

Wild Night 871

Chapter 871 Nipping It In The Bud

The rhythmic dripping of the shower was the only sound that disturbed the quiet of the apartment. Tom emerged from the bathroom, a towel wrapped around his waist, and padded towards the bedroom.

He expected to find Lucy still busy with her phone call or scrolling through her phone. Instead, she was fast asleep, still fully dressed and her phone was vibrating faintly beside her.

A smile tugged at Tom's lips. Exhaustion had finally won her over, he thought as he leaned down, brushing a stray strand of hair off her face, a pang of protectiveness washing over him.

A muffled groan escaped Lucy's lips, but she didn't stir. Tom chuckled as he picked up her phone, intending to silence the notification before it woke her but when he glanced at the screen, and he saw the caller ID: Tyler, he decided to receive the call.

He quietly walked out of the bedroom as he answered the call, "Calling another man's girlfriend, are we?" he teased in a hushed voice, since he was aware that Lucas had a phone now so it couldn't be Lucas calling with Tyler's phone as usual.

A laugh crackled through the receiver. "Hey Tom, no need to get possessive. I've already given up. You can have her all to yourself. And just so you know, it's you I wanted to talk to," he said and Tom raised an eyebrow.

"Shoot," Tom said, leaning against the couch.

Tyler cleared his throat. "It's about Henry Rosewood. He invited me to dinner tomorrow night."

Tom's brow furrowed. Dinner with Henry? An unwelcome prickle of suspicion ran down his spine. "Dinner?"

"Yeah," Tyler confirmed. "Apparently, it's a thank you for helping him find his wife. I wasn't sure if I should go or not."

Tom fell silent, his mind racing as he considered this for a moment. "If you didn't know the truth about why she was in Ludus would you go for dinner with him?" Tom asked curiously.

"Of course. Henry Rosewood is an influential man and..."

"Then I think you should," Tom cut in.

"Are you sure? Besides, I don't think Mia would be happy to see me..."

"That is more reason you have to go. Act like you do not know a thing. Apart from the fact that Henry doesn't take rejection too well, I believe he has another motive for inviting you over so it might be good to keep an eye on things. Don't give Henry any reason to suspect you know anything. He might be trying to see how much you know, to make sure you don't breathe a word about Mia being okay and not suffering from amnesia."

"Yeah, I figured," Tyler sighed. "Just wanted to see what you thought. I just... don't trust the guy now that I know stuff," Tyler said and Tom nodded.

"Good thinking," Tom agreed. "Keep me posted on how it goes."

"I understand," Tyler said, his voice serious. "I'll be careful, Tom. I'll keep my eyes peeled and try to get a feel for the situation. I'll definitely get back to you after and let you know how it goes, how Mia seems to be doing." Tyler promised.

"Thanks, Tyler. That would be great." Tom said before ending and he returned to the bedroom and placed the phone on the nightstand.

Before he could join Lucy on the bed, his phone began to vibrate, and he quickly picked it up and walked out of the bedroom when he saw it was Harry.

"Hey! What's up?" Tom asked immediately he received the call.

"I'm here enjoying the view of the beach, and bored out of my mind at the same time. What's going on over there?" Harry asked and Tom chuckled.

"You're such a workaholic. Where is Jade? Don't let her catch you saying you're bored," Tom warned.

"It's a secret between us. She went kayaking so let's talk before she gets back," Harry said and Tom chuckled before going on to fill him in on all he needed to know about the office and Mia's case.

"What if the Hendersons tell Henry about the plan?" Harry asked after Tom told him that Evelyn was going to speak to the Hendersons.

"You know my mom. She won't say anything until she is sure she can trust them. She sounded pretty confident. And you know we can count on the fact that Henry has more haters than loyal friends," Tom said and Harry sighed.

"Alright. I hope it's worth the shot. I also hope Tyler doesn't make a slip at the dinner," Harry said thoughtfully.

"I'm sure he won't. How are you enjoying your vacation?" Tom asked and Harry sighed.

"It's fun mostly when I'm not thinking of work, but when Jade goes to sleep or she goes to do something else, I begin to wish I brought my laptop," Harry confessed and Tom chuckled.

"How's the plan for the engagement coming?" Tom asked curiously.

"I plan to meet with the planner in a couple of minutes. That was one of the reasons I didn't go with Jade. And I'm trying to see if I can have them prepare somewhere close by and nice for you all to stay since you'd be spending the weekend," Harry said and Tom remembered that he had not told him about the incident with Bryan.

"I don't think Bryan and Sonia would come. Sonia had a threatened abortion, and I doubt Bryan would want her to go on any trip after that scare," Tom said and Harry frowned.

"A threatened abortion? Oh, my God! What happened? I hope she is fine and the baby is okay?" Harry asked, sounding genuinely concerned.

"Yes. She is fine and the baby is okay too. I will find out from Bryan if they will make the trip, but if not, you will have to make some adjustments to your plan," Tom explained.

"That's fine and quite understandable too. I wouldn't let her travel either if I were in his shoes," Harry said and Tom nodded in agreement.

"Sure."

"Well, keep me posted on whatever happens. And if there is anything I can do from here, do let me know. The planner is here now. I have to go. And give my love to Lucy," Harry said before hanging up.

Done with the phone call, Tom returned to the bedroom and after placing his phone beside Lucy's, he took off Lucy's lowflat and crawled into bed beside her. The moment he wrapped his arm around her, she snuggled closer to him and he closed his eyes with a sigh of contentment.

The gentle rise and fall of Lucy's breath a calming lullaby as he drifted off to sleep.

Away from there, steam billowed from the bathroom door as Lucas emerged, a towel wrapped around his damp hair.

He glanced at his phone on the nightstand, a silent reminder of the email he was yet to respond to. With a resigned sigh, he sat on the edge of the mattress and picked up the phone.

He unlocked the phone and tapped on the message. As he reread Amy's message this time, the image of her playful smile flashed in his mind at the playful jab about dreaming of him, and a ghost of a smile played on his lips.

A part of him, a curious, reckless part, wanted to delve into that, to tease her back, to see where that playful banter might lead.

But another, more cautious voice held him back. He didn't need complications right now. He barely knew Amy, and the distance between Ludus and Husla felt like a vast ocean separating them.

He began to type a response, his fingers hovering over the keys. [I had a good day. I'm going to bed now. Have a nice day...] he hesitated as he read the text.

It sounded curt. More like a brush off, he reasoned with a grimace, deleting the text with a frustrated swipe.

He sighed as he thought of the best way to respond without sounding so curt. [Hi! I had a good day. I was on my way to bed when your message came in. I hope you're good. Have a nice day.] he read it, and decided this sounded better.

He deliberately chose not to comment on the part about him being the first person she was reaching out to in the morning or the possibility of her dreaming of him.

Mentioning the dream felt like venturing onto a dangerous path, a path that could lead to confusing emotions and tangled desires. He didn't want to go there. He didn't want to be curious about what she had dreamt of. He didn't want to analyze what she might have dreamt of, or worse, let himself fantasize about it.

He knew how easy it was for that line of conversation to become flirty. He wasn't going to let himself fall into that trap by delving into a territory that could easily become flirty. It was best to nip it in the bud by not even responding to it.

Satisfied with the message he had composed, he hit send. Then, with a finality that surprised him, he switched his phone to airplane mode. No notifications, no distractions. He wouldn't be tempted to check for a reply, wouldn't be drawn into a late-night conversation. He could deal with that in the morning.

He settled deeper into the bed, the silence of the room broken only by the soft hum of the air conditioner. Despite his efforts to quell the curiosity, a flicker of it remained, a tiny ember refusing to be extinguished.

His thoughts drifted to what Tyler had said about him having a strained expression whenever it involved Amy and he shook his head.

This was a dangerous path, a tempting invitation to a world of what-ifs and maybes.

He wasn't going to think about that. He didn't care what Tyler, or Lucy or even Amy thought.

Before he could switch off the light in the bedroom so he could go to sleep, Tyler knocked on the door and peeked in, "I've spoken with Tom. I will be going to there tomorrow. So, I might leave for dinner from work," Tyler informed him.

"Alright. Good night," Lucas called back before Tyler left.

As soon as Lucas switched off the light, sleep, like a heavy blanket descended upon him, pushing thoughts of Amy and her dreams to the back of his mind as he slept off.

Chapter 872 A - Z

Lucy stirred, a lethargic groan escaping her lips. The events of the previous night, the worry and the relief, all caught up to her, leaving a dull ache in her limbs.

She smiled when she felt Tom's arms around her, his chest rising and falling rhythmically as he slept.

Why didn't he wake her up to go and freshen up? She mused as she wondered how long she had been out.

Picking up her phone, she glanced at the time and she was surprised to see that it was almost noon. She had been sleeping for over four hours already.

Not wanting to disturb him, she carefully lifted his hand and slipped out of arms. Careful not to rustle the sheets, she slipped out of bed as quietly as possible, and tiptoed towards the bathroom.

As she freshened up her thoughts drifted to her phone conversation with Candace and she could help but hope that Tom would let her check on Dawn now.

Wrapping a towel around herself, she stepped out, ready to grab some clothes and head back to bed for a few more precious moments of sleep.

Just then, Tom stirred, his eyes fluttering open. He paused, his gaze landing on Lucy standing in the doorway, the sunlight catching the damp strands of her hair and highlighting the curve of her shoulder. A slow grin spread across his face.

"Ain't that a lovely sight to wake up to," he drawled, his voice husky with sleep, "You look like an angel who just stepped out of a cloud."

Lucy flushed, a startled laugh escaping her lips. "Did I wake you up?"

"I missed you in my arms," he chuckled, propping himself up on his elbows. "But don't worry. I don't mind since I get to l admire this view. You look especially ravishing right now."

She rolled her eyes, a blush still warming her cheeks. "Flattery will get you nowhere."

"We'll see about that," he countered with a wink.

"I think I'm a bit hungry. Are you hungry?" Lucy asked with a yawn as she walked towards the dresser, grabbing a brush and detangling her damp hair.

"Sort of. I should probably give Samantha a call and have Adolf deliver lunch," Tom said as he picked up his phone.

After calling Samantha and instructing her to pack their lunch and have Adolf deliver it, he looked at Lucy who was seated in front of the mirror with a dryer in hand.

"I didn't expect you to wake up anytime soon seeing how exhausted you were."

Lucy sighed, running through her damp hair with the brush. "I'm still exhausted. I still plan to get some rest," she said as she dried her hair with the dryer.

"Need me to help you with that?" Tom asked as he got out of bed.

"Your help will be greatly appreciated as long as you don't come seeking reward of any kind," she said, and Tom chuckled as he took the dryer from her.

Tom dried her hair in silence while combing her hair at intervals and Lucy turned in her seat to look at him.

"Why are you so good with this? Have you done this for someone else before now?" She asked suspiciously.

Tom chuckled, "I see you do this often. How slow would I be not to pick up how to do it?" He asked and she grinned.

"Just wanted to be sure," she said as she relaxed back.

"I think it's all dry now," Tom said as he turned off the dryer.

"Thanks," Lucy said as she rose, and walked over to the closet to take out something to wear.

"Do you really need to cover up? I'm not complaining, you know?" Tom said as he ran his gaze over her.

Lucy giggled, "By the way, you won't believe what Candace told me earlier," Lucy said as she took out a comfortable shirt.

"What did she say?" Tom asked as he came to stand close to Lucy, a naughty gleam in his eyes.

"Step back. You're too close for comfort," she said with a giggle.

"Why? I didn't do nothing. Go on and dress up," Tom said with a chuckle as he waited for her to take off the towel.

"Step back. Go lie on the bed," she said, knowing he planned to do something once she took off the towel.

"Alright. Fine. Whatever," Tom said as he turned around like he was going to the bed, and immediately he heard a little movement behind, he turned to see if she had taken off the towel and Lucy laughed.

"I know you," she said laughing and Tom chuckled.

"Suit yourself then," he said as he got on the bed, and Lucy quickly took off the towel and put on the shirt.

"Did Harry mention anything to you about his dad coming to Ludus on Monday? Candace said Aaron is coming to visit Sara, and she wants me to see if I can accompany him," Lucy asked as she joined him on the bed and Tom nodded.

"Harry did mention that his father planned to visit her, but he didn't tell me the day or time. What did you tell her?" Tom asked and Lucy shrugged.

"I asked her to find out his flight details. I will go pick him from the airport..."

"I will go with you," he said and Lucy arched a brow.

"You might be busy," she reminded him.

"That's Harry's father. It doesn't matter whether or not I'm busy. I can always make out time for him. I'm sure Harry would have been there to pick him up had he been around. So, since Harry isn't here, I will fill in for him," Tom said and Lucy smiled.

"That's cool," Lucy said with approval.

"Was that what you wanted to tell me earlier?" Tom asked curiously.

"Oh, that. No. It's about Kimberly. Kimberly got engaged," Lucy said and Tom snorted.

"Engaged? How sure are you..."

"Candace said the guy in question confirmed the rumors," Lucy said, since she had thought the same.

"If that's the case, congrats to her. I hope she finds happiness," Tom said expressionlessly.

Lucy nodded. "Me too. Though, it does make me wonder about Dawn."

"What about her?" Tom asked, since he had resigned himself to the fact that no matter what he said, Lucy was always going to worry about the kid.

"Don't you think this changes everything? I mean, now that she is getting married..."

"Dawn is getting married?" Tom asked dryly and Lucy giggled.

"Don't be a clown. You know what I mean..."

"No, I don't," Tom cut in playfully again and Lucy laughed.

"I'm being serious," Lucy said and Tom sighed.

"Okay. Shoot."

"I was wondering if it might be okay for me to reach out to Dawn now. Kimberly won't be bothering you now that she is getting married," Lucy said and Tom sighed.

Lucy looked at him with hopeful eyes as she waited for him to say something, and just when she was about to give up speak again, Tom finally responded.

"If you think it would make you happy, then do it," he said, his voice gentle.

Lucy's face lit up with a radiant smile, and she threw her arms around him, burying her face in his chest.

"Thank you, Tom," she whispered, genuine relief and gratitude radiating from her.

He held her close, "Anything for you," he murmured, placing a soft kiss on the crown of her head.

They both glanced at Tom's phone when it buzzed and he picked up and received the call. He listened for a minute and nodded, "Sure. That's fine," he said as he hung up.

"That was Adolf. He will be here with lunch in about thirty minutes," he informed Lucy.

"Good. I'm starving," Lucy said, patting her abdomen.

"That reminds me. Tyler and Harry both called earlier," he said, and Lucy frowned.

"Tyler called you?"

"No. He called you while you were sleeping. But he wanted to speak with me," Tom explained.

"Oh. What did he want? Is everything alright?" She asked and Tom told her what Tyler had said.

"I don't feel too good about that," Lucy said when Tom was done telling her about their conversation.

"I don't either. But let's see how it goes," Tom said and Lucy sighed.

"What about Harry? How are they doing?" She asked and Tom chuckled.

"Harry is a bit bored. He's a workaholic to the bone. I think the only thing keeping him sane right now is the proposal planning," Tom said and Lucy scowled.

"He told you he is bored? How can he be bored when he is with Jade?" She asked and Tom chuckled when he heard the displeasure in her voice.

"He's not bored by her. When she is sleeping or busy with her own stuff he gets bored. Harry isn't too used to being idle," Tom said and Lucy shook her head.

"Isn't that what vacations are meant for? Being idle? I hope you won't be bored when we go on a vacation," she said in a threatening tone and Tom laughed.

"Or what?"

"Or I'm never going on a vacation with you ever again," she said and he nodded.

"Noted. Want to sleep? Or are you up for a game? Let's do something fun while we wait for Adolf," he said and she nodded.

"Yeah. Let's do that. I'd hate to sleep now and be disturbed in a couple of minutes. What game do you have in mind?" Lucy asked and Tom thought about it for a minute.

"Well, I have a couple of ideas, but let's do something simple. How about the A to Z game? Do you know it?" He asked, and when she looked at him like she didn't quite get what he meant he decided to elaborate.

"Alright, here's how it goes. We take turns making a sentence, but each sentence has to start with a different letter of the alphabet. We go in order, A to Z, and whoever stumbles or repeats a word loses."

Lucy grinned, a surge of competitiveness coursing through her. "You're on. But don't think I will take it easy on you," she warned.

"As long as you don't have mood swings when I win, let's do it," Tom said and she scowled at him.

"What does the winner get? Can I ask you for anything when I win?" She asked, and he chuckled.

"When, not if?" He asked in amusement and she grinned.

"You get it," she said and they both laughed.

"Sure. Ask me for anything whether you win or lose..."

"No. I'm not losing. You go first," Lucy urged him.

"Nah. Ladies first," Tom said, and Lucy tapped her chin, a playful smirk tugging at her lips.

"Adolf is bringing us lunch."

Tom's grin widened. "Breakfast was nice but lunch will be better."

"Can't wait to see what he brings," Lucy continued, the competitive spirit rising within her.

"Don't care. Just wanna eat," Tom added.

"That's not a correct sentence. What do you mean don't care?" Lucy asked and Tom looked at her incredulously.

"Don't tell me you are stalling because you don't know what to say?" Tom asked and she rolled her eyes.

"Everyone knows I'm a straightforward person. I have no reason to stall," Lucy said, continuing the game.

"For real, Jewel. You just stalled," Tom said and she snorted.

"Get over it," Lucy said with a playful jab.

"Ha Ha Ha," Tom said and Lucy laughed.

"You're a liar. That's not a word. No way I'm accepting that," Lucy said and Tom chuckled.

"How can you say that is not a word?" He asked and she glared at him.

"I can't believe you're cheating!"

"Just remember you started it first," he said with a wink.

"Kill me with your lies already," she said and they both laughed.

"That sentence doesn't make sense," Tom pointed out and she shrugged.

"Same as Ha Ha Ha. Letter L, Tom!" She reminded him.

"Letter L isn't so hard," Tom said and Lucy gaped at him, unable to believe he just took what she said, and Tom laughed.

"Man, you're unbelievable," she said with a shake of her head.

"No, ma'am. This is all your fault."

"Or yours, you mean?" Lucy asked and Tom shook his head.

"Please let's just end this game already."

"Quick question, why do you want to end the game?" She asked with a grin.

"Really? You are going to act like you don't know why?" Tom asked and she smiled.

"Smile, T. You're frowning too much."

"T isn't in the mood to smile," Tom said with a wink and Lucy glared at him.

"Under no circumstance should you use something I said for your sentence," she warned.

"Very well then. I'm just going to come up with mine," he said and Lucy sighed deeply.

"Well, I guess there is no winner or loser here."

"Xylophones are nice musical instruments to play when you win or lose," Tom said and Lucy rolled her eyes.

"Yes. I agree with whatever you say," she said and Tom grinned.

"Zee? That was say easy," he said and they both hollered with laughter.

"You lost. There is no word like Zee," Lucy said, laughing hard.

"Zebras are nicer than you," Tom said and Lucy scowled.

"You're a liar. You lost. You lost already," Lucy said and Tom laughed.

"Prove it," he said and she glared at him.

"You're always cheating. I'm never playing any game with you again," she said and Tom laughed as she got out of the bed.

"Neither of us won or lost. Why are you so mad?"

"You lost! You lost several times," she hissed and he laughed hard.

"You're such a sore loser," he said and just then, a knock on the door interrupted them and he grinned.

"Lunch is here," Tom said as he rose to get the door and he laughed when Lucy eyed him in annoyance as he walked past her.

Chapter 873 Watchdog Diana

A soft smile played on Mia's lips as she slept. Her brow remained smooth, untroubled by the anxieties that often plagued her waking hours.

In the dreamy world behind her closed eyelids, she found herself standing beside a familiar counter with Jeff beside her, their arms brushing as they leaned in over a sizzling pan. The scent of sizzling garlic and rosemary filling the air.

"Just a little less pressure, Mia," Jeff's voice, warm and familiar, cut through the dream. "You want to sear it, not flatten it."

Mia giggled, adjusting her grip on the spatula. The playful banter, the shared task, the easy companionship - it was everything she craved but could never have in the real world.

Laughter danced on the edge of her lips as Jeff, his grin wider than the spatula, as he held up a perfectly seared steak.

"Voila!" he declared, his eyes sparkling with amusement. "See, Mia? It's not magic, just a little technique."

Mia reached out, her fingers tracing the grill marks on the meat. It felt real, the warmth radiating through her fingertips like a forbidden secret.

"You're a natural," Jeff teased, gently swatting her hand away with the spatula.

The dream dissolved then, leaving behind a lingering warmth that seeped into her waking moments. Mia stretched, a contented sigh escaping her lips as she blinked her eyes open with a smile on her face.

The playful kitchen scene in her dream dissolved into the stark reality of her cold bedroom, and her contentment was short-lived when she came face to scowling face with Henry who loomed above her his eyes narrowed with suspicion. Her heart lurched into her throat and a chill ran down her spine.

"Well, well," Henry's voice dripped with icy sarcasm. "Seems like someone's having a lovely dream," he said, his voice dripping with a coldness that sent shivers down her spine.

He didn't want her to be peaceful, to have even a moment of respite. He wanted her to be perpetually cowed.

Mia scrambled back against the headboard, her heart hammering frantically against her ribs. "H-Henry? What are you doing here?" she stammered, feigning fear and confusion.

He leaned in closer, his breath hot on her cheek. "Curious. I saw that smile on your face. What kind of dream could make someone like you smile so wide? Care to share what little fantasy brought that on?" He asked with a cold smile as he grabbed her shoulder.

Mia felt a surge of defiance rise within her. How dare he pry into her dreams?

"I... I don't know what you're talking about, Henry," she mumbled, her voice barely a whisper.

"Don't play dumb, Vanessa," he snarled, his grip tightening on her shoulder. "Don't lie to me." his voice grew louder, a dangerous edge creeping into it.

"It was just a meaningless dream..."

"It couldn't possibly have been a mere dream," Henry cut in.

"You looked downright content there. Relaxed. Almost happy. And that is unacceptable. It's unsettling, really. You shouldn't be comfortable enough to have pleasant dreams under my roof. You should be having nightmares, nightmares that keep you awake at night. How dare you be happy?"

The anger in his voice sent a tremor through her. Happy? Unacceptable? He made it sound like she was a naughty child caught with a forbidden candy bar.

Taking a deep breath, Mia forced her voice to sound meek. "I'm sorry, Henry. I must have had a nice dream, but I don't remember what it was about. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to... to have a happy dream," she choked out, her voice trembling, and her eyes downcast.

Henry stared at her, his expression unreadable. The silence stretched on, heavy and suffocating. Finally, after a tense moment, he finally released his grip and he straightened up, his shoulders slumping slightly.

"See that you don't, Vanessa," he said, his voice low and menacing and she nodded.

"Come out. I want you to meet someone," he said and she glanced at the clock in her bedroom with a frown.

"It's barely six..." she pressed her lips together when he shot her a glare.

"Are you questioning me?" He asked with a raised brow and she shook her head.

"I will be right out," she said and her eyed her with displeasure.

"You have five minutes. We will be in the living room," he said and walked towards the door, leaving Mia alone in the cold, oppressive silence of her bedroom.

As the door clicked shut behind him, Mia let out a sigh. She shuddered at the thought that he had been standing over her and watching her sleep.

She was not permitted to have happy dreams? She mused and resisted the urge to roll her eyes. Well, he should try to stop her.

Had she really endured all of this in the past? She mused as she went to the bathroom to wash her face and mouth.

She wondered if she was going to be able to put up with him for up to a month talk more of three. She needed to teach the imbecile a lesson, and she needed to do it fast.

As she put on a robe over her sleeping wear, her lips twitched as she remembered her dream. Who would have thought she would be able to sleep for so comfortably on her first night back here? She thought as she walked out to go meet Henry.

As she walked into the living room, she heard Henry talking to someone and on getting close to them, she saw it was a beautiful young lady. She looked like she was in her mid-twenties.

Mia recognized her from the welcome party they had thrown previous day, and seeing how she was also wearing a sleeping dress, and judging by the way she was smiling at Henry as they talked, Mia could tell there was more to their relationship.

Henry looked up when Mia walked in, "Diana, this is my wife, Vanessa. Vanessa, this is Diana Locke, your aide," Henry said and Mia frowned.

"My aide?" Mia asked incredulously.

"Yes. She will be in charge of your appointments and schedule. She will be your shadow. She will go with you to wherever you're going," Henry said and Diana flashed Mia a smile.

"Thanks for going through the trouble to get me an aide, but..."

"Diana is also my lover," Henry announced as he held out a hand to Diana and she took his hand.

"Your lover?" Mia asked, looking shocked. She had not expected this.

"Yes. We were going to get married, but unfortunately you turned up alive before we could announce our engagement. So, we are all stuck together," Henry said and Mia looked at Diana who was staring at Henry like he was the best thing to have happened to her.

"Why don't you divorce me and get married to her since you're both so in love?" Mia asked hopefully, looking from Henry to Diana.

"No. My king here, believes in the sanctity of marriage. I do too. That means for as long as you are alive, he won't divorce you. Only death can do you part," Diana explained sweetly.

"And you're okay with that?" Mia asked and she nodded.

"Absolutely. As long as I can live close to my king and serve him in every way I can, I'm fine," Diana said and flashed Henry a smile which he returned.

"And you're going to be my aide? You will be an aide to the woman who is married to the man you love?" Mia asked incredulously.

"Yes. I have to make sure you don't cause any more problems for my King. To everyone else, I will be your live-in aide. We don't want the public to have a wrong opinion of Henry," she said and Mia opened her mouth to speak again, but Henry raised a finger.

"I didn't ask for your opinion. I only called to let you know how things are done around here now. She has been in charge of running the household since you disappeared. She will remain in charge. Whatever she asks you to do, make sure you do it. You left your place vacant, and now it has been filled by another," Henry said as he rose.

"I will leave you two to get acquainted," Henry said with a nod to Diana before walking away.

The moment Henry disappeared from view, the smile slid off Diana's face and she looked at Mia, "Sit down," she ordered.

Mia looked at her contemplatively before sitting down, "Just to make it clear to you. This is my turf. And like Henry already told you, I run things here. I hope you do not have any funny ideas and you're not here to pull any silly stunts," Diana said in a tone reeking of superiority.

"You realize that this could really be all yours if you could convince him to divorce me, right?" Mia asked and Diana snorted.

"Did you really contact a man like Henry, asking for a divorce and expecting him to give you one?" She asked, eyeing Mia speculatively.

"There is no way you could have followed him back here without a plan. I'm sure you knew he wouldn't divorce you and he would come for you. What is your plan? Did you come back because you suddenly realized it is better to serve him and enjoy all his wealth, or did you come because you want to hurt him? Perhaps kill him?" She asked thoughtfully.

"I was brought back here against my will..."

"Then you're either more foolish than I thought, or braver than I gave you credit for. If you had no intention of coming back here, you should never have let him know of your existence in the first place," Diana said with a shake of head as she rose.

"I have nothing personal against you, Vanessa. Be a good girl, and I will go easy on you. Who knows? We might even get along. But if you so much as give me a reason to raise an eyebrow, I will

make your life a living hell. If you came here with any silly plan in mind, discard it. I will be watching you like an eagle. Your every move. Today, we will be accompanying Henry to the golf club by 10 a.m. I'm sure you can dress up accordingly. And we will be having guests over for dinner. Go get ready for breakfast. It will be served by 7 a.m."

With that, Diana walked away, leaving Mia alone in the living room. Mia clutched her trembling hands together, willing them to stay still.

Mia didn't know how long she sat there, but her old fear returned. She had not seen this coming. Jeff and the others had been right. She had thought everything would be as usual— exactly as she had left them, but things had changed.

If Diana was going to be dogging her every move, then she was not going to be able to do much. How was she going to be able to get Henry to fire his domestic staff if that was Diana's turf?

What was she going to do? What if she was not able to carry out her plan? Had she willingly walked back into Henry's gilded cage to be stuck here?

No. Mia told herself calmly. No. She was not stuck. She had Jeff, Harry, Tom, Bryan, Sonia and even Lucy. She was not alone in this. She knew they would do whatever it took to get her out of here whether or not her plan failed.

She was not going to fear or give in to despair. This was only a hiccup in her plans. She would find a way. She was certain that they would also find a way. She would do whatever she could while also being careful to not provoke Henry or rouse the suspicion of his watchdog girlfriend. With that thought in mind, Mia rose and headed for her bedroom.

Chapter 874 ...We Both Need A Break

Sonia, still pale from the ordeal of the night before, leaned against the pillows as Bryan raised a glass of water to her lips so she could drink.

She raised her hand to support the cup but Bryan gently slapped her hand off making her sigh in exasperation.

"Bryan," she called in a warning tone and Bryan set the glass down.

"Yes, baby?" He replied sweetly and despite her irritation a smile tugged on the corners of her lips.

"You're doing too much," she said with disapproval.

"As I should have done from the beginning. Then last night would not have happened," he said, making her sigh as she placed both hands on her abdomen.

"Do you really think so? Then are you saying it's my fault that we almost lost Ryso?" She asked and Bryan shook his head immediately.

"Of course not. I could never say that or even think it. I'm just saying I'm the man here. It's my duty to protect my family. You and Ryso are my family and I have to be more proactive," he said and she shook her head.

"I don't think this is about anything we did or could have done..."

Before she could finish speaking, his phone buzzed in his pocket. He took it out and glanced at the screen and a tired smile tugged at his lips. "It's my parents," he said, picking up the call on speaker.

"Hey, mom!" he answered, his voice weary.

"Hello, darling! Tom said you're back from Paris already. How are you both doing?" Evelyn asked and Bryan sighed.

"We're still here at the hospital. Everything's okay now so you don't have to worry."

A gasp escaped Evelyn on the other end. "Oh my goodness! Tom only told us you were back from Paris, but I didn't know anything about a hospital!"

Bryan winced. He had thought Tom told her about it already, "There was a bit of a scare," he admitted, his voice low. "Sonia..."

Bryan closed his eyes briefly. Sonia reached out and squeezed his hand reassuringly. "It's okay, babe. I will tell her," Sonia said softly but Bryan shook his head.

"Oh dear, is she alright, darling? What happened?" Evelyn asked when Bryan's response didn't come as soon as she expected.

Bryan took a deep breath, "She had some complications with the pregnancy."

"What did the doctor say?" Evelyn asked, trying to keep the fear out of her voice.

Bryan recounted the doctor's explanation, his voice filled with a tremor of suppressed fear. He told her about the bleeding, the threatened miscarriage, and finally, the doctor's reassurance that everything seemed fine for now.

Relief flooded Evelyn's voice when she finished. "Oh, Bryan, I don't even know what to say! Thank goodness it's nothing serious. But Sonia, how is she doing? Can I speak to her?"

"Mom, she's resting," Bryan said, glancing at Sonia who rolled her eyes. "But you can talk to her if you want. The phone is on speaker so she can hear you."

"Hello..."

"Sonia, my dear!" Evelyn's voice filled the phone with relief. "I just heard from Bryan. I'm so sorry to hear what happened! Are you alright?"

Sonia smiled. "I'm okay. Just a bit shaken."

"Oh, you poor thing. And you listen here," Evelyn's voice turned firm. "You need to take it easy. No more stress, no running around. Just rest and recover, alright? And Bryan, you make sure she does."

"We will, Mom. Don't worry," Bryan promised, a reassuring smile playing on his lips.

"Alright, alright. Just take care of yourselves," Evelyn said, her voice softening. "Your dad wants to say hello."

Desmond, who had been listening intently on the other end, took the phone from Evelyn. "Sonia? It's Desmond. Glad to hear everything seems to be fine now. Sonia, you take good care of yourself and let Bryan take care of you, okay? I know he will do a good job."

Sonia chuckled weakly. "Thank you, Desmond. I will," Sonia said sincerely.

After a few more words of reassurance, Desmond and Evelyn said their goodbyes, leaving a comfortable silence in their wake.

Bryan placed the phone on the bedside table and sat beside Sonia, taking her hand in his. "You heard them, right? Let me take care of you," he said and she smiled.

"I do let you take care of me. Just don't do too much. Where is my phone by the way?" She asked and Bryan raised an eyebrow.

"Did you really expect me to remember to bring your phone with me in my haste to get you to the hospital?" He asked incredulously.

"But you remembered to bring yours," she pointed out.

"Only because it was in my pocket the whole time. Stop arguing and get some rest. We will be going home soon," he said and Sonia sighed as Bryan adjusted the pillows behind her so she could lie back down.

Just as she started to drift off, Bryan's phone buzzed again, and this time it was Candace, "It's Candace," Bryan informed Sonia and her eyes opened.

"She's probably trying to reach me," Sonia said as Bryan received the call and placed it on speaker.

"Hey, Bryan! Sorry to bother you. I've been trying to reach Sony but she isn't taking her calls. How is she doing?"

"I'm fine," Sonia responded to Candace's relief.

"Oh, Sony! Thank goodness! How are you feeling now? I heard from Lucy. I'm so glad that it wasn't very serious and you're fine," Candace said sounding genuinely relieved.

"Me too. The blogs are all saying you had a miscarriage. Talk about passing wrong information," Andy chipped in and Sonia exchanged a look with Bryan.

"What blogs?" Sonia asked in confusion.

"Oh! I guess you didn't know. The news is all over the internet that you were rushed to the hospital and you were bleeding," Andy said and Sonia frowned.

This was one of those times she wished Bryan wasn't a celebrity and she could have her privacy. Why would anyone want to put out such news? Especially when it wasn't even confirmed?

"I will take care of it," Bryan assured her softly, seeing how much she didn't like it.

"Thanks for calling. I do feel much better and will be going home soon," Sonia assured them before hanging up.

"Don't worry about it. I will have it taken down," Bryan promised before Sonia could speak and she sighed.

"I just want to go home," Sonia said and Bryan took her hand once again.

"Soon. Once the IV fluid is finished we can go home," he said and they both glanced at the fluid which was almost done.

"Why don't we check what's on the blogs?" Sonia suggested and Bryan shook his head.

"No. Let's not pay any attention to that. I don't want anything to bother you," Bryan said and they turned to the door when a knock sounded on it, before Lucy walked in with Tom following behind.

"How is my favorite girl doing?" Lucy asked and Sonia smiled.

"I'm alive and thankful," Sonia said as Lucy came to stand beside her and took her hand.

"How are you feeling now?" Tom asked and Sonia smiled.

"Much better. Can you take Bryan away for a moment? He's been fussing all morning. He won't let me drink water myself. I swear if he could do the chewing and swallowing for me and dump in in my stomach, he would do just that. I think we both need a break," Sonia said and Bryan scowled at her while Tom nodded, and jerked his head to the door for Bryan to follow him.

"Don't worry. I will take care of her," Lucy told Bryan.

"Don't let her do anything," Bryan said and Lucy raised a brow.

"Can I let her breathe at least? Pretty please?" She asked sweetly and Bryan scowled at her while Sonia and Tom chuckled.

"Did you see the news about me?" Sonia asked after Tom had left the room with Bryan, and Lucy shook her head.

"No. What news?" She asked curiously.

"Candace and Andy called. They said the news of my miscarriage is all over the internet. Can you believe it?" Sonia asked and Lucy sighed.

"Well, you're married to a celebrity so something like this is bound to happen, right?" Lucy asked reasonably.

"Still, how can they just say something like that. Saying I had a miscarriage is same as pronouncing my baby dead!" Sonia said, sounding really upset and Lucy placed a hand on her shoulder.

"Calm down, Sony. Our baby is very much alive and okay. Don't let something some clueless people said get to you or upset you. Our priority right now is making sure you and Ryso continue to remain fine. So, don't worry about anything else," Lucy said softly and Sonia sighed.

"By the way, I'm surprised you told Candace about it. Why did you tell her?" Sonia asked, eyeing Lucy curiously since she hadn't expected Lucy to do something like that.

As much as Candace was close to them, what happened was something personal to her and she expected that Lucy would keep it to herself and let her tell the others herself if she wanted to.

"I'm sorry. I know it wasn't my place to tell her about it. She called and while we were talking I told her I was tired and wanted to go to bed cause I was at the hospital all night," Lucy explained apologetically.

"I see," Sonia said with a sigh.

"Are you mad?" Lucy asked and Sonia shook her head.

"Nah. I'm not mad. It was unexpected, but I'm not mad," Sonia assured her.

"Thanks for not being mad," Lucy said and Sonia waved it off.

"Any news about Mia? Has Tom been able to find a way to get Jeff in?" Sonia asked hopefully.

"About that... wait. Should we be talking about that? Shouldn't you be resting and..."

"Don't be like that, Lu. Would you rather I keep thinking and worrying about it, or you tell me what you know so I can be at ease?" Sonia asked and Lucy sighed.

"Tyler is going to Mia's for dinner tonight," Lucy said and Sonia's eyes lit up.

"Really? He told you that? How? Why?" Sonia asked with interest and Lucy explained what Tom had told her.

"I see," Sonia said, pausing her lips thoughtfully.

"Why don't you give him a call, Lu. Let's talk to Tyler," Sonia said and Lucy shook her head.

"Sony, I don't think Bryan is going to like..."

"I just need him to tell me how Mia is doing when he sees her, that's all," Sonia said and Lucy sighed as she took her phone out of her purse and dialed Tyler's line since it was morning over there already.

Tyler received the call on the third ring, "Hey, LuLu. I'm getting ready to leave for work, but you can reach Lucas on his phone..."

"We called to speak with you not Lucas," Lucy said and then looked at Sonia.

"Tyler, it's Sony. How are you doing?" Sonia asked pleasantly.

"I suppose you're calling because you heard I'm going to Mia's house?" Tyler asked without bothering to answer Sonia's question since he doubted she was asking cause she really wanted to know how he was doing.

"Yes. Will you let me know how it goes? I will appreciate it if you can maybe record the conversations," Sonia pleaded and Lucy frowned.

"That would be putting him at risk. Do you have any idea what could happen to him if he was discovered?" Lucy asked with a shake of her head.

Tyler sighed, "I can't promise you that I will do that. But I will see what I can do. Like I already told Tom, I will observe all that is going on and see if Mia is doing okay," Tyler said and Sonia sighed.

"Alright. Do whatever you can do. And if you get the opportunity to speak with her privately, tell Mia that I miss her and that I hope she is doing okay."

"Ty, whatever you do, do not do anything to get yourself in trouble. Make sure you don't give him any reason to suspect that you know anything," Lucy said before hanging up.

"Why did you ask him to record the conversation?" Lucy asked immediately the call ended.

"Because he's the only one that has access to Mia right now. I'm sure things might not be the same in the house now as it was years ago. Mia could try to indirectly tell him stuff to communicate back to us, and if Tyler doesn't get what she is trying to say, we would never know how much has changed or what is going on. But with the recording, it would be easier to figure things out," Sonia explained and Lucy pursed her lips thoughtfully.

"You have a point. Although it's risky, but you have a point," Lucy said with a nod.

"By the way, Kimberly is engaged," Lucy said and Sonia arched a brow.

"Kimberly Moore?" Sonia asked and Lucy nodded.

"I guess it's an arranged marriage," Sonia said and Lucy raised a brow.

"Why do you think so?"

"Isn't it obvious? She caused trouble and her daughter was cut off. Now she is engaged all of a sudden. It's obviously to give Dawn a home. Or maybe her parents gave her an ultimatum. Whatever her reason is, I wish her good luck for Dawn's sake," Sonia said and Lucy nodded.

"Me too. In other news, Tom has given me the go ahead to reach out to Dawn," Lucy said with a beaming smile and Sonia shook her head in amusement.

"You'd make an excellent godmother with that heart of yours," Sonia said and Lucy reached out a hand to touch Sonia's abdomen.

"You can count on that, Ryso. I'm going to take really good care of you and spoil you silly, so make sure you don't give your mom and rest of us anymore scare, okay?" Lucy said softly, and Sonia smiled as Lucy patted her abdomen.

Chapter 875 Lonely

Lucas's eyes fluttered open, the silence of the room shattered only by the insistent chirp of a bird outside his window. He lay there for a moment, blinking blearily, before a jolt of unwelcome awareness shot through him. Amy. Had she replied?

He fumbled for his phone on the nightstand, the harsh white screen momentarily blinding in the dim room. Airplane mode mocked him from the corner of the display, a glaring reminder of his short-lived resolve.

Without dwelling on it, he deactivated it, a tense anticipation settling in his gut as the phone came back to life.

He went to his inbox and a flicker of disappointment washed over him when he saw there was no new message and the last message there was his response the previous night.

His thumb swiped open his inbox, and his heart sank like a stone in water as he saw the same messages from yesterday. No new email, just his carefully crafted response hanging there, unanswered.

A frown creased his brow. So, if he had not placed his phone on airplane mode and had decided to wait to get a response from her, she wouldn't have responded?

If he hadn't deactivated the airplane mode, if he'd stuck to his plan, she wouldn't have messaged at all? The thought sent a pang of something unexpected through him. Disappointment? Intrigue? Maybe it was a bit of both. He couldn't quite place it.

Perhaps his last message had been too curt? Too dismissive. He winced, rereading his carefully crafted response.

He tossed the phone back onto the bed, frustration boiling over.

Why did he care? Wasn't that the whole point? This was exactly what he had wanted, wasn't it? His plan had been to nip whatever was going on between them in the bud, so why did he care that she did not respond? he mused, surprised by his own disappointment.

It was better this way. No complications. He was glad she got his message. Now he didn't have to worry about Tyler or Lucy making useless assumptions anymore, he told himself firmly.

Just as he swung his legs over the edge of the bed, ready to grab a shower and banish these useless thoughts, a sharp chime shattered the silence.

His heart lurched. A notification. He snatched the phone back, a reluctant smile tugging at his lips as he saw the gmail icon blinking. It was Amy.

[Good morning, Doc! You awake yet?] the message read, a playful wink emoji attached.

The irritation that had been simmering moments ago evaporated completely. Forgetting his plan to go shower, he clambered back onto the bed, a comfortable Sunday sprawl replacing his initial upright posture.

It was Sunday and he didn't have to go anywhere, Lucas assured himself as he texted back. [Yeah. How's your day going?]

Amy, applying mascara in her bathroom mirror, grinned when she picked up her phone and saw his prompt response.

[Not bad. I'm getting ready to step out. Did you dream of me?] she texted back with a wink emoji for good measure since she knew very well that her question would make Lucas uncomfortable.

For some reason she liked to tease him. Maybe it was because of how cute he had looked when he came all the way to Miley's funeral just to assure her that he wasn't interested in her.

There was just something about his stoicism that she found oddly endearing, and she couldn't resist poking at him a little.

On seeing her message Lucas groaned inwardly, Of course, she would say that. He sighed, sending a quick reply. [Nah. I didn't. Where are you going?]

The message sent before he fully registered the question. Shoot. Had he just shown interest in her personal business?

Amy's smiled as she read his message, [There is this really nice lounge Miley and I used to hangout. She loved the place a great deal. I want to go spend the evening there. Who knows? I might find a new friend there or meet someone. When next you come to Ludus, I will take you there.] Amy texted back.

Lucas frowned, a furrow appearing between his brows. Was she trying to tell him something? He typed out a reply, each keystroke deliberate.

[Are you okay? Will you be fine on your own? Are you sure being there won't get you upset?] Concern, genuine and unwanted, laced his words.

The concern in his message sent a warmth through Amy. She smiled as she texted back. [There is no way it could be worse than being indoor all day and seeing her stuff around my bedroom. And if you're very worried about me, you could check on me if you're not too busy, to see how it's going.] she suggested, hoping he wouldn't be too busy to keep her company.

Lucas narrowed his eyes, a suspicion nagging at him. Why did it feel like there was more to her suggestion than just checking in? It felt like she had wanted to ask him to check on her all along. He sent a reply, his tone carefully neutral.

[Well, I'm not worried. I have no reason to be. I'm sure you will be fine on your own.] Lucas texted back, wanting to see how she would respond, a strange protectiveness warring with his initial desire for distance.

Amy's smile faltered slightly as she read his message. Disappointment flickered across her features. She sighed, her fingers hovering over the keyboard.

[Sure. I will be alright. Thanks. Hopefully I will meet someone nice and interesting soon, and I wouldn't bother you anymore. I know I've been bothering you with my messages and I'm deeply sorry for that. I'm also grateful that you've been quite accommodating. It's just that I have no one else to text and some times it gets pretty lonely. Still, that is not an excuse to bother you. I will get out of your hair now. Have a lovely day.]

Lucas frowned as he read her message. The cursor on his phone screen blinked accusingly. Each sentence was a fresh barb.

"Bothering you," "get out of your hair," "lonely." A knot of guilt tightened in his stomach. Had he been too harsh? His carefully crafted plan to nip things in the bud suddenly felt cruel.

Lucas reread the message, the weight of her words settling in his gut. Loneliness. It was a raw vulnerability he hadn't expected, a glimpse behind the playful facade.

Maybe it wasn't about him being interested, not exactly. Maybe it was just about being a decent human being.

He pictured Amy, alone in her apartment, surrounded by memories of Miley. A pang of sympathy shot through him.

He had been too focused on maintaining distance and not wanting to have anything romantic to do with her, that he had forgotten that she could be reaching out merely because she was lonely and needed a friend.

Ignoring the dismissive end of her text, he tapped a reply, then deleted it with a frustrated swipe.

[What about Lucy? Isn't she your friend?] Lucas texted again.

Hearing her phone beep, Amy sighed as she picked it up and read his message.

What was the point in responding? It was clear to her that it seemed like she was forcing the friendship between them.

She wasn't mad at him. She couldn't even blame him for it. She was just tired. He had his own problems to deal with and she was bothering him with hers.

It was best she go out and mix up with other people. Find a way to deal with her grief and cope with without bothering other people.

Ignoring his message, she finished up with her dressing and stepped out of her apartment.

The guilt gnawed at him as he kept waiting for her response and when nothing came after ten minutes, he tossed the phone onto the bed, the screen landing face down with a dull thud.

Was he the jerk here? Why did she keep making him feel like a jerk even without saying anything?

Was she mad at him because he didn't offer to check on her? He mused. Why would she be mad? He mused as he reread their chats for the third time.

Did he give her the impression that she was bothering him? He mused as he contemplated giving Lucy a call so she would check on Amy.

He picked the phone back up, his thumb hovering over Lucy's contact. No, that wouldn't do. Apart from the fact that this was between him and Amy, the thought of Lucy's knowing smirk and pointed questions held him back. He needed to put into consideration what Lucy would say if he asked her to check on Amy.

Deciding to be a good friend to Amy, until she found someone more reliable close to her, he took a deep breath and started a new message.

[Guess you left already. Look, if you want to talk, I'm here. You don't have to feel like you're bothering me. I'm your friend after all. Seriously. And if you're up for it, we could text or talk over the phone when you get back. Whatever you prefer. Just stop asking if I dreamt of you. It makes me uncomfortable.]

Lucas read the message and decided that It wasn't perfect, but it was honest to a large extent. He hit send, a knot of anxiety tightening in his stomach.

Not wanting to stay idle while waiting for her response, Lucas decided to go shower and maybe step out of the house too to go find something fun to do.

It had been a while since he went out on his own for the sheer fun of it. The last time he was out had been with Amy and Miley, and since he got to Tyler's, he had been keeping himself busy with the program he was doing.

If Amy who had lost her best friend was already stepping out this way, then he could as well do the same and put Rachel completely behind him.

He showered and dressed, the minutes ticking by like hours. He checked his phone every few seconds, disappointment gnawing at him with every unanswered message.

Just as he was about to convince himself that she must have ignored him, a notification chimed.

He practically leaped to grab the phone, a surge of relief washing over him. It was Amy, her phone number followed by a single emoji: a thumbs up. No explanation, no additional text, just the phone number.

He stared at it for a moment, a hesitant smile tugging at the corner of his lips. Maybe this wasn't so bad after all. Maybe, just maybe, there was a middle ground between complete disinterest and getting entangled with a grieving woman.

He copied her number and saved it in his phone before putting the phone in his pocket and heading out of the house.

He would give her a call when he gets to his location, and maybe they could both keep each other company.

876 Adoption And Denial

Lying belly down on her bed with her iPad positioned in front of her, Kimberly smiled as Dawn materialized on the screen, a halo of messy curls framing her wide, curious eyes.

"Hi, mummy!" Dawn chirped, a burst of sunshine in a pink princess dress.

"Hey, my little princess! Do you miss Mama?" Kimberly cooed, her voice thick with the emotion.

"Yes!" Dawn nodded enthusiastically, bouncing in her booster seat.

One look of disapproval from her governess and she stopped bouncing and adjusted in her seat.

"How was your phone call with Jamal?" Kimberly asked, suspecting that the phone call with Jamal the previous day was the reason Dawn seemed so uncharacteristically excited.

Dawn launched into a detailed narration of their phone call and all Jamal had said about learning to ride a bike, her tiny voice punctuated by enthusiastic gestures. Kimberly listened patiently, her heart brimming with love.

Seeing the excitement on her face and hearing how she kept going on and on about it, Kimberly could tell that Dawn liked Jamal. Perhaps he was her first crush.

Finally, taking a breath, Dawn tilted her head. "I want a bike," she said, her voice hushed with importance.

"Why? Because of Jamal? I thought we didn't like him. Why do you seem so happy to have heard from him? Or do we like him now?" Kimberly asked with a teasing smile and laughed softly when Dawn bobbed her head.

"So, what do you like about Jamal?" Kimberly asked curiously.

"He is my friend and he makes me laugh," she said and Kimberly laughed.

"That's good. It's nice to have people in our lives who make us laugh. Now, mummy have news to share with you," Kimberly said and Dawn gazed at her, wondering what she wanted to say.

"What?" Dawn tilted her head, her eyes sparkling with anticipation.

Taking a deep breath, Kimberly plunged into the news. "Mummy is getting married!"

Dawn's brow furrowed in confusion. "Married?"

"Yes," Kimberly explained, "like Aunt Sandra and Uncle John. Remember? They wear matching rings and live together."

Dawn's face lit up in realization. "Oh! So, you'll have a ring too?"

"Yes, honey," Kimberly said, her smile widening. "And guess what else?"

"What?" Dawn bounced again, barely containing her excitement.

"I'm coming to pick you up soon, and you're going to come live with me!"

Dawn's eyes widened further. "Live with you? Like, all the time like before?"

"That's right," Kimberly confirmed, her heart swelling with the thought of having her daughter close to her once again. "And you'll get to see your new home!"

A thoughtful silence descended on the screen. Kimberly waited, a touch of worry creeping in. Then, Dawn's brow furrowed again.

"Will that mean we're moving?" Dawn asked, her voice small.

"Yes, sweetie," Kimberly said softly. "After the wedding, we'll all be living together in a new home."

"With grandpa and grandma?" She asked hopefully and Kimberly's heart broke.

"No, hon. But we can visit them whenever you want to. It will be just me, you, and your daddy," Kimberly explained.

Dawn's lower lip trembled slightly. "Daddy? I get a daddy?" she asked, her voice barely a whisper.

Kimberly's smile faltered for a brief moment and her heart ached. "Yes, honey. You get a daddy." She wasn't entirely sure Ryan would embrace the role wholeheartedly, but she hoped he would be decent enough for Dawn's sake. Although she wasn't entirely convinced.

Just then, Kimberly's mom knocked on the door and walked in, holding a small gift bag. "Delivery for you, Kim," she announced, oblivious to the conversation on the phone.

"Hold on, one sec, Dawn," Kimberly mumbled, muting the microphone as she rose to take the package from her mom.

Looking inside the bag, she saw a velvet box and she took it out, knowing what was inside. Nestled inside the box sat a dazzling diamond ring.

"Honey, don't you think you're rushing into this?" Her mother's voice, usually laced with warmth, held a note of concern.

Kimberly glanced back at the screen, where Dawn was now happily babbling to Lucy, her stuffed panda about having a new house and a daddy.

"Were you talking with Dawn," her mother asked and as she approached the bed where the iPad lay to say hello to Dawn, Kimberly quickly picked up the iPad and ended the call with a promise to call her back soon.

"Did you have to end the call? I wanted to say hello," her mother said with disapproval.

"You can call her yourself if you truly want to say hello to her," Kimberly said flatly her voice devoid of its usual warmth, as she took out the ring from the box and slid it down her finger.

The ring felt heavy and foreign on her finger. A cold weight symbolizing a future she wasn't sure she wanted.

"Really? Couldn't he even manage a decent proposal?" Her mother asked as displeasure etched lines around her eyes.

Kimberly took a deep breath, her gaze meeting her mother's head-on. "What is it with that tone? I thought this was what you wanted?"

"Kim, I just feel there is something off with this. First he puts out the news of your engagement without your knowledge or ours, and..."

"And what, mom?" Kimberly cut in, her voice right.

"You said I should do this for Dawn, remember? I told you the kind of person Ryan was, but you insisted. This is who he is, so deal with it. I'm not looking for romance. All I want is a home for my daughter which you and dad have denied her..."

"You know very well I don't agree with your father's decision," her mother countered, her voice defensive.

"Yet not once have you called your granddaughter whom you so much adore," Kimberly shot back, the words laced with hurt.

Her voice hardened. "Put your worries to rest, mom. I'm going on with this arrangement since that is the only way out at the moment. If I had my way, I would cut both you and dad off and go live alone with my daughter, but I can hardly do that because I have no access to my money, thanks to dad. So, please, do not get in my way. I want this wedding to hold in two weeks so that Dawn can be with me," Kimberly said firmly and her mother's shoulders slumped, a defeated sigh escaping her lips. Without another word, she turned and walked out of the room.

Kimberly slumped back on her bed, a wave of frustration washing over her.

Her mother had woken her up earlier that morning to ask if she was the one who put out word of her engagement, and when they saw Ryan's post confirming the engagement, they knew he was behind it.

Of course, Ryan would be the one to announce their engagement without even discussing it with her first. It was just like him – impulsive and self-centered.

Kimberly glanced at her phone when it buzzed with a call from Ryan and she sighed as she stared back at the ring on her finger, a million questions swirling in her mind.

She glanced at the picture of her smiling daughter on the screen and knew deep down, she would do whatever it took to give Dawn the happy life she deserved, even if it meant taking this step with someone as selfcentered as Ryan.

Before the call could disconnect, she received the call, "Hello, Ryan," she said, her voice betraying none of the turmoil within.

"Hey! Did you receive the ring? Is it to your liking?" He asked, going straight to business.

"It's fine. It will do," Kimberly said, staring down at the offending jewel on her finger.

"Great! Mind sending me a picture of the ring on your finger? I need to upload it on my social media page. You will be doing the same, I presume?" He asked, oblivious to her reservations.

"Yeah. Sure," she mumbled, not bothering to call him out on releasing news of their engagement without first talking to her.

"Do you have any engagement for dinner? My parents would like both families to meet for dinner today..."

"That's sudden," Kimberly interjected with a frown.

"Sudden? Getting married in two weeks is sudden, darling. We have to fast track everything. It was your idea to do it on such short notice, remember?" He reminded her.

The reminder stung. It was true, she had pushed for a quick wedding, blinded by the desperate need to provide a stable home for Dawn, Kimberly thought with a resigned sigh.

"I will check with my parents and get back to you. Where would we be meeting?"

"My place, of course!" Ryan declared. "You haven't seen it yet, have you? Perfect opportunity to kill two birds with one stone. We can chat wedding details, get everyone on the same page so that everything can be set in motion."

Kimberly closed her eyes, picturing the whirlwind she'd gotten herself into. "Alright, that's fine by me. We will be there by five," Kimberly conceded.

Just as Ryan was about to launch into another monologue, Kimberly cut him off. "Hold on, Ryan," she said, her voice firming slightly. "There's something I need to ask."

"Shoot."

"Will you really be okay with my daughter living with us? You realize that means you're going to be her stepdad, right? Are you willing to play such a role?" She asked and Ryan smirked.

"Absolutely. As a matter of fact, I was going to ask..." He trailed off, leaving Kimberly hanging.

"Ask what?" she pressed, a flicker of curiosity sparking in her eyes despite herself.

"Adoption. Would you like for me to adopt her? I mean, considering all that drama over her paternity," he dropped the bombshell, surprising Kimberly.

Kimberly's heart skipped a beat. Adoption? From this self-centered man? The idea seemed absurd, yet a sliver of hope flickered within her. "Adoption?" she echoed, her voice barely a whisper.

"You would like to adopt her?" She asked, not expecting that from a selfish jerk like Ryan.

"Of course. If that's okay by you. And I would like to meet her soon. I know this is a loveless arrangement, but the kid knows nothing about it, so I have to do my best for her," he said and she smiled.

A hesitant smile tugged at the corners of Kimberly's lips. This wasn't what she expected, but it was good. Maybe, just maybe, there was more to Ryan than she initially thought.

And if it meant a stable home and a good father figure for Dawn, then perhaps this crazy, whirlwind plan wouldn't be so bad after all.

"That's... that's nice of you," she finally managed, her voice softer now. "We can talk more about it when we meet."

"Sounds like a plan. See you at five," Ryan said before hanging up.

Having done that he turned to look at his mother, "You heard that, right? They will be here by five. I told you I'm perfectly capable of handling the situation."

"Have you told her yet?" His mother asked, and he shook his head.

"There's no need to tell her that."

"There is every need. You know about her daughter, she deserves to know about yours," his mother said and he shook his head.

"She deserves to know only what I tell her, mom. Don't butt into my business..."

"How can I not? How do you plan to introduce the kid when she moves in and sees her?" His mother asked and he shrugged.

"I have a plan. And I will appreciate it if you don't ruin it. No one can know that Genevieve is my biological daughter. She is the daughter of my housekeeper who passed away and I've taken it upon myself to care for her. That's all there is to it..."

"You will deny your own daughter and adopt that of someone else?" His mother asked in disbelief.

"Yes. Kimberly's daughter has a lot more to offer me," he said with a smirk.

877 Best Baker

The aroma of freshly brewed coffee and pastries filled Lucas's nose as he pushed open the door of a quaint cafe.

He inhaled deeply, grateful that he had decided to step out of the house for breakfast instead of settling for a bowl of cereals in front of the television, as had become his habit lately.

The usual Sunday morning crowd was just beginning, the sound of chatter and the rhythmic clinking of spoons against mugs a comforting soundtrack. Lucas scanned the room, as he searched for an empty seat.

Most tables were occupied by couples or groups of friends, engaged in lively conversations. A lone woman sat by the window, a steaming cup of coffee in front of her, and Lucas thought of Amy seated by herself that way at the lounge.

He spotted one by the window, bathed in a warm shaft of sunlight. Perfect. He thought as he made his way to the window seat which had just been vacated.

With a sigh, he settled into the chair, pulling out his phone to check for a response to the email he had sent her on his way to the cafe.

It was a simple text. [Arrived at your destination yet?]

Seeing as there was no response yet, he ordered a latte and cake slice as he forced himself to put the phone away, not wanting to appear overly eager.

Once the latte was served, he took a sip, the warmth spreading through him. He glanced out the window, watching the world go by while waiting for Amy's response.

He was amazed by how the table had so quickly turned from not wanting her to text him, to impatiently awaiting her text.

Was this her plan? Was she staring at her phone right now and smirking with all arrogance at how she had successfully made him do her bidding? Lucas mused, and then shook his head.

Amy wasn't that type. She wasn't a manipulative person. If there was one thing he knew about her, it was how direct she was.

Just then, his phone beeped with a new email notification, and he smiled when he saw it was from Amy.

[Just settling in my seat now. Why are you still sending an email instead of a text?]

Now that he knew she had arrived at her destination, he decided to give her a call.

For a moment, Lucas debated his approach. Should he be direct? Or should he play it cool, pretending to be a stranger?

A mischievous glint entered his eyes. He decided on the latter. He leaned back in his chair as he dialed her number.

Amy, who was perusing the drink menu and trying to make up her mind on what to drink, glanced at her phone when it vibrated with a phone call, and seeing the country code displayed, she blinked, then a slow smile spread across her face.

She had begun to think he changed his mind about talking to her.

"I will have a glass of pina colada," she told the waiter distractedly as she picked up her phone and received the call.

Before she could speak, Lucas's voice came through the receiver. "Excuse me," Lucas said, his voice polite yet playful. "Is this seat taken?"

At first she was taken aback, wondering if Lucas had dialed her line mistakenly while talking to someone.

"Can you hear me?" Lucas asked when he didn't get a response and Amy chuckled, a light, musical sound when she realized he was talking to her

"Does it look taken?" She asked, playing along.

"Well, I'm not sure. I wouldn't want to intrude if you're expecting someone," Lucas said, liking the sound of her voice over the phone.

"As a matter of fact," he drawled, "a little birdie told me there might be a lonely soul looking for company out here."

Amy couldn't help but grin, "A little birdie, huh?" she said, her eyes twinkling. "Well, that little birdie must have been mistaken. There's nobody lonely here."

"Oh? So the little birdie lied? Then perhaps I should offer my company to someone else."

Amy's grin widened. "Alright, alright," she conceded, shaking her head. "The little birdie might have been partially right. Perhaps a little company wouldn't be so bad after all."

Lucas's grin widened. "In that case, I will join you. Dr. Lucas Perry at your service."

Amy raised an eyebrow, a playful smile on her lips. "Oh, I see. Doctor, huh? Well, it's nice to meet you. I'm Amy. Amy Grant. And not a doctor," she said and Lucas smiled.

"You can call me Luca. I've heard Lucas sounds like Look Ass," he replied, and Amy burst out laughing, the sound filling Lucas's ears and making him grin as well.

"You are never going to forget that, are you?" She asked, and Lucas shook his head enjoying the sound of her easy laughter.

"Never ever," he said and she smiled.

"Thank you," she said softly, and his brow shot up.

"For what? Never ever forgetting that you referred to me as Look Ass?" He teased, and she giggled.

She hadn't realized he had such a sense of humor. He always looked and acted sort of serious.

"For making me laugh. I was sort of feeling down. And I honestly felt like I was being a bother," she admitted.

"I take responsibility for that. I believe my response might have made you feel that way. I'm sorry," he said and she shook her head even though he couldn't see her.

"You don't have to apologize. You did nothing wrong. I'm sure you've got stuff you're dealing with too. I'm sorry I keep pestering you," Amy said apologetically.

"Let's forget about that, shall we?"

"What are we forgetting?" Amy asked as the waiter returned with her glass of cocktail.

Lucas' brows pulled together. "I mean let's forget..." he trailed off when she giggled and he realized what her question meant.

She had forgotten it already. She was witty. Lucas decided with a chuckle.

"Are you out? Your background isn't so quiet," Amy observed as she sipped from her glass and Lucas smiled.

"I thought I was seated opposite you?" He asked and Amy giggled.

"I'm being serious now..."

"That makes the both of us," Lucas said and Amy laughed.

"Well, I'm just having breakfast at a cafe. What's the scene like at the lounge?" He asked as he drank from his latte.

"It's not too bad," she replied. "A bit quiet, but it's early evening here, remember?"

"Right. Then I guess you haven't met any interesting characters yet."

"Not yet," she admitted. "Just a couple of regulars enjoying their drinks." There was a hint of disappointment in her voice.

"Ouch! I'm hurt. I'm seated opposite you but you don't think I'm interesting," Lucas joked, and Amy laughed softly.

"Was that a test?"

"It wasn't until you answered," he said and she grinned.

"So, what's the place like? I mean style. Is it a dive bar or a hidden gem?"

"Neither," Amy replied mysteriously. "Think cozy armchairs, dim lighting, and maybe a worn piano in the corner."

Lucas pictured the scene, "Sounds...interesting," he admitted.

"I will send you a picture after the call," she promised.

"I will be expecting it. So, what are you drinking? A cocktail or something more sophisticated?"

"Can't you see it? I thought you were seated opposite me?" Amy said, a hint of a smile in her voice.

Lucas chuckled, "Right. I am. You're having a... cocktail," he guessed.

"That's a good guess. What are you having for breakfast?" Amy asked curiously since she didn't want the whole of the conversation to be about her.

"Latte and cake."

"Cake, huh? You've got a sweet tooth?" She asked, curious to know more about him than she knew already.

"Guilty as charged," Lucas admitted.

"Noted. Maybe I will bake you a thank you present when next you come around," she offered.

"Do you realize that this is the third thing you're offering?" He asked, amused.

"What?" Amy asked, lost.

"You said you'd like to buy me a drink or coffee when next I visit. You said you'd take me to the lounge when next I visit. And now you are offering to bake me something. Just how many days do you plan to see me?" Lucas pointed out.

"One day is good enough. I will buy you the drink at the lounge, and you can take the cake, cookie, or pastry home with you. But I can assure you that the moment you taste whatever I bake, you are going to be begging for more. It will be an addiction," Amy said confidently.

"Then I guess it's best I never taste it. I do not want to become addicted to anything."

"Really? You'd rather miss the opportunity to taste the best cake ever because you're scared of addiction?" Amy asked incredulously.

Lucas angled his head, "You sound too confident in your ability. How did you learn to bake?"

"My mom. She is a housekeeper. She is the chief housekeeper at Miley's home. She has been working there since I was a little girl. She made me learn how to cook and bake," Amy explained with a note of pride in her voice.

"So, what's the cafe like? Any interesting people around?" Amy asked and Lucas looked around.

"It's a quaint place. It has a sort of homey feel. There's one interesting person in front of me. She claims she is the best baker in the world," Lucas teased and her delighted laugh filled his ear.

"I never said I was the best baker in the world," she said defensively.

"You said it would be the best cake I've ever tasted. That means you're better than every other baker," Lucas said and she rolled her eyes.

"Anyway, I was waiting for you to say no interesting person around you. Too bad you didn't fall into my trap," she said, and Lucas chuckled.

As their conversation neared an end, a comfortable silence settled between them. "I think I should leave you now. You might not meet anyone interesting if you remain on the phone," Lucas said and Amy sighed deeply.

She had enjoyed his company more than she could have ever thought possible, and now it made her think back to how she had behaved during his visit.

She had enjoyed his company more than she could have ever thought possible, and now it made her think back to how she had behaved during his visit.

"I'm sorry," she blurted with a wince.

"Sorry? What for?" Lucas asked at a loss.

Amy shut her eyes, "I just remembered how silly I behaved when we met at Lucy's. I'm usually a reasonable person..."

"Even the most reasonable people do unreasonable things at times. Forget it," Lucas cut in and Amy scowled.

"Are you saying I was unreasonable?" She asked playfully, and Lucas chuckled.

"You said it yourself, not me."

"Wow. Nice one," she said, and he grinned.

"So, Luca," Amy said, her voice softer, "what are you doing for the rest of the day after breakfast?"

"Honestly? I need to catch up on some reading." It wasn't entirely true, but the thought of admitting his day was wide open felt oddly appealing.

"Sounds...dreadfully boring," Amy drawled.

Lucas chuckled. "I love to read. Reading is not boring. What about you? What do you plan to do?" Lucas asked curiously.

"Go home and go to bed. I'm so glad tomorrow is Monday. I will be too busy to bother you. So, how about you be my weekend buddy? Can I bother you on weekends?" She asked and Lucas shrugged.

"I will try to be available."

"Deal!" Amy said, glad that he agreed.

"Alright then. Have fun," Lucas said, hanging up the call.

He sighed when he checked the call duration and realized they had been talking for almost an hour. He had not planned to stay that long on the phone with her.

He raised a brow when he received a text notification from Amy, and his lips twitched with an amused smile when he saw she had sent a selfie with the background of the lounge in full display.

Being friends with her wasn't so bad after all, Lucas decided as he set aside his phone to focus on his latte which had now become cold.

878 Couple Of The Night

The low hum of the hairdryer filled the suite as Jade, who was dressed in a sapphire blue dress that clung to her curves, meticulously styled her hair.

From the corners of her eyes, she watched Harry, clad in a crisp white shirt and a navy blazer, wrestling with his tie, the silk stubbornly refusing to cooperate.

The resort had arranged a special evening for couples, a chance for them to mingle, connect, and learn.

The resort's "Couples Mingle" event might have been a good idea in theory, but something about Harry's demeanor all day nagged at her.

No matter how hard she tried, she couldn't put away the feeling that Harry was bored and restless, and for some reason it hurt her to feel that way.

"Are you enjoying the vacation, Harry?" Jade asked, glancing at him through the mirror.

They had agreed to always keep the communication line between them, so she saw no reason why she should keep feeling upset and wondering what was on his mind when she could just ask him directly.

Harry, caught off guard by the sudden shift in tone, paused. "Of course," he replied, a touch too quickly. "These views are incredible, the food has been fantastic..." He trailed off, the silence stretching between them.

She took a deep breath as she put the hairdryer down and turned to face him. "Honestly, Harry? You don't seem that into it. Are you bored already?" Her voice was soft, laced with a touch of worry as she held his gaze.

Harry's stomach clenched. Was it that obvious? He mused when he heard her question and the thoughtful frown that creased his brow disappeared.

His expression softened as he rose and walked towards her. Stopping in front of her, he pulled her to her feet and wrapped his arms around her waist, pulling her close.

"No, no. It's not that," he assured her, his voice sincere. "I just... I've never really taken this sort of vacation before. It's a bit strange, you know? Restless, even. It's not about you..."

"Oh, please don't use that line. It's usually a break up line," she cut in and he chuckled.

"I could never break up with you. You know that. I'm just trying to say, I love you and I absolutely enjoy your company. I just feel like an addict having withdrawal symptoms right now. I've never stayed away from work for this long," he admitted, kissing the top of her head.

"I shouldn't have insisted that you leave your laptop behind. Is there like a rehab center for workaholics? We need to sign you up there immediately," she said with mock urgency and Harry chuckled.

"You're amazing, goddess. This whole vacation is amazing. I just need a little time to adjust to not being needed every second of the day," he confessed.

Jade's expression softened. "But I do need you every second..." Jade giggled when he wriggled his brows suggestively.

"Do you?" He joked.

"I understand you, love. I do," she said, her voice laced with sympathy. "I guess it's a big adjustment for you. But this is supposed to be a break for you, Harry. Relax. Let go. We're together, that's all that matters. Try to enjoy it for me. Can you?"

Harry squeezed her hand. "You're right. Sorry I'm ruining the mood," he conceded, placing a soft kiss on her forehead.

A smile tugged at Jade's lips. "Just a little," she teased, leaning up to peck him on the chin. "But you know how to fix that, right?"

"Sure. And I will. Just give me a little patience," he promised, leaning down and brushing a soft kiss against her chin, causing Jade's body to tingle.

Jade nodded. She knew how dedicated he was to his work. She rested her head against his chest, a small smile tugging at her lips. "Patience," she murmured. "I can be patient."

Harry leaned down and brushed his against her ear. "Thank you," he whispered, his voice sending a shiver down her spine.

Not stopping, he kept kissing her ear and nibbling on it, causing heat to spread over her body, "Harry," she called in a cracked voice and then cleared her throat as she stepped away.

"You have to stop. And I need to finish dressing up else we will be late and make a bad first impression," she reminded him.

"Only your impression of me matters to me," Harry said as he kissed her ear and she giggled as she pushed him away playfully.

"We both know if I let you continue this way, we are going to end up in bed and won't be going out... no, Jonas! Keep your distance," she threatened, and he laughed.

"Alright. Alright. Do what you need to do, and let's go see what they have planned out for us," Harry said as he stepped back to let her finish up.

When she was done with the hair and her makeup, she rose to face Harry.

"Wow," he breathed, his voice husky with appreciation. "You look incredible."

Jade blushed, a shy smile gracing her lips. "Thank you," she said, twirling a bit to show off the dress. "Do you think it's too much?"

"Absolutely not," Harry denied, his eyes lingering on the way the fabric clung to her like a second skin. "It's perfect."

"Just because I'm curious, how important is this dress to you?" He asked as he took a step closer, reaching out to tuck a stray curl behind her ear.

Jade grinned, "Why do you ask?"

"Am I allowed to rip it off you when we come back?" He asked, and giggled as her blood swam hot with a heavy dose of lust.

"It depends on what follows. Are you just going to rip it off? Or do you have plans to go all the way?" She drawled with a flirty smile and Harry chuckled.

"I intend to travel all the way," he said as he held out his arm to her, and she giggled as she let him lead her out of the suite.

Twenty minutes later, they stepped out onto the resort balcony, the breathtaking view of the sunset stealing Jade's breath away. The "Couples Mingle" was being held on a specially decorated platform overlooking the ocean, fairy lights twinkling like stars against the twilight sky. Around a large, circular table sat about fifteen couples, a mix of ages, colors, and backgrounds, all dressed in their finest vacation attire.

The atmosphere was warm and inviting, a light buzz of conversation filling the air. An older couple, radiating a warmth that spoke of decades spent together, greeted them at the entrance, and after a brief introduction, they were all directed to the round table.

Harry offered Jade his arm, and they joined the circle, finding a seat beside a bubbly couple who had been honeymooning for a week.

The air crackled with a mix of nervousness and excitement as the resort manager, a jovial man with a twinkle in his eye, took center stage and kicked off the evening.

"Welcome, lovebirds!" he boomed, his voice filled with enthusiasm. "Tonight, we celebrate love in all its forms! Over the evening, we'll be connecting, having a brief seminar, and you all will be taking us on a trip down your memory lane as each couple shares the story of how they met and what made them fall in love. And we also have a couple of games and a prize for the winners," he said, and a murmur of anticipation rippled through the room.

The manager went on to explain the purpose of the event, encouraging each couple to actively participate as every activity there is meant to strengthen their bonds.

Jade felt a familiar flutter of butterflies in her stomach. She stole a glance at Harry, and he smiled at her, "Maybe we should tell them we are not married yet," Jade whispered to him.

"Why? Do you really think everyone here is married?" Harry whispered back.

"You don't think so?" Jade asked as she took another look at the couples around the table.

"Don't worry. You will find out soon enough when it is time to share their stories," Harry assured her.

The evening unfolded with a series of light-hearted prompts, each designed to spark conversation and connection. The couples took turns sharing their stories - how they met, their first dates, the moments they knew they'd found "the one."

Their stories ranging from childhood sweethearts to whirlwind online romances. Each tale was met with cheers and applause.

"I think I know what you mean. That story was made up," Jade whispered to Harry after a young lady in her twenties and her husband who seemed to be in his fifties shared their love at first sight story.

Harry chuckled, "How can you tell?" He asked, even though he agreed with her that the story was made up.

"Their body language is wrong. He is uncomfortable and she doesn't really seem to like him much," Jade explained.

Finally, it was Harry and Jade's turn. Harry, usually at ease in any social setting, seemed hesitant. He took a deep breath and squeezed Jade's hand, his touch grounding her.

"Her elder brother is my best friend. So, we met at their home," he began, his voice surprisingly nervous. "I had heard about her for quite some time from her brother, and then I went home with him on Christmas, and Jade ran down the stairs with a smile that could light up even the darkest of rooms, and..." He trailed off, his gaze finding hers.

Jade picked up the story. "And I tripped, and he caught me," she said with a playful smile, earning a laugh from the group. "He had the most beautiful eyes I had ever seen, but I had a boy friend so I couldn't stare at it forever as I wanted. So, later that night, I stepped out for fresh air and there he was, on the porch swing. I joined him and we talked for quite some time that night..."

"I knew there was something special about her and believed she was mine, but I had to wait four years for her to realize it," Harry said and Jade smiled at him.

"I'm glad you waited. Don't worry, I will make it worth it," Jade promised as she leaned in and kissed him.

As they finished, the other couples cheered, their faces filled with warmth.

When it was time for the couple games, the men were brought forward and made to sit with their backs to their partners, and each female were given a sheet of paper with ten questions about themselves and preferences.

The ladies were given five minutes to answer the questions, while the men were told the rules of the game.

"...One wrong answer and you're out," the anchor told them.

Each watched with a proud smile as the other men returned to their seats one after the other after failing the questions, while Harry answered all ten questions correctly, making him the winner of that round.

All the ladies around Jade cooed and congratulated her on having a very intentional and observant partner.

For the next round of games, the men were asked to loosen their ties and stand while their partners were asked to knot their partner's ties, and the fastest would be the winner.

Harry grinned Jade expertly knotted the ties and when she finished before everybody else, she let out a loud screech and did a funny dance move, causing everyone around to laugh.

At the end of the evening, Harry and Jade were declared the couple of the night and were awarded the latest MacBook and a free vacation ticket there whenever they wanted to come back.

As they walked hand-in-hand back to their suite, Harry holding on to the MacBook with his other hand, the sound of the ocean waves serenading them, Jade snuggled closer to Harry. "Thank you," she whispered.

"For what?" he asked, puzzled.

"For trying," she replied, gazing up at the star-studded sky. "For being here, with me."

Harry smiled, his earlier restlessness replaced by a newfound sense of peace. He squeezed her hand. "You don't have to thank me for that. I'm always happy to be with you. Besides, I enjoyed my evening very much," Harry said and Jade smiled.

"I'm sure you'd find the vacation more interesting now that you've connected with other men. And just so you know, you made me so proud. I was the envy of the ladies there," she said and Harry grinned.

"Does that mean I get to rip it off?" He asked, and she giggled.

"You can rip off whatever you want even in the closet," she promised and he laughed.

For Jade, the evening had been a revelation. It wasn't just about the breathtaking scenery or the gourmet food. It was about the love and connection she shared with Harry.

Chapter 879 Lover/Hater

Stepping into the suite, the air thick with anticipation, Jade couldn't help but feel a thrill course through her as the door clicked shut behind them, the playful banter of the evening fading into a comfortable silence.

Jade leaned back against the door, the sapphire dress clinging to her curves like a second skin as she kicked off her heels, letting out a satisfied sigh.

Harry, his tie loosened and the MacBook tucked under his arm, turned to face her. His eyes, the same ones that had captivated her that first night, held a familiar glint that sent a shiver down her spine.

Before he could speak, she took a playful swipe at the MacBook.

"Careful with that," he chuckled, dodging her hand. "We wouldn't want to break our prize on the first night, would we?"

"Oh, I'm sure we can find another use for it besides work," she teased, her voice laced with a suggestive edge.

Harry set the MacBook down on the couch close to them, his gaze lingering on Jade for a moment too long before he closed the distance between them. He reached out, his fingers brushing against the soft fabric of her dress as his hands snaked around her waist, pulling her close.

Their lips met in a heated kiss, a slow burn that quickly ignited into a passionate dance. Jade melted into his touch, the worries of the day fading away with each deepening kiss.

"I need you, Jade," Harry said as he pressed his face into the curve of her neck.

"You have me. Take as much as you want," she said in a voice that was unfamiliar to her.

Taking that as the go ahead he needed, he brought his mouth back to her, his kiss hungrier and more possessive now. Her moan caught on a gasp when his hand moved to the V neckline of her dress and he ripped it.

The sound of her dress ripping made her blood leap. Her heart hammered in her chest, a delicious mix of anticipation and nervous energy coursing through her veins.

When Harry lowered his head to the black material of her Demi-cut bra, Jade arched her back against the door as she pulled his head down.

Harry helped her get out of the dress as he kissed her nipples through the bra, and just as Harry reached to unhook her bra, a flicker of concern crossed his face. He pulled away abruptly, leaving Jade breathless and slightly confused.

"Harry?" she questioned, her voice laced with a hint of disappointment.

"I just remembered something," he began, his voice strained. "There's something I forgot to tell you."

Jade frowned, a playful pout forming on her lips. "Can't it wait? You can't just stop in the middle of this, you know?"

Harry's expression remained serious. "It's important. You might be mad I didn't tell you earlier."

The playful glint in Jade's eyes faded. She stepped back, and looked at him with a frown. "What is it?"

He took a deep breath, bracing himself for her reaction. "It's Sonia," he started, his voice low.

"Sonia? What about her?" Jade asked with a frown, wondering what Sonia had to do with what Harry was keeping from her.

"She... she had a threatened abortion," he blurted out, his voice laced with guilt.

Jade gasped, the shock momentarily stealing her breath away. "A threatened abortion?" she repeated, her voice barely above a whisper. "How could you forget to tell me something like that?" She asked in disbelief as she walked past him in search of her phone.

Shame washed over Harry. He knew she would be worried and he should have told her, but he had forgotten. After she returned from her solo adventure, he had been too busy thinking about the proposal arrangement and then she had said she wanted to take a nap so they had slept together because she wanted him to cuddle her. They had received the invitation to the 'couple mingle' shortly after they woke up and had spent what was left of their time getting ready.

"I'm sorry. It wasn't intentional," Harry said apologetically.

Jade, who had found her phone, looked up at him and when she saw the genuine remorse on his face she went to him.

"It's alright. No need to feel so bad about it. I understand that it wasn't intentional," she said, pecking his cheeks so he would relax.

"When did you hear the news? Who told you about it? Tom?" Jade asked and after Harry answered her questions she nodded.

"I need to call her. See if she's alright."

"Wait," Harry interjected before she could dial Sonia's line, "She's probably sleeping. You should call Bryan instead," Harry suggested, since he knew if he were in Bryan's shoes he'd want all calls to go to him and not to his wife who should be resting.

Jade nodded, "You're right." In her moment of panic, she'd completely forgotten about Bryan.

She dialed Bryan's number immediately and it rang once, twice, before going to voicemail.

"No answer," she reported back to Harry, slumping onto the bed.

"Maybe you can try again in the morning," Harry suggested, his voice tentative.

"I'm glad she is fine. And the baby too," Jade said and Harry nodded as he sat beside her and she leaned on him.

"It must have been very scary for them. Poor Bryan," she said, thinking about how terrified Bryan must have been.

"How about we give Tom a call? We can find out if he's with them now or how they are doing," Harry suggested and Jade nodded.

"Let's do that," she said as she dialed Tom's number.

Away from there, Tom drove back to Lucy's place after they had dropped Bryan and Sonia back at their home.

"Sonia asked Tyler to record the conversation with Henry," Lucy informed Tom.

"That won't exactly be necessary," Tom said and Lucy raised a brow.

"Why not? Don't you need to know what is going on there?" She asked and he shrugged.

"I know what's going on already," he admitted.

"You do? How?"

"Barry," Tom confessed.

Lucy's eyes widened when she realized what he was saying, "Really? When did you get him involved? Is Mia aware?"

"No. She wanted us to go with her plan and we are doing just that. But we also need to take necessary precautions. You know, something like a plan B in case plan A doesn't go as planned. You should know that I like to know my enemy better than they know me and to be several steps ahead of them," Tom said as he kept his gaze on the road.

"But how is Barry able to hack into a system of someone that far away?" She asked, intrigued.

Tom shrugged, "It's his thing. He knows how to hack into anything from anywhere. But just to be safe and to make sure he doesn't make any mistakes, I sent him and his team to Husla before Henry came to get Mia," Tom said and Lucy looked at him incredulously, unable to believe he had kept that away from her.

"Before he came to Husla? When exactly?" She asked, wondering why he didn't tell her of the plan.

"The next day after she asked for our help," Tom said and Lucy sighed.

"Why didn't you tell me about it?"

"Maybe it's because I figured you know me well enough to know I'd do something like that. Or perhaps I wanted to impress you once again with my quick thinking," he said, turning to wink at her and she scowled at him.

Although she was mildly annoyed that he had withheld such information from her, her curiosity made her ignore her annoyance, "So? Has he reported back to you yet?"

"Well, he did earlier when Bryan and I left you girls alone. I guess things are not exactly going according to Mia's plan. There are security cameras in her room, and Henry's lover has taken over the house, so Mia won't be having much say when it comes to the domestic staff management. And Henry's lover is also keeping watch over Mia," Tom said and Lucy frowned.

"He has a lover? Why then did he not just grant her the divorce?" She asked in annoyance.

"Do you want me to give you my phone so you can give him a call and ask him yourself?" Tom joked, and Lucy hit his arm playfully.

"Don't be silly," she hissed and he chuckled.

"But there is another interesting angle," He said and she looked at him with interest.

"What?"

"His lover might not exactly be his lover. Seems more like his hater," he said with an amused twitch of his lips.

"What do you mean?"

"From Barry's digging, she seems to be out for revenge. She has something against Henry. He destroyed her only brother's life and it led him to take his life. I'm not sure he knows exactly who she is," Tom said and Lucy frowned.

"Doesn't that make things sort of dangerous for Mia? What if she murders Henry and pins it on her?" Lucy asked thoughtfully and Tom grinned.

"Detective Lucy," he said teasingly, and she giggled.

"I'm being serious. Think about it. What if she has been waiting for the right moment to strike and now that Mia is back she decides to do it?"

"Relax, detective. She is out to destroy him not just kill him..."

"But she might get in the way of Mia's plan," Lucy pointed out.

"True. But you know what they say? The enemy of my enemy is my friend," Tom said and Lucy looked at him with interest.

"Hm. You think she might be a good ally?" Lucy asked and Tom nodded.

"We know her secret. One word to Henry and she is done for. We will keep her secret as long as her plans don't get in the way of Mia's plan. If you ask me, I think it's a good thing. Henry trusts her, unlike Mia. If she dismisses the staff and replaces them, Henry wouldn't raise an eyebrow," Tom said and Lucy smiled.

"That's good then. For a moment I was worried about Mia," Lucy said, feeling genuinely relieved.

"Can I tell Sonia about it?" She asked, knowing that Sonia would be happy to know that Tom was still in control of things.

"I'm sure Bryan would let her know about it since I told him already," Tom said and just then his phone buzzed with a phone call.

Lucy picked up the phone, "It's Jade," she told him.

"Take the call," Tom said and Lucy received the call and placed the phone against Tom's ear.

"Tom, I just heard about Sonia from Harry. How is she doing? I tried reaching Bryan but his line wasn't connecting. Are you there with them?" Jade asked the moment the call connected.

"She is fine. The baby is fine too and they are back home now. Bryan's battery was flat earlier. You can call them in the morning. He needs to sleep. How are you enjoying your vacation?" Tom asked, wanting her to calm down.

"Oh, alright. The vacation is going smoothly. Harry and I won the couple of the night award at the couples hangout this evening. We got a MacBook and a free vacation ticket," Jade said and Tom smiled.

"I'm glad you're both having a nice time. Enjoy yourself, okay? And don't worry about a thing. Sonia is doing okay," Tom assured her.

"And Lucy? How is she doing? Is she there with you?" Jade asked and Tom turned to Lucy.

"Jade wants to say hello," he told her.

"Hello, Jade! You're having a swell time, yeah?" Lucy asked with a pleasant smile.

"I was until I heard about Sonia. Hearing how normal you sound assures me that she is fine. So, I'm going to relax now," Jade said and Lucy smiled.

"It was so scary last night, but she's fine now," Lucy assured her.

"Alright then. I need to get back to my man. Be good. Love you. Don't miss you," Jade said before hanging up, making both Lucy and Harry to laugh.

Chapter 880 Diana Locke

As Tyler navigated the winding driveway leading to Henry Rosewood's residence he thought about dinner with Henry – a prospect that would have thrilled him a week ago, but now felt heavy with a looming sense of dread.

He thought about Sonia's request. He'd never recorded a conversation without someone's knowledge, and the act felt like a betrayal, a violation of trust. Yet, the potential benefits of having proof of Henry's intentions, if any, were undeniable.

He pulled up to the imposing front door, its polished brass glinting in the evening sun. With a deep breath, he made his decision. Reaching for his phone, he tapped the screen, activating flight mode to ensure no interruptions, then hit record.

Tyler shrugged off the pang of guilt that gnawed at him when he thought about Mia and how doing this might help them save her from Henry.

The silence that followed seemed to amplify the pounding in his chest. He slipped the phone into his work bag, ensuring it wouldn't be visible during the evening.

Emerging from the car, he straightened his tie and composed his face, a mask of practiced charm. Before he could knock, the grand door swung open silently, revealing a vision in crimson. Diana stood there, dressed in a with a practiced smile.

"Dr Tyler? Mr. Rosewood is expecting you. Please, come in," Diana said with a polite smile.

Tyler nodded curtly, stepping inside the cool, marbled entrance hall. The air held a faint scent of polished wood and expensive cigars. Following Diana's silent lead, he walked down a hallway lined with priceless paintings, their subjects gazing down at him with an unsettling intensity.

As he followed her, he couldn't help but wonder who she was. Was she Henry's sibling? He shook his head. She wouldn't refer to him so formally if she were his sibling.

Yet, she was dressed too beautifully to be mistaken for a domestic staff. Perhaps she was Mia's sister or friend? Tyler reasoned.

Finally, they arrived at a large, mahogany-paneled living room. A fire crackled merrily in the hearth, casting dancing shadows on the opulent furnishings. And there, seated in a plush armchair, was Henry Rosewood himself.

Henry's face broke into a smile as Tyler entered. His eyes, held a hint of amusement, as if he could see right through Tyler's carefully constructed facade.

If Tyler had not known Lucy and Sonia all his life, he would have thought that Mia was the liar and they were all wrongfully accusing such a fine gentleman of being a monster. But he knew Lucy and Sonia, and he trusted them.

That meant Henry was a one of a kind type of Monster seeing how normal and dare he say, friendly, he looked.

"Dr Tyler! I'm so glad you could make it," Henry boomed, his voice surprisingly jovial for a man of such imposing status. "Come in, come in. Please, have a seat." He gestured towards a plush sofa opposite him.

"Thank you for inviting me. I'm sorry I didn't come with a wine. I wasn't sure I could afford a wine of your taste," Tyler said politely as he sank into the cushions, his back ramrod straight as he placed his bag on his thigh.

He offered a smile, attempting to match Henry's warmth, but it felt forced, hollow. And the recorder, hidden in his bag, felt like a ticking time bomb, a constant reminder of the deception playing out.

"Never mind about that. I've been both curious and eager to meet the man who helped me find a wife whom I didn't realize was merely missing and not dead. I'm sure you are aware that I have brought her back home now, yes?" Henry asked and Tyler nodded.

"I saw the news. Congratulations on your reunion with your wife," Tyler said with a polite smile.

"It is thanks to you. I never really thought of looking," Henry said, since that was indeed the truth. He never would have imagined that Mia had what it took to run away from him.

"I'm a man who believes very much in rewarding people when they do something to please me, and I do not hesitate to punish them when they displease me. An act like yours should be rewarded," Henry said and Tyler's smile faltered.

"I really didn't do anything to be rewarded for. I thought she looked a lot like her and I told Dr Evans so," Tyler said and Henry waved it off.

"There is no need for the modesty. I'm curious. What exactly happened? How did you meet her? And did you say anything to her? Did she say anything to you?" Henry asked, wanting to know how much Tyler knew.

Tyler paused, not sure what to say or what to keep to himself since he wasn't sure what Mia might have told him.

Not wanting to sound like he was very close to Lucy and the others so that Henry wouldn't suspect anything, he shrugged, "I accompanied a friend of mine to visit his sister, and I saw her. I thought she looked familiar and I said so, but she said she had never met me before, which was true, so I didn't push. I decided to talk to Dr Evans about it since I recalled he mentioned something about not

finding her corpse in the accident," Tyler responded, and before Henry could say another word, Mia walked in, escorted by Diana.

Seeing Tyler, Mia's steps faltered. What was he doing there? Did Sonia and the others send him? Or was he here on Henry's invitation? She mused.

"I see you're here, honey. Meet our guest, Dr Tyler. I trust you've met him before. Dr Tyler, my wife, Vanessa Rosewood," Henry said, reaching out a hand to Mia to come to him.

Hearing Henry, Mia snapped out of her thoughts as she realized that Tyler was one of the guests Diana had mentioned was coming over for dinner. Knowing Henry, he probably wanted to reward Tyler and make him one of his people. It was just like Henry to do something like that, Mia thought as she took the hand Henry offered, and met Tyler's gaze.

"You're welcome to our home, Dr Tyler. I must thank you for the role you played in helping my husband and I find each other again," Mia said with a stiff smile as she sat beside Henry looking every bit like the trophy wife Henry expected her to be.

Looking at her, Tyler could see how completely different this Vanessa Rosewood seemed from Mia despite the obvious physical resemblance.

Mia had seemed like a pretty ordinary lady, living a pretty ordinary life, but there was nothing ordinary about Vanessa. Not in her outfit or makeup or the manner with which she spoke and carried herself. She seemed like a different person now.

Realizing that he was yet to respond to what she had said, Tyler gave her a polite nod, "I'm glad I could help. I can't imagine how terrible it would have been had I decided to ignore my instincts. It must have been tough for you both being apart because of circumstances beyond your control," Tyler said and Henry turned to Mia with a loving gazer.

"Dinner has been served," Diana announced as she joined them, and Tyler looked at her, once again wondering who she was, especially when she exchanged a look with Henry.

"Let's move to the dining," Henry suggested as he rose, and they all headed to the dining.

Henry sat at the head of the table, while Mia sat at his left side, and Tyler at his right side.

Tyler resisted the urge to raise a brow when Diana also took the sit beside Mia. Seeing the curious look on his face, Mia reasoned that he was probably trying to figure out what was going on in the house so he could relay it to the others.

She was pretty sure that if Henry had invited Tyler over, Tyler would most likely have told Sonia or any of the others about the invitation. This was probably the best and easiest way to let them know about the changes and what was happening in the house.

"Dr Tyler, have you been introduced to Diana yet?" Mia asked, and Tyler watched as Diana exchanged a look with Henry.

"No, I haven't. I assumed she was your sister," Tyler said even though he no longer thought so.

Ignoring the warning look that Henry shot her, Mia turned to look at Diana, "My sister? Why would you think that? Do we look alike?" Mia asked and Tyler merely shrugged.

"Well, this is Diana Locke. My darling husband was so worried about my mental health that he employed her as my aide. She goes everywhere with me and monitors all that I do. I can't even

sneeze or go to the bathroom without her watching me, can you believe it? She is in charge of everything around here. Even the domestic staff. My darling husband doesn't want me to be stressed out by anything. I'm glad I have her with me, though. So, much has changed here and I'm still trying to find my footing. I can't add telling the kitchen staff what to make for dinner, to my plate right now," Mia said with a short laugh, wanting them to believe she was joking.

Henry and Diana both laughed awkwardly at what they assumed was Mia's joke and Tyler also forced a laugh, "You should let our guest enjoy his meal, darling," Henry cautioned.

"Right. I should. I'm sorry for blabbering. I must be having a manic episode," Mia said with a self deprecating smile and returned her attention to her meal.

"It's nice to make your acquaintance Ms Locke," Tyler said politely and Diana smiled.

"Diana is just fine," Diana said with a nod.

For the rest of dinner, Mia listened as Henry conversed with Tyler, trying to get to know him. She really hoped that Tyler got her message and would relate it to Sonia and the others. Once she was done with dinner, Mia excused herself, claiming she was having a headache after a busy day of playing golf and needed to rest, and Diana followed her.

Alone with Tyler now, Henry looked at him. "Tell me, how would you like me to reward you? Shall I invest in your clinic?" He asked, now that he had confirmed that Tyler seemed to believe the memory loss story and didn't seem to know anything about the fact that his wife had run away and "If you insist on rewarding me, why don't I think about something I want and get back to you?" Tyler asked, and Henry smiled.

"I like you," he said with a short laugh, "A man that doesn't make hasty decisions is a wise man. Now I'm convinced that I want to work with you," Henry said and his words sent a shiver down Tyler's spine.

"I appreciate the thought, Mr. Rosewood," he replied cautiously. "But I'm curious, what kind of work?"

Henry's smile widened, revealing a glint in his pale eyes. "That, is something best discussed over a good glass of wine. Shall we?"

He gestured towards a decanter on a nearby table, the amber liquid within shimmering in the firelight. Tyler hesitated, his stomach churning with a mix of apprehension and anticipation. This dinner, he realized, was about to take a turn he hadn't quite anticipated.

As they both returned to the living room with their wineglasses in hand, Tyler looked at Henry with interest as he waited to hear what the man had to offer him.

"As you must know, Dr Evans is retiring soon and plans to move away from here. I will like you to be my doctor," he said and Tyler shook his head.

"I'm not sure you are aware that I'm more of a cosmetic surgeon..."

"I am aware. And your service in that field will do just fine. You see, me and my wife we like to get a little rough when we make love. Some times it leaves marks. I'd like you to take care of those marks and keep it all to yourself. Whatever happens within the Rosewood family stays within the

Rosewood family. You also can't ask her questions about it. It embarrasses her to admit that she is so wild. You know what I mean?" Henry asked with a grin.

"I understand," Tyler said with a nod.

"So? Will you accept my offer?" Henry asked and Tyler gave him a nod.

"Of course. It will be a honor to be your family doctor," Tyler said with a polite smile and Henry laughed happily.