about not wanting to date me because you didn't want to be in public eyes. And now you're in public eyes and I'm not the cause," Matt said and Candace rolled her eyes.

"Half the questions they are asking is about my relationship with you," she snapped.

"You revealed that to them, not me. That's on you," Matt said and chuckled when Candace hissed at him and hung up.

Candace turned to see Samson on the phone, "Yes. I found it. The file with the green seal, right? I will bring it over now," he said before hanging up.

"Are you alright now? I'd love to lock up the office now," he said politely.

"Oh! Yeah. Sure," she said with a nod.

As they both stepped out of the office, Candace looked at him as he locked the door, "I'm sorry about last time..."

"It's okay. You don't have to apologize. Have a nice day," he said with a polite nod before walking away, leaving Candace with a frown on her face.

Why did he bother to help her if he was going to dismiss her that way? Candace mused.

## Chapter 859 Home Alone

The afternoon sun beat down on the glistening surface of the pool at Tom's house, casting shimmering diamonds across the water.

Tom, submerged up to his chest, leaned back against the edge, watching as Lucy swam leisurely across the pool. Her laughter echoed in the air as she did a playful underwater flip, emerging with a spray of water that dotted her face.

"You're enjoying this, aren't you?" Tom asked, a smile tugging at the corner of his lips.

Lucy, treading water playfully, tilted her head back, droplets clinging to her eyelashes. "This?" she said, gesturing towards the pool. "Or the fact that we have the whole place to ourselves?"

Sonia and Bryan had left for their place since Mia was gone now. And they had given all the domestic staff the weekend off. They wanted to have the whole place to themselves.

Tom chuckled. "Both, actually. But watching you enjoy the pool for the first time... it's pretty special."

She swam closer, the cool water lapping against her shoulders as she reached the edge. "I can't believe we haven't used this more. It's amazing and so relaxing. I feel all the tension of the week flowing out of me and into the water."

Tom cocked an eyebrow, "Should I get out of the water? I don't want all that tension flowing into me," he joked.

"Now I'm going to dump it all on you," she said playfully, splashing water towards him with a laugh.

He yelped, feigning offense, and retaliated with a playful splash of his own. Soon, a playful water fight ensued, filled with laughter and lighthearted teasing.

When they finally tired themselves out, panting slightly, they settled back into a comfortable silence. Tom swam closer to her, his eyes searching hers.

He reached out, gently tucking a wet strand of hair behind her ear. "It's nice just to relax, isn't it?"

Lucy nodded, leaning her head against his hand. "It really is."

Lucy closed her eyes, savoring the warmth of the sun on her skin and the feeling of Tom's hand resting on her cheek.

"There is something I do like about the pool though," Tom said, his voice laced with a hint of amusement.

Lucy cracked open one eye, a playful smile tugging at her lips. "Oh really? And what might that be?"

"The view," he said, his gaze dropping to her figure in the skimpy black bikini.

Lucy's cheeks flushed a warm pink, and she couldn't help but let out a playful snort. "You're impossible."

He grinned, pulling her closer until she was just a breath away. "Maybe. But I wouldn't trade this view for anything."

"Is that right?" she asked, her voice a husky whisper as she met his gaze. His eyes held a depth of warmth that sent a shiver down her spine.

He leaned in, his lips brushing against hers in a tender kiss. "Absolutely," he murmured against her mouth, his voice low and husky.

They kissed again, this time with a deeper intensity. When they finally broke apart, both breathless, Lucy rested her forehead against his chest.

"This feels nice, love," she admitted softly, her voice barely a whisper.

"Being here with you? It's more than nice, Jewel," he replied, his hand tracing gentle circles on her back. "It's almost perfect."

"This feels nice, love," she admitted softly, her voice barely a whisper.

"Being here with you? It's more than nice, Jewel," he replied, his hand tracing gentle circles on her back. "It's almost perfect."

"Almost?" She asked curiously.

"Yes. But I'm sure it would be perfect soon enough." He said, with a mischievous glint in his eyes.

"What are you thinking now?" She asked, knowing he was up to no good.

"How about we play a game?" He asked, and she narrowed her eyes.

"What sort of game?" She asked suspiciously.

"A game where the winner gets to ask the loser to do something," he said and Lucy nodded.

"Something like what?" Lucy asked curiously.

"Anything at all. You can ask me to buy you a private Jet or anything," Tom said, confident that he would win.

"Really? I love it. Tell me more about this game," she said, and Tom grinned.

"Well, it's easy. The first person to get to the other end of the pool wins," he said, and immediately the words left his lips, Lucy started swimming.

Tom laughed out loud as he quickly chased after her, "You are cheating. I haven't even called out the rule or said we can start yet," he called after her.

Lucy laughed as she turned to look at him, "It's just the both of us playing, darling. I can't let you make all that decision alone," she said and resumed swimming when she saw that he was in hot pursuit.

Just as she was about to get to the end of the pool, Tom appeared in front of her and beat her to it, "I won! I won!" Tom yelled, laughing and clapping happily while Lucy frowned.

"You cheated. How did you catch up?" She asked with a frown while Tom laughed happily.

"Says the cheat! Did no one tell you I used to be a swimming champion?" He asked, laughing harder when he saw the displeasure on her face.

"I can't believe you lost despite your cheating," he said and she pouted.

"I didn't cheat. And I don't agree that you won. Let's do it again," she protested making him laugh harder.

"Don't be such a sore loser, Jewel. Accept your defeat gracefully," he said, and she sighed.

"Don't you love me anymore?" She asked, batting her lashes at him, and he laughed.

"I love you with my life. But that's not going to change the result of the game. You lost and I won." Tom said, leaning forward to kiss her forehead.

"Alright. Fine. What do you want?" She asked, eyeing him with displeasure.

Tom grinned, "Take off your bikini," he said, and she looked at him in disbelief.

"You made me lose the game just so you could ask for something so silly? You didn't have to make me run so hard when you could have just asked in the first place and I would have easily taken it off," she hissed, making him laugh.

"It wouldn't be fun to just ask you to strip. I like that I worked for it," he said, still grinning.

"I can't believe I lost my chance to ask for something really expensive just so you can ask me for this," she muttered under her breath as she took off her bikini and left it on the edge of the pool where the towel was hanging.

"We both know you can always ask me for whatever..."

"It's not the same, is it?" She asked, and he grinned.

"We can always play another game. But for now, let me admire this perfect view," he said as he leaned forward and kissed a nipple.

Lucy giggled despite her annoyance, "Don't do that." She said, feeling a wave of lust wash over her.

"Don't do what?" he asked as he licked her nipple.

"What you're doing with your tongue," she said and Tom flashed her a naughty smile.

"Why? Is it turning you on?" He asked, and she laughed.

"Something like that."

"Good. 'Cause that was my intention," he said, making her giggle.

"Really? What do you hope to achieve by doing that?" She asked, and Tom grinned.

"What do I hope to achieve? Why don't we find out?" He asked, and she giggled as he lifted her so that she was straddling him with her legs around his waist.

"What are you doing?" She asked, and gasped in pleasure when his fingers brushed her slits, sending a jolt of electricity through her.

"Finding out what I hope to achieve," he said with a grin, and Lucy moaned when he slid a finger inside her.

"Tom, anyone can see..."

"No one is around to see, remember?" He asked as he kissed her boob.



"You planned this, didn't you?" She asked, trying to focus more on the discussion than on what he was doing.

"Of course, I did. Now less talking and more action," he said, as he made her sit on the edge of the pool while he remained standing in the water.

While Lucy was still trying to figure out what he was upto, he lowered his head to her private area, and he kissed her slit, setting her whole body on fire.

Lucy was grateful that he had made her sit before doing this, seeing as her legs were shaking when he had not even started yet.

With both hands behind her, Lucy arched her back so she could give him more access to her folds, and Tom's eyes met hers as he

Lucy moaned with reckless abandon as he licked and lapped at her juices like a thirsty man desperately in need of water—the sound of her moans was like music to his ears as he watched her.

"Please, don't stop. Don't ever stop," Lucy cried as Tom sucked faster and dove in deeper with his tongue, his movement becoming even more frenzied.

Tom didn't respond as his sole focus was to take her to her pleasure peak. When she started to rock her clit against his tongue as she usually did when she was close to her climax, he pulled away, and before she could complain, he pulled her back into the water, and turning her so that she had her back to him, and her arms could rest on the edge of the pool, he expertly slid into her.

"Fuck!" Lucy cried from sheer surprise and pleasure at his sudden move.

With one hand wrapped around her neck, and his other arm wrapped around her waist, Tom thrust into her from behind, his thrusts slow and steady as he kissed her neck.

"Fuck, Tom! You're driving me crazy," Lucy cried, and he chuckled, the sound sending a shiver of delight down her spine.

"Happy you lost to me now?" He asked, maintaining the rhythm of his slow, but long and deep thrusts.

"Delighted," Lucy moaned, and Tom laughed as he nibbled on her ear, making her scream out loud.

"Can you go faster now?" She pleaded as she began to climax.

And Tom's hand which was around her neck grabbed her boob as he increased in pace, and soon they were both panting and moaning and groaning as the pressure mounted withing them.

Lucy turned her head to the side, and as though he could read her mind, Tom leaned closer and met her lips in a kiss as they both climaxed.

And before Tom could pull away, Lucy held him back, "I'm safe," she assured him, and he came hard inside of her.

They both remained in that position as they caught their breath, and once their breathing had stabilized and Lucy turned to face Tom, he chuckled and she giggled.

"You keep making me do crazy things. Who would have thought I'd have sex in the open in broad daylight? What if someone is hiding somewhere and watching?" She asked as she looked around before meeting Tom's gaze again.

"No one is watching. I made sure everyone left the house. I wouldn't risk exposing you to something like that for any reason," Tom said, and Lucy nodded.

"I know. That's why I didn't object," she admitted.

"I can say being here together is perfect now," Tom said with a wink and she giggled.

"Yeah. I agree. It's more than perfect," Lucy said with a satisfied sigh.

"So, you can now add sex in the pool to your list of sexperience," Tom said and she grinned.

"Yeah," Lucy said, and then raised a brow when she saw Tom's brief floating on the water before looking down to see that he was naked.

"When did you take it off?" She asked, and he chuckled.

"When you were too lost to notice," he said with a grin.

"I think we should get dressed before anyone comes to find us here. I'd die of mortification if that happens," she said, and Tom laughed.

"Should we play a game of first to dress up and get out of the pool?" He asked as he swam towards his floating briefs.

"No way," she said with a giggle as she climbed out of the pool her body warm and relaxed.

After wearing her bikini, Tom wrapped her in a towel and they sat by the poolside in comfortable silence, simply enjoying each other's presence and sipping from their wineglasses.

"What is in your head?" Lucy asked after some time.

"Nothing."

"Nothing?" Lucy asked with a playful smile and Tom nodded.

"Yeah. Absolutely nothing. Just enjoying the silence," Tom said, and Lucy giggled, making him turn to look at what was amusing her.

"I can't understand how you became a CEO with an empty head. I mean, how can nothing be in your head? Not even a brain?" She asked, laughing.

"How dare you?" Tom asked when he realized what she had done, he reached for her as he laughed.

Lucy quickly got up and ran away, leaving him to chase after her. She ran all the way to the house, laughing as she ran while Tom remained hot on her pursuit.

By the time she got to the staircase, she was out of breath, so she stopped to catch her breath, and Tom caught her, sending her into another round of laughter.

"I dare you to say that again," he said, and she laughed as she turned to face him.

"You said it not me. You said you have absolutely nothing in your head," she said with a grin, and Tom smiled.

"You look so beautiful," Tom said, his voice filled with awe and Lucy blushed.

"Don't do that!" She said, looking away from him, and Tom smiled.

"What do you want us to do now? See a movie or go out?" He asked and she smiled.

"Let's read. I haven't read in some time," she said and Tom nodded.

"Alright. Let's do that," he said, and they both climbed the stairs.

Lucy paused when a thought suddenly occurred to her and she looked around the house with a wide smile.

"What?" Tom asked, stopping to look at her when he noticed she had stopped walking.

"I just remembered the first time I woke up in this place. I never would have imagined that I would be back here or even living here," she said, and Tom smiled.

"Well, I did imagine you living here," he said, not wanting to tell her he had not only imagined her living there, but had also imagined their kids running around.

"Really? Is this what you imagined?" She asked, and he shook his head.

"So far, it has been way more beautiful than my imagination, but it's not complete yet," he said, and Lucy smiled, guessing why he said so.

She could tell that he was probably talking about them getting married and having kids. Well, she was going to give him all of that soon, for now, she wanted them to enjoy their day together. Lucy thought with a happy smile as she linked her arm with his and led him upstairs.

#### Chapter 860 Prodigal Wife

The Husla private airport tarmac shimmered under the relentless morning sun. Stepping off the private jet, Mia felt a wave of nausea roll through her stomach.

It wasn't just the heat. It was the throng of reporters camped outside, their cameras flashing like a demented strobe light.

News of their arrival had spread like wildfire, and a throng of reporters, their faces a hungry mix of concern and sensationalism, pressed against the security barriers.

"Vanessa! Mrs. Rosewood! Over here!" A cacophony of voices clamored for her attention.

Mia shrank back instinctively, her eyes darting from the blinding flashes to the eager faces holding microphones. She knew without a doubt that Henry had let word out about their arrival, hence they were there.

He had claimed he had suitable clothes for her to change into, yet had given her nothing. Here she was, still dressed in the sleeping clothes she had worn to bed at Tom's and an in-house slippers.

Henry, the dutiful husband, had a practiced smile plastered on his face as he draped his jacket over her shoulders, shielding her from the barrage of questions and the intrusive lenses.

"Thank you all for your concern for my wife's well-being," he boomed, his voice cutting through the din. "As you can see, she's a little overwhelmed by the warm welcome."

A sympathetic murmur rippled through the crowd. "We just want to know she is alright, Mr. Rosewood," a voice called out.

"She is. Although, she has been through a very difficult ordeal, and your support means the world to us.," Henry replied smoothly, his hand firmly on her lower back, guiding her towards a waiting car.

"But this trip has taken its toll, and she needs to clean up and get some rest before she can face everyone. Please understand."

The car pulled away, leaving the disappointed reporters in its wake. Mia, still hidden under the cloak of Henry's jacket, clung to the leather seat, her heart hammering against her ribs.

Somehow, being here in Husla, thousands of miles away from everyone who loved and cared for her, made her familiar companion— fear, to return.

The familiar route to Henry's mansion stretched before her, each landmark a stark reminder of the life she had desperately tried to escape.

As they approached the gates, Mia grimaced when she saw a festive banner proclaiming "Welcome Home, Vanessa!" hung across the gate.

As the car drew closer, laughter and chatter filled the air, and music thrummed from within, letting her know a party was going on inside.

"How generous of me. I prepared a feast to celebrate the return of the prodigal wife," Henry whispered to her.

Mia ignored him, and watched as a throng of people came out of the house with wineglasses in hand.

"Surprise!" the crowd roared as the car came to a halt.

Panic clawed at Mia's throat. This wasn't supposed to happen. This was supposed to be a quiet return, so why did he do all of this? What did he hope to achieve by inviting them all here while making sure she was so shabbily dressed?

Amidst the throng, Mia recognized some faces from galas and charity events— the wives of Henry's business associates, his family members were present too.

Henry, ever the gracious host, pulled her out of the car and turned to the crowd. "Calm down, darling. Don't be scared. No one is going to harm you. They are all here to welcome you home. Say hello, honey," Henry said softly as though he was talking to a mentally unstable patient.

Amidst the throng, Mia recognized some faces from galas and charity events— the wives of Henry's business associates, his family members were present too.

Henry, ever the gracious host, pulled her out of the car and turned to the crowd. "Calm down, darling. Don't be scared. No one is going to harm you. They are all here to welcome you home. Say hello, honey," Henry said softly as though he was talking to a mentally unstable patient.

Mia plastered a smile on her face, a mask that felt heavy and suffocating. Greetings were exchanged, and Mia felt like a puppet on strings, mechanically responding to the endless stream of well-wishes and veiled questions.

As Henry ushered her into the house, she could hear some ladies talking some feet away.

"How lucky she is to be married to such a devoted man," one of them said.

"Who would have thought that she was crazy? Henry must be a saint," Another whispered and Mia gritted her teeth, shutting their voices out.

Almost as soon as they walked through the door, her parents emerged from nowhere, "Oh, my darling daughter. I thought I lost you for good," her mother cried as she went to embrace her, and Mia stood stiffly as her mother's arms went around her.

Henry remained by her side, a dotting smile on his face as he looked at Mia, leaving everyone there with no doubt in mind that he adored his wife.

"You are welcome home, Vanessa. We will talk after you have settled in," her father said.

The reporters, some of whom had managed to slip into the party, hovered on the fringes, their eyes never straying far from her. Henry, ever present at her side, kept a tight grip on her arm, a subtle reminder of who was in control.

"Smile, darling," he murmured into her ear, his voice laced with a sweetness that sent shivers down her spine. "They want to see the happy Vanessa they know."

"I'm exhausted..."

"We have guests, Vanessa. You will not leave our guests unattended," Henry said, cutting her off.

After an hour of playing the perfect host despite her out of place outfit, Henry announced that he had to take his wife upstairs to get some rest because she was very tired and sounds of aww rented the air.

Henry, the picture of solicitude, escorted her upstairs to her bedroom. And the moment the bedroom door closed behind them, the mask slipped from his face.

A cruel smile played on his lips. "Welcome home, Vanessa," he said, his voice low and dangerous.

"Why are there so many security cameras in my room?" Mia asked, looking around the place.

"I realized that I was to blame for the little stunt you pulled. I gave you too much freedom. That was the reason you had the time and space to come up with it. Now you will be on watch twenty-four hours, my darling wife," Henry said and Mia shook her head.

"You can't do that, Henry. I deserve some level of privacy..."

"Deserve?" He snorted with barely controlled rage, "after you dared to ask me for a divorce? You have no right to talk to me about what I can or cannot do. It is my place to tell you what you deserve and do not deserve. And I can tell you that, going forward you will be getting everything I believe you deserve. Freshen up and get some rest. Your doctor will arrive soon," he said, and turned to leave.

"Doctor? What doctor? I'm not ill," Mia said, stopping him.

"You are ill if I say you are, and right now, you are mentally ill. Your psychiatrist will be here to see how much your mental health has deteriorated. After the examination we will determine whether or not you need to be locked away in a mental asylum or allowed to live amongst humans," Henry said with a cold smile before walking away.

The fear that had simmered beneath the surface all day erupted into a full-blown terror and Mia felt a shudder run through her at the thought of being locked away in a mental asylum.

Mia realized, with a chilling certainty, that whatever Henry had planned for her this time, would be far worse than anything she could have imagined.

Away from there, Harry, shirtless, lay relaxed on the hammock, its gentle sway lulling him into a state of blissful laziness. He looked ahead of him where Jade, a vision in a bright sundress, skipped barefooted along the shoreline.

Every now and then, a wave would crash on the shore, sending a cool spray that tickled her bare feet making her laugh happily with childish delight.

The retreating tide had revealed a treasure trove of glistening seashells and smooth, colorful stones scattered like spilled jewels across the wet sand, and Jade had made it her duty to explore as many of them as she could.

Harry was about to drift off completely when a shriek, both excited and slightly breathless, shattered his peaceful reverie.

"Jonas! Come take a look at this!" she screeched as she bounded towards him, her damp footprints leaving a trail in the sand.

Harry, a smile already tugging at the corners of his lips, reluctantly rose from his haven curious to see what she had found.

Barefooted, and dressed in just his white shorts, he walked up to her, meeting her halfway.

As he reached her side, Jade held the stone out, its surface catching the sunlight and sparking a rainbow of colors. "Doesn't this look like a diamond?" she declared dramatically, her voice brimming with excitement.

Harry's lips twitched as he looked at her. "Let me see," he said, taking the stone gently from her grasp.

He examined it with mock seriousness, turning it over in his fingers. "Hmm, nope. Looks exactly like a stone to me."

A playful scowl creased her brow. "Come on, don't be boring! Look closer at it! I think it's a diamond in disguise. Maybe a pirate hid their loot somewhere around here. Imagine it, Harry," she continued, her voice rising with each word, "a hidden chest overflowing with gold and jewels, just waiting to be discovered by us!"

Harry couldn't help but chuckle at her infectious childlike enthusiasm. "And what would we do with all that pirate booty?"

"What else?" she asked, her eyes sparkling. "We will take it back home with us, of course! Proof of our adventure. Then, I'd sell some of it," she added with a mischievous grin, "and give you a tenth of the riches."

"A tenth?" he feigned surprise, raising an eyebrow. "How generous of you to give me so much. Isn't that too much?"

"Well, duh! You don't need pirate treasure. You're rich already." she retorted, sticking out her tongue playfully.

"If I remember correctly, you said you were rich too," he reminded her with a chuckle.

"I'm not as rich as you. That's precisely why I will be needing the treasure chest. That way the treasure would put us on equal footing, financially speaking." she said with a sweet smile.

Harry threw his head back and laughed, the sound echoing across the beach. "Equal footing, huh? And do you think the rightful owner of this 'treasure' would just let us waltz off with their chest full of gold?"

"The rightful owner is probably dead and the treasure is forgotten," Jade said easily.

"How would we get this treasure chest out of here? Do you think the owners of the resort or the residents of this island would let us leave with it?" Harry asked, indulging her beautiful daydream.

Jade puffed out her chest and struck a heroic pose. "We'd fight for it. I'm a good fighter. You did mention something about knowing how to fight, didn't you?" She asked with a grin.

Harry's laughter intensified, tears welling up in his eyes. "Esquire, did you lure me out of my perfectly good nap to admire a rock and fantasize about pirate battles?"

Jade nodded. "Yes. Is there a problem with that?" she asked and he shook his head.

"None at all," Harry said as he reached out, brushing a stray strand of hair from her cheek.

"But you know what? You don't need pirate booty or whatever to be on equal footing with me financially. When we get married, all I have will be yours, and all you have will remain yours. You will be wealthier than me then," Harry said, and she grinned.

"Nah. I don't want to be wealthier. That won't be equal footing. All I have will be yours too. That's the only way we would be on equal footing. Add up everything together," she said and then paused her lips.

"But that would complicate things if we ever plan to get divorced," she said, and the gleam in Harry's eyes disappeared.

"Divorce? Do you plan to get divorced?" He asked with a frown, not liking the mention of such a term between them.

"Well, the future is full of uncertainty. Most of the couples that seek divorce were once helplessly in love..."

"Can you do me a favor and never talk about divorce between us?" He cut in.

"I'm just being logical..."

"I'd rather not get married at all if divorce is an option between us," Harry stated flatly and turned to leave but Jade quickly ran to block his path.

"Why are you upset? I was only stating a fact. I'm..." she trailed off when it suddenly occurred to her that he might be reacting that way because of his father and Sara.

"You know what? Screw facts. I'm never divorcing you. As a matter of fact, let's never bring up the word between us. It is prohibited from our vocabulary going forward, and our kids are not permitted to say the word either. Speaking about kids, how soon will you like to have kids when we get married? Immediately? Or a year or two after?" She asked, placing both arms on his shoulder and standing on tiptoe to kiss away the crease on his forehead.

"You're never going to bring it up in our discussion again, right?" He asked, and she looked at him with a mock puzzled expression.

"Bring what up? Having kids? Cause I don't remember bringing anything else up," she said, and Harry laughed as she had expected him to.

"Fine. Let's have the home all to ourselves for two years and find a balance between work, marriage, and our personal lives before having kids. That way you would have worked for sometime before going on a break again because of your pregnancy," Harry suggested.

"That sounds reasonable. But there is no reason to go on a break because I'm pregnant..."

"You will go on a break when you're pregnant, sugar," Harry said and raised an eyebrow.

"Will you go on a break with me?" She asked, and he shook his head.

"You're the pregnant one..."

"We will be pregnant together. I won't go on a break. I will come to the office with you," she insisted and Harry opened his mouth to argue but shut it.

Time would tell. There was no need wasting his breath since he knew that when the time came, she would be the one insisting she didn't want to get out of bed herself. Thanks to Bryan's bragging, he had started to read on the subject.

"And how many kids would you want us to have? One? Two? A dozen?" She asked,

"A dozen," he said and she nodded.

"Good. We are on the same page," she said, and Harry looked at her incredulously.

"You really want a dozen?" He asked, and she laughed.

"I want three. Two boys and a girl," she said and Harry shook his head.

"I prefer to have all girls."

"Why all girls?" She asked with an amused smile.

"Because I want to be a proud girl dad forever," he said, and she giggled.

"Well, we will see how that goes. For now, let's go get ready for our sightseeing. Our tour guide will be here soon," Jade said, and hand in hand they returned to their suite.