

MARRIED TO MY ONE NIGHT MISTAKE

Chapter 25: Hellos and Goodbyes

The day for the exhibition had finally arrived. The children were neatly dressed in dinner outfits, with the boys in little tuxes and Diane in a knee length fluffy dress.

Reporters and paparazzi from different magazines, tabloids, and newspapers were everywhere. They had only permitted a few of them inside the building, so the rest had to scavenge as they queued up outside the building.

Dignitaries and other members of Spain's art world had come. And in the midst of the crowd, was Clancy.

Although he was not a resident of Spain, he was no stranger to the tabloids and magazines so they equally fought for a clear photograph of him when he got out of his car and onto the red carpet.

The event had not officially begun but the room was filled up with the expected amount of people.

Selen was going to give an opening speech in a few minutes, and in the meantime, she mingled with the guests.

Clancy watched her walk around the room so elegantly like she was familiar with every corner of the room. Like it was her home.

She was at home... in between art works that expressed different expressions and phases of her life.

Selen had not seen him yet. She was too busy attending to all the important dignitaries and guests.

She laughed at a joke the former minister of Spain's art and culture made alongside everyone in their conversation circle.

"Breathtaking" he muttered. No magazine or newspaper photo could capture how beautiful she was. And he was not the only one who saw her enchanting beauty.

Everyone in the room loved her beauty and graceful demeanor.

Although when Clancy had traveled all the way there, he was sure that this was what he wanted- to see her and his kids and reunite with them.

But at that moment, he was beginning to question if her exhibition was the right place to do it. "Maybe this was a bad idea," he thought. But it was too late.

There was no time like the present. He had waited seven years. He was not going to waste another second in doubt.

"Wait, where has she gone?" he asked himself when he noticed that she had not come out of the corner she had gone into.

He followed the direction of where he had expected her to come out from, but there were many people there, with no Selen in sight.

Selen took breaks in between greeting guests to check on the kids. They stayed put at the corner arranged for them, not looking interested in causing chaos.

"Okay, kids. Mummy has to go give her opening speech. But not to worry, it is an exhibition so there will be very little stage moment," she told them.

"You will be able to see and hear me from over here, but you are free to come closer if you want to as long as you tell your nanny first" she said to them.

The kids nodded in obedience at Selen's instructions and watched her walk away and made her way up the stage.

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen..." she said and the hall became silent, everyone's attention was on her and the cameras were rolling.

"... and finally, I would like to say thank you to my drive and motivation... my kids. Mummy loves you all" she concluded her opening speech and the crowd clapped.

"Beautiful speech, ambassador" JK said as she got off stage. "You made it!" She exclaimed and hugged him, not caring about the paparazzi fishing for gossip whether true or not.

"Of course I came. You should not sound surprised. I mean, when have I ever missed anything that concerned you?" He asked.

"Even that one with the-" "twenty guests!" They both said and laughed and the memory that was now funny enough to be laughed at.

But all those years ago, it was a heartbreaking moment for Selen. And now her halls were packed with people and more were outside wanting to sneak in for a peek.

"Are you okay?" JK asked her. "Yes, I just feel a little uneasy. Which is weird since this is not my first exhibition" she responded.

"Well, it is your first exhibition as an ambassador for Spain's art world," he said.

They both concluded that was the reason for her tension and solved the problem with a glass of champagne before she continued her rounds.

Clancy watched her carefully to know when she would be less occupied by the numerous people waiting to speak to her.

And also to avoid catching the eye of security for suspiciously following her about. They did not care if you were invited or not, if you acted suspiciously, they would suspect.

She went into the corner earlier again and this time, he followed her. He halted in his steps when he saw her with three kids.

No questions needed to be asked. Those were his children. They had to be. After trying to look at their individual faces, he could barely see them clearly from where he stood.

He only noticed the boy who faced his direction, he was a spitting image of him.

His eyes moved from the two boys to the girl, only then did he notice the man with them.

He was different from the one he had seen her with earlier. "Who was that?!" He wondered angrily. He watched Selen and the man walk the kids out of their seats and into the crowd, holding hands.

"No, it can not be. It is not too late. No way" he thought to himself and hurriedly took out his handkerchief to clean the sweat on his face.

Selen got on stage and left the man with the three kids and continued to hold on to each other.

He would be a fool to assume that the man was a nanny. He looked nothing like one. If he was not so jealous, he would admit that the man gave off the same energy as him- like he was wealthy.

Chapter 26: The Reunion

Was the man with Selen and the kids her boyfriend? Husband? No that was not possible, she was his wife and she still carried her mother's maiden name.

So what was he to her that she would trust him enough to hold her children in public and in front of the press?

Did she not know better than that? He needed to calm down, that was his jealousy speaking.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I am pleased to announce that all displayed artworks have been sold!" She announced and the crowd cheered with loud claps.

He looked around the room and everyone looked genuinely happy for her. They were like her own cheerleaders. They looked like they wanted her to win. And that was where he belonged.

He wanted to be there, cheering for her alongside everyone else instead of hiding at the back in between people. So he did.

He came out of hiding, and with his tall frame, it was not hard to be spotted if he wanted to.

He slowly made his way through the crowd and walked to the front and was now in her line of vision.

As Selen walked down the stage, she felt eyes on her, not the one that she had felt from the happy guests. And then, she saw him... Clancy.

He stood firmly with his hands in his pocket making him look even taller. His face looked older and more handsome than seven years ago.

Although he maintained his habit of shaving off his beard, he had let his hair grow longer. His sleeked back hair showed his face more clearly. "What was he doing here?" She asked in a mumble.

Clancy watched her reaction change the moment her eyes landed on him. And none of it looked like she was happy to see him. Obviously.

He did not know what exactly to expect from then on. If she would be angry and confront him in public. Or if she would curse at him. Or maybe even have security escort him out.

But Selen was a classy lady, she did none of the things he had expected of her. Instead, she walked past him without acknowledging his presence and so did his kids who did not know what their father looked like.

He let out a breath of confusion at her action. She just ignored him. She did not acknowledge his presence at all. He did not try to follow her, he was too surprised by her actions.

And what would he do if he did follow her? There were paparazzi everywhere, along with lots of people who had her back. And making a scene was not what he had come here for.

"Selen, are you okay?" Newton asked her when they got to a more quiet place. She signaled the nanny to take the kids who had worried expressions on their faces when he asked the question.

"Yeah, I guess I was more exhausted than I would have liked to agree" she said and dabbed her face with a small tissue. "Oh, this is my fault. I took you out to dinner last night and made you stay up late" he began to blame himself.

"And the house, oh! I mean, I could have waited right? I only added more work load on your shoulders" Newton continued to blame himself for Selen's fake tiredness.

Even she had not realised that it was fake. She did not believe that she would see Clancy after seven years or that he would want to see her as well.

Their last meeting was divorce papers through his sister on a hospital bed. That was not the kind of goodbye you got from someone who wanted to see you again.

Selen stopped him, "no, if anything, you reduced my work load. I loved having dinner with you last night and I am not even done with telling you thank you for the house, if it was even a day later, maybe it would have been too late.

Thank you for everything. You are a good friend, Newton" she said.

Newton just smiled at her words, "friend?" he said to himself. Why did he feel the way he did when she said that?

"Maybe he was here for something else," Selen told herself as she dealt with her own internal battle.

Maybe he did not know that it was her exhibition, after all she changed her name. Or maybe he came here for business, maybe he did not have a choice.

Or maybe he wanted to belittle her like he did all those years ago. But he had gotten it all wrong, she was not the woman from seven years ago.

She was not a pawn in anyone's game anymore, she was not collateral damage. She was her own person. A successful one at that.

Why was she letting Clancy ruin her big night by making her stay in a corner? No way. She walked back out looking confident and more relaxed.

"Hey kiddos, we will be out in a few minutes and will be just in time for story time, okay?" She assured the kids who had gone back to playing with creative tools at their corner.

The event was not for kids, but her kids were an exception. Which was why the corner was crafted just for them to get familiar with the world but not be immersed in it just yet.

She walked back to the crowd, and began greeting more people from the back. "Congratulations, ambassador" she heard countless times that night.

By the time they were done, her cheeks were aching from smiling so much. "This was THE life" she said through the pain.

JK and Newton had both waited behind for Selen. So at the end of the day, she had three drivers, including hers waiting to take her and the kids home.

"No, it's fine. I promise. You can both go home and I'll go with mine" she assured them. "Alright, enjoy your weekend and we will meet up for coffee on monday, yes?" JK confirmed as he said his goodbye and left after Newton.

Chapter 27: The Friend and the Ex

"Did you guys have fun tonight?" Selen asked the kids when they got home. Diane had said she was tired so she went to bed early, while the boys were still wide awake.

"I liked the painting I did as we waited for you," David said. "Me too," Daniel chimed in. They spent the next hour catching up and reading bed time stories till they fell asleep.

When her busy week began, they all returned to their schedule. She had movers going in and out of the house with boxes of their belongings as she tried to make it through to the door.

"Remember to make sure that every item that leaves this place is in the same condition when it arrives at the new house" she said.

New house... she liked the sound of it. She got into her car and drove off. She had a meeting before going into the office and headed there first.

When she arrived at the venue, she could not help but feel skeptical about the emptiness of the restaurant during that time of the day.

When she walked in, she was met with a sight that would end up ruining her entire day... It was Clancy.

After his appearance at her exhibition, she had believed that it was either a mistake or she had not seen him like she thought.

And since she did not hear from him for a while after that, she went on with her life. Until then.

"I am sorry that I had to do things like this, I just thought this was the only other way," he said.

Selen wondered how he managed to set up a meeting and then everything began to clear up.

During the exhibition, guests were given a bar code to scan if they were interested in the pieces before and after they were sold out.

He had made a request for some personalised designs and she had accepted to meet the client in person because of the amount of money he was dropping for the designs.

But it was all a set up. "So, you are saying that this is not a business meeting, Mr Avelino?" She asked, still sounding professional.

"No, now please can we talk?" He asked and motioned for a seat. She turned around and headed back for the door she had just walked through.

"Selen? Selen!" He called at her and followed behind her.

"I am just trying to talk to you, Selen. Slow down, please " He said as he continued to walk behind.

"If you do not want to speak to me about us then at least let us talk about our children" he said. She halted in her steps and turned to him.

"What kids? You could not possibly be talking about my children right? Because you have no right to call them your children." She said to him,

He was dumbfounded. He did not expect her to respond like that.

"Wh- what?" He asked in a stutter. "What children are you talking about? We do not have any children together" she stated.

"We would have to have sex for a baby to be made, is that not so? When did we ever get intimate, hm?" She asked him and walked away without waiting for a response.

His tongue was tied. He could not believe what she was playing at. He was especially embarrassed at the fact that it was something he had used threat in coercing her into obliging to.

And now it was coming back to bite him in the ass. Her statement had brought back memories of how badly he had treated her in the past.

"Wow," he said with a heavy heart. He did not expect to waltz into her life and act like nothing happened.

And his conversation with her today showed that it was going to be harder than whatever he had imagined for their "perfect reunion."

Their night together turned out to be one of his most valuable memories. And now, she had made it clear that to her, that night never existed.

By the time her appointment with JK arrived, she was hopeful to talk to a friend about what had transpired earlier that day.

"No way. He did that?" JK said, confused. Selen nodded her head, "yes, he did" she responded.

JK was irritated by Clancy's audacity to go through such lengths to see her. "Do you want me involved?" He asked her.

Selen shook her head, no. It was her battle and she did not want anyone else taking on enemies for her.

JK shook his head in disbelief. He hated that he had not met Clancy at the exhibition. He saw how his sudden appearance was going to affect the lives of Selen and the kids as well.

He was going to honour her response to stay out of it, but he was on standby for whenever she needed it. And he made sure that she knew it.

"If things start to get out of control with him, remember to come to me first. I'll handle things from there. I do not want you bothered about such matters" he said to her.

She appreciated his concern but knew that it would not get to that point. "Hopefully" she added internally.

In as much as she wanted to take things with a light heart. She also knew to thread carefully around him.

It had been seven years and she did not know if he had changed or become worse.

She remembered what his family was capable of and they were never known to take the high road on matters. So she did not expect anything more from them and Clancy.

"I have to go in a few minutes, we still have a lot of packing to do before settling into the new house" Selen said as she glanced at her watch.

"About that," JK began to say. She knew that he would have some questions to ask her and she had anticipated them.

Chapter 28: The not so forgotten memories

JK was not focused on the house being a gift from a friend to her, instead he was looking further into the future.

"So, are you and Newton a couple now?" He asked Selen.

"What? No. But why do you ask that?" She asked him. "Before you begin to wonder, no this is not about the house" he began.

"I have known you for a long time now and I am also a man. So I know what the look of love looks like when I see it in the eyes of another man.

I want you to know that I support your relationship with him, if it ever grows into one. I mean, you no longer have the excuse of working twice as hard for a better life for your kids on your shoulders.

Now you have a genuine chance at being happy for yourself. Do not deprive yourself of that by looking for more excuses not to and creating things to take up your personal time." he said.

Selen thought about what he said. JK was right. She always used securing her children's future as an excuse for not wanting a romantic relationship.

And now that their futures were more secure than before, she was slowly looking for other things to fill in that gap. From work, to the new place, she was doing everything but getting in a romantic relationship.

Had she been doing that on purpose? But the only other question on her mind was who was it going to be?

The obvious answer to anyone would be Mr Newton but she did not know if she liked him enough for that.

That was something she would have to figure out by herself with time. But it made her feel a lot better that JK thought that Newton was a good choice.

JK was very judgemental and strict when it came to people that came around Selen and the triplets.

So him being okay with Newton being in their lives in a way that was more than he already was, was a big go ahead from JK.

Clancy had returned back to his hotel with a frown still etched on his face. He was receiving calls from his office in England.

His impromptu trip had put them in a maze of confusion when it came to pending deals and meetings. But that was not his main concern right now.

Only his kids and wife mattered. That's right... his wife. And he was not going to let them out of his sight once again.

His family was one of the people that were pestering him since he traveled. With the way he left things at the party, they had tried reaching out to know how he was.

Especially his mother who had tried various means to reach him. As he stared at the missed calls, another call came in. It was his mother.

He told her the truth about where he was and she was overjoyed at the news of her grandkids.

"Have you met them yet? What are they like?" She asked multiple questions at once. Her questions reminded him that he had not even been close to the kids.

Except when they had passed by him at the exhibition, and that was the closest he had gotten to them.

He explained everything to her and she quietly listened. She felt sorry for her son and shame for her actions.

When Clancy updated his mother on what was going on between him and Selen, she broke down after learning she nearly killed her own grandchildren.

She sobbed uncontrollably as she thought about all that she did to Selen. How she had treated her even after finding out about her pregnancy.

She had believed that her son was not responsible for the pregnancy because they believed that he had never spared her a glance.

And any form of intimacy between them seemed almost impossible. She had supported her daughter when she found out about the divorce papers.

How was she ever going to face Selen and her grandchildren now? She began to cry even more. No one from their family could help with this because they had all treated her badly.

She had her daughter come over to their home as they tried to find anything they could about how Selen had lived after they chased her away and a way to plead with her on behalf of their son and brother.

They both had a hand in this. They played a huge role in everything that was happening now.

When they found out that she was pregnant, they did not give her a fair chance to speak or at least treat her better for the sake of her pregnancy.

Instead, they treated her worse, making her almost have a miscarriage and taken to the hospital.

And even then, they showed her no mercy. Instead Katherine went there with divorce papers for her brother and made her sign the divorce papers.

When they finally saw something about the kids, it was a recent publication from Selen's latest exhibition before the photo was taken down.

One of the photographers had managed to get a blurry photo of the three of them at the corner they were sitting as they doodled some art.

Katherine paused, her heart beating very fast. "Mom," she called her mother to see what she had found.

They both let out shaky breaths of pain. "We- we almost killed them," she let out before the tears rolled down her eyes.

She looked at them closely as she zoomed in and out of their faces. She could barely make out their faces but she knew that they were her brother's kids. They were undeniably his kids.

What hurt her the most was that she had no specific reason for why she treated Selen the way she did all those years ago.

She did not know her personally, or have a personal vendetta against her or her family.

Chapter 29: The pot calling the kettle black

From the moment Selen walked into their home in her wedding dress, Katherine made her hatred for Selen clearly known.

She had been so heartless for no reason! And now that karma was here, she did not know how to respond anymore.

She had no right to even reach out to Selen and apologise for what she did to her and the kids.

Her mother imagined what life would have been like if she had not acted the way she did to Selen. How different life would have been.

She would have had the kids playing around in the compound and calling her grandma. Now, she was sure that they did not even know that she existed.

And even if they did. How would she explain being away from their lives for so long?

How would she explain to them that their mother had to literally run away from them in order to keep them alive?

"Poor Clancy. I can only wonder how he is taking all of this" Katherine said.

"You should wonder, Katherine. Because you are the reason why he is in this mess with his Selen and kids in the first place" Julian said unprovoked as he walked inside the room.

His mother had called him as well to tell him about what Clancy had told her. "Julian, do not even dare act innocent" Katherine warned.

"Oh, please. Act innocent? I am innocent. I never laid hands on her. Was I the one who punished her so badly that she ended up in the hospital?

Was I the one who went to the hospital with divorce papers claiming that they were from Clancy who had no idea of what was going on?!" He defended.

"What? So you think because you did not do anything that makes you free of being an accomplice?" She yelled back at him.

"You saw everything, Julian. You heard everything. I TOLD YOU EVERYTHING! But since it did not matter then, you did not care.

Or at least not care enough to say or do anything. But the moment you found out the truth, boom! You suddenly became a better person.

Do not kid yourself, you are just as guilty as the rest of us" she said. Julian laughed loudly. He laughed so loudly that it echoed in the walls.

"Just as guilty as the rest of you?! Do you not get it, Katherine?! I would never, and I mean never do any of those things that you did to her.

I would never have gone to the lengths you did to make sure that she was miserable and that she left this home in pain.

And the fact that you are deluding yourself by thinking we are all on the same weight of sin makes you not just a wicked person, but also a hypocritical one as well" he said and walked out of the room.

Their mother was there the entire time. She watched her children turn against each other without being able to say a word.

They had spent years walking on eggshells when it came to this topic. And even after Clancy's forgiveness, they had not truly forgiven themselves.

Maybe Clancy was not the only issue that they believed they had over the past seven years.

The truth was that they had never gotten the chance to confront one another about the role they had played in it all.

Yes, they were guilty and they knew it, and they wanted forgiveness. But beneath it, they were being hypocritical.

They were hiding in the disguise of the fact that they thought they were helping Clancy. Meanwhile the entire time, they were doing things that he did not know about.

Clancy was relentlessly trying to make things right with Selen. Or at least get the chance to speak to her.

He was basically chasing her around town at this point. She had cancelled his art order with the description of a conflict of interests.

She was making sure that he had no reason or excuse to see her again. She became stricter with the kids' school on who they handed the kids over to.

As she faced her personal issues, a corporate one was also headed her way.

Selen did not build her career by just looking at paintings, she built it by using art as a tool.

During her earlier years in the industry, she had learnt a number of things like how artworks were used as leverage, money laundering vehicles, corporate tax shelters, and sometimes, a way to exert revenge.

As Spain's new Ambassador of art, she spent her days at work navigating the brutal, multi-billion-euro chess board that was the art world.

But right now, she was faced with a major dilemma- the Vance Foundation, a company that played a major part of Spain's art world, was facing a major corporate coup.

And it was going to affect all of them if it was successful.

A competitor, the Mininil group, had launched a hostile, multi-billion-euro takeover bid. They had spent the last three months quietly buying up floating shares in the company, bribing board members, and backing Selen into a legal corner.

By tomorrow, they would vote to liquidate the foundation, strip its assets, and sell off its historic holdings and art work to commercial distributors and private collectors.

Selen stood in her office overlooking the photos of the pieces that were at risk with her phone pressed to her ear.

"I am sorry, ambassador. But the Ministry can not intervene with this. This is a private foundation and nothing of this is illegal.

Having the government involved would appear as bullying, no matter the reason." said the secretary of the office of the minister of Commerce explained.

He was right. If they got involved, it would look like the government is trying to bully private corporations which could cause even more chaos than there already was.

And it was a private foundation, they just have ties with Spain's art world, but they remained a private foundation. And now it was backfiring.

Chapter 30: The Takeover

"The competition had capital flowing through three different sovereign wealth funds. If we freeze their acquisition, it triggers an international trade dispute. Next, we are locked out" the secretary said.

"So that's it? We are just going to let a predatory hedge fund dismantle the largest private collection in Southern Europe?" Selen said, her voice dropping to a dangerous, icy register.

"The office of Commerce is completely paralyzed with the threat of an international trade dispute. We are short exactly four hundred and fifty million euros to mount a defensive buyback. Nobody is willing to write that check.

"It is a matter of liquidity, not legacy. I am sorry" he said and the line went dead. She knew exactly how the upper class of the European business world operated.

It was not guided by cryptic poetry. It was governed by liquidity, regulatory pressure, and raw leverage.

She was short on votes and liquidity to cast her own votes. Her internal stats showed she needed exactly seven point five percent more of the voting shares to form a defensive blocking minority.

Without it, the boardroom vote tomorrow afternoon would be a slaughter. She thought she would have a solution when the time came.

But she had less than twenty-four hours and she was still stranded. She remembered how she had confidently promised the CEO that she would find a way around it.

She and her team had thought that it was just another attempt by a small corporation at poking the bear.

But this was different, it was a carefully calculated movement, carefully crafted and executed since the former ambassador was in seat.

She was not the target, she just happened to be the one in the seat when the final step was ready.

She needed hard capital and a political sledgehammer if she had a shot at stopping this. It would be a stain on her reputation if this happened with her on seat just for a few months.

Her secretary came in shortly after with a tablet in hand, she showed it to Selen. It was a leak.

But she knew better than to believe that it was a leak. They had done it on purpose to ridicule her and her position.

As they tried to do damage control from her end and the end of Vance cooperation, her phone rang within the next hour, it was from the commerce office. She answered immediately.

"Ambassador, you have to see this. I just sent it to you" he said to her. She went back to her table and looked at what he sent. "No way," she said.

Five minutes ago, an anonymous blind trust had executed an aggressive bulk buy of the Foundation's public shares on the open market, absorbing the artificial selling pressure.

They were absorbing every single floating share of the Vance Foundation stock. They were not quietly accumulating, they were deliberately driving the price up, completely pricing the Mininil group out of the secondary market.

Within ten minutes, the buyer had swallowed eight point two percent of the total equity, effectively shattering the competitors guaranteed board majority.

The buyer had immediately executed a legal proxy assignment, locking the voting rights directly to Selen's board seat for the next ninety days.

The seven point five percent deficit was erased in a single stroke. Selen stared at the screen, her mind racing through the global players capable of this.

To pull this off, someone needed immediate access to hundreds of millions in liquid capital, and a weaponized forensic accounting team.

No way, it seemed like a dream. She was trying to figure out who could have done that in less than an hour after the information leaked.

There was no way someone loved the Vance foundation enough to spend such a huge amount of money without a second thought in a matter of minutes.

Even the CEO was surprised. All the people he had asked for help needed weeks and months to liquidate their funds to about three or four percent of the stock.

He was certain it was not someone from his circle and his company pride themselves in their level of privacy so when the buyer clicked the option to be anonymous to third parties, they had to respect that.

"Who cares if the buyer was anonymous, we have been saved!" The CEO had said excitedly over the phone.

Selen smiled happily, yes it was a good thing. But she could not help but wonder who it might have been.

"Could it be JK? No, he did not have enough to liquidate four hundred and fifty million euros. His company would flip.

And it could not possibly be Newton, there was no way his company could handle it. Their companies would not even let them do such a thing.

She knew that they both loved and cared for her but this was one of those things that she knew that it was impossible for them to help her with.

She would be too selfish to even ask them. And she also saw it as a sign of weakness.

She was an ambassador, and she could not imagine how it would look if the first challenge she faced was fixed by going to ask her friends for help.

The secret helper did not seem to be done, because the CEO, who was still on the call, began to read a message he just received.

"Right now, three members of your own board are preparing to vote in favor of the liquidation plan. They have been promised lucrative board seats in the competition's shell companies.

A formal corruption disclosure with the Spanish federal prosecutors. The wire transfers to those three board members, connecting them to the Mininil group have been fully traced and flagged for money laundering" he read out in excitement.

"It is here, it is all here. A massive, official legal brief, backed by the full weight of a Tier-1 international bank had just been logged into the foundation's internal system." He said.