

Married To My One Night Mistake

Chapter 61: Going back to normal

After a while, the breeze started to pick up, making the yard a bit chilly. Diana shifted in her seat, rubbing her arms. Her energy levels were still low because her body was busy recovering, and the cooler air meant it was time to go back inside.

"I am getting tired," she whispered. "Alright, team, break it up," Clancy announced cheerfully, ending the meeting. He stood up and brushed the grass off his jeans.

Then with careful, steady movements, Clancy stepped behind Diana's wheelchair. He unlocked the brakes. "Hold on tight," he said with a smile. Diana grinned, holding the armrests as Clancy wheeled her back inside across the smooth walkway.

The boys trailed right behind him like guards, David hiding the secret photo under his shirt, and Daniel skipping along. As they reached the door, Selen stood up to let them in, looking at them with a curious, playful expression.

Clancy said goodbye to the kids and was headed out when he met Newton at the door. Their relationship was still awkward because they obviously disliked each other, but no one was letting that stop them from showing up for Selen and the kids.

As Clancy got in his car and headed to work, he thought about giving Selen a gift. "What would I give her that she would not reject but wholeheartedly accept" he asked himself as he pulled out of her driveway and out of the compound.

"Selen," Newton called out as he came into the house. "Hey!" Selen said excitedly. "Hey, how are you doing?" He asked her. This time, the question was not overwhelming to her. In fact, ever since Diana came back home. Whenever Newton asked her that question, she looked forward to telling him how happy she was.

Their bond was slowly growing and it was obvious to anyone who looked hard enough. Even Clancy. But he saw it from a point of protectiveness and jealousy.

The truth was that Newton and Selen's friendship was growing tighter with each conversation they had. He kept to his word about not pressuring her, but he did stop showing her his affection.

He believed that if things were to grow into something more in the future, then it had to be on a foundation of friendship. And he was really killing it in the friendship role.

"What do you want for your birthday this weekend?" He asked her after managing to escape from the kids who were enjoying their game of scrabble with him.

"Oh my, how did you know?" Selen asked in surprise. "Why wouldn't I know or remember your birthday, Selen? Now tell me, what do you want? Anything at all" he asked.

It was a blank offer, and she knew that he would do anything to get whatever she mentioned. "I really just want to spend time with people I love and people that love me. I actually have no plans for celebrating" she said.

"Diana is recovering well, I have my children and good friends, I am happy with just being able to witness and experience it all" she added.

"But you have overcome so much in the past year, you deserve to celebrate yourself, Selen" Newton said. Selen seemed adamant on not having a celebration and he was going to respect her wishes. It was about her and what she wanted after all.

As Newton left her home, he made a call to his contacts in the art worlds and real estate world. If she was not going to tell him what she wanted, he would give her what he thought was the perfect gift.

*** the weekend of Selen's birthday***

The front door of Selen's house swung open, and JK walked in. He was balancing a box that definitely had cake in it. "JK, you did not have to. I told you that I was not hosting a party" she said as she helped him carry the bottle of Champagne in his other hand.

"I know that and I respect your absurd request. But that does not mean that I will not get you a cake and a bottle of champagne" he said to her as he set the box on the kitchen table.

Shortly after, Newton arrived as well, carrying a large manila envelope. The triplets were sitting on the rug, intensely trading video game cards and laughing loudly.

Newton stopped short when he saw JK already hanging out, completely at home. He wanted to give the gift to Selen in private.

"Uncle Newton!" The kids called to him, none of them leaving their game. "What do you have there?" Daniel asked him inquisitively. They finally moved away from their game.

"Uhh," Newton stalled as he looked at Selen and the kids. They were not going to back down.

"Well, I was going to give you either way. So, here you go. Happy birthday, Selen" He said and handed the envelope to Selen.

"Open it, mummy," Diana said, still sitting at her previous spot. Selen walked over to her, so she would not feel left out for being at a distance.

Selen slid the contents out. It was not a birthday card. It was an official document and a set of shiny brass keys. Selen began to feel emotional as she read the content of the document.

"It's the keys to the art studio on 4th Street," Newton explained casually. "The top-floor, the one with the massive skylights you said you liked on that day you saw it put up for sale. I got it for you. Now you finally have a place to host your own events, and be open as often as you want.

Selen's jaw dropped. She looked from the keys to Newton, completely stunned. "Newton, are you serious? This is insane. Thank you so much!" She stepped forward and threw her arms around him in a tight, grateful hug.

The kids ran over to inspect the shiny keys, asking their mom if the new place had an elevator.

At the entrance stood Clancy. He had watched the scene play out, his grip tightening on the framed photo of the kids drawing in his hand.

His eyes darted to the paperwork on the coffee table, then at Newton's relaxed, confident posture. He watched Selen laugh at something Newton said, her thumb tracing the new keys while his kids high-fived Newton.

Married To My One Night Mistake

Chapter 62: A right to be hurt

Clancy finally gathered up the courage to leave his corner of hiding and walked toward the group. "Hey," he said as he got in, turning everyone's attention to him.

The boys ran to Clancy for a welcome hug as well as a query for bringing their surprise later than planned. JK returned with the champagne and apple juice for the kids.

"Your present is here mummy," Diana said to Selen as she pointed at Clancy. She noticed the largely wrapped gift and the boys took it to her to open.

"Happy birthday, mummy" the three of them said as the boys handed it to her. Selen carefully unwrapped the frame to reveal the painting of herself.

She gasped at it. She had definitely not expected it. Just looking at the drawing, she could tell which of her photos they had tried recreating.

"This is beautiful, kids. Thank you so much, I love it" she said with glossy eyes as she hugged and kissed them individually. "You are welcome mom" they all said. David began explaining their planning process "We painted it ourselves and-" he paused.

He did not know what to call Clancy. Everyone was looking at him for him to continue but he had just stayed silent. When Clancy realised what was happening, he interfered. "And I got the supplies and framed the painting," he said.

That was when JK understood why David had gone mute mid sentence. Selen broke the silence by thanking the kids once more and telling them how much she loved it.

Then Selen walked toward Clancy, "thank you," she said to him and he nodded with a small smile threatening to leave his lips. And suddenly, he no longer cared about how jealous he was of Newton.

She appreciated his effort and that was all that mattered to him at that moment. The insecurity he had felt earlier about Newton's present for Selen and his history with the family just faded away.

"Now, let's open this before it gets warm," JK said, breaking the silence. He popped the champagne cork, making the adults cheer, while Diana and her brothers held out her plastic cup for the apple juice.

The living room went back to its usual busy, noisy self. Selen leaned the heavy wooden frame safely against the wall by the mantelpiece so everyone could see it. She looked at the brushstrokes, which were messy but clearly made with a lot of effort.

When she looked up, she caught Clancy's eye from across the room and they both looked away.

For the next couple of hours, they all ate cake and talked. The triplets loudly explained how they had hidden the big canvas under David's bed for days, terrified that Selen would find it. Clancy did not feel like an outsider anymore.

The boys kept dragging him into their conversations, asking him to judge their video game debates or show them things on his phone. By the end of the night the kids were visibly exhausted from the sugar rush.

Diana was already asleep on the long couch, while David and Daniel were practically falling asleep against the arm of the couch, the both of them leaning on each other for support.

When Selen observed the room, she thought it best to call the night to an end. "Alright, everyone," she said, clapping her hands. She got everyone's attention now.

"Birthday party or whatever name for this is, is over. Kids, time to head upstairs and brush your teeth" she said to the boys since Diana was still deep in sleep. The boys groaned a little, but they were too tired to argue. They started slowly picking up their things.

Clancy grabbed his jacket from the chair, figuring it was his time to head out. "I should probably get going too, let you guys get some rest." he said.

The truth was that he wanted to stay, to maybe help out with the kids. But today was about her and he knew that she would much prefer Newton or JK to do that. And they would undeniably offer too.

Before Clancy could reach the front door, a small weight hit his lower body. It was Daniel, the youngest of the triplets. His hair was messy and he looked completely drained. He wrapped his arms around Clancy's waist, leaning his head against him.

Clancy smiled and bent his upper body down so they were eye-to-eye. He put a hand on Daniel's shoulder. "Hey buddy. Time for bed, remember? I will see you tomorrow" he said to him.

Daniel pulled back, rubbing his eyes with his fist. He gave a massive yawn, looking straight at Clancy. "Thank you for helping us with the picture," Daniel mumbled sleepily. "Of course, anything for you at any time" he said.

Then Daniel leaned forward again, putting his head on Clancy's shoulder for a final hug. "See you tomorrow. Goodnight, Daddy." he said.

The entire room went completely quiet.

The word seemed to echo in the hallway. Selen and David, who was already headed upstairs, froze on the bottom step of the stairs, both their eyes wide.

JK stopped right in the middle of picking up empty cake plates, his head snapping over to look at Selen. Clancy's heart jumped. He was frozen in place, his hands staying still on Daniel's back. For a second, he worried he had misheard it, or that Selen would think he had pressured the boy into saying it.

He looked up at Selen quickly, his face full of panic and confusion. Selen was standing only a few feet away, her hand over her mouth that was agape in shock. She looked at Clancy's stressed expression and gave him a small, reassuring nod. Clancy let out a breath he did not realize he was holding.

The tension left his shoulders completely. He wrapped his arms around Daniel, holding the little boy tightly for a moment. "Goodnight, Clancy finally said, trying to keep his voice steady. "Sleep well. I will be back to see you tomorrow" he said.

Chapter 63: A Father

Daniel later let go of Clancy, completely unaware of the shockwave he had just caused in the room, and walked sleepily up the stairs. His small steps faded as he reached the top floor.

David, who was already on his way upstairs and Selen stood completely still, looking at Clancy for a long moment. They were trying to process what had just happened. After a few seconds of silence, Selen gave Clancy a quiet look, turned around, and followed her sons up to the bedrooms.

JK cleared his throat to break the silence. He carefully set down the stack of plates he was holding onto the dining table. Then, he walked over to the couch to pick up Diana , who was still sound asleep and did not notice any of the commotion.

Newton stayed completely silent throughout this. He stood by the wall and just watched everything unfold, observing how everyone was reacting to the situation.

As Clancy finally walked out of the house and made his way to his car, he stopped for a second in the driveway. The night air was cool, and the house was slowly getting quiet. He realized right then that everything had changed.

He was not just a guest or a casual helper anymore to them anymore. He felt a real shift in how they saw him, and he knew he was finally a part of their family.

When everyone had gone, Selen was left completely alone in the room. The space was suddenly very silent, as opposed to how it had carried the sounds of laughter, joy, and excitement just an hour earlier.

She walked around the living room and one of her workers was cleaning the place up. Despite the mess, she was genuinely happy about how things turned out that day.

Although she had explicitly told everyone beforehand that she did not want a part in a big celebration which she ended up not having, she was glad she spent the day this way.

She was happy to be surrounded by true friends and family. It felt good to be around people who were genuinely happy that she was turning another year older and wanted to celebrate her life.

She sat down on the couch, took out her phone, and opened her messages. "Thank you so much for my birthday present, Newton," she texted him. She looked at the screen for a moment, feeling like a simple text message wasn't enough. She honestly did not know how many times she would have to say thank you to Newton for it to be enough for what he did.

Newton was at his own house when his phone buzzed. Reading her message, he was incredibly elated that she had loved the present. He had been highly skeptical about the

gift up until the exact moment he gave it to her. He knew the gift itself was a great object, but he had been worried about how she would react to it.

He knew exactly how much she liked to do things for herself without relying on outside help. She was a very independent person and was definitely planning toward buying a professional studio with her own hard-earned money.

But Newton had really wanted to do something significant for her to ease her burden. He figured that if he bought the studio for her, she could use whatever money she had set aside for something else entirely.

He knew that Diana's recent medical surgery had definitely cut her finances back a bit. It had taken a large portion of her savings, and this gift was his way of trying to even things out for her.

When he saw her text notification pop up that evening, it felt like the perfect conclusion to the day. It was the absolute cherry on his icing. He smiled to himself as he sat up and began to type back a response to Selen.

"You are most welcome, Selen. I hope your day was as great as I witnessed?" he texted back.

He kept his eyes on the screen, waiting. He did not want the conversation to end so soon. Even though he had just spent the entire day with her at the gathering, he particularly cherished quiet moments like these.

These were the moments when he knew that he had her completely undivided attention. There were no distractions, no other guests, and no kids running around. She was spending her alone time communicating with him, even if they were not physically in the same room.

Their messages went back and forth for a good while, talking about the party and their plans, before they both finally went to sleep to prepare for work the following day.

The following morning, Clancy woke up early. As soon as he opened his eyes, a wide smile was plastered on his face. He felt like he was in an incredibly good mood today, and he decided that no one was going to ruin it for him.

The reason for his happiness was simple, his son had called him daddy for the very first time the previous night. The memory kept playing back in his mind as he got out of bed.

He got dressed in his work clothes, grabbed his keys, and left the house for work with the same smile still on his face. The positive expression lasted for a long time as he drove through the morning traffic. It kept him in high spirits until he received a phone call from his mother.

She had called him early in the morning to catch up. During the conversation, she asked about how Selen and the kids were doing. Clancy decided to keep things simple. He had not mentioned anything to her about Diana's surgery, and he chose not to bring it up then either.

He just told his mother that everyone was doing fine. The mood shifted quickly when she asked her next question. She asked him directly about how things were going with his plans to get his family back together with him under one roof.

Chapter 64: Every man for his family

Hearing her ask that made him freeze. He felt bile build up in his throat at the sudden realization of his actual situation.

Despite the great moment with his son the night before, there was still a very real possibility that getting his family back together might never happen.

Clancy's mother had not mentioned their mail to Selen up until then. They did not want to ruin their chances of being grandparents and also having Clancy in the family again.

But since they had not heard anything from Selen after all these while, everyone took that as her response- that she still did not want anything to do with them and for them to stay away from her kids. Even the trust fund their mother had set up had not been checked on.

But they were not going to just give up, especially not their Mom, she was determined to see her grandchildren and know them before she took her last breath one day. So, she asked Clancy.

"Everything seems to be going well between you and Selen. So I believe you will be able to tell me if she ever got our envelope and what she thought of it. How did she react?" She asked.

Her question made Clancy realise that he may have given them answers that made them believe things were much better than how they really were. But he was glad, because he would probably not have known about the letter.

"What envelope mom?" He asked her. His tone had now changed to concern. Not concern for his family, but concern for how whatever they might have done could affect his chances with her.

His mother then went ahead to tell him everything that transpired to the point of sending the mail. Clancy did not know if he should be mad or sad. He would be lying if he said he did not see their intentions as pure, but as someone who had tried the letter and the financial approach, he knew how things would have gone in Selen's head.

She never responded to his letters, and the hospital bill for Diana that he paid for is still hung over his neck by Selen almost everyday for the first month after Diana came back home, where she tried to make him give her a payment plan to return his money.

He had to begin to meticulously avoid her in her own home whenever he came to visit the kids, just so that she would not mention it. His plan seemed to have worked since after she stopped asking, he never mentioned money around her so she would not bring it up again.

So after the call with his mother, he knew that he would have to bring their message up with Selen and he hoped that she saw that he had not told them to do it and they did it on their own accord and in good conscience. And that the trust fund was not a bribe or a way of calling her incompetent to raise her kids by herself.

Meanwhile at Julian's home, his wife was threatening to set the roof on fire when she found out how much was given to each of Selen's kids in a trust fund while her baby got nothing yet.

"You do not understand and you are failing to try to understand. These children are seven years older than our daughter MARY! Seven frigging years. That means that they were born even before I met you. Listen, do you really think that my parents would not leave anything to our daughter?" He said to her,

"Yes, I do. I believe that just like you, our daughter might grow up to be the forgotten one, the back up child. And just like Clancy, his children will live their lives with everyone running to them and begging for their attention. I do not want my daughter to grow up around a family that will make her feel like second best" she said.

Julian was regretting telling his postpartum wife about the envelope that himself and his sister had mailed to Selen along with the documents his mother added.

Even before the child was born, Mary always felt that way about Clancy and her husband. And now that she found out about the trust fund, she had a good enough reason to shout it out loud.

"They have never even met the kids and yet they give them all this, what would happen when they eventually meet them, huh?" She asked Julian. He had given up on her and was now seated on the chair in their bedroom.

"Mary, get a hold of yourself. My mother is downstairs right now, using the guest room for the tenth time now, just so she can be around our daughter, something Clancy's wife never got to experience.

Every time any of my family members come to visit, they come with loads of gifts for our baby girl. They even threw you a safe delivery party just because you had not decided on a date for the official celebrations.

All these things and so many more are the things that Clancy's children never got to experience. So why would you even for one second think that our daughter would ever be second best to my brother's kids?" He said finally. If this did not make her think, then he was done reasoning with her.

"You keep on mentioning Clancy's kids in comparison like it was not his wife that ran away and deprived her kids of what I am enjoying now" she said. "Oh, so you do know that it is an enjoyment? And we caused her to leave. She had no choice. If she stayed, she would not have had those kids.

Listen here, Mary. When his family finally reunites and maybe come back here to England one day, I want you to remember this. They are our daughter's cousins and you will not let hate for them grow in our child's heart." He said.

Chapter 65: A man's word

"And remember, just as our daughter is your baby, that is the same way those kids are Selen's babies," Julian said, his voice flat with exhaustion. He rubbed the bridge of his nose, refusing to let the argument stretch on any longer.

"And if you want to know if there is a trust fund with such an amount for our daughter as well, then why don't you ask my parents yourself? I'm going to sleep." he said and without waiting for her reply, Julian turned his back, pulled the blanket up over his shoulders, and settled into the mattress.

Mary stood in place by the side of the bed. Her arms were tightly folded across her chest as she watched him close his eyes.

"Hmph!" Mary huffed loudly, deliberately making sure he heard her annoyance.

She crawled into her side of the bed, pulling her own section of the duvet over her.

She did not hate Clancy's children. In fact, she had never wished them any ill will. But she was fiercely protective of her own, and she wanted absolute certainty that her daughter was not going to receive second-class treatment from Julian's family.

From the very moment she had married Julian, Mary had felt a massive, Clancy-shaped cloud hanging over the entire family. It felt like every holiday, every dinner, and every family milestone was threaded carefully because of Clancy's shadow.

Now that she finally had a child of her own, she refused to let her innocent daughter carry that same emotional baggage.

As the room grew darker and her eyes grew heavier, Julian's blunt words began to loop in her mind. Deep down, she knew he was right. How nearly impossible would it be that his

parents would see her daughter as anything other than their own flesh and blood grandchild?

They had never been cruel to her since the beginning, but anxiety has a way of making the mind play tricks. As she finally started drifting to sleep, a cold knot of regret formed in her stomach.

She genuinely hoped that Julian's mother had not somehow picked up on what she thought about them. Her questions had not just been a dig at Clancy, she had essentially questioned their capacity to love their own son and granddaughter equally. It was a messy line to cross, and she knew it.

The next afternoon, Clancy arrived at Selen's home much earlier than his usual time. His corporate meetings had wrapped up ahead of schedule, and rather than killing time in his hotel room or his eerily silent office he wanted to see the kids.

But more than that, he desperately wanted a chance to actually talk to Selen. He needed to discuss the envelope his family had sent, but there was a deeper urgency inside him- he wanted to talk about them.

Before their agonizing months spent sitting in hospital waiting rooms, Selen had completely rejected every single attempt he made to speak to her. She had built an impenetrable wall around herself.

Even now, during this fragile truce where he spent significantly more time sitting in her living room than he did at his hotel, they still barely spoke a word to each other that was not strictly about the children. That certainly was not how he wanted them to grow.

Up until this point, Clancy had been forcing himself to focus on one single fire at a time. He did not want to overwhelm her. And for the most part, things were finally looking up.

His relationship with the kids seemed to be going genuinely well. Diana was recovering speedily from her surgery and treatments, and Selen had even managed to return to her regular work schedule. With the baseline chaos finally settling down, Clancy figured it might finally be time to try once again to rebuild the foundation of their relationship.

As he pulled his car into the driveway, he could not help but marvel at the sheer absurdity of his own life. If anyone had told him a few years ago that the family he had entered into an underground deal with would end up forcing a wife on him, and that she would somehow end up being the only woman to ever truly hold his heart and bear his children, he would have called total bullshit.

He genuinely had not expected that greed had swallowed the Williams family, Selen's family so completely. Even after Clancy had compensated them handsomely for the deal,

their greed was bottomless. They were terrified of losing the connection, so they forced their daughter down his throat.

At the beginning, even he had not realised that it was Tola, Selen's step-sister, whom her parents were originally supposed to arrange for him. Tola was the one mapped out for the contract. But when the Williams family caught wind of Clancy's ruthless, cold reputation and heard rumors that he was a hardened misogynist, they panicked.

By then, it was far too late to cancel the binding contract without facing Clancy's wrath. So, in a desperate bid to protect their favorite daughter, they twisted the arrangement behind closed doors. They threw Selen into the fire instead.

Clancy had not realized the depth of this until much later, long after Selen had already packed her things and left him.

Sitting in his parked car, staring at Selen's front door, he could only imagine how vastly different, how completely ruined things would have been if he had indeed ended up with Tola. Tola was a gambling drunk who could not keep her life straight if her life depended on it.

He allowed his mind to wander through the alternate possibilities. Maybe, just maybe, he still would have crossed paths with Selen on that fateful night. Maybe she still would have gotten pregnant with his kids anyway, and he still would have spent years looking for her, eventually flying across the entire world just to be with her.

But if that had happened, he would currently be trapped in a messy, public, and expensive divorce from Tola.

Married To My One Night Mistake

There was a possibility that things could be even worse than a messy public divorce if he had stayed with Tola. She would probably be a classic Margarita wife right now, waking up at noon every single day just to drink her life away on his dime while their home burned down around them.

But that was not his reality. As Clancy turned off the ignition, a wave of gratitude washed over him. For once in his highly calculated, tightly controlled life, he was incredibly grateful that he had gotten the wrong sister. Now, he just had to convince the right sister to give him another chance.

Clancy walked into the house and was welcomed by an unusual silence. "Hello, is anyone home?" He said as he made slow steps toward the kitchen. "Good day, Mr Clancy," Sarah, the children's nanny said.

"Hello, Sarah. Where are the kids? And are the boys not back from school yet?" He asked her. "They are back, sir. Diana went for her check up at the hospital and went to sleep shortly after. And the boys equally fell asleep almost immediately after their shower. They had Physical health today in school, so they played a lot" she said.

Sarah had said it so casually that he assumed it was a normal occurrence but it was the first time he had met them asleep at that time. "And Selen?" He asked her. Sarah told him that she was not back from work yet. So he offered to wait for the kids to wake up and went to the sitting room.

"Okay, sir. Would you like anything while you wait?" she asked politely. But Clancy simply shook his head, no. "I will be here just in case you change your mind," she said politely.

Clancy nodded his head slowly and retreated back to the sitting room where he began working on his phone. The truth was that he was never fully free, he just had some things that could wait.

So as he waited to see the kids, he tried to catch up on work. About an hour later, the doors to the house opened and he could hear Selen's voice from where he was.

Selen was speaking to Sarah, who was getting her caught up on what had happened since she left home. "And Mr Clancy is here, he is waiting for the kids to wake up" she said. Selen looked at her wrist watch and said, "are they all still asleep?" She asked Sarah.

"Yes ma'am" she said. "Those injections must have knocked Diana out. And the boys had their monthly P. E today right? They must be tired from all the running around" she said and Sarah nodded in agreement.

After Sarah walked away with one of Selen's bags that she had helped with, Selen noticed Clancy quietly standing at the corner of the hallway. He was leaning on his left side to the wall, with both hands in his pockets.

He had opened the first two buttons of his dress shirt and it was not loosely tucked into his dress pants. His hair had fallen in front of his face, just above his eyebrows, giving him an edgy and sexy look.

"Hi," he said in his deep baritone that echoed in the halls. "Hi," Selen said and looked away after her obviously long stare at him. She pretended to rummage through her bag for a while and then walk away from the spot she was standing in.

Clancy had the same idea as he then walked toward her. "The kids are still asleep" he said, stating the known fact. He internally slapped himself for the sentence. "The kids are still asleep? Really? That was the first sentence that left your lips?" He queried himself.

Selen was already headed toward the staircase when Clancy called for her attention, "Selen," he called out. She turned around at the foot of the stairs and looked at him. "Yeah?" She said, "Um, I was hoping we could talk?" He asked her.

Selen deliberated on it and thought to give it a shot. Maybe it was how he was looking that evening that discombobulated her thoughts or she was just slowly softening toward him without realising it, but she led them to her home office.

It was the first time Clancy had gone this far in her home. Every time he visited, he respected her privacy and only went where the kids went, which was almost never up the stairs.

Clancy looked around the hallway as she walked them down to the end of the hall. He did not know if it was the art that hung around or the colour scheme of the walls, or if it was the contrast between the colours of the paints and the colours on the artworks, but he liked it. And he saw it as a vision for some of the vacation villas he owned.

"I like the interior. You may have to share the contact of your interior decorator with me" he said to her, trying to sound casual.

"That was not sarcasm, was it?" Selen asked him as she unlocked the door to the office. "What? No. I love it. As a matter of fact, I am already thinking about which of my villas would suit this vibe and a whole number of them are coming to mind" he explained honestly.

He noticed the expression on Selen's face and then it clicked. "Hold on, did you- are you the designer?" He asked her. She was surprised that he had figured it out so soon. "Wow, you are incredibly talented," he said, genuinely.

"Well, it is one thing to create art, and it is another to present it in a way that you want it to be seen. One art can mean life, death or even rebirth depending on how it is placed. And if I am going to be a better artist, I need to know how to present my art because no one can read my mind. So only I can place it in a way that I like" she said.

Chapter 67: Forgetting, Not Forgiving

This was the most Selen had spoken to him in a very long time. She set her things on her desk and then walked toward the couch on the other side of the office. Clancy was still standing close to the door, he was too busy paying attention to every single word that left her lips.

"So, you could help arrange art in a client's space?" he asked her, trying to make more conversation.

"Yeah, for extra fees of course. But that is about work, and that is not what you want to speak to me about, is it?" She said to him, Clancy shook his head, no, in response to her question.

"Did you receive anything from my family lately?" He asked her. He was going to go straight to the point. There was no use beating about the bush, especially if she had already seen it. And according to what his mom said, it had been a while since it was sent and she was bound to have received it already.

Selen was surprised by his question. "Did he tell them to do it?" She wondered. "Yes." She answered plainly. "Selen, I know that my appearance must have been a shock to you and I want you to know that this is not me interceding for my family. But I want you to know that I had no idea, but I think that they are genuine.

I believe that their interests are pure and they meant no harm with what they left to the kids and-" Selen interrupted him. "What is the problem with you and your family thinking that my silence equals anger? Have you thought about the fact that maybe I am just indifferent when it comes to you guys?

Maybe I just do not care enough to respond, Maybe I just do not care enough to feed your conscience that I have already let go of the past because I do not think of them as significant enough to make myself a bitter person. How about that?" She said,

To Clancy, she was not just talking about his mother and his siblings. He felt like she was talking to him directly and not just his family, applying every single word to their own history.

He immediately thought about the long, detailed message he had sent her months ago, explaining his regrets and asking for a chance to talk. The silence he got after his long and heartfelt message to her, her denying every request he made to continue their conversation from that day in her office.

Even when Diana needed his bone marrow. She knew that there was a chance that he would be a match, and yet, she called him last. After all of her options had worn out. All this time, he thought the silence was due to her lingering anger. But what if she just did not care about him?

All this time, Clancy had convinced himself that her silence was because she was still holding onto deep, lingering anger. He had told himself that she just needed time to process her resentment. But looking at her expressionless face right now, reality hit him differently.

What if she did not hate him at all? What if she just did not care about him anymore?

Clancy cleared his throat, trying to find words, but his throat felt dry. The office was quiet "Selen," he started, but he stopped himself.

He looked at how she was sitting, completely relaxed, not showing a single sign of agitation or nerves. She was not avoiding eye contact, and she was not gripping the couch cushions. She was just waiting for him to finish so she could get to her work.

"So you really do not feel anything when you look at me?" he asked, his voice much quieter now. "Not even a little bit of resentment for how things ended?" He asked.

Selen leaned back slightly. "I believe that I have told you this before. Resentment takes energy, Clancy. It means I would have to spend my day thinking about what you did, what your family did, and how it affected me. I do not have the time or the desire to do that.

When the package arrived, I did not get mad. I just put it in a drawer because it did not matter more to me than my daughter who was in the hospital" she said. Clancy shifted his weight from one foot to the other. Hearing her say it out loud was different from guessing it.

When someone is angry, you can argue with them, apologize, or try to fix the mistake. But there was nothing to fix here. She had simply closed that Chapter of her life and moved on, leaving them completely outside of it.

"I see," Clancy said. He glanced toward the desk where her things were neatly organized. "I did not mean to ambush you. My mom was just worried that you were holding a grudge, and I wanted to clear the air." He said.

"The air is clear," Selen said, standing up from the couch and walking back to her desk. She picked up a folder, making it clear that their conversation was over.

"You can tell your mother she does not need to send anything else. You are already a part of the kids' lives, and they are still adjusting. Please do not add your drama filled family to the mix." she said.

Clancy nodded slowly. He backed toward the door, his hand finding the metal handle. He wanted to say something else about just the two of them, not his mom, not his siblings, not the kids. Just the two of them.

Instead he opened the door and walked out to the hallway, shutting the door behind himself. He was pleased to hear the sound of the kids at the end of the hall. When they spotted him, the boys ran toward him for a hug. "Where is Diana ?" He asked them. "Downstairs," they said simultaneously.

Clancy held their hands and led them downstairs to meet Diana . "Hey kiddo," he said to her, calling her attention. "You're here!" She exclaimed and got up, catching Clancy off guard.

Chapter 68: A Recovering Diana

Across the room, Clancy gasped, his instincts taking over instantly. He stretched his hands out in sheer panic, his heart leaping into his throat. Even as he did it, a distant part of his brain realized how foolish the gesture was.

His outstretched hands would have done absolutely nothing to catch her, given the significant distance separating them across the hardwood floor. If she fell, he could only watch. But she did not fall.

"Surprise!" Diana beamed, her face lighting up with a radiant, triumphant smile. She directed the exclamation straight at Clancy, who remained frozen in place like a statue, his mouth hanging wide open and his hands still awkwardly extended in mid-air.

"D- Diana ?" Clancy finally gasped, his voice cracking slightly. The shock threatened to pull the air right out of his lungs. He lowered his arms slowly, taking a tentative step forward, and then another, walking toward her as if approaching a fragile miracle.

Diana did not just stand there waiting. With a joyful giggle, she began walking toward him as well. Her steps were surprisingly steady, a stark contrast to the bedridden days that had defined her recent past.

"I can walk on my own now. My sides are healed," she declared proudly. She stopped just a foot away from him and pointed at her sides, where the pain used to reside.

The sight was too much for Clancy's defenses. Moving forward, he engulfed her in a tight, protective hug. He squeezed his eyes shut as a wave of intense relief washed over him, and tears threatened to spill over his eyelashes.

"This is great. This is so great," he whispered repeatedly into her hair, refusing to let go, anchoring himself to the reality that she was finally okay.

Meanwhile, a floor above them, Selen was silently seated in her office. For the past few minutes, she had made multiple failed attempts at working, staring blankly at documents that seemed to blur together.

Her mind was a chaotic loop, completely unaware of the beautiful breakthrough transpiring downstairs. Finally, letting out a heavy sigh, she gave up, pushed her chair back, and left the office in search of a distraction.

As her feet hit the top of the staircase, a sound drifted up to meet her. It was loud, laughter echoing from the sitting room. Intrigued, and perhaps a little envious of whatever joy was happening without her, she followed the sound down the stairs and down the hallway.

When she stepped into the archway of the sitting room, she stopped dead in her tracks. She was met with a sight that instantly sent a shockwave of surprise through her entire being.

There, in the center of the rug, Diana was squatting comfortably, completely immersed in a lively game with her brothers and Clancy.

Selen braced herself, waiting for the inevitable wince, but it never came. Diana was not groaning in pain. She did not have that familiar, heartbreakingly painful expression etched onto her face. Instead, she looked perfectly whole.

Diana's eyes scanned the room as she waited for her turn in the game, and she spotted her mother first. "Mummy, look! I can move on my own now!" Diana yelled excitedly, abandoning her game piece and standing up to show off.

"I have been practicing in my room every single day. I took it one day at a time, just like he suggested." She gestured grandly toward Clancy, giving him full credit for the advice that had fueled her secret rehabilitation.

Selen's hand flew to her mouth, her heart swelling so fast. "Yes, baby. I can see that," she said, her voice thick with an overwhelming happiness. She quickly walked toward the group, her eyes taking in the sight of her healthy daughter.

As Selen approached, Clancy remained seated on the floor, but his attention shifted completely. He had his eyes trained on Selen the entire time, watching her expression change from shock to pure, unadulterated bliss.

It struck him with sudden clarity, he had just seen her show more raw emotion within a single minute of talking to Diana than she had during the entire grueling hour they had spent speaking about his family up in her office.

With him, she was an impenetrable wall, but with her children, the walls crumbled instantly. Before he could dwell on the thought, Diana marched back over and stood directly in front of him, planting her hands on her hips. A mischievous glint sparkled in her eyes.

"Remember what you promised me when I was still very sick?" she asked, looking down at Clancy with a knowing grin. "You said that you would take me to the beach, since I have never been to one before."

"Oops, she remembered," Clancy thought to himself, a comical wave of panic washing over him.

The truth was that he did not have any problem taking them. In fact, he would love nothing more than to see Diana running around in the sand.

The real issue was the minor detail that he had not mentioned a single word about this alleged promise to their mother. He could feel the dangerous territory he had just walked into.

Selen, now standing just behind her daughter, went quiet. She was silently watching their interaction, her eyes darting between Clancy's guilty face and Diana's expectant one.

Clancy swallowed hard, offering a nervous smile. "Well, we will have to ask your mom first," he said, shifting the responsibility as smoothly as he could and looking up at Selen for rescue or judgment.

Diana didn't waste a beat. She whirled around to face her mother, her eyes wide and pleading. "Mummy, can we go to the beach? Please?" she asked her mother. As if on cue, the boys materialized at Diana's side, sensing an opportunity for an adventure.

"Yes, please, can we go? Can we? Please, Mummy!" they chimed in, creating a chorus of desperate begging. This is an ambush, Selen thought to herself, looking at the wide, hopeful eyes staring back at her.

It was a synchronized parental trap, and she was caught dead in the center of it.

Chapter 69: Cool for the summer

Selen knew that the entire mood of the kids, this fragile, beautiful joy they had just recovered was currently depending entirely on her next word. If she said no, the light in the room would vanish.

She took a deep breath, trying to inject a voice of reason into the excitement. "I will have to think about it, kids. Your sister still needs to be under supervision at all times and close to a hospital, and you all still have school to finish too."

David, always the strategist, stepped forward with a counter argument. "Our teacher said that school closes this week, Mummy. Can we go after them? During the summer?"

Selen looked at David, then turned her gaze back to Diana . The recovery was a miracle, yes, but miracles needed to be protected. "But Diana," Selen asked gently, reaching out to brush a stray hair from her daughter's face, "do you really think you can stay in the sun and the heat for so long without getting sick again?"

The room went entirely still, everyone waiting to see how Diana would answer the ultimate test. "I think so. And if I am ever tired, I promise to stay in the shade and communicate with you or whoever is with me" Diana said.

"Hmph" Selen let out a heavy breath. How could she deprive them of that? "Of course, sweetie. We can make plans for that when school closes and I see very good grades and exemplary remarks from your teachers" she added.

The last part was just so it would not be as though she gave in easily. She knew how smart her kids were and good grades was a norm in their house.

"We? Does that mean that you will be going with us, mummy?" Daniel asked her. She had not thought about it yet. But it seemed like what would have ended up happening anyway.

She would not be at ease knowing that the three kids were left alone to be catered and watched after by just Clancy and Sarah. She slowly nodded her head, yes. "Yes, I will be going to the beach with you guys too. I have also not been to any beaches in Spain" she said.

Clancy could not control the small smile that made its way to his lips. As the kids asked her, he had hoped that she would join in. But she was an unpredictable woman.

He needed an excuse to spend more time with his entire family. And one that was outside of the walls of Selen's home seemed like a lottery win.

He did not say anything else after that and just hung out with the kids. Selen had caught the smile on his face but ignored it as what sheer excitement for their plans. She watched the kids finish their food and hurry to hang out with Clancy.

She sat down for a while and watched them do whatever they did that made them laugh and giggle uncontrollably.

They really just liked hanging around Clancy and that was not a father and children bond she saw everyday. Maybe it was because he was not there from the beginning, so now he is like a fun little addition to their family. Or they always wanted a dad and she had not realised it.

A message notification came on Selen's phone and she opened it to reveal a text from Newton, "Hey!" it read. She did not notice when the small smile appeared on her lips. It was not the kind of smile that came from trying to hide a blush. But one that came with familiarity.

And it made her even more confused about what she would call their current relationship. Since the last time he confessed his feelings, on the night after Clancy ruined their dinner, he stuck to his word of being there and not pressuring her. But she was feeling the pressure that she was putting on herself.

Newton did not mind slow and steady, as long as when she came to him, she was sure and ready. As she typed back a response, she noticed a pair of eyes stuck on her.

Clancy, who had noticed when she took out her phone and smiled as she typed back, was jealously watching her. "Oh, so now she responds immediately. But when it's me checking in, she ignores me" he said to himself as he kept his eyes on her.

Their eyes met. They both looked at each other, with no one giving way for the other. Selen was having an awkward stare when she caught him looking at her. And Clancy was staring at her like she had just shown him a secret that he did not like knowing.

Selen looked away when Clancy's lower lip began to bend into an involuntary pout and went back to her phone, which luckily had a new message waiting for her.

"What are your plans this summer? Any vacation plans?" Newton asked her. Selen thought about an answer, making sure that she was not forgetting anything. "None right now. Besides the kids having a beach day at the beginning of the summer, we have nothing else in our calendar for now. Besides work for me" she said back.

"Beach day? Can I come along?" Newton asked her. If it was just her and the kids then she would have been the one inviting him first, but she did not want anything that would cause the air to be filled with tension. So, she told Newton no and explained why.

"That sounds like family time to me," he said and the jealousy could be felt through the text. "No, the kids just want to go to the beach and spend time with Clancy. I do not want to be the reason their smiles are taken away from them" she explained.

Selen looked up at the kids, who were engrossed in a game of monopoly with Clancy. They had just begun and were already trying to change some of the rules of the game, causing Selen to forget about her phone for a while and laugh loudly.

Chapter 70: Family time

"Kids, you can't do that" Selen said to the kids as they tried moving they tried to give themselves more monopoly money at the beginning of the game. "Why not? As long as we make the rules at the beginning, it stands" Diana insisted.

"Well sweetie, some rules are not meant to be broken, that's what makes winning fun-knowing that you followed the rules and still won fair and square. Sure, some of them may be changed along the way, but that should not be because it favors you at that point" she said.

"Fine," Diana said in surrender. "But now you have to play with us, mummy," she added. "Sorry, I can't play. Plus, it takes forever and I will hate to leave the game half way" she said, dodging the invitation. "Fine, scrabble then? Come on, join us mummy" Daniel said.

"Fine. Make room for me" Selen said and walked toward them. The kids adjusted and left her between Diana and Clancy. Their eyes met for a split second and both of them knew that the next few hours were going to carry a lot of those kinds of moments.

After the second triple word, everyone including Selen had loosened up and was now totally enjoying the game. "Xo is a word!" Clancy said insistently at his placement of his "x" plaque above a word that had an "o"

"No it isn't!" Everyone said in between their fits of laughter. "Well, well, well," he said animatedly. "So, I get to use only regular words to seem fair, but you all are objecting to my use of a very familiar word that we all know!" Clancy objected as he tried to maintain a straight face.

"Use it in a sentence then" Selen challenged. "Fine. See you soon, xo xo" Clancy said proudly, making everyone resume their laughter. Clancy could no longer hold his in and joined them in laughing as well. "Fine, fine. You all win!" He said as he waved his hands dramatically in the air for surrender.

He then picked the plaque out of the board and replaced it with an "N". Everyone gasped at his action. "You had an N this whole time and you spent so much time defending xo?!" Selen said, calling him out.

Clancy shrugged his shoulders, "it was worth a shot" he said and they all went back to laughing.

Hours went by without anyone's realisation. The kids had fallen asleep and left just Selen and Clancy to continue, then they began to use what the kids called big words. When they realised it was late was when Selen's stomach made a loud grumble. She looked at the time and saw that it was almost midnight. "Oh no! We stayed up too late!" She said,

Clancy's eyes darted to Selen and to where her eyes were and noticed the time on the wall clock. "We should get them to their rooms" he simply said. He and Selen then carried the children up the stairs, with Clancy carrying both boys at once.

After tucking them in, Selen's stomach grumbled loudly again. "Let's get you dinner before I leave" Clancy said and walked out of the door, leaving Selen to follow behind him. "That was my first time tucking them in," Clancy pointed out to Selen as he walked down the stairs. She nodded slowly even though she knew that he could not see her.

They walked to the kitchen where he opened the fridge to scavenge what he could while Selen silently just silently took a seat on one of the kitchen stools.

"Salad or sandwich?" he asked her as he held up the loaf of bread and the plate of already prepped salad. Selen pondered on it and then responded.

"Sandwich" she said with her lower lip between her teeth. He nodded in acknowledgement and went for it. He laid out the bread and picked out the lettuce from the salad bowl.

"Mustard?" He asked and she got down from her stool and opened the cupboard that carried the dressings. Clancy continued from where he stopped and she just let him and watched him.

"And voila, here you are, a plate of Clancy's special sandwich" he said and slid the plate toward her. Selen looked at the surprisingly good looking sandwich and dove in. Her eyes opened in surprise as she tasted it.

Clancy smiled proudly at her expression. When she managed to speak, "wow," was what she said. "Impressive right?" he asked and Selen nodded in response. "Why does it taste so different in a good way? Like it has both sweet and healthy components at the same time. And is that chocolate I taste?" She said at once and went for another bite.

"That is because it does have chocolate," he said, confirming her taste buds. Then he told her a bit about how he got so good at making an ordinary sandwich into a tasteful snack,

"Some years ago, I once had to live with my grandpa for a while before he died. And he was on a strict diet. So since he could not eat lots of things that he wanted, I found an alternative.

One of the things that he was sick with was diabetes. So I made him stay a whole day without any form of sugar, and his reward was this- a regular sandwich with a small drizzle of chocolate syrup as his reward. But our plan was not long lived since his nurse found out and explained to me how my sugar distribution system was not as full proof as I had thought.

I remember how he cursed at her and called those days the days that made him want to stay alive" Clancy said, finishing with a small chuckle. Selen had finished an entire half of the sandwich as he spoke.

Then, she extended the other half to him. "Here, have this" she said to him. "Would you really let me have the entire half? I thought you loved it" he said to her.