Bound by Her Bump

Symplyayisha

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Complete English text · A4 reading edition

Contents

Chapter 1 7

Chapter 2 10

Chapter 3 13

Chapter 4 15

Chapter 5 17

Chapter 6 20

Chapter 7 22

Chapter 8 24

Chapter 9 26

Chapter 10 29

Chapter 11 32

Chapter 12 33

Chapter 13 35

Chapter 14 38

Chapter 15 41

Chapter 16 44

Chapter 17 46

Chapter 18 49

Chapter 19 51

Chapter 20 54

Chapter 21 58

Chapter 22 60

Chapter 23 62

Chapter 24 64

Chapter 25 65

Chapter 26 67

Chapter 27 69

Chapter 28 71

Chapter 29 73

Chapter 30 76

Chapter 31 78

Chapter 32 80

Chapter 33 82

Chapter 34 85

Chapter 35 88

Chapter 36 90

Chapter 37 92

Chapter 38 95

Chapter 39 97

Chapter 40 100

Chapter 41 103

Chapter 42 105

Chapter 43 107

Chapter 44 110

Chapter 45 113

Chapter 46 115

Chapter 47 117

Chapter 48 120

Chapter 49 122

Chapter 50 124

Chapter 51 128

Chapter 52 131

Chapter 53 133

Chapter 54 136

Chapter 55 139

Chapter 56 141

Chapter 57 143

Chapter 58 146

Chapter 59 150

Chapter 60 154

Chapter 61 157

Chapter 62 159

Chapter 63 162

Chapter 64 165

Chapter 65 168

Chapter 66 172

Chapter 67 173

Chapter 68 175

Chapter 69 177

Chapter 70 180

Chapter 71 183

Chapter 72 186

Chapter 73 188

Chapter 74 190

Chapter 75 193

Chapter 76 196

Chapter 77 199

Chapter 78 202

Chapter 79 205

Chapter 80 207

Chapter 81 210

Chapter 82 212

Chapter 83 214

Chapter 84 218

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Chapter 1

“I'm having a baby,” Annie said out of the blue, making Ella, her best friend, choke on her orange juice.

Annie was relieved that she let it all out to her best friend even though she wasn't sure about her reaction. It hadn't been easy keeping something this sensitive away from Ella.

"You're what??" Ella asked in shock, her eyes not leaving Annie who was seated opposite her.

Annie sighed. She knew Ella heard her loud and clear but she didn't mind saying it again. "I'm having a baby."

"I heard you. I don't just understand how?.....I mean, I know how a baby is being conceived but when did it happen? I never knew you were seeing someone." Ella voiced out, looking as confused as ever. As far as she knew, Annie had been single for a while now.

Annie sighed. "I'm not seeing anyone and neither am I pregnant, yet."

Ella was even more confused now. She placed her glass cup which still had some juice in it on a small table beside her. They were seated in Annie's living room. "I want to believe you were only pulling my legs." Ella said.

Annie Davis shook her head. "I'm having him or her by Insemination. The procedure will be done tomorrow."

Ella couldn't believe her ears. She opened her mouth to give a response to what Annie said but no words came out. Her brain was finding it hard to process the reason behind her best friend's decision.

After a while, Ella spoke. "Okay, You win. I'm known for pulling expensive jokes on you but this is way more than all I've ever done to you." Ella said, hoping it was all a joke. But she wasn't that sure because Annie was looking very serious.

"None of this is a joke, Ella. This is something I've thought about and also acted on. I've been in contact with my doctor and the whole procedure started a couple of weeks back. Getting the right sperm donor, I also had to do a couple of tests, I've been eating according to the meal plan given to me and I've also been on prescribed medications. We are anticipating that the procedure will be successful on the first trial."

"I'm sorry for not opening up to you sooner. I had to come to terms with myself to know if this was what I truly wanted. You would have talked me out of it if I told you earlier."

"Of course I would have talked you out of it. What were you thinking Ann??? You're just 27 and already thinking about having a baby by Insemination. Who does that?"

"I did." Annie shrugged like it was no big deal.

Ella sighed, running a hand over her hair. "I mean, You're still young, Annie. You're smart, you're beautiful, You're attractive, You're the sweetest and kindest person I've ever known. You had no reason to think in that direction. You may not be dating anyone now but your soulmate will surely find you. You'll have your dream wedding and start a family with your prince charming. All you needed to do was to be patient." Ella explained.

"You should have believed me when I said I was done with men," Annie said.

"Annie." Ella groaned. "Not anyone will be like the douchebags you've dated. There's someone out there who's meant for you."

"I don't want to dwell in that. I've made my decision. I wouldn't forgive myself if I go through with the procedure tomorrow without telling you. That's why I'm opening up to you now."

Ella sighed, burying her face in her hands. She spoke after a few seconds of silence. "You realize raising a child alone comes with a whole lot of responsibility. Are you sure you're ready for this? I want to be assured you know what you're doing. What if your baby grows up and asks for its father. What will you tell him or her?"

"I'm certain that this is what I want and Yes, I've prepared my mind for all of the responsibilities. I never imagined myself bringing up a child alone but it is what it is. Life is full of surprises. As for the baby asking for its father when he or she grows up, I have no idea what I will say to that but I know I'll cross that bridge when I get there. I'll love the baby so much and make sure he or she doesn't lack anything. I'm ready to start a family, I want to have a child."

Ella sighed. "If I could see any of your exes right now, I won't think twice before strangling them, especially that douchebag calle…."

"Please, don't mention his name." Annie interrupted, referring to her recent ex who used her and broke her heart. It took a while for Annie to get over it. She then made up her mind that all men were the same or perhaps, true love wasn't for her. So she decided to start her family alone. She would love her child with every strength in her and hopefully, her child would reciprocate the same feelings to her.

"You're not doing this because you feel lonely or because you're afraid you will end up alone?"

A sad smile tugged at Annie's lips. "I'm far from being lonely, especially when I have my type of job. I have you and my annoying but loving siblings so I know I'll never be alone. This baby will be the ray of sunshine I need in my life."

"I'm sure you've told mom. How did she take the news?" Ella asked. Annie's Dad passed away when she was nine years old. Her mother, Angela remarried and now she has two younger siblings, Claire and Jayden; the most troublesome fourteen years old twins ever. Despite the age difference, Annie had always loved her younger brother and sister.

"She freaked out just like you. I mean, she would have wanted her grandchild to be conceived naturally but she ended up respecting my decision.

"There's nothing I can say to talk you out of this. Is there?"

Annie shook her head.

Ella sighed. "I guess I have to start preparing my mind about being an aunt. I'll respect your decision and I promise to be there for you in every step of the way. You have my support."

Annie smiled. She joined Ella where she was seated and pulled her into a hug. "Thank you!"

"Don't mention. What time is the procedure tomorrow? You want me to come with you?" Ella didn't mind ditching work the next day to give her best friend all of her support.

“9:15 am. As much as I would want you in there with me, I don't think your Boss will be comfortable with the idea of you not showing up at work on a Monday morning.” Annie smirked which earned a groan from Ella.

Ella works in a well-known company. The owner retired and appointed his son to take over and since then, Ella never fails to complain about how much of a pain in the ass he was.

“Dylan is not a problem, Annie. I can take an excuse from him.”

“You don’t have to Ella. I’ll be fine. I will let you know how it goes.” Annie said.

"You sure?" She asked.

Ella nodded.

"So, that means you won't be showing up at work tomorrow?" She asked Annie.

"I would when I'm done with my appointment. I'll probably try not to do too much. It all depends on my Doctor. If he insists I have to rest for the rest of the day, I have no choice but to obey."

Annie was her own boss. She owns a beauty parlour called Ann's Home. Alongside being a beautician and owning her business, She was also a Youtuber. She started making YouTube videos out of boredom and it turned to something she could not do without. Ann was known for uploading amazing contents on her channel and that made her subscribers yearn for more videos. Though she was not a popular YouTuber, she was doing quite well.

"I have a crazy human for a best friend." Ella voiced out.

Annie chuckled. "I love you too, sis."

Chapter 2

Annie said her goodbye to Ella. She watched as Ella's car left her driveway and then she went back inside.

Before Ella left, they talked more about how busier and crazier their life was going to be in the future months, with the baby in the picture. To be honest, Annie was a little scared about the whole thing but she was even more scared about the fact that She may not get pregnant on the first trial of the procedure and if that happens, she would have to keep trying until it worked.

Annie switched off the TV, closed the windows, turned off the lights in the living room before heading to her bedroom. She took a shower, did her nighttime skincare routine and changed into something comfy.

She tied her now dried hair into a messy bun, reached for her laptop, a pen and a notepad, then she got comfortable on her bed to do some work.

The month was coming to an end which means Annie will have to pay her workers so she was trying to go through all invoices and also cross-check everything her accountant sent to her email.

She did that very quickly after which she started looking online for a bigger shop to rent. She was thinking of relocating her beauty parlour to a bigger place with more space. She got tired when she didn't find the shop that interests her so she eventually shut down her laptop.

Annie got comfortable under the duvet, reached for her phone and replied all pending messages.

She got tired after a while, said a short prayer and slept off.

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"So what did Doctor Myers say concerning the test you took? When will the results be ready?" Evelyn, Eric's mother asked Eric.

"I haven't heard from him mom but I should get the result latest by Wednesday," Eric replied, connecting his glass of white wine to his lips.

Eric Ivan-James was the first child and only son of Evelyn and Austin Ivan-James. He was 30 years old and handsome as hell. He currently heads his Father's company alongside the chain of five-star hotels and investments he owns. Eric was one hell of a hard worker and what makes him unique was that he was very kind and he treated everyone with respect; A trait he got from his parents.

Because of his busy schedule during weekdays, he made sure he spent Sundays with his parents, had lunch and dinner with them and updated them with the latest developments concerning the company.

Right now, Eric was seated with his parents in one of the living rooms downstairs.

“I’m tired of hearing the same thing all the time so I don’t think collecting the result will be necessary anymore,” Eric added.

“No dear. You should follow up with the result. Everything will be fine.” Evelyn said with pleading eyes which earned a sigh from Eric, knowing he’ll have to find time during the week to go collect the result.

To be honest, Eric Ivan-James was tired of it all. The depression started when he found out he had a low sperm count. Since then, he has been in and out of the hospital once every three months for some tests to keep up with his progress and also for treatment recommended by Doctor Myers.

Seeing that there wasn't any progress, Eric concluded he was not destined to conceive and that he would adopt a child when the time was right. But his mom found a way to make him go for his last check-up where his urine, sperm and blood samples were collected.

“Alright mom, I will go for the result this week.” Eric heeded to his mother’s plea which made her smile.

Before they could go further into their conversation, they were interrupted by Laura. Eric’s youngest sister, the baby of the house.

“I thought you would have gone.” She said, taking a seat beside Eric. Laura had taken an excuse to go complete her homework as soon as they finished dinner. The soon to be fourteen years old had taken a shower and was already in her pyjamas.

“Not yet, but I’ll soon be on my way,” Eric replied.

“My birthday is fast approaching Eric,” Laura announced to her brother with a puppy dog face. Eric nodded, encouraging her to say what was on her mind. “I want to throw a party.”

“We’ve talked about this, Laura. You threw one last year, I think you should keep it cool this year.” Evelyn, Eric and Laura’s mother said, making Laura groan.

“Honey, please let her have one this year. You know she will keep disturbing us if we don’t allow her.” Austin, Eric and Laura’s Father pleaded which earned a playful glare from Evelyn.

Laura was always getting what she wanted. She had her Dad and brother wrapped around her little fingers which made it so hard for them to say NO to her demands.

“I don’t support her having a party,” Evelyn replied firmly.

“Mom said no party, cupcake. How about you spend your day with me? Your birthday falls on a Saturday, we can go out and do anything you want, just the two of us.”

“That's fine with me. Thanks Eric; I love you!” Laura said with a huge smile before wrapping her arms around Eric, giving him the best hug ever. She was sure her elder brother was going to spoil her. That was why she loved him so much.

Eric chuckled “You’re welcome.”

“I have to go now. It’s getting late already.” Eric announced, rising to his feet.

“Goodnight Son, we’ll keep in touch.” Austin hugged his son.

“I’ll be expecting you next week,” Evelyn said as she hugged him too.

After the hugs, Evelyn, Laura and Austin escorted Eric to his car.

“Drive safe, my love,” Evelyn said one last time before Eric got into the driver’s seat and drove away.

The whole family was protective of Eric, most especially Evelyn because he was her only Son.

Laura was the first person to walk back into the mansion, followed by her parents, Evelyn and Austin who walked in, hand in hand. Even after thirty-two years of marriage, their bond was still as strong as the day they first met each other.

Ivan-James's mansion was a very big one with an amazing view in front and a garden at the back. The Mansion was a two-storey Mansion with seven bedrooms, three living rooms, a gym, kitchen, study rooms, a library, theatre and the two dining rooms.

Eric lives in his apartment which was a forty minutes drive away from his Parents mansion but Laura who was still in high school lived in the mansion with her parents.

The drive to Eric’s apartment was very quiet. He couldn’t help but wonder how lonely his life was. Nothing would make him happier than having a family of his own. A wife who will love him more than anything in the world and a child or children to call his own.

Chapter 3

Annie woke up a few minutes past seven to meet up with her appointment which was set for 9:15 am. She would rather get there early than late.

She said her morning prayer, arranged her bed and then did a little cleaning after which she had breakfast. She hardly had any appetite because of how nervous she was but she had to eat something according to the Doctor's instruction.

Annie tried her best to eat as much as she could, cleaned the dishes after which she went to take a shower and prepare for the day.

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"That will be all dear. Remember to avoid stress, worry less, follow your meal plan and take your medications. It's normal if it doesn't work at first, you can always try again." Doctor Myers said calmly to Annie who was seated on the hospital bed in a pale blue gown.

She nodded.

The insemination was done a while ago and Annie couldn't explain how she felt. Her heart was beating twice faster all through. She tried to stay calm but it was just so impossible.

"When will I be able to know the outcome?, If I'm pregnant or not." She asked nervously.

"You can check in two weeks. I'll give you two tests before you leave."

Forty-seven-years-old Doctor Myers went out of the room to give Annie some privacy to change back into her clothes. She did that very quickly after which she left for Doctor Myers office. He gave her a flyer which contained the necessary things she needed to know about and also the pregnancy sticks. She thanked him and left the hospital.

As soon as Annie pulled up in the driveway of her beauty parlour, a call came in. It was her best friend, Ella.

"Hey, How did it go?" Ella asked over the phone, slightly worried.

"It went well but it will take about two weeks to know if the procedure was a success."

"It will be fine," Ella assured.

"Yeah, that's what I keep telling myself." Annie sighed. "I'm so nervous. I pray it's successful" She said, placing her right hand on her belly.

"I'm sure it will and your child will be so lucky to have you. No doubt you will be an amazing mom, Ann."

Annie smiled sadly. "You always know what to say to comfort me."

"I'm being very hopeful since this is what you truly want and as for being an amazing mom, I have no doubt about that. You're amazing with Claire and Jayden. I think this baby will be more than lucky to have you."

Annie smiled. "Thanks."

“So should I come over this evening, mama bear?” Ella asked.

Annie chuckled at the sudden nickname “I don’t mind.”

“Okay then, we will see in the evening. Don’t bother preparing anything. I’ll bring some Chinese food along. You’re allowed to eat Chinese right?” She asked hopefully.

“Yes, I’m allowed for tonight. How's your Boss?” Annie teased.

“He's a pain in the ass. You should see my office this morning. You would mistake it for a flower shop.”

“Aren’t you lucky he bought you flowers?”

“A bouquet of red roses would have been enough. He didn't need to go overboard.”

“You won’t forgive him, will you?” Ann chuckled over the phone.

“Well maybe. I just want to stay away from him but I don’t think it’s possible because he’s my Boss.”

“He likes you Ella and I think you’re being too hard on him. Pity the poor guy, please.”

Ella sighed “I will think about it.”

“Alright dear, I have to get to work. My customers are waiting.”

“Okay boo. I’ll see you later.” Ella ended the call.

Annie reached for her handbag from the backseat and helped herself out of the car. Entering her beauty parlour, She was not surprised by the number of customers that were already there. She replied to the greetings of her Staff and also greeted some of her customers. Some were there to do their nails, some came for spa treatment and the others were there to make their hair. Annie entered her office, placed her bag on a table and got to work. She started attending to her customers knowing it was going to be a long day.

Chapter 4

“There’s a problem Doctor Myers.” Nurse Silvia panicked as she stepped into Doctor Myers's office.

“What is it?” He asked her

Nurse Silvia said nervously “Nurse Belinda handed you the wrong semen for the insemination.” The middle-aged nurse was seriously panicking as she knew they were all in trouble.

“What???” Doctor Myers rose to his feet. Every sperm was labelled before and after they were tested and treated. He couldn't wrap his head around what went wrong.

“How did you let that happen?” He asked, irritated. No doubt they were careless.

“There was a mix up with the tag.“Nurse Silvia swallowed painfully.

"Then whose sperm did I use for the procedure earlier?"

“The one you used belongs to the Billionaire, Eric Ivan-James.”

Doctor Myers plopped down on his office chair in defeat. He took off his reading glasses, tossed it on the table, then massaged his forehead with his fingers, trying to send away the headache that was building up there.

He knew Eric had a low sperm count and if it was truly his sperm he used for Annie, there was a very high probability that the whole process was a waste.

“You nurses should have been more careful. What in the hell do you expect me to tell both patients? Do you even have an idea of the type of trouble we are in? We could be sued!!!" Dr Myers said in anger.

“I’m so sorry, sir. It was truly an honest mistake. There's something else you should know too.” The nurse said.

“Which is?” Dr Myers asked, clearly pissed about the whole situation. He wondered what could be worse than what she just told him.

“I think Mr Eric is cured. The last time he came in for the test, we collected samples of his blood, urine and semen. The blood and the urine test showed that his sperm count has increased. Just for us to do the final confirmation with his semen sample, we discovered there had been a mix-up and you’ve used it for the procedure instead.”

“Go get me the result.” Doctor Myers demanded. Nurse Silvia obeyed and was back in no time. “This is it, Sir.” She handed him the result.

He collected the papers from her, put on his glasses and went through it. Indeed Nurse Silvia was saying the truth. Eric's condition has improved. His treatment over the years finally paid off.

"Don't get too excited because we are all going down for your mistakes. I would start praying if I were you all. You're free to go." He dismissed Nurse Silvia.

Doctor Myers skipped lunch. He used that period to think of a Solution. Annie and Eric were like his children. He couldn't betray either of them and neither does he want to end up in jail or losing his license.

After weighing the pros and cons, He decided he was going to go by the truth even though he would be going against his professional ethics and by doing so he would speak to Eric first.

He reached for his phone and dialled Eric who picked up almost immediately.

"It seems you were expecting my call, Son."

"Something like that. Good afternoon, Doc Myers."

"Good afternoon, Son. Hope you're good?"

"Yeah. I was about to call you for the test result. But if there's no improvement I think I won't bother coming over to collect them."

"I have good and bad news, Eric." Dr Myers mumbled.

Eric's heart fell. He knew the bad news was about him not being cured. He had no idea what the good news was. "Okay?!" Eric answered, unsure as to how to react.

"Can you come to see me at the hospital today?" He pleaded.

"Okay Doc, I'm on my way," Eric said.

"Alright, I'll be expecting you." Doctor Myers said.

Chapter 5

Eric stopped what he was doing intending to continue after his visit to Doctor Myers; a man who was like a father to him.

The drive to the hospital was very quiet, He couldn't help but wonder what good news Doctor Myers had for him.

A happy smile spread across his face as he thought about the possibility of what the good news could be. The smile was replaced with a frown when he remembered there was bad news also which will probably overshadow the good news. He decided to be hopeful and silently prayed to God to give him the strength to go through whatever Dr Myers had to discuss with him.

Robin, Eric's driver parked in front of the hospital. It was a private hospital, a four-storey building, all painted in white.

Eric was bombarded with greetings from the staff and even some patients. He did not fail to notice the lust in the eyes of some of the nurses. He chuckled and focused on where he was going. He was used to people drooling over him. But unfortunately, he wasn't interested in them. He was still waiting for the woman who was going to steal his heart.

He knew where Doctor Myers office was so he went there straight and knocked on his door.

"Come in." He heard a faint voice say and he opened the door.

"Hi, Doc." Eric greeted as he made his way in.

Doctor Myers stretched out his hand to him for a shake after which they both took their seats. Myers sat behind his desk and Eric sat opposite him.

Eric rubbed his hands together as they started becoming sweaty despite the fact that the air conditioner was on. Eric Ivan-James was nervous as hell.

"Thanks for being here on time." Doctor Myers said as he removed his glasses and placed them on the table.

"Should I be worried?" Eric asked with a shaky voice.

Myers sighed. "A little."

"So what is it?" He asked.

"As I said earlier, I have good and bad news. I will start with the good one which is about the test result. You no longer have a low sperm count."

There was a few minutes of silence as Eric tried to process the unbelievable statement he just heard.

"Are you sure, Doc?" His voice came out as a whisper.

Doctor Myers nodded. Only then did Eric have a sigh of relief. He never believed this day was going to come. He had lost all hope but God came through for him. This means he would be able to have his child, what he had always wanted. His parents will surely go crazy when they hear this news.

“Your blood and urine test confirmed it but we couldn’t confirm with the semen you provided us with.”

“What does that mean?” Eric asked, his small smile slowly turning into a frown.“Does that mean you’re not sure of what you just told me?” He asked with a heavy heart.

“I’m sure Eric, you’re fine now. Once your blood test proves it then it’s final. It’s just that there was a mix-up and your semen was used for another person.”

“I don’t understand.” He said. A small frown creasing on his forehead.

“A close patient of mine had an Insemination procedure this morning and one of my nurses brought me the wrong sperm. She brought yours instead of the one from the donor.”

Everything was silent for a while as Doctor Myers gave Eric some time to process what he had told him.

"What???" Eric finally said when he found his voice.

“I’m very sorry, my child. I know it’s wrong and unprofessional to make such a mistake. Please forgive us.” The old man pleaded.

Eric sighed, running a hand through his hair. "What happens now? What if she gets pregnant?”

“She may and she may not. I have an idea and it’s up to you if you want to hear it.”

Eric nodded encouraging him to continue.

“I know this is all against my work ethics but now that the deed has been done, I think it's only fair that I'm honest with the parties involved. The lady I inseminated earlier is just like you are to me. She’s like my daughter. I chose to talk to you first instead of Annie because I don’t want to impose any stress on her. For protocol’s sake, you will have to give us another semen sample so we can do the final verification. And I promise to do a follow up with Annie and if she gets pregnant, I will tell her everything including the fact that you want to be in your child’s life.” Myers said.

Eric sighed. “What if the Lady in question does not agree to it or what if her husband or boyfriend refuses to let me be in my child’s life?” Eric was trying his hardest to remain calm. Dr Myers had been a family Doctor to the Ivan-James for years now. Suing him or the hospital just wouldn't make any sense or change the fact that the lady in question was carrying his flesh and blood and he was the father (that was if the procedure was successful).

Doctor Myers knew about Annie's past relationships, how they ended badly and the fact that she was planning on raising the baby alone if she gets pregnant. But it wasn't his place to tell Eric. If they were destined for each other, things will surely fall in place. "You have every right to be mad at me. This is not something I'm proud of either because such has never occurred. But I assure you one thing, Annie is a very nice girl. I think the two of you will be able to figure things out.

Chapter 6

“Are you sure you’re not pregnant already? You’ve finished the Ice cream. The last time I checked, you don’t like this flavour.” Ella teased Annie.

As promised, she came over after work to keep her friend company. They just finished eating their Chinese food and Annie had her face buried in the ice cream Ella bought.

“It’s too early to tell Ella.” Annie rolled her eyes, making Ella chuckle. Ella was almost at Annie’s house when Annie called and asked her to buy Icecream so she had to go back to get it. The ice cream shop was out of Annie’s favourite flavour so Ella bought another flavour, Vanilla.

“Enough about me. How’s your Boss? I hope you guys did not fight again today.” Annie smiled.

“No. I came to my senses after you called this morning. I apologized to him and we’ve been civil after that.”

“So does that mean you two....”

“Oh!! stop thinking too far Annie. We’re just friends. Scratch that, we only became friends today.”

Annie said as she took another scoop of her Ice cream. “I wonder why you two are delaying when it’s so damn obvious that you guys like each other.”

“I don’t think I like him. I just have a crush on him which I’m sure will disappear sooner than you know.” Ella replied.

Annie nodded, not believing what her friend said.

Ella woke up at exactly two minutes to six. She woke up feeling tired because she slept late the previous night. She and Annie were up till midnight, chatting and editing one of Annie’s videos that was due for upload on YouTube.

From the guest room, Ella made her way to the Kitchen. She made breakfast for two, cleaned the kitchen and went back upstairs to get ready for work.

By the time she was all dressed up, Annie was still sleeping, She ate half of the breakfast she made and left the other half for Annie. She left a note on the fridge and left for work

…….

Annie stirred when her Alarm buzzed. She turned it off, said her morning prayer, arranged her bed and proceeded to the bathroom for her morning rituals.

By the time she finished dressing up which included applying her makeup, it was almost 8.30 am.

A known smile tugged at Annie's lips when she got to the kitchen and perceived the aroma of her favourite breakfast. She was sure Ella made it before she left for work. She served herself and dug in immediately.

She was about to take a bottle of water from the fridge when she saw the note Ella left for her; informing her she made breakfast and they would see each other over the weekend.

Annie smiled as she tossed the paper in a nearby bin. She was blessed to have a friend like Ella. She took her medications, washed her plate and left for work.

Chapter 7

Eric heaved a sigh when he felt a serious headache building up on the right side of his head. No doubt it was due to his constant thinking and lack of sleep. He even came earlier to work today and buried himself with work but still, the probabilities of what could happen in the future scared the hell out of him.

For almost four minutes Eric has been walking back and forth in his office, waiting patiently for Doctor Myers phone call.

He wanted to be a hundred percent sure his condition had improved. That was why he stopped by Myers office on his way home from the office yesterday to drop a sample of his semen. And Doctor Myers promised he would get the result by this time today.

He wondered why the old man hadn't given him a call. An impatient Eric was contemplating if he should go to the hospital when his phone rang. The caller ID showed it was Doctor Myers. He didn't think twice before clicking on the answer button.

"Sorry for calling late, my child. I've got the result with me. I was right Eric, your sperm count has increased tremendously. Congratulations!" Doctor Myers said with a huge smile on his face. He was so damn happy for Eric.

"Thank God," Eric replied, feeling so relieved. His lips curved into a smile. There was hope for him to have a child.

"Have you spoken to her?" Eric asked, referring to Annie.

"Not yet. I think it's still early to tell her because right now, she needs to avoid anything that will make her worry."

"So what do we do? Or should I approach her myself?" Eric suggested.

"Not yet son, please give me the chance to talk to her first and I think we should wait till she confirms if she's pregnant or not. I will do a follow up about it and let you know how it goes."

"Okay. That should take how long?" Eric asked.

"Almost two weeks from now."

"Can you please tell me her name? I promise not to stalk her or anything." Eric asked, trying not to sound creepy. He wanted to have an idea of what her name was because she might be carrying his child so he needed to know a few things about her.

"Her name is Annie Davis." Doctor Myers said over the phone.

"Thanks, Doc. I hope you'll keep me updated. I have to go back to work now." Eric announced.

“I will Son. Have a good day.” The old man ended the call

Eric crashed on the sofa in his office. He felt better than he was a couple of minutes ago. He was so damn happy because his treatment over the years finally paid off and now he can have a child to call his own.

Chapter 8

LATER AT NIGHT

Eric swiped his keycard and helped himself into his luxurious three-bedroom apartment. He was tired which was why he came home earlier than usual.

He placed his briefcase on a sofa in the living room and walked to the kitchen to get a bottle of water which he gulped down immediately.

After that, he went into his room to take a shower. He dried himself and changed into his grey sweatpants and no shirt on.

He searched the kitchen for something to eat but there was none so he decided to order pizza.

While waiting for the pizza to arrive, Eric decided to call his immediate younger sister. Just to check up on her and see how she was doing.

Elaina picked up the call almost immediately. It was as if she was expecting her brother's call.

"Hello, brother."

"How are you doing baby Sister? It's been a while."

"I'm fine Eric. How are you too? I miss you." Elaina said from the other side. She was very happy to hear from her brother.

"I'm fine sweetheart. I miss you too. How's work?" he asked her.

"Work is stressful but I'm coping." She said and Eric chuckled.

Elaina is a lawyer. She's four years younger than Eric. She's very beautiful, smart and above all respectful, just like her brother. She and Eric are very close.

She was called to the bar last year and she's presently working in a law firm. Elaina's dream is to own her law firm but now that she's fresh at the bar, she wants to get all the experience she can get before setting up hers.

"You okay right? Or are you in need of anything, money, groceries?" Eric being the overly protective brother asked.

"I'm fine Eric. Remember I work now and I have my earnings. I'm no longer in law school." She groaned, making Eric smile from the other side.

"If you say so. When will you come to visit me or should I come to visit you instead?" He asked.

"You've been coming to my place, Eric. It's only fair that I come to yours this time around. I'll try to see you over the weekend."

“Okay muffin. I’ll be expecting you!”

“Thanks for calling. Love you, Bye.” She said before ending the call.

Two minutes later, Eric's doorbell rang so he got up from the couch to answer it and it turned out to be His best friend, Dylan, in his tailored suit, holding three boxes of Pizza.

“You didn’t tell me you were coming,” Eric said, surprised.

“I didn’t think I would be here too,” Dylan helped himself in. Eric closed the door.

“How come you have these?” Eric asked referring to the three boxes of pizza Dylan was holding.

“I saw the delivery guy downstairs so I collected and paid for them,” Dylan answered.

They decided to sit and eat on the balcony so Dylan took the pizza there and settled down on a chair while Eric went to the kitchen to get wine.

“So if she’s pregnant with your baby what will you do?” Dylan, Eric’s best friend asked him. He just told him about the crazy situation.

“I will have no choice but to accept her and the baby. They’ll be my number one priority.” Eric said after which he took a sip of his wine.

Dylan smiled at his best friend’s reply. He knew Eric wanted a child so much and he was happy that his dream was almost coming true.

“Please let this stay between us. I don’t want my parents or sisters to find out yet. I don’t want to keep anybody’s hope up.”

“If Annie gets pregnant with my child, I’ll still have to talk to her and her opinion matters too so let’s keep this to ourselves.” He said. Dylan smirked.

“I think you love this girl already. From the way you talk, you’re already protective of her. Are you sure you've not met her before?” He asked, suspicious.

Eric chuckled. “Trust me I’ve not. I don’t even know what she looks like but one thing is for sure. I respect her already.”

“So how is your Miss Charming?” Eric smiled, referring to Dylan’s Crush. Ella Macaulay.

“She’s Fine.” He replied with a smile. “I dropped her at her place before coming here. Fortunately, she lives in the estate next to yours.”

“So you two are good now, right?”

“Something like that,” Dylan whispered, nervously scratching the back of his head. "We just became friends so we’re taking it slow,"

The two best friends talked more about business after which Dylan left for his apartment.

Chapter 9

Eric couldn't sleep; Series of thoughts were going to and fro in his head. He knew he promised Doctor Myers not to stalk Annie Davis but he couldn't help but want to know more about her since she might be carrying his child. He wanted to know what she looked like, what she does for a living. He wanted to know if she has had dinner already. Damn, he was so curious. He wished he had her phone number or her home address.

Eric didn't know what came over him when he took his laptop and searched for the name ANNIE DAVIS. He groaned when he saw thousands of people bearing that name. Of course, what did he expect?

"What do I do?" He murmured as he kept on scrolling through. He clicked on a link which directed him to all the Annie Davis on Facebook.

Fortunately, most of the Annie Davis he saw were either younger or older and the Annie Davis he was searching for was someone close to his age according to the description Doctor Myers gave him.

Eric was almost giving up when a picture caught his attention. He clicked on the profile to get more information.

As he scrolled through, he saw that this particular lady was a mutual friend to Doctor Myers and his wife. Eric smiled as if he just won a jackpot. This might be the lady he was looking for.

He clicked on her pictures and to say Eric was blown away would be an understatement. In the whole 30 years of his existence, he had never seen a lady as beautiful as she was. After admiring all her pictures, Eric went to her post and her last post was a picture of Dr Myers celebrating him for his birthday which Dr Myers replied, thanking her.

This was when he knew he had found His Annie.

Eric decided to check out her info and saw her bio which stated that she was the owner of Ann's Home and a YouTuber.

He was impressed to know she was an independent woman.

Eric clicked on the link in her bio and it directed him to Annie's YouTube page. He was impressed she had a huge fan base, 436 thousand subscribers. He subscribed too and started watching her videos.

The first video he watched was one where she did a tour of her beauty parlour and the services they offered. The place looked familiar to him and that was when he remembered that he had once dropped Elaina there for a spa treatment.

The next video he watched was when she did a question and answer session. Towards the end of the video, Annie read out a question which Eric was surprisingly interested in.

The question was “What type of qualities do you want in a man you would like to spend the rest of your life with and mention five celebrity guys you would like to hang out with.”

He chuckled as Annie groaned after reading the question. She looked so adorable.

And her answer went as follows. “First and foremost I want y’all to know I’m not dating anyone for now." Eric didn't know why but hearing this was such a relief to him. The video was uploaded not too long ago so there was a very high probability that she was still single.

"But talking about the qualities I would like in a man I want to spend the rest of my life with, Firstly, He must be a lover of God. He must be respectful, hardworking, good-looking and obviously, must like me for who I am.”

“So the top five celebrity guys I would love to hang out with. Hmm, let’s see.” She said, pretending to think for a while. Then she started mentioning their names and the reasons she would love to hang out with them. Then she said something that shocked Eric. He thought he heard the wrong thing so he clicked the rewind button and he heard the statement again which made him grin like crazy.

“The final celebrity guy I would love to hang out with is Eric Ivan-James. Honestly, I would love to meet him one on one and ask him how he does his things. You all can testify that I’m not exaggerating because we all know he’s hardworking and very successful. There was a time I almost made him my role model.” She said with a chuckle.

“Another thing about Eric is that....” He smiled hearing the way his name rolled off her tongue.

“I’m a very sincere person and y’all will agree with me that Eric is sexy as hell. There was a time Ella and I used to buy Times Magazine just to admire his sexy body.” Eric laughed out loud. That was when he used to model for Times Magazine. His contract with them was over that’s why he stopped modelling for them. Although they pleaded for him to renew and other modelling contracts came but he lost interest in the Job because they were bringing unnecessary attention as he wanted to focus on his businesses.

“Besides, another thing I greatly admire about Eric is that he adores his family and I find that so adorable. I mean he’s a very busy person but he still makes time for his family. It reminds me of high school. I used to be in the same class as his sister and he was always there for her. Even after he graduated, he came for all her shows and plays. I know all these because I’m kind of an Ivan-James fan so I’m up to date with every talk and gossip. But honestly, I love and respect their bond as a family.”

“So if I get the opportunity to hang out with him, I honestly don’t know what I’ll say to him. I mean, I don’t even think I’ll ever get to meet him and If I do which I know is almost impossible, I guess I’ll tell him how much I’ve always adored him.

“So that’s all for today. Thanks for watching. I will see you guys in my next video. Bye.” The video ended with a priceless smile plastered on Eric’s face.

Chapter 10

Two Weeks Later

By now, Eric had watched all of Annie's videos on her YouTube channel. The more he watched, the more he fell for her. He likes her already. Liking at first sight, was something Eric never believed in but it all made sense to him now. He wanted nothing more than Annie to carry his child; He wanted her to be the mother of his baby.

Eric has still not heard from Doctor Myers. He was hoping the old man would reach out to him before the week runs out.

…….

Annie Davis woke up feeling a bit nervous as she remembered today was the day. The day she would find out if she was pregnant or not. The day that will determine whether she should start preparing for motherhood or not but above all she silently prayed to God to give her the strength to go through what might come her way, especially if the result turns negative.

Annie skipped her morning prayers, got down from her bed and rushed into the bathroom. She took the pregnancy sticks where she placed them the previous night on the bathroom counter and read the instructions again.

She had read the instructions so many times starting from the day Doctor Myers handed it to her. She couldn't help but read it again, just to make sure she does it right.

Her heart was beating hard against her chest as she peeped on the sticks. Then she placed them on the counter and waited for it to tell the result.

Annie washed and dried her hands after which she walked into her room and reached for her camera. She wanted to capture the moment. Just in case she was lucky enough for the results to come out positive. It was not for YouTube purposes, she wanted to keep this memory and perhaps show her baby sometime in the future.

The timer went off and it was time for Annie to look at the sticks but she was scared. For a moment, she thought about the possibility of what could happen in the next few seconds. Whatever the outcome was, it would be a life-changing one. It was either for better or for worse.

Annie took slow steps towards the counter, picked up the sticks and took a look at them.

'Negative.' She read the first one and her heart fell.

Tears welled up in Annie's eyes. Of course, she blamed herself for being so stupid thinking the increase in her appetite was a probability of her being pregnant.

Then she took a look at the second stick and it read "Positive."

A sad smile found its way to her lips as she felt there was still hope of her being pregnant.

Annie took a quick shower, changed into casual clothes, grabbed her handbag, reached for her car keys and left her apartment.

While driving, Annie silently prayed to God, giving him reasons why he should answer her prayer. She did all that Doctor Myers asked her to do. She ate well, followed the meal plan he had given her, she took her medications and avoided stress.

"Good Morning Miss Annie." Nurse Silvia greeted her as soon as she approached the busy reception.

"Good Morning." She replied with a small smile. "I'm here to see Doctor Myers." She said nervously, playing with her car keys.

"Doctor Myers is off duty and won't be here until noon. Do you mind seeing another Doctor?" She asked politely.

"I don't mind." She replied Nurse Silvia.

"Hold on a sec." Nurse Silvia said before she disappeared. She came back almost immediately, asking Annie to follow her into the Doctor's Office.

Annie knew almost all the doctors in this hospital but had never come across this face. She was beautiful, a little bit taller than Annie and around Annie's age.

"Good Morning Miss." The young Doctor greeted Annie with a smile as soon as she walked in.

"Good morning Doc," Annie replied, taking a seat.

"How may I help you, Ma'am?" She asked politely.

"I'm here to confirm if I'm pregnant; I took a test this morning, One turned out negative and the other one turned positive," Annie said and the lady Doctor nodded in understanding.

She asked Annie a few more questions after which she told Annie to follow her to the laboratory room where they collected her blood and urine sample to test.

Annie felt weak immediately after she gave her blood sample.

"Have you had breakfast?" The Doctor asked with concern as she assisted Annie in taking a seat right outside the laboratory room.

"Not yet." She replied weakly,

"I'll be right back." The Doctor said after which she disappeared down the hallway.

"Here, take this. It'll help with the dizziness." She handed Annie a bottle of mineral water.

“Thank you, Doctor?” Annie said, trying to ask for her name.

“Madeleine.” She replied with a smile.

“Thanks, Doctor Madeleine,” Annie said while opening the bottle cover. She gulped down half of the mineral water.

“I brought this for you too.” Madeleine handed Annie a snack she never knew she was holding. It was one of those healthy snacks they had in store.

“Thanks, Madeleine.” Annie smiled.

“You’re welcome.” She smiled at Annie as if she knew something unknown to Annie.

“Your test results will soon be ready. I’ll be back in ten minutes.” She said and excused herself.

Annie kept herself busy with the snack. She finished it in no time and drank the rest of the mineral water.

To while away time, she brought out her phone and replied to her messages and soon enough Doctor Madeleine was back from her office, she helped herself into the laboratory and came out holding a white envelope. Madeleine’s expression was normal so Annie didn't know what to expect.

“Your test result.” She said, taking a seat beside Annie.

“W.. What does it say?” Annie whispered.

Madeleine opened the sealed envelope and went through the result. She smiled. “It's positive ma’am. You’re pregnant.”

“I.. I’m Pregnant?” Annie shuttered as tears welled up in her eyes. She couldn’t believe it.

“Yes, you are!” Madeleine affirmed. “Congratulations.” She added.

“Thanks,” Annie replied with a smile as her arms went around her belly protectively. She prayed to God about it and now her little miracle was already growing inside her.

“I’m sure Doctor Myers will take it from here when you meet him. Please continue to eat well, keep yourself hydrated, and avoid stress as much as you can. You’re still in your first trimester so please be very careful.”

“Thank you. I promise I’ll take good care of myself. He or she is my priority now.” She said with determination.

They talked more, with Doctor Madeleine giving Annie more healthful tips after which Annie left the hospital.

Chapter 11

With his jacket off, the first two buttons of his shirt unbuttoned, Eric was seated on a chair behind his desk; he was engrossed with the document he was going through. He was trying to complete everything on his to-do list so he could have a free weekend to spend with his youngest sister, Laura. Her Birthday was on Saturday so they would be celebrating all weekend, starting from Friday.

The distraction came when his cell phone rang. Without looking at the Caller ID, he picked up.

“Good day, Eric.” Dr Myers' voice came through from the other side which made his stomach flip.

“Good day Doc” He replied nervously and the old man chuckled.

“I’m sure you were not expecting my call, Son.”

“I wasn’t expecting you to call today.” He replied, turning away his attention from the document he was previously going through.

“I have news, Eric. The process was Successful, Annie is Pregnant.”

A priceless smile tugged at Eric’s lips as he threw his fist in the air.

“That’s good news, Doc.” He said, trying to control his excitement but failed terribly.

“I’m happy you are excited. It was confirmed this morning by my Junior colleague. But I haven’t spoken to Annie. I’ll visit her later today.”

No doubt Eric was ecstatic about the news but He was also concerned about Annie. He had no doubt she was going to freak out when she heard the news about him being the father of the child she was carrying and him wanting to be in the baby’s life.

But Eric wanted more than that; He wanted them to be a family, He fell in love with her even before the pregnancy was confirmed. He knew she would freak out but he was willing to be patient.

“Please let me know how it goes when you talk to her.” He pleaded with him.

“No problem, son. I’ll keep you updated,” he promised. “Congratulations, by the way.”

“Thank You,” Eric blushed. His joy knew no bounds. This has been his dream for so long, to be a Father.

Chapter 12

“Sorry, I’m late.” Annie apologized, taking a seat opposite Doctor Myers. He called her earlier and demanded to see her so they planned to meet at a restaurant close to the hospital.

“It seems you had a lot of customers to attend to.” He teased and she smiled.

Annie nodded, placing her small bag on the table. Today was indeed a hectic day for her.

“So what is it you want to talk to me about?” She asked as she studied his face. He was putting on a dark fitted shirt and pants. The first two buttons were opened. He might be in his late forties but he was handsome.

Apart from the fact that Doctor Myers was like a father to Annie, he was also a family friend. He and Annie’s father were childhood friends so he had always been there for her.

Annie hoped nothing had gone wrong. Her right hand went around her belly protectively, praying nothing bad happens to her baby.

“Do you want anything?” He asked so he could order for her.

“I’m fine. Please just tell me the reason for this meeting, I’m getting nervous.”

“Congratulations on the baby!” He said with a small smile.

"Thank you," Annie replied but she could tell there was something else he had to say.

Myers sighed “Annie we got you inseminated with the wrong sperm.”

Annie went pale, her eyes showing fear and confusion. She opened her mouth to say something but no words came out.

“You need not worry about your health or the baby’s health. There’s no trace of any kind of sickness from the Father’s side.” He said and Annie’s heartbeat increased.

She couldn’t help but dread what Doctor Myers had to say next.

He reached for her hand which was cold. He feared for a bit that she was going to pass out.

“The baby’s father is aware of its existence and he wants to be there for the two of you.”

It was then that it hit her. All these were too good to be true and now she had to share not only custody but her baby’s love with the Father whom she had no idea was.

She swallowed painfully, “Who is the Father?” Her voice came out almost as a whisper.

“Eric Ivan-James.”Annie’s eyes went wide as she tried to control her panic attack

Doctor Myers noticed and rushed to get a glass of water from a waiter. He made sure Annie drank some water after which he made her do a few breathing exercises.

“Will he take my baby away from me?“She asked, trying to hold back her tears.

“No dear, he has good intentions. He wants to be there for you and the baby”

Annie did not know what made her ask that question even when she knew Eric was not that of a horrible person.

She dreamt of meeting him one day but not like this, him being the father of her child.

“I’m very sorry about everything Annie. His semen was mixed with that of the donor. I had to come clean to the two of you.”

“The reason Eric is very interested in being there for you and his child is that he cares. This child will be his first fruit and he wants to be there in every step of the way.”

“He will care for you and will never do anything to hurt you.” Doctor Myers said sincerely and she looked at him with her eyes filled with a certain question.

'How can he care for her when he knows nothing about her?'

Chapter 13

Ella couldn't describe the joy she felt when Annie gave her the good news. She couldn't help but fantasise on how much she was going to spoil Annie's baby.

Ella finished her work as soon as she could so she would go and celebrate with Annie. She stopped by the grocery store before heading to Annie's house. She bought ingredients for dinner because she promised to make Annie a celebratory dinner.

Ella proceeded into Annie's house with a smile on her face, excited to hug the hell out of her friend and congratulate her on the baby. But what she saw was not what she expected.

She found Annie sitting on the Sofa, deep in thought. Annie did not notice her presence from the time she entered, went to the kitchen to drop the groceries and came back to the living room.

Something was wrong.

She took a seat beside Annie, placing a hand on her lap. "Heyy?"

"When did you arrive?" Annie asked, surprised. Even though Ella had a key to her apartment, she did not notice when she entered.

a couple of seconds ago" Ella replied. "Now tell me what the matter is." She demanded because she knew Annie was good at changing topics and she was not going to let go of this one.

"My baby daddy wants to be in our lives." She said. Ella looked puzzled.

"I can't even believe I'm calling him that." Annie groaned, running a hand through her hair.

"The whole point of this idea was to have the baby without any male drama in your life, how did the baby daddy issue come into play? the donor was meant to be unknown, right? and so is you to the donor."

"Yes, but luck wasn't on my side as I was inseminated with the wrong sperm," Annie said reluctantly, trying to erase a building headache by massaging her head with her right hand.

"What the…?" Ella looked furious.

"Yeah. I had a panic attack when Dr Myers told me. How well will it be for me to sue my Dad's childhood's friend for putting the wrong semen in me?"

"I should have tried harder to stop you from this insane decision but you were way too determined for me to change your mind. The deed has been done. What's going to happen now? Will you allow him to be in the baby's life?" Ella asked.

"I don't know but I have no choice, right?" She asked, looking at Ella.

“You don’t know him, do you?” Ella asked, trying to come up with a plan.

Annie whispered. “I think we do.”

“What do you mean?” Ella asked, a small frown creasing on her forehead.

“Eric Ivan-James is the Father.”

Ella stared at Annie like she had two horns on her head. "You're joking, right?"

“This matter is far too serious for me to be telling an expensive joke, Ella.”

The duo were silent for a while. While Annie thought of how pathetic her life was about to become, Ella was processing what she just heard.

"Eric Ivan-James, what the fucking hell!!" Ella finally spoke with a smile on her face which made Annie wonder if her best friend was okay.

“You’ve always been the lucky one, Ann. Besides, you should be happy. He’s a billionaire for crying out loud. Not to talk of how hot and sexy he is. Gosh, you guys will make a beautiful baby.” Ella couldn't help but say.

“You’re not helping matters here, Emmanuella.” Annie groaned.

“Don’t give me that face Annie. You’ve been crushing on this guy since High school. You’ve even been following up on every news and gossip about him, defending him as if your life depended on it. Now you have him on a platter of gold, you should be celebrating, babe.” Ella smiled.

“That is even what makes it more embarrassing.” She said as she buried her face in one of the cushion pillows.

Ella removed the pillow from her face. “Tell me, Annie, What are you afraid of? I know you did not expect things to turn out this way but it is what it is and we need to look at the brighter side of things.”

“I’m just scared, Ella. I’m scared of facing him. I will never be able to keep up with his standard. What if he takes my baby away from me when he or she is born?” She said nervously.

Ella took her hand in hers and looked into her eyes. “You and I know that will never happen.”

Annie sighed.

“Enough of what if’s Annie. Don’t impose any stress on my innocent god baby. Let me go make the two of you something to eat and then we can talk some more about baby daddy.” Annie rolled her eyes.

Ella was about to stand up to go make dinner when Annie asked: “Did you buy Ice cream?” Ella replied to Annie with a playful glare and Annie gave her a puppy dog face.

When Ella was about leaving the office, she called Annie to let her know she would stop by at the grocery and asked if she needed anything. Ella specifically asked if she should get ice cream for her and she replied with a firm No, that she wasn't in the mood for Ice cream.

"Don't give me that face, Ann. I'm not going back to the grocery store." Ella proceeded to the kitchen with Annie behind her.

"But your god baby wants ice cream." She pleaded.

"Don't worry, once my god baby tastes my home-cooked dinner, he or she will forget about Ice cream. Or better still, we can give your baby daddy a call. I'm sure he'll provide us with tubs of ice cream." Ella teased as she gathered the ingredients for dinner. Annie rolled her eyes.

Ella paused what she was doing and gave Annie a look that showed she just remembered something. "Do you know that Eric is my Boss's Best friend?"

Chapter 14

Eric could not help but worry about Annie and his child as he waited for Doctor Myers feedback on his talk with her.

He had no doubt she was going to freak out but he wanted to be there for her and their little miracle.

As at the time Eric left for his apartment, there was no news from Myers. After changing into his nightwear, he got comfortable on his bed and dialled his family Doctor who picked up immediately.

“Good evening, Doc.” he greeted nervously.

“Hello, Eric. Sorry for not getting back to you on time.”

“Did she take the news well? Will she be okay?” He asked truly concerned which earned a smile from Doctor Myers on the other side.

“She didn’t take the news well, Eric. She went pale when I told her but I was able to calm her down. Maybe you should give her some time to process the news.” He advised.

“Okay.” He answered, knowing it was hard for her as well as it was for him. “Please, can you give me her phone number, email address or any other thing I can contact her with?” Eric asked. He decided not to leave her a message on Facebook so she would not think that he was stalking her. Scaring her away would be the last thing he will ever think of doing.

“I will text you her number. And on that note be patient with her and please take very good care of her or you will have me to deal with.”

“I will, Thank you Doc,” Eric assured.

‘Calling Annie now wouldn’t be a good idea.’ Eric thought to himself as he struggled not to dial her number. He wondered if she had someone to lean on, like a friend or her mom. He wished he was there with her; to make her understand that He meant no harm.

Eric will be going to Paris for the weekend with Laura, his younger sister, to celebrate her birthday as promised and he wanted to see Annie before he left.

He knew it was too early but did it anyway. He wanted to let her know he will be there for her so he unlocked his phone and sent her a text message.

He waited for her reply but there was none till he fell asleep.

“I can’t believe you made me do this.” Ella groaned as she unlocked the door to Annie’s home, stepping in with Annie behind her.

“Don’t blame me, It’s your god baby in action,” Annie said with her mouth full of strawberry flavoured ice cream.

After dinner, Annie kept whining that she wanted Ice cream so they had to go out to buy some.

“Thank you for escorting me, Ella. I’m usually not like this. It’s just that I was craving ice cream so bad that I couldn’t wait for tomorrow.” Annie said sincerely. She felt bad for forcing Ella to go with her at this late hour in search of Ice cream.

Annie needed Ella to drive her because of her eyesight. She was under strict instructions from her optometrist not to drive at night because her eyesight was usually blurry and she was in the process of correcting it with the glasses handed to her which she uses once a while.

The last time Annie drove late at night, she almost had an accident which is why she avoided driving at nighttime, especially now that she was expecting a baby, she didn’t want to risk their lives.

“It’s okay babe, What are friends for?” Ella smiled giving Annie a side hug before going to the kitchen to place the extra tub of Ice cream in the fridge.

Ella came back to the living room and found Annie staring strangely at her phone.

“What’s wrong Ann? You’re looking as if you’ve just seen a ghost.”

“I just got a text from an unknown number. It’s him." She replied, not looking up from her phone.

"Him?" Ella asked.

"Eric."

Ella made her way towards Annie “what does it say?” Annie passed her phone to her.

“Good evening, Annie. I know it may seem too early to reach out to you but I couldn’t help it. I just want to let you know that you can always count on me. You and our baby mean the world to me. Please don’t hesitate to let me know if you need anything. Again, I will like for us to meet before Friday evening because I’ll be leaving for Paris. Please let me know when you’ll be free and take very good care of yourself and our baby." Eric Ivan-James.

“Damn, he’s into you already.” Ella giggled as she handed Annie back her phone.

“He isn’t. He’s just trying to be nice because I’m carrying his child.”

“I don’t think so Ann, Just be nice to him. Who knows, you guys may end up liking each other and you may end up being Mrs Ivan-James.”

Annie tried to stop her blush. “I don’t think I’m his type, Ella. I’m not even close to all those models that move around with him.”

“You’re smart, beautiful and amazing; He must be silly if he doesn’t feel anything for you.”

Annie rolled to the other side of her bed. She read his text again, this making the Seventh time. She sighed. Thinking of what to do (whether she should reply to him or not) sleep overtook her.

Chapter 15

The first thing Eric did when he woke up was to check his phone if there was a reply from Annie. Unfortunately, there wasn't one which made his heart sink.

Reluctantly, he got up from the bed and proceeded to the bathroom to do his morning rituals after which he dressed up for work.

“Good morning, Son.” Nora greeted him.

“Good morning, Nora.” He placed his briefcase on the sofa, approached Nora and kissed her cheek.

Nora was Eric’s housekeeper. She has been working for him for a while now. Eric adores and respects her; She was like a second mom to him.

Nora comes to work every day except for weekends which were her days off. She cooks and cleans for Eric.

“How are you this morning?” She asked him.

“I’m okay.” He replied but she could tell something was wrong. His eyes were dull and she could see worry in them.

“Breakfast is ready, the table is set.” She said to him. He nodded and walked towards the dining room with Nora behind him.

Eric had no appetite; He forced himself to eat the small portion Nora served him. As he ate, He couldn’t help but wonder if Annie already had breakfast.

“What is wrong, my child? You know you can talk to me about anything.”

Eric gave a sad smile. . He didn't want to reveal Annie’s pregnancy without talking to her first.”

“I will tell you when the time comes.” His voice held promise and Nora nodded in understanding. She decided not to push any further, knowing he would come clean when he was ready to talk about what was bothering him.

After breakfast, Eric left for office. He got to the office and buried himself with work. When it was almost lunchtime, he decided to make it up to Annie. He called a restaurant and ordered for lunch to be delivered to Annie’s workplace. He ordered her favourite. He knew what her favourite was because of all her YouTube videos he watched.

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“There you go ma’am,” Annie said as she did the finishing touches of her customer’s nail.

“I love it.” The beautiful brunette grinned and Annie smiled at her.

“You can pay over there.” Annie pointed at where the cashier was and the customer nodded.

One of Annie’s staff called her attention that there was a delivery for her.

She found that very weird as she did not order anything and neither was she expecting anything from anybody. She made her way to the entrance of her beauty parlour and saw the delivery guy.

The delivery came from her favourite restaurant. She could tell by the delivery guy’s shirt and cap and the bags he was holding which had the restaurant’s logo on them.

“Miss Annie Davis?” The delivery guy asked and she nodded.

“This is for you!” He stretched out the two plastic bags he was holding for her to collect.

“But I didn’t order anything.” She replied, confused.

“Yes, ma’am. It was ordered on your behalf and I was asked to deliver it to you.”

“Okay, Thank you.” She collected the bag from him.

“Do I need to pay anyth…..”

“Everything has been covered, have a great day!”

Annie went to her office with the bags and placed them on her table. She brought out the contents in both bags and saw that they were all her favourite.

She reached for her phone in her handbag to confirm from Ella if she was the one that decided to surprise her with a free lunch.

She unlocked her phone and was greeted with a text from Eric.

“I ordered lunch for you. Bon Appetite.” Eric Ivan-James.

She smiled, wondering how he knew her favourite food and workplace.

Annie proceeded to the adjoined bathroom in her office to wash her hand. She came back, sat behind her desk and dug into the food.

Halfway through her meal, she was full so she decided to leave the rest for later.

Remembering she hadn’t replied Eric to thank him for the food, she reached for her phone and did just that.

“Thanks for sending me lunch.“Annie.

Eric replied almost immediately. ”You’re welcome. I’m happy you replied. How are you and the baby?” Eric.

“We’re fine, thanks.” Annie.

“Good to hear. Will you be available on Friday evening? I would like to see you. Please?” Eric.

“I’ll let you know before then if I will be free.” Annie.

'Okay. Have a great day!' Eric.

Annie couldn’t believe she just had a chat with Eric. She made a mental note to check her Friday schedule to see if she would be available to meet Eric.

Chapter 16

Annie came out of her bathroom in a short pyjamas dress; she reached for her phone on the nightstand. There was an incoming call from Ella, her best friend.

“Hey!” She said, taking a seat on her bed.

Hi babe,” Ella replied cheerfully.

“You sound so happy today,” Annie asked suspiciously.

“Guess who I ran into today at the office?”

“Who?”

“Your baby daddy” Ella giggled, making Annie groan.

“He came to see Dylan. He was looking so handsome, Annie. I was opportuned to talk to him. Dylan kind of introduced me to him and we chatted for a while. I almost died Ann. I still can’t believe I not only saw him but we talked.”

“Annie? Are you there?” Ella asked after a while.

“Yeah. I’m listening. I hope you didn’t tell him about me.”

“I almost did but I didn’t.”

“Damn you’re so lucky Ann. If your baby is a boy, he will be just as handsome as his dad.”

“He had lunch delivered to me today.” She opened up to her.

" Eric?”

“Yes!” She replied.

“You must be kidding me!” Ella screamed excitedly over the phone.

“I’m serious, Ella. I have no idea how he knew my favourite lunch and my shop's address.

“Awww, I’m convinced he loves you Annie” Ella assured.

“Or he’s just concerned because I’m carrying his child.”

“You’re wrong. The Eric I talked to earlier today was so sweet and charming. Whatever it is, I’m sure he has good intentions”

“So when will you have your first check-up?” Ella asked excitedly, slightly changing the topic.

“I’ve made an appointment for next week with the person Dr Myers recommended.”

“So, will Eric be going with you?”

“I don't know,” Annie replied.

“You should extend the invitation to him. Please don’t deny him the chance of experiencing this beautiful process.” Ella pleaded.

Annie sighed."I'll think about it. Claire and Jayden are coming home this Thursday for a short break”

“Awww my babies, I miss them a lot.” Annie cooed. Claire and Jayden attended boarding schools.

“Me too, so you better be here after work on Friday because we’ll be spending the weekend together.”

“Noted,” Ella said.

“Goodnight babe, my regards to my little Tiger.” Ella said, referring to Annie’s growing baby.

“Sure, sleep tight,” Annie said after which she hung up.

She placed her phone on the nightstand, covered herself properly with the duvet and closed her eyes.

Her sleep was disturbed when her phone buzzed, indicating she had a text. She reached for her phone and read the text.

“Hi, just checking on you. Send my love to our baby; you two mean a lot to me. Sleep tight!”

Annie could not help with the smile that overtook her face as she read Eric’s message. She returned her phone to the nightstand and closed her eyes with her hand on her belly.

“Daddy said I should send his love to you,

honey.” She whispered after a while.

Chapter 17

It was Friday already and Annie was kind of nervous. She had this mixed feeling because she was going to be facing the almighty Eric Ivan-James late today.

She agreed to meet him this evening at a restaurant close to her house.

Annie took a deep breath before walking out of her office to go attend to her customers. She felt kind of weak because she didn't get enough sleep last night.

Her younger siblings, Claire and Jayden made her stay awake till midnight as they kept on telling Annie about all the fun things that happened in school.

Annie smiled when she remembered how the twins screamed for joy when she announced that she was pregnant. She never pictured them being that excited. They couldn't wait for the baby to be born to shower him or her with so much love.

Claire and Jayden had asked about the baby's father but Annie evaded the question by telling them they would meet him soon.

Eric, on the other hand, was so excited for today. He was happy Annie agreed to meet with him before he left for Paris. He was very excited to see her in person and talk about their baby. Something he had been looking forward to doing for days.

Annie was getting ready to leave her shop to meet Eric at the restaurant when a call came in.

It was Claire, her younger sister.

"Hey?" Annie greeted.

"Annie, I need your help." Claire pleaded from the other side.

"Please tell me you didn't get into trouble?" Annie asked. It could get tiring being an elder sibling to teenagers. They always came to her whenever they were in trouble or needed any favour. But Annie wouldn't trade her siblings for any other thing in the world."

"No, Sis. You see, tomorrow's my close friend's birthday and her brother is taking her to Paris tonight. Her hair is in very bad shape. Please, can you help her out?"

"You should have told me earlier, Claire. I have an appointment with someone at seven."

"Please Annie, my friend is crying her eyes out here."

"You guys can come over. I'll tell Becca to make something nice for her." Annie said, referring to Becca, her manager.

"No Annie. We want you to do the hair." Claire insisted.

She sighed. “Okay, I’ll see what I can do. Hurry up, I’m waiting for you guys.”

“Thank you, Annie. I love you!” Claire ended the call.

Soon enough, Claire and her friend got to Annie’s shop and Claire flung her arms around Annie as soon as she saw her. Annie chuckled as she hugged her back. Her little sister was almost as tall as she was.

“Annie this is my friend, Laura and Laura this is my Sister, Annie.” Claire introduced.

“It’s nice to meet you, Laura.” Annie extended her hand to her which she accepted with a shy smile.

Annie secretly admired Laura who was almost the same height as Claire. She thought Laura looked familiar especially with her unique eye colour.

“Same here Annie, thank you for wanting to help me despite your busy schedule,” Laura said in a very sweet voice and Annie smiled at her after which she kissed her on her cheek then said to her.

“Let’s get started.”

Annie ushered the girls to the salon area. She made Laura take a seat in front of the mirror and started doing magic to her hair while Claire applied some nail polish.

“There you go honey,” Annie said as she completed the magic she was doing on Laura’s hair.

“I love it. Thank you.” Laura smiled.

“You’re welcome, dear. Hold on let me get something.” Annie said after which she walked over to the store and came back with a spray which she sprayed on Laura’s hair. Then she applied a light makeup for Laura.

“Thank you so much, Annie, I’m so in love with myself right now,” Laura said, admiring herself in the mirror.

“So I have to get going.” Annie turned to Claire “Make sure you get home on time.” Then she turned to Laura and gave her a quick hug. “Happy Birthday in advance dear, Have fun in Paris.”

“Thank you.” She replied after which she pulled away from the hug.

Annie saw Laura open her purse,wanting to take out her card to pay for Annie’s services but Annie stopped her. "Don't bother paying dear, consider it as a gift from me."

Annie went to her office, reached for her handbag and exited her shop. She hailed a taxi and gave him the address of the restaurant she was going to.

Annie purposely left her car home today. She knew she would be out late and didn’t want to risk driving at night.

In less than ten minutes she got to her destination, got down from the Taxi, paid the Driver, then helped herself into the restaurant.

Chapter 18

Eric got to the restaurant at exactly 7 pm. He had discarded his suit and was now putting on a dark fitted shirt and pants with a black jacket. His hair was styled in his favourite way and he hoped Annie likes the way he styled it.

Since the restaurant was a five-star restaurant, he booked a VIP spot for them.

Twenty-five minutes passed without any sign of Annie and Eric became kind of sad with the thought of her not showing up.

Soon enough, he sighted her beside a waiter who was directing her to where he was seated.

Eric's heart started beating twice faster as soon as he saw her. She was also in a casual outfit, almost as if they were matching. He watched as she walked towards him and that was when he concluded that she was more beautiful in person.

Few more steps for Annie to get to where their table was, Eric rose to his feet, ready to welcome her.

"Hi." He said nervously as soon as she approached him.

"Good evening." She replied with a smile.

He pulled out a chair for her, she muttered a small thank you and sat down.

"I'm sorry for showing up late. I was busy with one of my customers." She apologized sincerely, hoping he wasn't angry for keeping him waiting.

"It's fine." He replied with a smile which showed his left dimple.

"So how are you?" He asked, looking at her intently.

"Fine, you?" She was literally freaking out on the inside but tried to be on her best behaviour on the outside.

"I'm good as far as you are fine and our baby is fine too." He replied with a smile.

"Thanks for making time to see me today." Annie nodded.

Eric contemplated for a while but he decided to do it anyway. He took Annie's warm hand in his. He could tell she wasn't herself around him. She seemed kind of uncomfortable. Hopefully, She would warm up to him when he said all that was in his mind.

Eric couldn't help but notice how her hand fitted perfectly into his.

Annie, on the other hand, swallowed painfully as soon as his skin came in contact with hers. She felt a shiver run down her spine which made her wonder what was happening.

Eric looked into her beautiful eyes. “Don’t be scared Annie, I promise not to hurt you or our baby. I know this wasn’t what we planned but I want us to work, not only for the sake of the baby but for our sake. I want us to know and be there for each other. Please, will you give us a chance?”

She stared at him for a while, thinking about what he said. She eventually responded with a nod, deciding to give him a chance not only in her baby’s life but in her life also.

“Thank you!” He replied with a smile, then freed their hands. Annie had no idea why she felt cold when he removed his hands from hers. She wondered what it would be like to have Eric's arms wrapped around her.

“How is work?” He asked, trying to make a conversation as a female waiter served them food and drinks.

“Work is fine and I try not to stress myself.” She said, accessing the food, the waitress served.

Eric nodded, thankful that she was mindful of her health.

“How did you know these are my favourite?” She asked referring to the food on the table.

Eric grinned. “Let’s just say I did my homework well. Eat up, You don’t want our baby to starve. Do you?” He winked at her.

“Or should I feed you?” He offered, earning a blush from Annie.

“No thanks. I’ll manage.” She replied then dug into her delicious food.

They were halfway through with their meal when Eric decided to make small conversations.

“I waited till 11 pm yesterday hoping you would upload a new video.” He said after which he took a sip of his red wine. Then folded his arms and waited for Annie’s reply.

“What do you mean?” She asked confused as she placed a napkin on the table.

“I was waiting for a video update but you didn’t put up one.” That was when it hit Annie.

Her heart skipped a bit. “You watch my YouTube videos?”

Eric smiled “I do.”

Annie couldn’t believe it. She was sure as hell that Eric was a very busy person who she believes has more important things to do than to sit and watch all her videos.

Chapter 19

“Are you serious?” She asked unbelievably and he nodded in affirmation. A smile still plastered on his face.

“Did you??? Oh my God!” She groaned and hid her face in her palm as she remembered talking about him on a few occasions on her channel. No wonder he knew the address of her workplace and her favourite food.

“Did I do what???” He smirked, knowing what she was talking about.

Annie blushed in embarrassment.

“So I guess you’ve always wanted to meet me and I’m glad destiny brought us together,” he said with a warm smile. Annie knew her face was as red as a tomato which was why she avoided looking him in the eye.

“I love all the content you put up on your channel. I’m one of your diehard fans.” He commended.

“Thank you.” She whispered, not knowing what else to say. Her cheeks were still red from blushing.

“So how have you been?” He asked, his voice showing concern. “Any morning sickness?” He was worried about her. He had witnessed his mom being pregnant with three children so he knew how much mothers had to endure.

“Fine and so is the baby. So far I haven’t experienced any morning sickness.”

“I don’t know how you’ll feel about this Annie but I wanted to talk to you about it first.”

Annie nodded, encouraging him to continue.

“No one except my best friend knows about you and the baby. I want to tell my parents and siblings about you and our baby. I wanted to know if you are okay with me telling them.”

Annie’s eyes were glued to him as he spoke. She could not help but admire the handsome man seated in front of her. She was happy he cared about her opinion.

“It’s fine Eric. You can tell them. I think they have a right to know.”

“They will want to meet you.” He added.

“It’s fine. I’ll show up when they do.” She replied with a small smile. The thought of facing Eric’s family scared her but she had no choice but to give in when the time came. If she was in their shoes, she would also want to meet who was carrying Eric’s child.

He placed his beautifully manicured hand over her right hand that was on the table. “Now that I have you and our baby, the media will surely be around you. They’ll want to know what’s going on between us.” He said and Annie went mute as she looked down at his hand which was shielding hers.

She had not thought about the fact that the press would be running after her and who knows, She and Eric’s picture might be all over the newspapers and magazine tomorrow morning.

“I promise you, no pictures of us tonight will be in front of any magazine whatsoever.” He assured and she felt relieved.

Annie has not updated her mom and stepdad about the insemination being successful. Neither has she told her siblings who the father of her baby was. Only Ella knows everything for now.

“You need not worry about the media harassing you. I’ll take care of that. But I want you to know that we’ll eventually have to talk to the media about us and our baby. But that will be when you’re ready and we’ll only give them minimal information.” She nodded slowly, knowing she had no choice. This is what happens when you’re attached to someone like Eric.

Annie took a sip of her juice to calm her nerves after which she changed the subject.

“My first doctor’s appointment is on Tuesday. Will you be able to come with me?” She asked hopefully. She thought she could do it alone. But thinking about it now, some support from Eric wouldn’t be a bad idea.

"It's okay if you can't make it. I'll understand. Since he or she is still very young, we might not be able to know much. It will just be a general check-up to see how the baby and I are fairing." She added, not wanting it to seem like she was imposing anything on him.

“I’ll be there. What time? “He asked with a smile. His voice filled with promise and eagerness.

She answered. “9:45, in the morning.”

“I will pick you up and we’ll go together.”

“I don’t think that will be necessary. We can meet at the hospital.” She reasoned.

“I want to, please allow me.” He pleaded and she had no choice but to give in.

“I’m still surprised we went to the same high school because I never noticed you,” Eric said amused.

“Yes. Elaina and I used to be in the same class in high school. She was friendly but we were never close.”

“How I wish I knew you then.” He said and Annie chuckled. She was thankful He didn’t know her then. Eric was a senior when she transferred to the school. She was always admiring him

secretly. Then she was shy and reserved and was sure as hell that Eric would never be attracted to her.

“I tried talking to you but luck wasn’t on my side. You were always surrounded by your friends and secret admirers.”

“Not my fault.” He smirked. “They couldn’t help it. That’s what I have to endure for being so handsome.”

Annie rolled her eyes.

He chuckled.

Chapter 20

They talked some more. Eric told her about his family, about his work and his close friends. Annie also told him about her family and work too.

“I think we should get going. My flight is in two hours.”

“I hope you've packed everything you need?”

“Yes. I just need to get my younger sister and we’ll be on our way.”

Annie watched as Eric signalled for the waiter to come over. The middle-aged waiter came with the bill. Eric took a look at it and removed one of his cards from the wallet and gave the waiter. Soon the waiter passed the POS to him to enter his pin which he did with his left hand. Annie smiled as she remembered he was left-handed.

Will their baby be left-handed too?

The transaction went through, the waiter gave Eric a receipt which he accepted and squeezed into his jacket pocket. Then he handed him his card which he returned to his wallet.

“Let’s go, dear.” He went over to where Annie was seated and gave her a hand. Before Annie could reach for her handbag, he carried it.

“You don’t have to worry about that.” She mumbled.

“I know but I want to so please allow me.” He pleaded.

“Besides, you’re pregnant and you need to avoid lifting heavy things.” He whispered. Annie shivered as his breath fanned her neck.

With his right hand holding her bag and his left hand on her lower back, they walked out of the restaurant into Eric’s expensive car.

He helped her into the front passenger seat before going over to the driver’s seat. He got settled, then started the car. Annie gave him her home address and he drove towards her place.

The drive was silent until Eric’s phone rang. He put his phone against his ear, supporting it with his right hand while his left hand was on the steering wheel.

“Yes, Laura.” He said to the other side.

“Where are you, Eric? I’m all set. Our flight is in less than an hour and thirty minutes. Or have you changed your mind?” Laura said at a go. He could tell she was worried.

“I’m on my way, cupcake.”

“Okay. Please hurry.” She said and hung up.

“Your sister?” Annie asked.

“Yes. She’s worried I’ve not come to pick her up. She doesn’t want us to miss our flight.”

“Oh, I thought you were going with your private jet.”

“No. We decided not to. I booked a first-class ticket instead. That way, we will enjoy our trip better.” He said and she nodded.

Soon enough they arrived in front of Annie’s house. Eric pulled up in her driveway and parked behind a car which he assumed was for Annie. He got down and went to open the door for her. She told him ‘Thank you.’ and he walked her to her doorstep with her hand intertwined with his.

Annie felt butterflies in her stomach all through. It was unbelievable; she never thought she would for once come across Eric and most, importantly carry his child.

Eric made Annie face him by placing his hand on her shoulder. He had a small smile on his face. "You still haven't told me how much you adore me."

Annie smiled shyly. "I didn't think you would remember that."

"Oh, I do. I still remember every damn thing you said about me in that video."

Annie blushed. "Well, you watched the video so it's self-explanatory. You already know how much I've always adored you so I need not say anything anymore. I remember talking about being up to date with everything related to you but I promise you that I'm not a creep or a stalker."

"You just love knowing all that was going on with me?" Eric asked, loving the conversation.

Annie shrugged. "I've always been a fan so!"

Eric nodded with a small smile on his face. "I'm honoured and never for once do I feel like you're a stalker or a creep. I love your personality."

Annie's heart skipped a beat upon his last statement. She hoped her neighbours were not watching them, if not, they would not let her be the next day as they would keep on teasing her.

"Thanks for seeing me tonight. I have one more request tho."

She nodded, encouraging him to say whatever he wanted to.

"I would like to say Hi to our baby. It’s okay if you don’t want to. I mean, I know it’s still tiny but it’s alright if you’re not fine with it.” He said shyly and she smiled. All her life, she had seen him so confident. The way he talked in high school and even on TV when he was interviewed and now he was stammering before her. Does she have that effect on him?

“Sure, you can.” She replied with a smile.

Eric let out a sigh of relief after which he moved closer to her and slowly zipped down her jacket.

Annie watched him as he got down on one knee and placed his hand on her belly. Annie's heart melted the way he looked at her flat belly with so much love and adoration in his eyes. There was no bump yet but she was sure as hell that this baby meant so much to him and he will love him or her beyond words.

He wrapped his arms possessively around her waist and gently rested his head against her belly. Annie could not help but smile. She ran her fingers through Eric's hair as he had his moment with their little one.

After a while, he pulled away, raised her shirt a bit and placed a kiss on her belly, the lower abdomen area.

Eric rose to his feet, leaned against her forehead and wrapped his arms possessively around her waist. “Promise me you will take care of yourself and our baby. Please promise me that both of you will be fine.”

“I pro..mise.” She replied nervously, finding it hard to breathe due to his contact with her body which was making her feel what she never felt with anyone.

“I wish you and our baby will agree to live with me.” He whispered, tucking some stray strands of hair behind her ear. “I want to take care of you two and be there for you in every step of the way.”

He raised her chin with his finger “Feel free to call me if you need anything and I’ll be at your service. Please let me know if you notice anything unusual.” He said with pleading eyes. She nodded.

Annie watched him as he put his hand into his pocket and brought out his wallet. He searched through his cards and finally picked the black one and handed it to her.

“No, You don’t have to.” She stopped him.

“I want to. Please accept it.” He pleaded.

“No, I can’t.” She replied, shaking her head.

“Please, Annie.” He urged. She sighed, accepting the card reluctantly.

“There’s no limit Annie. You’re free to buy anything you want.” He instructed. she nodded, putting the credit card in her purse.

“I should be on my way. I’ll make sure I call regularly and of course, we will see when I come back.”

“Have a safe trip.” She whispered.

Eric smiled. He pulled her into a hug, then placed a long kiss on her forehead.

Chapter 21

"So what do you think?" Eric smiled as he watched out for his youngest sister's reaction.

He just finished giving her a tour of the private suite they will be staying for the weekend.

"I love it, Eric. Thank you!" She whispered, trying to hold back tears.

She walked towards him and hugged him. "Thank you."

The private suite Eric rented was a two-bedroom expensive suit with an amazing view of the Eiffel tower right in front of it.

After giving Laura a tour of the apartment, he took her to her room and she was surprised at what she saw. She saw three cakes on the bed with another box of cupcakes and four wrapped gifts with some decorations on the wall saying 'Happy Birthday Laura.'

Eric planned ahead with the hotel manager to get the surprise done.

"You're welcome. So does that mean I'm forgiven? You're no longer mad at me?" He asked hopefully.

She has been giving him cold treatment since he arrived at his parents' mansion to pick her up. She refused to talk to him on their way to the airport and she ignored him on the flight.

"I'm sorry for acting childish, Eric. I was scared you wouldn't show up. Can you forgive me too?" She apologized sincerely, looking at him with her puppy dog eyes.

"It's fine dear."

"I don't think I'll be able to finish all of these." She pointed to the cakes on her bed.

Eric chuckled. "They're all yours. Figure out what to do with them."

"I'll think of something." She murmured as she approached the bed, sat on it and began to unwrap the gifts.

There were three boxes. All squared shaped with the same colour of wrapping papers but in different sizes. Laura decided to start with the biggest box which contained a pair of red heels. She smiled, she was a fan of heels; she could wear them all day. Her mom, Evelyn often begs her to take it easy on heels so she won't break her ankle. But Laura was used to them already.

Laura was about to place the heels back in the box when she saw a purse in it. It was a matching red purse for the heels.

She opened the second box and came across a camera. It was one of the latest brands and her name 'Laura.' was engraved on it.

The last box contained a diamond earring and her favourite chocolate.

“Thanks for spoiling me.” She smiled as she hugged her elder brother, then took a seat beside him.

“You’re welcome. Keep on being a good girl."

“I’m going to miss you when you get married.” Laura declared out of the blue.

“What do you mean?” He asked, amused.

“You’re so caring. Whoever becomes your wife will be the luckiest person in the world. Also, when you get married, you’ll have more responsibilities and you’ll hardly have time to hang out with me.”

“No matter what, I’ll always make time for you.” He promised. His parents taught him how to care for and protect his younger siblings.

“Why don’t you go take a shower and go to bed? It’s past midnight. We have a long day tomorrow.”

“Okay. But I don't think I'm ready to sleep so I might come to your room to hang out before I go to bed.

“No problem. You can come over as soon as you’re done. I’ll go take a shower too.”

Laura took a very quick shower, dried her hair and changed into her pyjamas, a plain purple shirt with a ‘sweet dreams’ design on it with matching pants.

She reached for her phone and airpods from her bag then made her way to her elder brother’s room.

Chapter 22

After Eric told her to come in, She slowly opened the door and shut it behind her. He was seated on the left side of the bed with his sweat pants on and a plain dark shirt which did not fail to display his muscle.

Eric's room was bigger than Laura's room.

"So, I was thinking of joining the hostel once school resumes." She said as she walked over to Eric's bed, raised the duvet and took a seat on the right side of the bed.

"Are you sure about that?" Eric asked with his eyebrow raised.

Apart from Laura's school being a mixed school, it had both day and boarding facilities. She never liked being away from home which was why she never joined the hostel and now Eric was surprised to hear her say otherwise.

"I'm sure Eric. Being in the hostel is fun; Besides I'm a big girl now." She said proudly. "Meaning I can take very good care of myself."

"Okay. You have my support." He said and she smiled. Eric was okay with it and now it remained her parents' approval.

As Eric busied himself with some work on his laptop, Laura also got busy, typing on her phone and listening to some music.

Eric shut down his laptop and placed it on the nightstand after which he picked up his phone and rested his head against the headboard.

He scrolled through his pictures and his eyes met a very attractive one, Annie's picture. He took it when they were at the restaurant. In the picture, Annie looked away from him, with a small smile on her face, trying to hide her blush.

No doubt he was into her already.

He smiled as he decided to send her a text.

"Hi Gorgeous, hope you're good? We arrived safe, about two hours ago. I just wanted to let you know. Take care." Eric Ivan James.

She replied seconds after he sent the message. He was surprised that she was still awake. It was a few minutes past 1 am in Paris and a few minutes past 4 am back home.

"Good to hear! Your little one and I are doing okay. Have fun in Paris, my regards to the birthday girl." Annie

He smiled as he read the text with his inner voice. He replied almost immediately.

“I thought you would be asleep already. Thanks for the reply. Your regards to the birthday girl? Should I tell her about us?” Eric.

"I’m working on a new project that’s why I’m still awake. Maybe you should tell your sister about us. She’ll eventually know right?" Annie.

“I’ll try. I may just tell her about you but keep your name anonymous until you’re ready to meet my family.” Eric

“Concerning the project you’re working on, I have no doubt you’ll do great in it.” Eric.

“Okay and thanks for the encouragement. I think I’m going to bed now. I feel tired already.” Annie.

“Sweet dreams!” Eric Ivan James.

Chapter 23

“Is there anything you’d like to share?” Laura asked carefully.

“What do you mean?” He asked, confused.

“I’ve been watching you for two minutes, the way you were smiling and texting. She must be special right?” She asked as she looked at Eric in the eye. “Your smile was so real and there was this look in your eyes. Something like adoration, compassion or should I say, love?” She asked with her eyebrow raised. She had never seen her brother that way in all the years she had known him.

Eric sighed. He knew there was no way he could escape telling Laura about Annie.

“Her name is Annie, She’s very special to me and I like her so much.”

“I knew it!” Laura smirked. “She has you whipped.” She added.

“So when can I meet her?” She asked impatiently.

He replied with a smile “Very soon!”

Eric was tired of keeping it a secret so he decided to break the news to Laura.

“There’s more Laura.” He said, looking into her eyes. “Annie and I are expecting a baby.” He whispered and Laura’s eyes went wide.

It didn’t take long before a big smile found its way to her face. “For real?” She asked excitedly and he nodded.

Laura flung her arms around her elder brother, giving him a bone-crushing hug. “Congratulations Eric. I’m so happy for you!” She said and he chuckled.

She released him from the hug and took a seat beside him. “I can’t keep calm. This is amazing; I’m going to be an aunt. OMG!, best present ever.” She said in a rush which made Eric chuckle.

“Mom and Dad will be so happy! Damn mommy will go crazy.” She said to herself then took a look at Eric and asked.“Mom doesn’t know about this right?”

“No, she doesn’t. Neither does she know about Annie. You’re the first person I’m telling this to but I plan to break the news to the rest when we return.”

Laura nodded to her brother’s reply. She just knew that their mom was unaware because if she was aware, one would see it in her.

Laura whispered. “Mom will be so happy.”

Eric smiled. “I know.”

Only Eric's parents and best friend, Dylan knew about Eric's condition, him having a low sperm count and therefore unable to conceive. His siblings had no idea. Evelyn, his mom had secretly fasted and prayed concerning her son's condition. No doubt God has finally heard her humble cry. She had been longing for a grandchild for years now.

"And I was beginning to think you were gay." Laura frowned and Eric chuckled. 'If only she knew what the problem was.'

"Why do you say so?" He asked, surprised, folding his arms.

"Tons of ladies are always throwing themselves at you and you don't even seem to notice them. I'm sure they'll give anything in this world to be your wife or the mother of your child at least."

"Trust me, I do notice them but none of them had me whipped like Annie."

"I see." She whispered.

"You are amazing Eric and I'm sure you will be the best dad ever."

"I hope so, cupcake. I think it's time you retire to your room. We have to be up in a few hours."

Chapter 24

“Wake up sleepy head.” Annie heard a loud voice say from her sleep.

“Go away.” She mumbled as she snuggled closer to the pillow.

“Annnnnieeeee, wake up.” The voice said again.

“Give me twenty minutes, Ella.” She mumbled with her eyes closed.

“No way, honey. You have to wake up now.” She placed a kiss on Annie’s cheek after which she removed the duvet from her body.

Annie groaned as she slowly opened her eyes.

“Good morning.” She greeted her best friend.

“Hi, love.” Ella hugged her.

“What time is it?” Annie asked, pulling away from the hug.

“10:23 which is very strange since you’re an early riser.”

“It’s Saturday, Ella, don’t blame me, besides I slept very late. When did you arrive?” She asked, using the back of her palm to rub her eyes.

“Few minutes past eight, I checked up on you, you were sleeping so peacefully so I decided to give you more time to rest.”

“I was hoping to see Claire and Jayden. I thought they would be here.” Ella said disappointed.

“They spent the night at mom’s place. They’ll be back this evening.”

“So how was your date with Eric?” Ella smiled.

“It wasn’t a date, Ella.” Annie blushed.

“Whatever, you’re going to tell me what you guys talked about. But first, go and clean up and I’ll bring breakfast for you.”

As soon as Ella exited Annie’s room, She lazily got down from her bed, arranged it a little and then proceeded to her bathroom to clean up.

Coming out of the bathroom all cleaned up, She saw Ella seated on her bed.

Chapter 25

"I don't think I'll be able to finish that" She pointed to the tray of food on her nightstand.

"You should eat well Annie. You know you're eating for two now." Ella persuaded.

"Thanks for the food." She said sincerely, referring to the items on the tray. Bread, eggs, bacon, sausage and a glass of orange juice.

Ella smiled. "You're welcome."

"But that doesn't mean I'm going to finish everything." She chuckled. "You care for some?"

"No, I've had mine, it's all yours. Enjoy."

"So what did you guys talk about?" Ella asked Annie when She was halfway through her meal.

"Nothing much," Annie mumbled and Ella glared at her.

"Okay. First of all, I got there twenty-five minutes late; I thought he was going to be angry at me but he wasn't."

"So what was the first thing you did when you saw him?" Ella asked with dreamy eyes.

"I don't even know how to describe how I felt. But I was nervous, I kept drooling over him. He's so handsome."

"Just imagine how beautiful your baby will be," Ella smiled as Annie gulped down half of her juice.

"You will not believe he's one of my subscribers on YouTube. He said he had watched all my videos. He also asked me why I didn't upload a video the day before."

Ella's eyes went wide. "Wow, I'm now convinced he's totally into you."

"It's just so surprising. As busy as he is, he made time to watch all my videos. There were times I did crazy videos, times where I was only in a bikini. I can't believe he saw all of that." She groaned and Ella laughed out loud.

"He hasn't told his parents about me but I'm sure he will tell them eventually so I should be prepared to meet them anytime soon."

"You know now that you're associated with him, the press will be all over you." Ella reminded.

"Yes, Eric and I discussed that. I have no choice, right? I pray I survive all of it."

"He made me warm up to him. We made conversations; it was fun spending the night with him. I had no regrets."

“So you guys didn’t kiss??” Ella teased.

“It was just a friendly dinner ma'am” She reminded.

Of course, Annie left out the part of how attracted she was to him. How she felt sparks fly through her whenever his skin came in contact with hers.

It was not as if she didn't trust Ella enough to tell her. She just does not want to say it out because her feelings for Eric may be one-sided. She doesn’t know if he felt the same way about her even though he asked for a chance to let him in, in her life. A part of her felt he was doing all of that for the baby’s sake.

“So what is your conclusion about Eric? Even if you keep saying otherwise, I know you like him.”

“Nothing serious for now, Ella, Let’s just see how things go.”

“Enough about me, how was your night with Dylan?” Annie smirked as she placed the tray on the nightstand to her left. There was some leftover on her plate.

Ella’s face went red as she looked shyly at Annie. She spent most of her Fridays at Annie’s house but yesterday she spent the night with Dylan.

“Fine, romantic, memorable.” She smiled.

“So did you guys get intimate?” Annie asked excitedly.

“Annnnnn!” Ella groaned.

“Don’t blame me. I’m just curious.” She smiled.

“No, we didn’t Miss. We spent the night getting to know each other.” Annie shook her head in disbelief at Ella’s reply. She knew her best friend was hiding something.

“Fine. We talked about you and Eric. Dylan also made me promise to take very good care of you. He wants to meet you too.” She placed her right hand on Annie’s own.

True, Dylan and Ella spoke about Annie and Eric. Dylan told her about how Eric had fallen in love with her best friend even before he met her. He also told Ella how shy Eric could be when it comes to loving someone and how protective he could be at the same time.

Ella and Dylan ended the conversation by promising to do everything in their power to make sure Annie and Eric end up together. Not only as parents to their child but something more than that.

Chapter 26

Annie and Ella spent the day cleaning the apartment after which they lazily crashed on the carpet in the living room, going over Annie's new project idea on her laptop.

They were interrupted when the doorbell rang.

"That must be Claire and Jayden" Annie responded to Ella's questioning eyes. Before she could stand up to go open the door, Ella beat her to it.

"Ella!" Claire hugged her.

She chuckled. "Hello, cupcake."

"I'm so happy to see you. I've got a lot of gists for you"

"Really?" She asked and Claire nodded.

"Then I can't wait to hear them." She replied.

"Don't I deserve a hug too?" Annie asked as she walked towards her best friend and younger sister.

"Hi, Sis." She greeted and hugged her the same way she hugged Ella.

"I missed you." Annie said then kissed her forehead."Where's Jayden?" She asked.

"He's helping mom offload the bags in the car." She answered as she walked towards the sofa and placed her backpack on it.

"Just look at how my baby is glowing wonderfully." Angela, Annie's mom praised as she walked in with her hands full of shopping bags.

Annie groaned as she tried to hide the blush on her face. Her mom's reaction was priceless when she told her she was pregnant and her mom was even thrilled when Annie called her yesterday telling her how Eric wants to be in her life and the baby's life.

The forty-six-year-old woman was very happy and grateful to God. She was already dreading the idea that her daughter was going to raise her child alone but now that Eric was in the picture, she was calm.

She placed the shopping bags on the couch, then hugged her daughter and Ella.

"How are you girls doing?" She asked.

"We are fine," Annie replied.

"How's our lover boy, Your Boss?" She directed to Ella which made her groan.

“I see you no longer have any interest in me.” A sad voice said from the entrance.

They looked towards the direction and found Jayden standing there with his backpack and a grocery shopping bag.

“Don’t be silly. You know you’ll forever be the love of my life.” She teased and everyone chuckled.

Jayden playfully rolled his eyes and shut the door behind him. He proceeded to the kitchen, kept the groceries on the counter and returned to the living room.

“So what’s in there?” Annie asked, pointing to the shopping bags her mom placed on the couch earlier on.

“Oh! These are for my grandbaby.” She went towards the shopping bag to reveal all that was in there.

“Mom!” Annie groaned as she plopped down on a nearby chair.

The fact that everyone was going the extra mile was starting to make her go crazy; Eric was being all protective, sending her a text every six hours to check up on her. He even insisted she collected his card which by the way she hadn’t spent any cent from.

Her best friend was also behaving like a Mother hen. She hardly allowed Annie to take part in the cleaning this morning as she kept on emphasizing that stress was not good for the baby.

And now her mother not only bought groceries for her but also baby items.

Chapter 27

“But mom it’s still early for all of these.” She said with a sad smile. Even though Annie was kind of going crazy, one thing she has learnt from life was to be thankful for the things she had so she was happy for the love and care the people around her were showing to her.

“Then you should thank me,” Jayden said, taking a seat beside Ella. “Mom wanted to buy more stuff. I kind of stopped her.” he completed.

“Yeah, Jaden’s right,” Claire confirmed, before turning her attention back to her phone.

“It isn’t too early sweetheart.” Angela smiled as she displayed the items she bought. “I made sure all the clothes are unisex and when we find out the baby’s gender I’ll start shopping proper.”

Annie shook her head in disbelief as she took a look at all the items her mom bought. In addition to the baby clothes, there were pacifiers of different colours, bibs, diapers, toys, baby spoons, plates, Sippy cup, three milk bottles and some unisex shoes.

“Something is missing,” Angela said and everyone turned to look at her. She reached for her car key in her handbag which Jayden handed to her earlier and excused herself. She was back in two minutes with the most beautiful stroller Annie had ever seen.

“Wow!” Ella whispered.

It was a grey coloured stroller which comes with a matching car seat and a matching baby bag which Angela had on her left hand and arm respectively.

Annie collected the car seat and baby bag, placed them on the floor and pulled her mom into a hug. “Thank you mom” She whispered, trying to hold back her tears. She hadn’t even thought about when she was going to buy all the stuff her baby would need.

“You’re welcome, my baby!” She smiled “I do not doubt that you’ll be an amazing mom.” She assured. Annie smiled back at her.

Annie crouched towards the stroller and inspected it. It was indeed very beautiful. “Why do I have a feeling this stroller can fit two babies?” Annie questioned her mom because of how big and modern the stroller was.

Her mom smiled.

“Mom, you know I’m going to have only one baby, right?” She chuckled.

“We don’t know for sure, my dear.” Angela winked. “But there’s a solution for whatever happens. Annie’s mom took a few steps towards the stroller and showed Annie the extra compartment if she wanted to use the pram for two babies. She also showed Annie how she could detach the other compartment if it was being used for one baby. Annie was in awe. She

was sure as hell it was very expensive so she made a mental note to ask her mom how much it costs and maybe even refund it with Eric's credit card. That way he won't complain that she wasn't using his card.

"I hope you have space in this house to keep all of these," Ella said.

"I'm sure Mr Right who happens to be the baby's father will take care of that." Angela teased and Annie groaned, trying to hide her blush at the same time.

Truthfully Annie hadn't thought about it. She doesn't know what her mom meant by her baby daddy being Mr right. Even though she loved the idea, she was not certain he feels the same way about her.

Nevertheless, her baby will stay with her and Eric is free to come to visit him or her at any time. And perhaps when the baby is a bit older, he will be going for sleepovers at Eric's place.

"Don't worry I have space in my room." There was a space in her walk-in closet which she thinks should fit all that her mom bought. She turned to her mom and pleaded. "Mom, please don't buy anything again, at least for now."

"I'm not promising anything, my love but I'll try," Angela said truthfully. She did not plan to buy all that she bought today, She was at the mall with Jayden and Claire shopping for them for their school supplies when she came across the baby store and she couldn't help but get in there and buy some things for her growing grandchild. It was as if she was the most excited about the baby.

"So, when can we meet the baby's Father? I'd like to hang out with him." Claire asked.

"Yes, me too." Jayden chipped in.

"Arggggghhhh, trust me, you guys know him" Ella spoke.

"We do?" They chorused as they looked at Annie who refused to tell them who the father of her baby was.

Chapter 28

“I can tell you enjoyed yourself.” Evelyn directed her question to her last born who was seated beside her husband. Laura's head was on her Dad's shoulder.

“Yes, mom. This is like the best birthday I’ve ever had.” She grinned.

“I remember you saying the same thing last year.” Her mom mocked, referring to her thirteenth birthday last year where they threw a huge party for her.

“I said that?” Laura frowned and her mom nodded. “Well, that means it only gets better.” She concluded with a shy smile.

“Don’t break my husband’s shoulder, Laura. You can now go to your room and clean up.” Evelyn playfully glared at her daughter who was suddenly becoming possessive of her husband. Eric and his father, Austin burst into laughter.

“Mom.” She groaned “Your husband is not complaining.”

“But I am.” She shrugged.

“Anyway your present is in your room, on your bed to be precise. It’s from your Dad and me. We hope you love it. Happy belated Birthday, Dear.”

A huge smile found its way to Laura’s face. She left her Dad's embrace to hug her mom. She loved her mom so much. Evelyn was witty, kind, loving, her best friend, cheerleader and partner in crime; to Laura her mom was everything. Laura remembered the first time she saw her period. She cried because she wasn’t prepared for it. She saw her period at the age of nine when most of her friends were still far from puberty so she felt odd. But her mom was there to console her, motivate her and let her know there was nothing she had to be embarrassed about. Her Mom made her regain her lost confidence.

She smiled as she remembered her mom’s lecture on sex and abstinence. It was still the funniest conversation she and her mom ever had.

“Thanks, mom. I love you.” She whispered in her mom’s ear.

“Anything for you, my love.”

She pulled away from the hug and went to hug her daddy too, thanking him for the gift.

“I think I’ll go upstairs to settle down so y’all can catch up.” She knew her brother wanted to tell his parents about Annie and the baby. She had no doubt they will be overjoyed when Eric spills the beans.

Before Laura left for her room She hugged Eric, thanking him for the special birthday treat to Paris.

“You must be very tired, Son.” Evelyn directed at Eric who was seated opposite Her and her husband.

“Kind of. I’ll soon take my leave but I need to discuss something with you.” He replied nervously.

He and Laura arrived about 20minutes ago. At exactly 8:41 pm. Austin sent his driver to pick them up from the airport.

“Is anything the matter?” Evelyn asked with a worried voice.

“Do you want to discuss here or we should go to my study?” Austin offered.

“Here is fine.” He replied to his dad, thinking of a way to start the conversation.

They were seated in one of the living rooms downstairs. A medium-sized room painted in its finest colours and decorated with expensive furniture.

“Mom, Dad,” Eric started, looking into his parents’ eyes. “You will be grandparents in a couple of months.”

Chapter 29

A minute went by and no one said anything. His parents were quiet and Eric was giving them time to process everything.

Evelyn's heart was beating twice faster. She never expected this news. Eric had told her on two occasions that if there was no improvement in his condition, he would gladly adopt a baby. Not that Evelyn was not happy about her Son adopting, she would prefer her son to have his flesh and blood just like she conceived him and his three sisters.

Eric sighed, he knew his parents were thinking that he adopted a child. Not that he could blame them as he never gave them the news concerning the result of his last check-up with Doctor Myers.

"Not by adoption; this child is my flesh and blood." As soon as this statement left Eric's mouth, Evelyn burst into tears. She covered her face in her palm and cried. All tears of Joy. Austin smiled as he mouthed congratulations to his son after which he pulled his wife closer to him. Austin tried to keep his tears at bay as he consoled his wife. He knew how much she wanted a grandchild. He knew how much she fasted and prayed for Eric and God finally heard her cry.

"T...hankkk you God.. I'm so gra...teful." She whispered as she sobbed.

Eric smiled. He stood up from where he was seated and joined his mother. He wiped her tears with his thumb, embraced her into a hug and whispered soothing words in her ear.

"It's okay mom." He whispered as his mom cried harder in his chest.

Austin made his way to the kitchen and came back with a glass of water and a box of tissue.

Eric collected the glass cup from his father and made his mom drink some water after which he placed the cup on a small table, then Austin handed her the tissue to wipe her face.

After some time, Evelyn calmed down.

"How?" She asked, her voice still shaking.

"The last test confirmed it but not directly. Honestly, after you persuaded me to get the results I didn't bother and a few days later I got a call from Doctor Myers requesting to see me. I went and he told me the test results via my blood and urine sample was positive which means my sperm count had increased to a point where I'm able to have my child. The blood and urine test was 70% the result, to make it 100%, my sperm sample was the last test that was to determine. But there was a mistake in the laboratory as my semen was used for insemination instead."

Austin got angry, wondering how a high-class private hospital will make such a mistake. Unfortunately, He cannot sue Dr Myers because they've both come a long way.

Evelyn, on the other hand, was unbothered on how the child came about. She just wanted to know if her grandbaby was fine and growing well.

“It was a tough time for me mom,” Eric said and his mom intertwined her right hand with his.

“Doctor Myers apologized. He told me the lady who got inseminated was fit to carry my baby. He said he was going to follow up on Annie if she gets pregnant because the whole thing hardly works at first instance but for the meantime, I had to give a sample of my sperm again to doctor Myers to do the final clarification which turned positive.”

“I managed to get little details about Annie from Doctor Myers and I searched for information about her which I got because she had a YouTube channel. I know it sounds weird but I took a liking to her watching her first video. It was also great to know that she was single."

“Two weeks later, I got a call from Doctor Myers who said it turned out positive and Annie was pregnant. I was so happy that I wanted the world to know about it.” He said with a sad smile.

“But Myers had to talk to her first about the situation, then I got in touch with her later. We communicated via text message until she finally agreed to see me on Friday before I left for Paris.”

“Sorry I kept the news away from you. I just wanted to talk to Annie first and made sure we were cool.” He directed to his parents and they nodded in understanding.

“How are they?” Evelyn asked with a smile, referring to Annie and the Baby, excitement evident in her voice.

“Annie is fine, the baby is fine too. It’s still very tiny and you can hardly tell she’s pregnant. She's three weeks along and we will be going for her first check-up tomorrow. To make sure both mother and baby are fine.

“Congratulations my child, I’m so happy for you.” Evelyn wrapped her arms around her son.

“Finally we get to see a mini-you, running around the house.” Austin directed at his son who smiled back at him.

“I’m so happy too.” He said to his parents.

Eric was genuinely happy he has Annie and his baby. The beautiful woman who he was starting to fall for, he knew he had to prove to her that he loves her not just because she was the mother of his baby but because she did to him what no other woman had succeeded in doing.

“I’m hoping my grandchild will spend most of his or her holiday here with us.” She said excitedly as she made a mental note to order all the baby supplies she has had in her shopping cart for a very long time.

“When will you introduce us to Annie? I want to meet her.” Evelyn asked.

“I’ll discuss it with her mom and we will come for a visit if she’s free this weekend.” He said and she nodded in understanding, giving all glory to God for answered prayers. She couldn’t wait to hold her grandchild in her arms and spoil him or her.

Chapter 30

Annie found it difficult to fall asleep after reading the romantic text Eric sent her which made her stomach flip. He knew how to make a woman feel special.

She woke up feeling nauseous, left her bed for the bathroom, buried her face in the toilet and puked in it. A tear rolled down her cheeks as she puked the more.

She has heard a lot about morning sickness but she never knew it could be this bad.

Annie thought of calling for help because not only was she in pain, she was also scared, scared of what might happen to her baby.

But it was still too early to call for help. Ella had gone back to her apartment, her younger siblings; the twins went with Ella to spend some time with her before they left for boarding school next week. She thought of calling Eric but she did not want to disturb him as it was midnight; three minutes past 3 am.

Thankfully, the pain subsided but she still felt weak. She sat on the bathroom floor for a few more minutes to regain her lost energy after which she cleaned up.

Annie went back to bed and covered herself with the duvet. It took her a while to fall asleep but she eventually did around twelve minutes past four.

Annie woke up a few hours later feeling tired and hungry as if she skipped dinner the previous night. She reached for her phone on the nightstand to check what the time was. Luckily for her, it was 8.08 am. She was glad she still had time until her doctor's appointment at 9:45. Eric should be at her place by 9:20.

She smiled as she thought of him and suddenly got excited about seeing him today. She was grateful he agreed to come with her to her doctor's appointment.

Though, when the idea of opting for insemination came to her, she thought she could do it alone but now she's happy she was not alone in this journey and she would always have Eric to lean on.

After saying her morning prayers, She went downstairs to find something to eat.

On her way to the kitchen, She stopped by the window in her living room to see how the weather was. Something she does every morning. Fortunately, the day was bright and she predicted it would be sunny too.

Something else caught Annie's attention. There was a car parked in her driveway. Not just any car but a very expensive one. It was parked where Ella usually parked her car whenever she visited. She concluded it was probably one of her neighbours who bought a new car.

She shrugged off the thoughts and continued her journey to the kitchen. Annie opened the fridge, took out all the ingredients for breakfast and reached for the pan in one of the cupboards. As she was about to light the gas, the sound of her doorbell came through.

She rushed to open it, thinking it was Doris, her neighbour, the loving 52-year-old who brought her freshly baked cookies whenever she had excess.

“Wh....what are...you doing here?” She asked nervously as soon as she came face to face with Eric. Her mouth went dry when she took in his appearance. He looked more handsome than the last time she saw him. He was putting on his perfectly tailored suit and his hair was well styled. He also smelled so damn good. Annie couldn't believe the Greek god standing before him was her baby daddy.

“Good Morning. We have an appointment with the Doctor, remember?” He distracted her thoughts.

“Sorry.” She facepalmed. “Good morning, I know we have an appointment. I just meant isn’t it too early?” It wasn’t even 8.30 and he was standing in front of her fully dressed. She was expecting him around 9.20.

The truth was that Eric was excited for today. He woke up as early as 5, tried to while away time by going for a run after which he showered and got dressed. He left his house at 6:30 and got to Annie’s place at 7 on the dot. He could have gotten there earlier but he drove at a slower pace. He knew Annie was very much still asleep so he waited in his car, made some calls and replied to his emails. He saw Annie when she peeped through the window so he got down from his car and came to knock on the door. It wouldn’t be a bad idea to see where she lives and most importantly, spend some time with her before they proceeded to the hospital.

He was speechless when he saw Annie. She was glowing beautifully; her hair in a messy bun, her white robe tied loosely around her, She was standing before him barefoot. She never ceased to amaze him.

But he noticed something. Her eyes were dull and puffy.

Chapter 31

“Come in.” She said politely, inviting him into her home.

He entered and she closed the door.

Before she could escape, he pulled her into his arms. He circled his left hand around her waist, cupped her face with his right hand so he could look into her eyes.

“You look dull. Is anything the matter? I know you’ve been crying; are you sick?” He asked, caressing her cheek in the process.

Annie closed her eyes and leaned into his embrace. The heat generating from his body, the smell of his cologne was making her go crazy. The way his touch was making her feel, no one made her feel that way.

He saw how reluctant she was to answer his question so he pressed on.

“Please Annie, You can tell me anything. I’ll always be here to listen to you.” He said with adoration in his eyes.

“I didn’t sleep well; I had terrible morning sickness this midnight, I think that’s what drained me.” She said as she looked into his worried eyes.

“How about now? do you still feel sick?”

“I feel tired and hungry.” She confessed.

“Show me your kitchen. I’ll make breakfast for you while you go take a shower and get ready.”

“Are you sure?” She asked as she wouldn’t like the idea of him burning down her kitchen.

“Trust me on this.” He said with so much confidence.

Even though Eric was the only male child in his family, his mom made sure he knew how to do certain things himself.

She swallowed painfully. “Okay.”

Before she could escape from Eric’s arms, he pulled her closer and placed a long kiss on her forehead.

Annie showed him the kitchen, he saw the laid out ingredients and she explained that she was about making breakfast before she went to answer the door. Then she went upstairs to take a shower.

The first thing Annie did was to arrange her bed and then proceeded to the bathroom to do her morning rituals.

Thinking of what to wear, she searched through tons of clothes in her closet; because she was going for a check-up, she finally decided on blue skinny jeans, white button-up shirt with a pair of red heels with a matching bag.

She got ready, pulled her hair in a ponytail and applied light makeup.

Annie wasn't that skinny; she had the right amount of weight, she was endowed with curves in the right places, she had the right size of butt and boobs and average height. The exact features that made Eric fall deeply for her.

Annie made sure she kept all her essentials inside her bag after which she slipped her feet into her heels, sprayed her body and then exited her bedroom.

Her mouth watered as the aroma of eggs, bacon and sausages filled her apartment. She placed her handbag on the couch and approached Eric who was already setting the table for two.

He had removed his suit jacket and rolled up the sleeves of his shirt.

Eric noticed her presence behind him. He turned around and walked towards her. He couldn't help but notice how beautiful she was.

"You look gorgeous, babe." He whispered which made her blush like crazy. This was the first time he was using this kind of endearment to her. 'Does that mean he likes me? Does that mean he feels the same way about me?' Annie thought as she did a happy dance in her head.

"Can you put your hair down? I like it better that way. Please?"

He asked politely and she nodded to his request.

Before she could untie her hair herself, Eric reached for it and slowly released her hair scrunchie, letting her hair loose free.

He smiled as he stared at her, satisfied with the way she looked.

Eric refused to give back her hair ruffle. Instead, he wore it on his left hand. It was a slender black hair ruffle with silver decorations.

He kissed her cheek and directed her to the dining table. He pulled the chair out for her to sit and he sat beside her.

Annie couldn't wait to devour her breakfast and it was the yummiest she had tasted in a while. Eric also made a glass of freshly squeezed orange juice for her. He made sure she finished everything on her plate.

They finished their breakfast and cleared the table together.

Annie picked up her bag from the couch and they both exited her apartment.

Chapter 32

Eric intertwined his hands with Annie's own and led her to his car.

He opened the front passenger's door for her, she got settled and he made his way to the driver's seat.

They were both quiet during the drive until Eric decided to start a conversation.

"I spoke to my family about you." He took a glance at her then turned his face back to the road.

"How did they take the news?" She asked nervously, hoping they don't see her as a gold digger.

He smiled at her. "Better than I imagined."

"Elaina was screaming for joy when I told her." He said and Annie smiled. She wasn't that close to Elaina in high school but she knew Eric's sister was a good person. Even though she came from a very rich home, she was very humble and treated everyone with respect.

There were times when she would humbly ask Annie to explain some things to her concerning their school work and there were times they were project partners and that made Annie know a little more about the Ivan- James family.

"Like I said she was very happy and she talked about how she couldn't wait to see you. She even asked if you'll be going for your class reunion but I told her I had no idea."

Annie remembered receiving an invitation concerning that but was not sure if she would show up.

"I' don't know if I'll be going for the reunion."

"Okay. Maybe I'll give you her number so you two can catch up."

"Yes, that will be fine." She agreed.

Eric was getting ready for bed the previous night when Elaina called him so he told her the good news. His immediate younger sister was so happy for him, she was also happy for Annie whom she had always admired for her creativity and she was excited because she was already a soon to be aunt.

"My parents are very excited too and they can't wait to meet you."

"Oh, okay." She swallowed painfully, not sure how to react.

"Annie, you don't have to worry about anything. My parents are the best set of people you can ever come across." He assured.

"They were hoping you will be free to see them this weekend."

Annie wanted to postpone like in five weeks or something but 'why postpone the inevitable?' She asked herself.

"This weekend is fine, probably on Saturday evening." She announced and he nodded as he pulled into the hospital's parking lot.

They walked into the hospital side by side, excited to go check on their little one.

From the reception, they were directed to the Doctor's office where they settled down and waited for the doctor.

Eric was excited; He couldn't wait to hear what the Doctor had to say about his little miracle. He knew it was going to take a while before they found out the gender but it was something he looked forward to.

He bought books from Paris; books on what he needed to know about babies which he had started reading.

Unlike Eric, the same couldn't be said about Annie. She was nervous as hell as she hoped and prayed the baby was okay. She will not be able to live with herself if anything happens to him or her.

Eric noticed she was nervous so he took her cold hands in his warm ones. "It will be fine." He assured.

She nodded and rested her head on his shoulder which made him untangle his hand from hers and wrap his arm around her waist instead. She felt better, she felt safer knowing Eric will be there for her.

They stayed like that for a few more minutes until the doctor showed up.

"Sorry I kept you waiting." The Female Doctor apologized with a smile. Her heart melted at the position she found them. She had no doubt the two were so much in love.

"We meet again." Annie smiled at Doctor Madeleine. The one who confirmed she was pregnant. For Doctor Myers to have recommended her, she must be very good at what she does.

She gave both Annie and Eric a handshake before taking a seat behind her desk. She took a file from her drawer, scribbled something on it and diverted her attention to the most adorable parents to be.

Chapter 33

Eric knew Doctor Madeleine was about to ask Annie questions so he placed his hand on hers, as a sense of assurance that everything was going to be fine and he'll always be there for her.

"How are you, Annie?" She asked.

She replied, "Fine I guess."

"Morning Sickness?" The doctor asked.

"It started this morning; It made me weak." She answered truthfully.

Doctor Madeleine smiled. "It's because this is the first time you're experiencing it but I can't assure you it will get better. I'll prescribe some prenatal vitamins which you can supplement with some crackers."

Annie nodded.

"Have you noticed any weird signs in your body? Like any pain?"

"No, I haven't." She replied sincerely.

"Okay then. We will do a check-up in the ultrasound room to see how you and the baby are doing."

Eric could not tell how relieved he was to hear that Annie and the baby were perfectly fine. He was scared that something was going to go wrong, well considering the way the baby was conceived.

Madeleine gave Annie a meal plan, handout and her prescribed vitamins which they bought in the hospital's pharmacy after they left Dr Madeleine's office.

"I'm so happy the baby is okay." Annie breathed a sigh of relief as she leaned against the headrest.

Eric smiled as he stroked her hair. "Same here." He whispered, looking into her beautiful eyes. The duo stared at each other for a while, their eyes having conversations they would have both loved to say with their mouths.

"Let's get going. I'm sure my customers are waiting for me." She said shyly, bringing Eric out of his trance.

Suddenly, he remembered what he wanted to talk to her about. "I haven't received any debit alert on the card I gave you Annie. The card is for use and not for decorating your purse." He explained.

Not knowing what to say, Annie looked away from him. She was used to working hard for her money. Spending his money was like taking advantage of him. Even though she was tempted to repay her mom for the pram she bought by using Eric's card, she couldn't bring herself to do it.

"I'm sorry. It's just that I'm not used to getting free money. Besides I'm not comfortable with spending money that isn't mine" She explained.

"You need not feel guilty about spending the money; It's all yours. You should get used to that because I'll be spoiling you often. You're my family now and I must take care of you and make sure you have everything in abundance." He said sincerely and she nodded reluctantly.

Eric started the car and drove towards Annie's workplace. There was no traffic whatsoever so they got there just in time.

"Wait, please....d.. don't.." Annie said and Eric gave her a questioning look.

"I mean, you don't have to come down. I can go in myself "She whispered.

His car was parked directly in front of her beauty parlour. She knew if he came down to open the door for her, all eyes would be on them and she didn't think she was ready to give any explanation to anyone.

"Are you shy of me? You don't want me to be seen with you in public?" He teased even when he understood her concern.

"Not that." She groaned.

Eric smiled. "I understand. Thank you so much for letting me come with you to the appointment."

"Thank you too for being here for us. I'm glad we had someone to lean on."

"My pleasure! Don't forget to follow all the instructions given by the Doctor and don't worry about Lunch. It's on me, I'll get someone to deliver it."

Annie nodded.

"What time do you close from work?" He asked.

"It depends. Why do you ask?"

"I was thinking of giving you a ride home."

"Don't worry about that; my best friend will be coming to pick me up. Thanks for the offer." She gave him a sad smile.

"Okay then. Have a nice day at work." He leaned closer to her and placed a long kiss on her forehead before she could escape.

Just as Annie predicted, everyone's attention was on her when she got down from Eric's car. His car was the latest hence it attracted the neighbouring shops. Thank heavens the glass was tinted. If not, everyone would have seen how intimate she and Eric were a while ago.

Becca Thompson smiled as soon as she saw her Boss enter the beauty parlour. Annie groaned, hoping she would not be questioned by Becca, her most trusted staff but little did she know that the 25-year-old brunette had no intention of questioning her.

Becca was the manager of Annie's beauty parlour. She has been working for Annie for a very long time, even before Annie's beauty parlour became popular. So Angela was like a younger sister to Annie hence they have this good relationship between them.

She was surprised when she saw an expensive car stop in front of the beauty parlour. She thought it was a new endowed customer, coming to seek their services. Instead, the curiosity turned to a smile on her face when she saw her Boss come down from the front passenger seat.

She knew what Annie went through in her last relationship. She knew how bad it ended and how broken it left her. Angela was happy Annie was attempting to move on. She wished she saw the person behind the steering wheel so she could give him the warning of his life not to ever hurt her Boss.

As much as she was very curious to know what was going on, she decided to keep calm, knowing Annie would open up to her when she was ready.

Chapter 34

Annie took a break from attending to her customers when it was almost lunchtime. She wanted to rest a little and of course, find something to eat.

As soon as she stepped into her office, her phone buzzed, indicating a message just came in. She took it out of her pocket and smiled as soon as she saw the message was from Eric.

“As promised I got lunch covered for my angels. The delivery guy is waiting outside, go get your lunch from him. Take care.” Eric.

She kept her phone into her pocket and went in search of the delivery guy who she saw outside her beauty parlour. She greeted him and collected the plastic bag. She wanted to give him some cash but he refused because everything had already been paid for and a huge tip had been given.

The aroma of the food was making Annie go crazy. She couldn’t wait to devour it. She got to her office, unpacked the food and settled behind her desk to enjoy all of it.

Even though she didn’t finish everything, she was surprised at the amount she ate. Perhaps it’s because she was now eating for two.

As soon as she was done with her meal, she got a call from Ella, her best friend.

“Hey? How are you and my little peanut? How did the check-up go?"

"Fine. And the Doctor confirmed we are both fine. She also gave me my prescriptions. I hope they help ease the morning sickness."

“ Good to hear. Morning sickness?” Ella reiterated

“Yes, it started this midnight; It was horrible.”

“Sorry boo, I’m sure the vitamins will help lessen it.”

“I hope so too. I was also given a meal plan to follow and Eric gave me a shoulder to lean on. I’m glad he was there with me.” She smiled at the last part.

“Awww my best friend sounds so in love.” Ella teased.

“Stop it, Ella.” She groaned.

“Oh goodness, when are you going to admit your feelings for him?”

“We shouldn’t be talking about this on the phone.” Annie reminded.

“And why not?” Ella persisted.

“You’re impossible Ella. You’re still coming to pick me up right?”

“Yes.” She answered, “Or do you have another ride?” She chipped in.

“Not anymore. Eric offered to pick me up but I told him you were going to do so.”

“Awww. He’s so sweet. You could have said yes to him.” She reasoned.

“But I didn’t so I’m expecting you.”

Shortly after Annie’s call with Ella, She received some visitors who were involved in the future project she was working on. The products were tested, samples were shown to her and she gave recommendations which they were to put in place for the finishing product. She was very happy things were falling in place. It has been her dream to own her own cosmetics line.

Everything went by in a blur, it was a little past six pm when Ella arrived to pick Annie up. Of course, the beauty parlour was still open; it closes at 8.00 pm on weekdays and 10 pm on weekends. Annie took an early night off hence Becca; her manager was in charge in her absence.

“Hiii.” Annie greeted as she settled in the front passenger seat.

“Heyy,” Ella replied.

“Hi, Sis.” Her younger siblings chorused from the backseat.

Claire was munching on a bag of potato chips while Jayden was texting away on his phone.

Ella retired early from work, went home, picked up Annie’s siblings and came to pick Annie. That explained why she was in her casual wear and not in her office clothes.

“So how was work?” Ella asked as she started the car.

“Fine, I had a meeting with the manufacturing company I’m working with. My products are almost ready and they will be launching in a few months.” Annie said excitedly.

“I’m so happy for you boo. Don’t worry; I’ll be the first to purchase every collection.” She promised.

“Oh, I’ll appreciate that.” Annie smiled.

“Annie?” Claire called.

“Yes, honey.” She answered.

“Ella refused to tell us who our niece or nephew’s Daddy is.” Annie was speechless. She took a look at Ella who was driving and Ella shrugged back at her.

“You will meet him soon.” She promised.

“I told you she was not going to tell us,” Jayden accused.

“Don’t make me feel like the meanest person on earth, please.” Annie groaned which earned a chuckle from Ella.

“Just tell them, Ann.” Ella encouraged.

“Yes, please tell us. Even mom refused to tell us, too.” Claire pleaded.

They knew they were bound to meet Annie’s baby daddy one day. But they became more curious when Ella dropped the hint that it was someone they knew very well.

“Okay, his name is Eric” Annie responded reluctantly.

Chapter 35

Claire and Jayden looked at each other, trying to recall If they knew anyone bearing that name.

“Eric?” Claire rephrased, confused.

“Eric what? What’s his other name?” Jayden asked.

“Eric Ivan-James.”

“Oh my God!” Claire smiled

“What?” Jayden said in horror.

“Oh please don’t tell me you don’t know who Eric Ivan-James is.” Claire hissed at her brother.

“I’m so happy for you Sister.” Claire kind of stood up in the moving car and wrapped her arms around Annie.

“Don’t mind Jayden, He’s just jealous.” She whispered in Annie’s ear which earned a chuckle from her.

“Does Laura know about this?” She directed to her sister.

“Who’s Laura?” Annie asked confused.

“My close friend, the one you did a makeover for.”

“Oh....” She said as she digested what her younger sister just told her.

“hm.mmm m...maybe! I don’t know if Eric already told her about me.”

“I still can’t believe it, my sister and Eric Ivan-James. OMG!” Claire whisper-yelled which made Annie blush a little.

The rest of the ride was filled with sweet talks, with Claire, Jayden and Ella teasing Annie about how perfect her life would be if she would just marry Eric. They said it as if Eric had proposed to her.

Annie was happy when Ella pulled up in her driveway. She let out a sigh of relief as soon as she got down from her best friend’s car, happy to be free from them as they bombarded her with questions and weird imaginations.

Annie was the first person to walk into her apartment then Claire, Jayden and Ella.

“You can go take a shower, Annie. I’ll start dinner.” Ella offered.

“And I’ll pick desert.” Jayden volunteered.

“I’ll pick the movie,” Claire announced.

Annie's phone started ringing and she reached for it from her bag. Eric's name appeared on the caller ID. A small smile found its way to her lips as she answered it and walked away from the living room. She wouldn't dare answer his call in front of her siblings and best friend.

"Say hi to him for me." Claire grinned knowing who was calling her sister and why her sister was walking away.

"Yes, I just got home." She replied to Eric as she proceeded to her room and placed her handbag by the side of her bed.

"Good. I just wanted to hear your voice, I miss you" He said, which earned a smile from Annie.

"I think you're starting to become too possessive." She teased.

"Maybe. But I can't help it, especially with the ones I love." He said with so much adoration in his voice.

"I assume you're at home too right?" she asked.

"Yeah, I just got back a few minutes ago. Can I tell you something?" He asked.

"Sure," Annie encouraged.

"I can't remember when last I've been this happy. You had no idea how calm and happy I became when the Doctor confirmed that you and the baby were fine. Thank you for everything Annie, thanks for being in my life and thanks for carrying our child. I know it wasn't planned but I'm really grateful."

Annie's hand went to her belly. She lovingly caressed her still flat stomach. Her baby was so little, yet he or she has done nothing but received massive love. "I think the same goes for me. I've never been happier. Thank you too for being a gentleman and for being there for us."

There was a few seconds of silence before Eric spoke. What he said made Annie's heart beat very hard against her chest.

"I like you,"

"Please say something." Eric's voice came through when he heard no reply from her.

"Y.. You... do?" She shuttered.

"Yes Annie, I like you very much. It started even before I met you in person."

"I don't want you to think I'm saying all of these because you're carrying our child. I've been dying to tell you how I feel about you and it feels so good to let it out."

"I know you may not feel the same for me. But please can you give me a chance to win you over?"

Chapter 36

Damn. Who was Annie Davis kidding? She was so in love with him. No one made her feel the way she feels whenever she was around him. Right now, her joy knew no bounds hearing him confess his feelings to her.

“A chance? Are you…”

“I want us to be more open to each other, go on dates, spend more time together and go on vacations together. Hopefully, by then, you’ll feel something for me too and we will take a step further in our relationship and if you don’t feel anything for me, I promise to let you go but we will remain friends because of our baby."

Poor Eric, little did he know that Annie was drunk in love with him.

“Okay.” She said with a cool voice, trying to hide her excitement. When in real life, she wanted to stand on the roof and let everyone know that Eric Ivan-James fucking likes her.

“Thanks, babe.” He replied, relieved that she gave a positive response.

“I never knew my siblings knew your sister.”

“Which of them?” He asked.

“Laura. They attend the same school.”

“Oh, that’s good to hear. I think it’s time I meet your family too.” He posed.

“You sure?”

“A hundred per cent.” He replied.

“Okay. I’ll talk to my mom and we’ll set a date. I have to go now, Eric; dinner is almost ready and I haven’t taken a shower.”

“Alright. Don’t forget to take your vitamins before you go to bed. Call me if you need anything and take care of yourself and our peanut.”

“I will. Take good care of yourself too. Sweet dreams.” She ended the call.

Annie kept her phone on the nightstand, rushed into the bathroom to take a shower, dried herself and put on her purple pyjamas dress.

“I was thinking you’ve gone to bed already.” Ella rolled her eyes at Annie as she approached the dining table.

Ella had served already. She made spaghetti with meatballs. Claire and Jayden were halfway through their meal.

“Sorry I took long.” She apologized as she took a seat beside Ella. She served herself and dug in immediately.

Jayden and Claire were the first to finish their food, they took their plates to the kitchen and did the dishes which left Annie and Ella the only ones on the table.

“So how’s Dylan?” She tried to make a conversation.

“He’s fine but I miss him.” Ella pouted as she took a forkful of spaghetti.

“He told me his mom wants to meet me,” Ella added.

“Wow. What was your reply?” She asked excitedly.

“I don’t know Annie,” Ella said uncomfortably as she played with her food.

“I mean why would his mom want to see me? What if she warns me to stay away from her son?”

Annie laughed. “You’ve got to be kidding me.”

“Perhaps his mom wants to meet the beautiful woman her son has been telling her about.” Annie reasoned.

“Maybe, but I told Dylan I was going to think about it.”

“You know he adores his mom right?” Annie said.

“I know. But do you think his Dad will be happy to see me with his son? His Dad used to be my Boss you know.”

“You’re overthinking Ella. I’m sure things will turn out better than you even expect.”

“Perhaps I’ll tell Dylan that we can go visit his parents this weekend.” She concluded.

“What a coincidence!” Annie uttered.

“What do you mean?” Ella asked.

“I’ll be meeting Eric’s parents over the weekend, on Saturday or Sunday.”

“Well, I’m glad I won’t be the only one getting nervous.” She teased and they both chuckled.

Chapter 37

“It’s okay Ella, you know I don’t like putting too much makeup on.” Annie groaned but Ella did not pay attention to her. Instead, she concentrated on the magic she was doing on Annie’s face.

Ella, Claire and Jayden were getting Annie ready. She agreed to be Eric’s date at a function tonight.

“You don’t have any choice, Ann. I want you to be the most beautiful woman in that event tonight. And if possible, I want to see your face all over the newspapers and magazines tomorrow morning.” She grinned.

Annie was prepared for that. She knew accompanying Eric to the charity event would have its consequences. But he had begged her that he wanted her to go with him. She agreed too because she wouldn’t like the idea of him taking another woman as his date.

After the charity event, she’ll be spending the night with Eric at his apartment. She will also be spending the day with him tomorrow after which they’ll go to his parents’ mansion in the evening then Eric will drop her at her apartment.

“Ella, the bag is all set.” Claire grinned as she walked out of Annie’s closet with a medium-size sleepover bag.

Ella offered to pack for Annie and according to Annie, the bag should contain: her nightdress, casual clothes for tomorrow morning, an evening dress for her to wear to visit Eric’s parents, her vitamins, a pair of heels and her skincare products.

Ella had carefully selected everything when Annie was in the shower and had instructed Claire to put them in a bag

“You look gorgeous, my Queen.” Ella playfully bowed which earned a chuckle from all of them.

“Thank you, Ella.” Annie stood up and hugged her best friend; the one who has been there for her in good and bad times, the person she will forever cherish.

They pulled away from the hug when someone opened the door and walked into Annie’s room. It was Jayden.

“Your Prince Charming is here, sis.” He announced. Annie's heart skipped a bit.

From her reaction, Ella could tell Annie was nervous. She took her hands in hers and gave it a comforting squeeze.

They all escorted Annie downstairs to meet Eric.

……..

Eric needed to attend a charity event and he had to go with a date. He wanted Annie to go with him so he asked her to come with him. He could tell she was reluctant with the way She sounded over the phone. But he ended up persuading her and the most exciting part was that she had agreed to spend the night at his place. Eric's heart was filled with so much joy.

Exactly 7.45 pm, he was in front of Annie's apartment; all dressed up in his well-tailored suit and holding a bouquet of red roses.

He sighed before pressing the doorbell. A few minutes later, the door was opened and he saw a young boy who was about his youngest sister's age.

"Hi." He greeted with a smile. "You must be Jayden. It's nice to meet you." He added.

Jayden just stared at Eric as if he wasn't happy that Eric and his elder sister were kind of together.

"Come in." He said reluctantly as he opened the door wider for him.

Eric said a small 'thank you.' as he walked in. This wouldn't be his first time in Annie's home, he knew his way around but he decided to wait a few steps away from the door.

Jayden closed the door, he ignored Eric, proceeded to the living room, sat on the couch and resumed the game he was playing.

Eric heaved a sigh. No doubt the little boy was mad at him. He'd have to find a way to win his heart.

He took slow steps towards Jayden and sat beside him. Jayden noticed his presence, paused the game and looked down at the pad in his hands not wanting to look at Eric.

"Jayden, I don't know what is going on in your mind and head but I give you my word that I have good intentions with your sister. I like her and I think I'm falling for her already. I Promise to take care of her and the baby and not to hurt them in any way." He said hoping Jayden would be satisfied with the short speech he gave.

Both boys were quiet for a while. Eric watched Jayden as he battled with himself. Finally, he took a look at Eric and spoke.

"I'm just scared and jealous now that she has you and with the baby on the way, she wouldn't have time for Claire and me anymore." He whispered and Eric smiled in understanding.

"No one will ever take your place in your sister's heart Jayden. Neither will she love you any less when the baby is born." He assured him.

"Maybe, but I should get used to her not being around me all the time." he shrugged.

“Or maybe you should start preparing because very soon your niece or nephew will look up to you as his or her uncle. Imagine if it’s a boy, he will want to play ball and do all other fun things with you.” Eric said, hoping his statement would cheer him up.

“Sorry for being rude to you.” He apologized, looking into Eric’s eyes with regret on his face.

“It’s fine. We’re okay now, right?” He asked and Jayden nodded with a smile.

“Promise me you won’t tell my sister of my rude behaviour, She will be so mad at me. Please.”

“I promise.”

Jayden let go of his gamepad and hugged Eric. At the same time being careful not to ruin the flower he was holding.

“So where’s She?” He asked after they pulled away from the hug.

“Upstairs. Let me go get her.” Jayden offered.

Chapter 38

As the woman of the night, she descended the stairs first with her best friend and siblings behind her.

Eric could not take his eyes off her. He was dumbstruck as to how beautiful she looked. She was putting on a long red dress which matched with the colour of his tie. The dress had a slit which revealed a bit of her long tanned legs. He was amazed at the curves he saw. Though the dress showed a little cleavage, it showed it decently. He was so damn proud of her and couldn't wait to show her off to the world tonight.

"Hi." She greeted nervously as she held her clutch tighter.

He closed the gap between them and kissed her forehead. "You are very beautiful my Queen." He whispered which made her blush like crazy. He smiled, then kissed her already red cheeks.

"I brought this for you." He handed her the flowers. She muttered a small thank you and collected it.

Eric put his hand in his pocket and reached for a small jewellery box. He opened it and showed her the diamond necklace that was in it.

"I got this for you, No doubt it will look good on you. May I?" He asked for permission to put it on her neck.

Annie tried to keep her tears at bay. All the men that have come and gone in her life, none of them did half of what Eric has done for her neither did they shower her with so much love. Instead, She was always the one living up to their expectations and trying to satisfy them.

"No, I can't accept it, Eric. It...this is expensive. You have to return it. What if I misplace it? I'll never forgive myself."

He caressed her cheek with his right hand. "Please accept it, my love. It's my first gift to you." He pleaded.

She stared at him for a while, thinking of what to do. Sure, it was very expensive but to someone like Eric Ivan James, it's obvious it had no consequence on his bank account.

Giving in to his puppy dog eyes, she nodded reluctantly.

He smiled then made her way to her back, he carefully put her hair to one side and fixed the necklace.

Annie knew he loved it when her hair was down which was why she told Ella she wanted it that way.

He fixed the chain almost immediately and placed her hair where they were.

All these while, they were watched by Ella, Claire and Jayden who are all smiling like crazy.

Claire walked towards the lovebirds with a smile on her face. She had never seen her sister this happy. She was happier because Annie was happy.

“Hi. I’m Claire.” She introduced herself to Eric.

“Hey, I’ve heard so much about you from Laura.” He replied as he remembered Laura telling him Claire was her very good friend.

“Here’s Annie’s bag.” She handed him the bag pack which he collected immediately.

“You guys should get going. You don’t want to be late.” Ella chipped in as she gave Eric a side hug.

She was now friends with Eric after Dylan introduced her to him as his special one.

“I will take care of this. She collected the roses from Annie.

“Have fun!”

“Bye.”

“Have a wonderful night.”

“Enjoy yourselves.”

Ella, Claire and Jayden chorused.

Annie and Eric exited Annie’s apartment hand in hand. He helped her settle down in the front passenger seat after which he placed her backpack in the back seat then went over to the driver’s seat.

“Thanks for being my date tonight.” He said as the engine roared to life.

“Like I have any other choice.” She smiled.

“So how are you and my little angel?” He asked sincerely.

“We are fine. Thanks."

“My mom is very excited about tomorrow. She can’t wait to meet you.” Eric announced.

“I can’t say the same over here. I’m as nervous as hell.” She mumbled.

Eric chuckled. He knew it was normal for her to feel that way. But there was no need to worry because his parents loved her already.

Eric drove into the Estate where the charity event was taking place. There were expensive cars everywhere and the press were all over the place. Sure, it was only well-to-do people that attended this kind of event.

Chapter 39

Eric stopped the car at the main entrance, got down, went to the other side to help Annie out. Immediately she came out, there were flashes of cameras all over. Annie thought she was going to go blind. It was as if they were waiting for Eric to see who he would bring as his date. Last year, he came alone and the year before, he came with Elaina, his sister.

“You will be fine, my love.” He whispered to her and then kissed her forehead. Trust the press to capture that moment.

Then they approached the hall with his right hand on her lower back.

“She’s so pretty, Mr Ivan-James.”

“How long have you guys been together Eric?”

“Is she the Future Mrs Ivan-James?”

“Will you marry her?”

“Can you give us a proper pose?”

Eric stopped in his tracks and turned to face Annie.

“Maybe we should give them a little detail about us so all the men will know you’re mine.” He teased with a smirk which made her blush. The press captured the moment.

“Maybe.” She replied shyly. Then Eric turned to the Press, his arms around Annie possessively.

“The only thing I can say for now is that.” He looked into Annie’s eyes with so much adoration. “My heart beats for her and she’s very special to me.” He smiled at Annie and she smiled back at him too.

Annie and Eric did a few poses for the press which was very romantic. Then they proceeded to the hall.

Everyone’s attention was on Eric and Annie as they entered the hall. People kept whispering to each other as they passed by, it kind of made Annie nervous.

“Why is everyone staring at us? or is it me? Is something wrong with my makeup?”

“Nothing is wrong with you my love. I’ll say they’re just curious as to who this gorgeous lady is.” He replied with a smile but Annie wasn’t convinced. If not for Eric’s arms that were wrapped protectively around her waist, she would have gone to find somewhere to hide.

They were approaching their table when a woman in her late forties walked towards them with a man beside her who seemed to be around her age. They were probably couples.

“Aunt Eva. I had no idea you’ll be here.” Eric smiled as he released Annie from his hold and hugged the woman.

“Yeah, I wasn’t planning to but your uncle forced me to.” She said pointing to her husband.

“Eric smiled and pulled his Uncle Robert in for a hug too.”It’s been a while son.” he said.

“Aunt Eva, Uncle Robert, I want you to meet someone special; Annie Davis.”

“Annie, this is Aunt Eva, my mom’s elder sister and her husband.” He introduced.

“Good evening.” Annie greeted with a smile.

“OMG! She’s so beautiful. Evelyn has told me about you. She will be damn jealous if I told her I saw you tonight.” She said, pulling Annie into a warm hug.

“I hope my boy is taking good care of you.” She asked. Annie nodded.

“Hello, Sir.” She greeted Eva’s husband. He smiled and gave her a warm handshake.

“How are Melissa and Toby?” Eric asked about his cousins.

Eva got married in her early thirties so her kids were still kind of young. Melissa, the older one was in her first year of college and Toby, the younger one was still in high school.

“They are doing well. But Toby misses you a lot.”

Toby was like the brother Eric never had. They played games together and did all the fun stuff guys find interesting.

“I miss him too, my regards to them.”

“So when will you come to visit us?” Eva asked.

“Very soon Auntie, I’ll find the time and I’ll make sure I bring Annie along.” He replied as he held Annie possessively and kissed her cheek.

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The event commenced and the guests were ushered to their respective tables. Eric and Annie got to share a table with Aunt Eva and her husband.

The charity event was different from what Annie had in mind. She expected it to be boring and full of donation talks but it was the other way around. She saw some of her high-class clients whom she engaged in conversation with, Eric introduced her to some of his business associates who kept drooling over her and praised Eric for trapping such a beauty queen.

Annie couldn’t be more proud of Eric when he gave his speech. That was when she realized he was a co-founder of this great event, raising money for the less privileged.

Eric was so possessive around her as if telling other men that she was taken. He made sure she ate enough and also made sure the wine she was given was a fruit wine, hundred per cent non-alcoholic.

Chapter 40

“So I take it that you had fun at the event?” Eric asked on their way home.

“Honestly, I did.” She smiled at him. “I was expecting it to be boring but it wasn’t.”

The rest of the drive was silent. Annie slept halfway through. She woke up when Eric pulled up in his estate. Annie was in awe as she took in the surroundings. The whole estate was screaming money. It was a new estate, one could tell by the look of it. Sure only billionaires can afford to live here. The estate had its park combined with a modern playground, a mini grocery store and a pharmacy.

Eric pulled up in his driveway. Annie was shocked as to how beautiful Eric’s house was from the outside. It was like a mini-mansion, she only saw them magazines and wondered if she would ever get a glance in real life.

Eric chuckled as soon as he saw her reaction. He came down from the driver’s seat, reached for her backpack and shut the door. He approached the front passenger’s seat, wanting to help Annie down but by the time he got there, she had already helped herself.

“Welcome to my home, my Queen.” He smiled.

“You have a beautiful home.”

“Thank you! I moved to this place the day after I came back from my Paris trip. Let me give you a quick tour.” He said, sneaking his arm around her waist, the two of them walking side by side.

Eric pointed to the guest house beside the main house. “My workers occupy the guest house: my drivers, securities, housekeeper and gardener”

“I assumed it was reserved for your guests; like your parents, family and friends.” She said.

“Yes, I thought about that. But there are more than enough rooms inside and besides it will be so stressful for my workers to go and come every day. I just wanted them to feel safe where they work so I insisted they stay at my guest house which is big enough for them, although some go home on weekends when they are not on duty.”

“You’re a very caring Boss.”

“I suppose I am.” He smiled.

They got to the entrance of the main house and Eric opened the door. As a gentleman, he allowed her to go in first and he went in next.

“This is the main living room.” He said as Annie assessed it.

“This is beautiful.” She whispered after a while.

Eric showed her the kitchen which was almost as big as the living room; it had all the kitchen equipment one can ever think of. In the middle of the kitchen was a marble designed counter with matching stools. He also showed her the dining room which was a few steps away from the kitchen.

The downstairs floor had three guest rooms with their respective bathrooms, a gym and Eric's home office which was combined with a small library.

Eric decided it was time to explore the upper floor so he guided her to the curved shaped staircase and they made their way up.

There were three spare rooms upstairs apart from the master bedroom. Eric showed her the first two and then showed her the third one.

"I was thinking our baby will make use of this room." He said and Annie chuckled as she accessed the room. It was pretty big and empty. It had an adjoined bathroom, walk-in closet and an empty space they could use as a playroom.

"I think this is the biggest of the three rooms upstairs. Our baby will have to reach a certain age before he or she will move in here."

She took a few steps to where he was and wrapped her arms around his neck as she looked him in the eye. "I think he or she will be okay with a smaller room in the first few years of its life."

"Noted." He wrapped his arms around her waist and told her what has been on his mind for a while now. "I hope before the baby arrives, both of us will be an item already and you would have moved in with me." He said sincerely which made her smile.

"Let's go take a look at our bedroom."

"Our?" She asked curiously.

"Yes, our bedroom, whenever you are here it's 'Ours.' Or did you think I was going to allow you to sleep in a separate bedroom? That is not going to happen and I'm sure our little one wouldn't want that. Right honey?" He asked, placing his hand on her belly.

She laughed and playfully slapped his hand away. "It can't hear you, silly."

"Oh, you will be surprised that he or she will get familiar with my voice very soon and who knows, his or her first word might be 'Dada.'" He teased.

"Oh, we shall see about that." She challenged.

"You have no idea how much happiness you and our unborn child have brought into my life. Thank you." He kissed her forehead.

Annie awed as Eric ushered her into his room. It was a dream room. The big bed was situated in the middle of the room. To the far left was a single grey Sofa and next to it was a glass door

which leads to the balcony where one can stay and enjoy the beautiful view of the estate. To the right-hand side of the bed was a nightstand and to the far end were two adjoining rooms. The first one leads to the walk-in closet while the other one leads to the bathroom.

“What do you think?” He asked as he placed her backpack on the bed before wrapping his arms around her waist from behind.

“I love it.” She said.

Eric took Annie to see the walk-in closet and she was surprised at what she saw. It looked like a boutique.

“So this will be your side when you move in with me.” He pointed to the opposite side of his closet.

He walked closer to her and tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. “I know all the decorations look a bit masculine. But I’ll hire someone who will change a few things to your taste.”

“No need Eric. Everything is fine this way.” She assured.

“Okay then, if you say so. Are you sure you don’t want anything to eat? Like a snack or something?”

“No, I’m fine thanks. I had enough to eat at the event besides it’s too late to eat anything.” She said and he nodded since it was just twelve minutes past 11 pm.

“You can take a shower here. I’ll use the one in the guest room. Do you need help taking your clothes off?” He asked. The thought of her being naked before him made her blush.

“I think I can manage.” She replied.

He gave her a quick kiss on her cheek before exiting the room. He didn’t take anything along with him so Annie assumed he had spare clothes to change into in the guest room.

Chapter 41

She stepped into his bathroom with her backpack and wasn't surprised by everything she saw. In as much as she would love to soak herself in his tub, she ended up taking a quick shower instead. It took Annie four minutes to take her dress off because the zip was far from her reach.

She felt better as soon as the warm water came in contact with her body. She dried herself with a fresh white towel, washed her teeth with a new toothbrush she found in the cabinet then did her nighttime skincare routine.

Deciding it was time to put on her nightwear, she opened her backpack and searched for it.

"I'm going to kill Ella when next I see her." Annie groaned as she searched all the items in the bag to see if there was any other nightwear there.

Indeed there wasn't. She sighed as she accessed the only nightdress Ella kept in the bag. "Of course I can't wear this." She groaned. It was a Sling lace V-neck. It showed way too much cleavage and the short was very short. She didn't want to wear it as it was too revealing. The last thing she wanted was for Eric to think that she was here to seduce him.

……..

Eric took the quickest shower ever. He couldn't wait to go join Annie in the room and spend time with her. This was a once in a while opportunity so he wanted to use it wisely.

After changing into his sweatpants, he made his way to the room and realized that Annie was still in the bathroom, he sat on the bed and kept himself busy with his phone.

Eric soon started to get worried. Annie had been in the bathroom for almost fifteen minutes since he entered the room.

He got down from the bed and walked towards the bathroom.

"Annie? Is anything wrong?" He said through the door, worry evident in his voice.

"H.. um.. no... Nothing is wrong." She stammered.

Eric was not convinced with her reply so he insisted she opened the door.

"Please open the door Annie" He pleaded, wondering if he had done anything to upset her.

In less than a minute, she opened up.

Eric noticed she was wrapped in his towel. Her hair was wet; she was barefoot and shivering also.

"I will be right back," Eric said and left her sight. The first thing he did was to reduce the room's air conditioner to normal temperature, then made his way to the closet, searched through his

shirts and eventually picked one. He went back to Annie who was still standing in front of the bathroom and handed her his shirt.

“It might be a little big for you but I’m sure you’ll find it comfy.”

“Thank you.” She replied.

He nodded. “Go and change, I will get you the air dryer.” He said and then walked out of the room.

Chapter 42

The first thing Annie noticed when she opened the door was Eric standing in front of her, shirtless. She swallowed painfully as she took in his physique. He was perfect, she had seen him display his perfectly toned six-pack in the magazines she used to read when he was a model and seeing him shirtless in real life was a dream come true. She couldn't believe it was all hers to devour. Annie was lost in her dreamland but she was more than happy when he came back with his shirt for her to wear which was so thoughtful of him.

Once he was out of sight, Annie put the shirt on. She smiled as she admired herself in front of the mirror; she looked sexy in his shirt. Even though it was kind of big, she found it comfy. The shirt stopped right below her butt. She smiled as right her hand went to the necklace he gave her earlier on. She promised herself to wear it always. She looked down at her belly and caressed it lovingly."Your Dad cares a lot about us. Should I be worried about him spoiling you rotten?"

"I think I heard that." Eric chuckled. True to his word he came back with a hairdryer and a pair of bedroom slippers for her to wear.

He placed the slippers by her feet "It's Elaina's. But I'm sure she wouldn't mind."

Annie nodded and slipped her feet into the pink coloured fluffy bedroom slippers.

After that, he made her seat on the edge of the tub and began taking care of her hair. He dried them, brushed them and put them in a ponytail. He loved the feel of her hair in his hand; so soft and long.

Annie felt like a princess as she let him take care of her hair. "Never in my wildest dreams would I have thought that you knew how to braid." She teased.

Eric chuckled. "I have three sisters and Elaina made sure I knew how to do a french braid. She would always insist I do them for her."

He finished on time and Annie stood up from the tub to admire herself in the mirror.

"I love it. Thank you!" She smiled.

He moved closer to her and wrapped his left hand around her waist. He reached for his phone with his right hand and took a bathroom selfie of them. Annie gave her best smile and they did different poses and took as many shots as possible.

"The project you told me you've been working on. What is it about?" He asked as they lay side by side on the bed.

She played with her fingers "Starting my own cosmetics line, it's what I've always wanted."

He moved closer to her and took her hands in his. “I have no doubt it’ll be a huge success.”

“You think so?” She asked.

He nodded. “I believe in you, Annie and I also believe in your dreams. Why are you so unsure about it being a success?”

“I don’t know but I guess it’s pretty normal for me to be nervous. Again, I know there are lots of cosmetic lines which people are already used to and that is why I’m working hard to make sure my products are of good quality and most importantly affordable.”

“So when will you be launching them?” he asked.

“In three to four months.”

“I want to pre-order about a hundred of every item.” He said.

“Eric, it’s for the public. Besides, you are not a lady. What do you want to use a hundred pieces for?” She groaned.

“To help you advertise.” He said and she gave him a questioning look, not understanding what he meant.

“Everyone would love to receive a gift from Eric Ivan-James. I have about thirty female employees who will get one each. I will send some to my mom, sisters and cousins, female business partners, extended families, friends. I’m sure they will use the products and if they like it, no doubt they will want to purchase more.”

“Thank you.” She wrapped her arms around him, giving him a bone-crushing hug.“I’ll make sure I give you a good discount.”

He caressed her cheek “You’re welcome. I’ll do all I can to support you”

Chapter 43

The last thing Eric remembered before they fell asleep was him wrapping his arms around Annie's waist and Annie snuggling closer to him.

He woke up when he felt her untangling herself from him. She didn't do it gently but with force and ran into his bathroom and what followed was the sound of Annie puking her guts out.

He got down from the bed and went to check on her. He saw her kneeling in front of the toilet, her face in the toilet bowl.

He took a few steps to where she was, kneeled by her side and caressed her back, whispering soothing words in her ear.

When she was done, he cleaned her up and made her seat on the bathtub. By this time, Annie's shirt was wet as a result of the water that splashed on it so Eric went to get another one for her.

He crouched to Annie's height and kissed her forehead. He knew she was very weak, he could tell from the way she was staring at nothing in particular.

"Annie, you have to change the shirt."He said to her, holding out a sky blue shirt for her to wear. Eric helped her to her feet, He waited for her to unbutton the shirt she was wearing but she didn't.

"Annie you've to...." But he was cut off.

"Please, do it for me." She whispered.

"Are you sure?"

She nodded.

Eric began undoing the buttons on her shirt. Since three buttons were already unbuttoned It didn't take long for him to undo the rest.

Taking her shirt off, he couldn't help but admire her body. He tried not to look but he couldn't resist either. She was so beautiful; she only had her panties on as she doesn't like wearing a bra to bed. However, her breast was perfect, firm, round and with the perfect size, her nipples pink and erect, silently begging for them to be sucked by him.

It took him a lot but he managed to overcome the temptation of things he could do to her and also this was not the time for that as Annie was pretty unwell.

He put on the clean shirt for her and did the buttons. He placed a long kiss on her forehead, then carried her in a bridal style into the room. He made her sit on the bed.

"Where's the vitamin?" He asked.

“In the backpack.” She replied.

He went in search of the bag and brought the vitamins to her along with a glass of water.

“Should I go make a sandwich for you before taking them?” He asked, unsure if she was allowed to take the vitamins on an empty stomach.

“I don’t want anything. I might just throw up again.” She said and he fed her the vitamins and the water. Eric made sure she drank enough water before putting aside the glass cup.

Then He made her lie beside him, her head on his chest, his arms around her waist protectively.

“Thank you.” She whispered tiredly as she snuggled closer to him.

“It’s okay love, have some rest.” He encouraged.

About three hours later Eric woke up with a smile on his face. Sleeping beside Annie and his unborn miracle was the best feeling in the world.

He smiled as he watched Annie snuggle closer to him, her face in the crook of his neck and her leg in between his. She looked like an angel as she slept. Eric spent a few minutes admiring her, watching her sleep.

He knew she needed her sleep. The morning sickness was taking a toll on her. He carefully untangled himself from her and made his way downstairs to prepare breakfast.

Before her morning sickness which happened around 5 am, they were up till past 2 am talking about random things. Eric also told her about his career and how he manages his company along with the chain of hotels he owns.

“Good morning, dear.” Nora greeted Eric.

“Morning Nora, I hope you slept well.” He asked her.

“Yes, I did. I won’t bother asking you the same because I can tell you had the best night of your life.” She smiled as she wiped her hands with a napkin.

“I can’t disagree.” He smiled.

“So should I make the usual for breakfast?” She asked.

“Don’t worry Nora. I’ll take care of breakfast. I want to make something special for Annie.” He replied, his eyes scanning through the kitchen.

“Will I get to meet her?”

“Sure but she’s still asleep. She’s very tired so I decided not to wake her up.” He said and Nora grinned.

“Nora.” Eric groaned reaching for the eggs in the fridge. “Not that kind of tired. We were up till midnight talking and she had morning sickness.”

“Poor child, the morning sickness will disappear as time goes on. Make sure you take very good care of her or you’ll have me to deal with.” She threatened.

Nora was very happy when Eric told her about Annie and the baby. She was happy for Eric because she knew he had always wanted a family to call his own.

When Eric moved into this mansion, he decided to employ Nora full time unlike the three days a week job she was used to when he was still living in his former apartment. He needed a Gardner which was why he employed Nora’s husband, Bernard. He gave them a space in the guest house and he has been responsible for providing them with what they need, which includes food and their monthly salary.

Eric has so much respect for the couple, he treats them like his second parents and they love and treat him like the son they never had.

“Trust me I’ll take very good care of her. Where’s Nano?” He said.

“Oh, he’s with Ben. I’ll clean him up and bring him over.” She said before she left the kitchen.

Chapter 44

Annie felt something soft and hairy cuddling against her chest. She smiled as she snuggled closer to it and it began licking her face. She smiled in her sleep, enjoying the feel of its body against hers.

“Nano, Don’t disturb her. Come over here, buddy.” Eric said to the golden-brown puppy who did not seem interested in what he was saying. The adorable cavapoo was more interested in getting Annie’s attention.

The first thing Annie saw when she opened her eyes was the little puppy looking at her. “Hey,” She smiled at it. It made an adorable sound before it buried its face in the crook of her neck which made her chuckle.

“I think he likes you,” Eric said then came to take a seat beside her.

She suddenly felt shy around him as soon as she remembered this midnight’s episode when he changed her shirt. Honestly, she never thought about the consequences. She was very weak and needed him to do it for her. Now she was bothered about what he must be thinking of her. She mentally facepalmed as she avoided looking into his eyes.

“Annie?” He called but she looked away, giving all her attention to Nano.

He sighed, went over to where she was and made her sit on his lap. He raised her chin with his thumb, Nano watching them from afar.

“I’m sorry I didn’t mean to....” But he cut her off, knowing what she wanted to apologize for.

“It’s fine and I want you to know I do not and I will never think ill of you. That’s why I’m here Annie, to support you. Besides, there's nothing to be embarrassed about because you have a very sexy body.” He said which made her blush.

“I’m hoping you’re feeling better now?” He caressed her cheek.

“Yes, I am. Thank you!”

“You never told me about him.” She pointed towards Nano who came to their side and rested his face on Annie’s lap.

“He’s Nano. Dylan gave him to me as my housewarming gift. He said since the house is too big for me, Nano will keep it warm and keep me company too.”

That was so Dylan based on what she has heard from Ella.

“Are you ready to have breakfast?”

She nodded.

"We will have breakfast on my balcony."

"Okay. I'll meet you there in a few minutes; let me use the bathroom." She said to him.

Annie did all the necessary things she had to do in the bathroom before joining Eric for breakfast on the balcony.

"Where's Nano?" She asked.

Eric pulled out a chair for her. "I asked Nora to watch after him so we can have some alone time."

"Alone time?" She questioned as she took her seat.

He scratched the back of his head as he took a seat opposite her. "Yes, you see Nano can be manipulative. He likes you already and will make sure he does everything to get your attention."

"Do I smell jealousy?" She teased.

"I think so because it's not every time I get the pleasure of you being here. I just want to spend as much time as I can with you before you leave this evening." He said and she nodded.

It was a very beautiful view on the balcony. Annie and Eric were seated on a small round breakfast table. Eric made sure the breakfast consisted of varieties so Annie would have options to choose from. Honestly, he felt like taking coffee but he didn't. He knew for a fact that Annie loved coffee and now that she was pregnant, she had to avoid it so he decided to go with the orange juice he made for them.

"My mom called this morning. According to her, she can't wait to meet you." He said to Annie; from the look on her face, he could tell she was worried.

"Everything will be fine." He assured.

Not satisfied with her response, He closed the gap between them and cupped her face with his hand. "I feel there's something you're not telling me. Are you not happy to be here with me? If you're not happy with the idea of having dinner with my parents, tell me, I'll come up with an excuse as to why we wouldn't be there. I don't want you to do anything against your will."

"You're wrong Eric. I don't regret coming over to spend the night here. If possible I'll love to extend my stay here."

His face lit up "Really?"

"Yes. Maybe I'll go back on Sunday evening."

"I'll love that." He smiled.

"But I didn't bring extra clothes."

"It will be taken care of." He assured.

“I guess I’m not leaving tonight then.” She said. He smiled and kissed her forehead.

“I can’t help but be nervous about meeting your parents. I guess it’s normal. I’ll be fine. You’ll be by my side right?” She asked adorably.

He pulled her closer to him, wrapped his arms around her waist and tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. “Yes, my love. I’m never leaving your side.” He whispered as he stared at her lips.

“Please don’t fight this. I know you want it as much as I do.” He had wanted to do this for a very long time. So has she, she had dreamt of what it would be like to feel his lips against hers.

As soon as Eric's lips met her pink plump ones, Annie closed her eyes and enjoyed the moment. The kiss was a passionate one. She could not help but admire how soft and sweet his lips were. At the same time, she felt butterflies in her stomach. She didn’t regret the kiss a bit. It felt right and even better than she had imagined.

When they broke apart to get some air, Annie hid her face in Eric’s chest as her cheeks turned a shade of red. Eric chuckled and wrapped his arms around her.

He was so tempted to tell her he loves her but didn’t want to scare her away.

Chapter 45

"You shouldn't have bothered hon. You know I'll do it when I come back." Nora said as she entered the kitchen with three grocery bags and a wobbling Nano behind her.

"Honestly I didn't want to but Annie wanted us to do the dishes together." He pointed to Annie who was wiping her hand with a napkin.

"Hi." Annie greeted Nora.

Nora smiled at the sweet child who had captured her son's heart. After placing the grocery bags on the kitchen counter, She approached Annie and pulled her into a hug.

"It's nice to finally meet you, my child. Eric has told me so much about you. I hope you and this little one (She pointed at her belly) are doing great."

"Yes, ma'am. We're fine." She replied politely.

"Quit the formality dear. You're like a daughter to me now. You can call me Nora."

Annie nodded. She felt something tugging her leg; she looked down and saw it was Nano. She smiled and picked him up. He licked her face then cuddled against her chest. She smiled at him as she caressed his body lovingly.

"You know you are not supposed to lift anything heavy?" Eric groaned. Nora burst into laughter while Annie gave him the 'Are you serious look.'

"Calm down Eric, the poor thing isn't even up to fourteen pounds." Nora chuckled.

"Well, we can't tell." He shrugged, a bit jealous as to the attention Nano was getting from Annie.

"Hey, seems your daddy is jealous," Annie said to Nano. "How about we make him more jealous by taking a shower together then we can settle on the couch and watch your favourite movie." She teased, making Eric look like he was about to cry.

Annie and Eric finally settled for a movie after they took their shower. When it was almost lunchtime, Annie assisted Nora in making lunch after which She and Eric ate in the dining room.

Once they were done with lunch, the duo descended to Eric's bedroom to take a nap but they ended up talking about random things; one conversation led to another which made them take a thirty minutes nap.

In thirty minutes, Eric was awake. He knew Annie was tired so he let her sleep more while he used the bathroom and got ready. He finished all he wanted to do within fifteen minutes, then he woke Annie up.

“Annie.” He whispered in her ear. “wake up, you have to get ready”

She tiredly opened her eyes and came across his beautiful ones. She smiled, then ran her fingers through his hair. She saw he was all dressed up and was thankful for the fact that he let her sleep more.

“You’re looking more handsome than you were before we took a nap.”

He smirked. “I’m glad you find me sexy.”

Eric looked at his wristwatch then back at Annie. “It’s almost time for dinner, you have to get ready.”

He helped her get up from the bed and she went to change.

“I’m ready.” She said to Eric as she approached him. He was seated on the sofa in their bedroom, waiting for her.

Eric looked up from his phone and was mesmerized by her appearance. He was proud of Annie, he was proud to know her, proud to know that she was the mother of their baby and hopefully his future wife.

Annie was putting on a green designer dress, matching heels which came with a sling designer bag. This time around her hair was in a presentable messy bun and she wore an earring that fits the necklace he gave her. She had minimal makeup on her face and she was glowing wonderfully well. Her dress showed a little bit of her cleavage and her curves.

Eric closed the gap between them “You look gorgeous, my Queen.” He praised with a smile on his face as he wrapped his arms around her waist.

She playfully rolled her eyes at him. “You’re such a tease.”

“I’m serious Annie.” He raised her chin so she would look him in the eye. “You’re the most beautiful woman I’ve ever met. You’re not only beautiful on the outside but also the inside.” He said sincerely. She nodded slowly, biting her lip in the process.

“Has no one ever told you that?” He asked.

“Well if the compliments of my family, Staff, clients, fans and best friend counts.” She whispered to him.

“Believe me when I say you’re more than a goddess. I couldn't count how many glares I threw yesterday at those perverted men who couldn't stop checking you out at the event." Annie blushed.

“I don’t know what it is about you, you make me feel special.” She admitted.

“And that’s how it should be, my love.” He kissed her forehead “we should get going.” He placed his hand on her lower back and led her out of the bedroom.

Chapter 46

Annie could not help but admire Eric's parents' mansion. It was way bigger than Eric's own and even more beautiful. She heaved a big sigh as Eric opened the door for her and helped her down. He gave her a quick kiss on her lips and guided her to the entrance.

Before Eric could reach for the knob, someone opened the door from inside and suddenly Annie felt the person wrapped both arms around her waist.

"Careful Laura, you don't want to hurt your baby nephew and your future sister in law." A sweet voice yelled from inside.

Annie's eyes went wide as she looked at Eric who was grinning like crazy.

'Sister in law?' She questioned herself mentally.

"Hi." The adorable teenage girl greeted Annie with a smile as she unwrapped her arms around her.

"Hi dear," Annie replied with a smile also after which she leaned closer to her and kissed her cheek.

"You remember me right?" Laura asked excitedly.

"Of course I do. You're Laura, my sister's close friend who also happens to be my brother's rival." She said and the little girl grinned.

Her joy knew no bounds when Claire texted her saying her elder brother was the father of her sister's baby. She had screamed for joy after which she quickly dialled Claire and Claire explained to her in detail about all that had happened.

"I'm so happy you're with my brother." She smiled and hugged Annie once more.

"I guess I am too." She chuckled as she took a glance at Eric who was looking at them before returning Laura's hug.

"Hello, I'm Eric, Your elder brother, in case you don't remember."

"Don't be Silly. I had to welcome your girlfriend first." She smiled, then went to hug him.

Annie blushed when she heard what Laura said. She couldn't help but wonder if that was what Eric told her, Deep down, she would love to be his girlfriend and even more.

"You all can come in now." A motherly voice said.

"Meet my mom, Evelyn Ivan-James. And Mom, this is Annie" He introduced.

“Good evening Ma’am.” Annie greeted with a polite smile. Evelyn smiled and pulled her into a hug.

“You’re welcome, my dear. I’ve been dying to meet you.”

“She even looks prettier in person. Those pictures did no justice to her.” A masculine voice said.

“Annie, this is my Dad, Austin Ivan- James and Dad, this is Annie.” Eric introduced them.

“Good day sir.” She greeted an older version of Eric politely.

“You’re very welcome my dear.” He said with a smile as he shook her hand.

Annie and Eric were ushered into the mansion and were entertained in one of the living rooms downstairs. Eric was catching up with his father on business while Annie was seated with Evelyn and Laura who could not stop talking about how they will spoil the baby when he or she arrives.

“I think you and Eric will be having a boy.” She said after a while.

“No, I want it to be a girl.” Laura pouted.

“Why?” Annie asked curiously.

“Well, if it’s a girl, we will be able to do so much together. But never mind, if it’s a boy I’ll manage. Since I’m good at sports I can teach him a lot.” She said proudly.

Evelyn smiled. "I don't mind if it's a girl too but my instincts tell me it's going to be a boy."

Annie was about to say something else but was cut off by a loud, irritating voice. “What is this Gold digger doing here?” Annie froze on her seat at the sound of that harsh voice. The person she has been dreading to see was finally here.

Chapter 47

“Mind your language, Lucia!” Evelyn countered.

Laura noticed Annie went pale, even though she was confused as to what was going on, afraid that Annie would pass out, she went to her and held her cold hands in hers.

“Come on mom, don’t tell me you believe the thing she’s carrying in her belly is my brother’s child?” Lucia said harshly which made Annie’s eyes moist.

“I don’t want to hear anything from you again Lucia” Evelyn warned. Lucia rolled her eyes. She didn’t seem to care about her mother’s warning; she turned her attention to Annie.

“I couldn’t believe the morning papers I saw with you and my brother getting all lovey-dovey. So it was you mom was talking about all along and I know you’re after my brother because of his money. You’re tired of your poor wretched life and want to stylishly come into wealth that was why you got pregnant with someone else’s child and claim it’s for my brother. Are you even pregna....” She did not finish the statement because Evelyn’s hand landed across her cheek.

“What’s going on here?” Eric asked, his father coming behind him. They were discussing business in the study room but were interrupted by the noise coming from the living room.

Eric could see his mother was angry; Lucia was standing a few steps away from his mom with her right hand on her cheek as if she had been slapped. Annie was seated on the couch with her face down, her hands in between Laura’s own who looked scared.

With her right hand on her cheeks, Evelyn dragged Lucia out of the living room into the Study room. Austin followed them.

Tears welled up in Lucia’s eyes as she held her right hand close to her cheek. Her mom had never raised a hand on her and she eventually did because of Annie. She swore in her inner mind that Annie was going to pay for what her mom did to her.

“What the hell is wrong with you, Lucia?” Evelyn shouted at her daughter as soon as Austin shut the door.

“Why are you such a pain in the neck? Your brother is happy, why can’t you be happy for him? All his life he has always sided you, took blames and punishments for you even when you knew you were wrong. Is this how you repay him?”

Lucia Ivan-James was the third and only wayward child of the Ivan James family. She was so different from her siblings; she believed in class and treated people below her as if they were garbage. She doesn’t think twice before saying hurtful words to people. She believed in having fun, shopping and spending lavishly. The only good thing about Lucia was that she was a very

brilliant student but with a very bad attitude. She was in her final year of college, studying for an accounting degree.

“Mom, you have to trust me. She’s only with Eric because of money and fame. Trust me she’s a gold digger, a lying bitch, a murder.....”

“Enough!!!!” Her Dad, Austin commanded. “I don’t want to hear the rubbish you have to say. Again, stay away from Annie and her relationship with your brother. If I hear that you cause trouble again, I will personally deal with you. You have to apologize to her.”

“What??? Of course not. Why will I apologize to that...?” She wanted to describe Annie with a mean word but her mom glared at her which prevented her from doing so.

“Just go to your room and don’t show your face until tomorrow” Austin commanded.

Lucia mumbled incoherent words as she walked out of the study room, slamming the door behind her.

Evelyn sighed as she plopped down on a couch. “I’m tired of her Austin, I don’t know what else to do to make her change her behaviour.” She said with a very sad voice.

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Immediately his mom and dad left with Lucia, Eric sat next to Annie. She was trembling when he made her sit on his lap. He turned to Laura. “Honey please go and get a glass of water.” She nodded and left for the kitchen.

As soon as he lifted Annie’s chin to look into her face, a tear rolled down her cheek which Eric wiped away with his thumb.

“Please don’t cry; I can’t bear to see you this way.” He pleaded.

Laura came back with a glass of water and some tissue.

Eric thanked her, collected the water and fed it to Annie who only took a sip. He handed her the tissue and she wiped her face.

He was so tempted to ask what was wrong but he wanted her to calm down. She was seriously trembling and he knew stress was not good for her because of her condition so he decided to wait until later.

“We can go home now if you want. I’m sure mom will understand.” He said to her.

“No, it’s fine. I’ll stay.”

“Are you sure? I mean, I perfectly understand if you want to leave now.” Evelyn added as she walked into the living room.

“I’m sure, Mom.” She replied with a smile which was not reaching her eyes.

“Okay. Please give me fifteen minutes to finalize something with my dad.” He said then kissed her cheek. She stood up from his lap and sat on the couch. Eric and his dad left for the study while the women returned to their discussion.

“I’m sorry about Lucia’s behaviour.” She said as she sat beside Annie.

“It’s fine. It’s just that Lucia and I never had a good relationship.”

“You don’t need to explain anything, my child. I know how complicated she can be. Please forget about Lucia and all she said. I know the child you’re carrying is Eric’s flesh and blood and I want you to carry more of Eric’s children. I like you Annie and I know Eric likes you more.” She assured.

“Not LIKE Mom, Eric LOVES her, He is OBSESSED with her.” Laura contributed as she took a seat beside them.

Both Annie and Evelyn chuckled. “I think I feel better now.“Annie announced.

“Good, because I don’t want you all stressed out, it is not good for the baby.”

“Before I set up the table, are you immune to anything right now?” She asked Annie “Like the smell of fish or meat? I don’t want you getting sick again.”

“Either is fine. They don’t make me nauseous.” She replied with a smile, thankful for the fact that she had Evelyn’s support and the beautiful woman seems to care for her too. If only Lucia could be as understanding as her mom. She prayed Eric would take the truth well and not freak out.

When they were done setting up the table, Laura was asked to go call her Dad and Brother in the study room. They settled down, Laura said a short prayer before they dug in.

Chapter 48

As usual, Evelyn received compliments for her cooking but she was only interested to know if Annie liked the meal.

They were halfway through dessert when Evelyn began a conversation. “Elaina was supposed to join us but she said something work-related came up.”

“She texted me earlier that she won’t make it for dinner” Annie replied.

“I miss my baby girl. She hardly comes to visit.

“That reminds me, Annie, what’s your take on Laura joining the boarding school? She said your siblings are in the hostel.”

“Yes, they are. They started as day students but my mom insisted they join the hostel because they were becoming clingy. She said they needed to learn how to be independent. Staying in the hostel is not bad. It has shaped my siblings well.”

“You see mom, being in the hostel is good. Besides I’m 14 and I can take good care of myself.” Laura said proudly.

“Your dad and I will have to decide on that.” She said, making Laura put up a sad face.

They finished their meal in no time and a maid came to clear the table.

“Thanks for coming over dear and sorry about Lucia’s behaviour.” Evelyn apologized. Annie and Eric were ready to go back to Eric’s apartment. So they were saying their goodbyes.

“It’s okay, mom. Thanks for the food and advice on the baby.” After dinner, Evelyn had sat her down and talked to her about all she needed to know about motherhood.

“It’s my pleasure dear. Thank you too. You have no idea how much joy you’ve brought into this family. I’ve never seen him this happy.” She turned to look at Eric who was smiling at what his father was saying. They were standing beside Eric’s car.

“He makes me happy too.” She whispered as an unknowing smile took over her face..

“So is it okay if I stop by your beauty house this coming week? I think I’m due for a spa treatment and maybe change my hair. You know, to look good for my husband.” She smirked.

Annie chuckled. Evelyn was everything: loving, playful, disciplined and funny.

“No Problem. It will be a pleasure having you over.”

“Perfect, expect me on Thursday or Friday.” She smiled, pulling Annie into a hug. “Take care, my child.”

“Bye, mom.” Eric hugged his mom.

“Bye Sweetheart. Take very good care of Annie and my grandchild and drive safely.”

“Sure. I’ll text you when I get home.” He kissed her cheek, gave his Dad one final hug, helped Annie into the passenger seat and settled in the driver’s seat.

Chapter 49

The drive home was very quiet as Annie and Eric were drowned in their thoughts. She stole glances at him on many occasions but she could not tell if he was angry because his expression was plain.

Eric had been acting strange since they had dinner. He didn't talk much and when he was asked questions he gave a one-word answer.

She could not help but wonder if Eric was mad at her because he somehow discovered the truth. Tears welled up in her eyes at the thought of him being angry at her because of the foolish decisions she made in the past.

As soon as Eric pulled up in the driveway, she did not wait for him to open the door for her. She got down and walked as fast as her leg could carry her into his bedroom. She reached for her backpack and started packing her things. She knew she had promised to stay till the next day but she couldn't stand his silent treatment; She couldn't bear him not talking to her.

Tears rolled down her cheeks as she folded her clothes in the bag. She knew it was all too good when Eric confessed how he felt about her. She was always screwing up, now her past had come to invade her happiness.

"What is going on here?" A concerned voice asked and she stood still, her back turned to him.

Eric took quick steps to where she was. His heart broke when he saw her in tears. The more she wiped the tears away from her face, the more they kept falling. For once, he felt as if he had offended her and he started getting mad at himself.

"Annie, please tell me what's wrong. You know I don't like seeing you cry." He pleaded, taking her hand in his.

"Do..don't make it worse, Eric. I will leave if you want me to but I can't accept this silent treatment from you." She said in tears.

"What do you mean?" He asked, confused.

"I know you are angry at me for what happened this evening. I know you know the real story but I assure you I'm not a murderer." She whisper-yelled; plopped down on the bed, buried her face in her hands and cried harder.

Eric sighed, took a seat beside her and tried to calm her down but nothing helped as the tears kept falling.

"I don't know the whole story. I know family comes first but in a situation like this, I believe you over Lucia."

She raised her head to look him in the eye. She could see he was being sincere. “So you’re not mad at me?” She asked, kind of relieved.

“No, I’m not.” He whispered, tucking some stray strands of hair behind her ear.

“Then why didn’t you ask me anything? I owe you an explanation right?”

“You don’t have to explain anything if you’re not ready.” He cupped her face with his palm. “And I know you’re not a murderer. Don’t ever call yourself that.” She bit her lip and nodded.

“But I want to tell you everything.”

“Are you sure?” He asked and she nodded in affirmation.

“How about you take a shower first? I’ll fix you a quick snack then you can tell me everything.” He suggested.

Annie’s face was not in the best state right now and a headache was already building up on the right side of her head.

“Okay.” She whispered.

Eric kissed her forehead before exiting the room. As soon as he shut the door behind him, she made her way to the bathroom. She cleaned up and changed into one of Eric’s shirts.

Eric walked in a few minutes later with a tray of cookies and a glass of orange juice.

Annie noticed he just took a shower too. She could smell his body wash and besides he had changed his outfit into his regular sweat pants and shirt.

He placed the tray on the nightstand then took a seat beside her. He took her hand in his and kissed it.

“I’m sorry if I made you feel like I was giving you silent treatment. It’s just that I don’t like making conversations when I’m angry.”

“As you know, Dad and I were going over some paperwork in the study room, we were interrupted by the noise coming from the living room so we came to see what was going on. I was devastated when I saw you in tears. I wanted to ask what was wrong but I didn’t want to put so much pressure on you.”

“I couldn’t help myself which was why I asked my dad what had happened and he told me everything. How Lucia misbehaved and called you names. Angry would be an understatement to describe the way I felt. Honestly, I had wanted to go to her room and talk some sense into her but I stopped myself because I didn’t want to do or say something to her that I was going to regret later on”

He looked into Annie’s eyes, her eyes were heavy with tears. “I understand if you no longer want anything to do with m....” She said but was cut off.

Chapter 50

“I’ve grown so attached to you and I’ll be the most foolish person if I let you go. Hell, I don’t even believe a thing of what Lucia said. Sometimes I wonder why she’s different from my siblings and I.” he said the last part in a very sad voice.

“Why did you say so?” She asked, sniffling. “I don’t want to come between your relationship with your family.”

“Trust me, Annie, you haven’t broken our relationship with Lucia. She has always been like that. Jealous, witty, proud, you name it”

It took a while for Annie to start talking but she did anyway.

“I joined our high school the week we moved to this city. A few weeks later, I began receiving love letters from an unknown person. At the end of each letter, he will leave his initials J.O so I never knew his name. Honestly, I was kind of excited that someone was interested in me for the first time in my life.”

“Then one day, I was reading a novel in the school garden and having my snack at the same time. Suddenly I was surrounded by a group of girls, about six of them including Lucia. Before I could say anything, she slapped me.”

“What?” Eric asked, horrified. “Lucia?” he asked and she nodded.

“After slapping me, she talked about how much of a whore I was for stealing her boyfriend whose name I learnt was Jordan. She went on saying I was the reason he broke up with her. She abused me, told me how stupid I was for crushing on my junior. Honestly, I expected him to be in the same class with me or be my senior at least, I never expected him to be in a class below me. Lucia embarrassed me that day. She threw my snack in the trash can and ripped off my novel, tearing most of the pages.”

“How come I never knew about this? I was still in Greenspring right?” He asked, mentioning the name of the high school they all went to.

“Yes. A Few minutes after Lucia and her friend left, Elaina came to meet me in the garden where I was crying. She apologized on Lucia’s behalf; bought me another snack and promised to replace the novel I was reading. She begged me not to report to the principal because he would summon your parents and Elaina told me something about your mom being in the hospital due to high blood pressure caused by this same Lucia and your dad was looking after her.”

“I remember, a few days before that time, Lucia got into a fight and hit a vase on a girl’s head. The girl almost died. My parents bore her hospital cost and even compensated her family not to press charges. That was what caused mom’s high blood pressure.” Eric said.

“I considered Elaina’s request and decided not to report her. That evening I received a visitor. It was Jordan; He finally revealed himself and fortunately, he was my neighbour.”

"He apologized for everything Lucia did. He told me they were not dating and they never dated. He never liked her but she was obsessed with him. From that day, Jordan and I became friends. He would always drop me at school and give me a ride home. Of course, he couldn’t drive. His parents were just too rich to buy him a car and hire a driver for him.”

“The closer we became, the more I avoided Lucia. Although she would see me at a far distance and glare at me, that was all she could do then. I don’t know who talked to her; if it was Elaina or Jordan but I was happy she stayed away from me.”

“Months later, Jordan asked me to be his girlfriend and I accepted. Although I was made fun of for dating someone who I was older than in age and class. I didn’t let that bother me as far as he liked me and I liked him too or so I believed.”

“We would go on dates, do so much cool stuff together. That was until a while before I stopped feeling the chemistry between us. I was looking for a way to tell him without breaking his heart.”

“Then one day Jordan invited me to his brother’s birthday party at their house. I’m sure you were there.” She said to him and he nodded.

“I got drunk that night and when I woke up the next day, I found myself naked on Jordan’s bed. He was naked too. I freaked out, asked him if something happened between us and he gave a positive reply. I was angry because I lost my virginity and I couldn’t even remember anything about it. I was bitter because he used me. He confessed not being drunk and I was the one throwing myself at him and he couldn’t resist. I got mad at him, accusing him of taking advantage of me and I broke up with him.”

“The first thing I did when I got home was to explain everything to my mom. Even though she was mad at me, she took care of me and took me to the hospital where I was examined because she asked me if he used a condom and I told her I had no idea. They checked me up in the hospital and there was nothing, I wasn’t pregnant but I was given some pills.”

“I didn’t go to school for a week; I ignored Jordan’s call, texts and I even refused to see him when he came knocking on my door. I blamed him for taking advantage of me.”

“Everything went by a blur and a few weeks later I heard Jordan was in Coma. The only thing I asked myself was how?” She said as tears rolled down her cheeks.

“Rumours were carried about me in school about how I killed Jordan. I had to delete my Facebook page and trust me Lucia frustrated me during that time. She made me feel more guilty than I felt about being responsible for Jordan’s condition.”

“My life was a mess. I couldn’t walk on the street without being criticized. I locked myself indoor, praying hard that Jordan makes it and I confessed to my mom that if he doesn’t make it, I would kill myself. My mom had to work from home just to monitor me so I wouldn’t do anything stupid. She already lost my dad and she didn’t want to lose me too.”

“Fortunately, Jordan’s mom came knocking on my door one day and told me Jordan was out of Coma and wanted to see me.”

“Of course you could tell she didn’t want me around her son but I couldn’t blame her.”

“I got to the hospital, I saw Jordan and we cried, asked each other for forgiveness and agreed to become friends again. He told me he woke up two days before and had to do a lot of begging for his mom to allow him to see me. He also told me they were moving to another state where they transferred his Father for work.”

“I spent the whole day with him, I made sure he gave me his new contact and we’ve been in touch till now, Just as friends.”

“Of course it was only after that I was able to move on. I went back to school, ignored all the gossip and focused on what I needed to focus on. The truth was that as far as Jordan forgave me and we were on good terms, I couldn’t care less of anyone’s opinion. But Lucia still called me a murderer, saying it was because of me he tried to kill himself, ended up in Coma and moved to another state which made her lose him.”

Eric made Annie sit on his lap and wrapped his arms around her. “I’m sorry you had to go through all of that.”

“Sometimes I wish I did things differently; hearing Lucia talk about it brought sad memories.”

“I’ve always wanted to ask why you opted for insemination,” Eric asked.

Annie sighed, “My relationship with men has been nothing but a nightmare. They either wanted me for my body or for the little money and tiny fame I had. Geoffrey was the last guy I dated. I liked him and I thought he liked me too. That was until he started misbehaving. I wanted us to work so I went out of my way to do things for him. I surrendered my body to him, what I never did for the previous guys I dated. I would plan surprise dates for us and he wouldn’t even appreciate it. One day he came clean to me, telling me he was in love with another girl."

“I was broken. It took me a while to move on and I concluded love wasn’t for me. That was when I came up with the idea, having a baby without the father in our lives.”

“It’s okay if you don’t want me anymore.” She swallowed painfully. “I know I have a horrible past which you wouldn’t want to associate yourself with.”

“I don’t care about your past and I’m officially telling you you’re stuck with me because I’m not letting you go. I love you, Annie and we are going to raise our baby together.”

His statement made her tear up again. She buried her face in his chest and cried.

“Please don’t cry. I don’t want you to get sick. You’ve been crying all evening.” He pleaded, stroking her hair.

He was able to calm her down a bit and then she spoke. “I like you too, Eric. Please don’t break my heart. I don’t think I’ll be able to survive another heartbreak.”

He raised her chin so she would look into his eyes. “I won’t break your heart, I give you my word.”

Chapter 51

“Perfect, you’re awake.” Eric smiled as he peeped into the room.

“Good morning.” She yawned.

Eric walked in, took a seat beside her and kissed her forehead.

“Feeling better?”

She nodded. “What time is it?” She asked.

“Thirteen minutes past ten, I wanted you to rest well which is why I didn’t wake you earlier.”

“Hungry?” He asked and she nodded.

“Breakfast is ready, let’s go downstairs.”

“Can you give me two minutes to use the bathroom?” She asked.

“Sure.”

He helped her stand up, she went to the bathroom to do her business and in exactly two minutes, she was out.

“What are you doing?” She chuckled as he lifted her on her back. “I can walk, remember”

“I know. Just felt like giving you a piggyback ride.” He said. she smiled, holding on to him tightly.

When they got to the dining room, he placed her on her feet. The table was already set.

Instead of Eric pulling out a seat for her, he sat down and made her sit on his lap.

“It’s not fair you know.” She pouted. “There are empty chairs. Why make me sit on your lap? Not that I’m complaining.” She justified.

“Good. This is how we are going to have breakfast.” He said then began feeding her.

After their meal, they did the dishes together before settling on the sofa in the living room to watch a movie.

“You know I’ll miss you when you go back to your apartment.” He said, playing with her hair with his fingers. He loved how soft and long it was. He was seated on the Sofa while Annie was lying down with her head on his lap.

“Me too.” She whispered.

“Will you move in with me?” he asked even when he knew it was too soon but there was nothing bad in trying right?

Annie opened her mouth to say something but unfortunately, nothing came out.

“You don’t have to reply now. Just think about it.” He said, hoping she would take his offer into consideration.

The movie they chose to watch ended ten minutes ago so they decided to continue making conversations."Do you want our baby to be a girl or a boy?" Annie asked.

He smiled “A boy.”

“Why?” she asked.

“Because he will look after his baby sister.”

“Baby Sister?”

“Yes, Babe. I want to have lots of children with you.” He said sincerely.

Annie blushed at his statement. Of course, we all know how she got pregnant with his first child which would not be the case of the second child. Her cheeks went red thinking about how baby number two will be conceived.

“But don’t get me wrong. If it’s a girl, I will not love her any less; the two of you will be the queens of my heart.”

“You’ll be an amazing Dad and if our child is a girl, she will have you wrapped around her fingers.” She smiled.

“I know.” He grinned. “And I’ll be the only man in her life. If she's going to date anyone, He must answer to me first."

Annie laughed. Oh, how he loved to hear her laugh. “We will see about that.” She smiled.

She stayed a little longer with Eric until it was a little past six pm when he drove her home.

He pulled up in her driveway and before she could help herself out of the car, he put the car on lock.

He leaned closer to her, looking into her eyes. “I miss you already.” He pouted which made her chuckle. He looked so adorable so she gave him a quick kiss on his lips.

“How about you come to pick me up on Friday to spend the weekend with you?” She suggested.

“Really?” he beamed.

She nodded.

“That will be great. I will start planning on how we’ll spend the weekend. I promise you it will be better than this one.”

“Please take care of yourself, Don’t hesitate to call me if you need anything.” He said before connecting his lips to hers for a passionate kiss.

Chapter 52

“What were you doing for more than ten minutes? I saw his car pull up in the driveway and you refused to come down.” Ella teased as soon as Annie walked in.

“I think I’m regretting giving you a spare key to my house.” Annie pouted.

“Whatever.” Ella playfully rolled her eyes before pulling Annie into a hug.

“I miss you” Annie whispered.

“I miss you too, Boo” Ella admitted.

“But I’m mad at you.” She glared at Ella, pulling away from the hug.“You packed the wrong clothes for me. I know you did it on purpose.”

“Oh about that.” Ella grinned.

“It’s not funny, Emmaunella. I had to borrow his shirt.”

“Don’t get so mad boo. I’m sure your body was excited to be putting on one of his shirts.”

“You’re so impossible. Anyways, how did it go with meeting Dylan’s Parents?” She asked.

Ella blushed. “Better than I expected. His mom was so sweet and loving. She even asked me if I would like to be Dylan’s wife and give her grandchildren.”

“Awww. Aren’t you lucky? So what was your reply?” Annie asked excitedly.

“Well, I told her I haven’t given it a thought. You know, marrying Dylan and most importantly having his children. But she told me not to worry that her son loves me very much.”

“I think I like her already,” Annie said

“Me too.” Ella giggled.

“Your turn how was it with the Ivan-James?”

Annie sighed. “A roller coaster.”

They both took a seat by the kitchen counter and Annie told her everything.

Ella groaned. “I feel like strangling Lucia.” Then she pulled Annie into a hug. “I’m sorry you had to go through all of that. But guess what? I’m proud of Eric. He was there for you and he even declared his love for you. OMG, he even said he would never let you go.” Ella said loudly which made Annie blush.

“I knew he was into you. The way he looks at you is just so priceless. Oh, Annie, I’m so happy for you. You deserve all the happiness in the world.”

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“Shit.” Annie cursed.

“What is it?” Ella asked, placing a glass of orange juice on the counter before Annie.

“I have 3.6 million followers. Where did they come from?” She asked with a frown on her face wondering if she logged into another person’s Instagram account.

“Oh, it’s because you’re now a celebrity.”

“What do you mean by that?” Annie asked.

“There are pictures of you and Eric all over the internet from the charity event you accompanied him to. The whole world is going crazy about the news.”

“Oh,” Annie whispered. The last time she went online was on Friday afternoon, before the charity event.

“Impossible.” She shook her head as she scrolled through her recent followers. Most of the celebrities she followed when she joined Instagram were even following her back. She had so many messages to reply to and so many pending requests.

“Wait till you see how many YouTube subscribers you have.” Ella winked. “Almost two million.”

“What???” Annie said in disbelief which made Ella burst into laughter.

Annie continued scrolling through her page. There were so many comments and questions. Some people were congratulating her while others were asking if she and Eric were truly together while some were telling her how lucky she was to have him.

“I hope I will survive this.” She said as she tossed her phone aside.

Chapter 53

“Mr Ivan James, your sister is here. Should I send her in?” Eric’s secretary asked through the intercom.

“Send her in, please. Thank you.”

Almost immediately, Lucia entered Eric’s office without knocking. She looked pissed.

“You should fire that tramp you know. She made me wait and insisted she must call you and confirm if I’m allowed to come in. I’m your sister for crying out loud.”

Eric looked at his younger sister in disbelief.

“It’s a procedure, Lucia. That’s what she was instructed to do.” He told her.

“Whatever.” She rolled her eyes, taking a seat before Eric.

“You insisted on seeing me today. I assume you want to talk about my birthday plans. Well, I’m t.....” She started talking but he cut her off.

“I didn’t call you here for that.” Truthfully, he had even forgotten her birthday was in a few weeks.

“Okay.” She said disappointed

“I called you here to plead with you to start respecting Annie.”

“What? That bitch?”

“Don’t you dare call her that.” He said, trying to control his temper.

“Listen carefully, Lucia. I love Annie and she’s the mother of my child, therefore, you must give her the same respect you give me.”

“How can you love someone like that?” Lucia asked in disgust.

“And how is it your business with whom I choose to fall in love with?” He countered.

“You can’t fall in love with her, Eric. She’s a commoner, she’s poor, she’s a horrible hairstylist and she’s only with you for your money. Can’t you see that?”

“Fine if she’s with me for my money. At least it’s my money and not yours.”

“Are you dumb Eric? How sure are you that you’re even the father of the ba....”

“ENOUGH!!!!!!!!”

Lucia looked at her elder brother in shock. He had never raised his voice at her.

"I can't believe you're supporting that thing over your sister. She's slowly destroying our family and I wonder why you refuse to see things from my perspective." She said with tears in her eyes.

"Forget about me respecting Annie because she doesn't deserve to be respected but the good thing is that I'll not intervene in your relationship with her. So go ahead and fuck her all you want. I'm sure you'll get tired of her." She said then stormed out of his office.

Eric sighed as he buried his face in his hands. No doubt Lucia was going crazy.

A few minutes later, his cell phone rang. He wanted to ignore the call because he didn't feel like talking. Lucia spoilt his mood but he changed his mind when he saw it was Annie who was calling him.

"Heyy." He said to the other side.

"Hi. You sound disturbed, everything okay?" She asked concerned.

"Work is just hectic." He said to her. He didn't want to tell her about his encounter with Lucia. He knew she was going to feel bad about it and he didn't want her to be stressed.

"Sorry about that." She said sincerely.

"Yeah, thanks."

"So I assume you've had lunch?"

"Yes. That's why I called you. I want to thank you for sending lunch over for me."

"Anything for you, babe." He smiled.

"I think I'm going on a diet."

"Diet? Why?"

"I think I'm eating a lot. I don't want to get fat."

"You're okay the way you are, Annie. It's normal for you to feel hungrier and eat more because you have someone who depends on you for food."

"Maybe." She whispered.

"So how's work?" He asked.

"Stressful but fine. Today has been crazy, there were so many people to attend to. My beauty parlour hardly fits everyone; I'm thinking of relocating to a bigger place."

"Good to hear that your business is booming."

"Yeah, all thanks to your influence. Everyone wants to come to my beauty house to tease me about you and I being together and to ask me how good you're in bed."

Eric chuckled. “Really? Did they ask you that?”

“Oh, you’ll be surprised how blunt people can be.”

Annie and Eric have not given any official statement about their relationship. They just smiled at anyone who asked them about it and let them think what they wanted to.

“Anyway, we miss you. We just wanted to hear your voice.” She said to him as she caressed her belly.

“I miss you both too. I’ll stop by your place tonight if I leave work early.”

“Really?” She asked excitedly.

“Yeah. Want me to buy you anything?”

“Just pizza, I will pick the movie.”

“Alright, my love. I’ll see you later.”

love you, Bye.”

Fortunately, Eric felt much better after speaking to Annie and he was able to concentrate on his work.

Chapter 54

It was a sunny Friday afternoon; just a little over one pm. Eric finished his meeting with his new investors, returned to his office to go over the notes his secretary made. He was distracted when his phone started ringing; he looked at the caller id and saw that it was his mom. A small smile crept to his lips. It has been a while since he heard from her.

“Hi, mom.” He said to the other side.

“Eric Christian Ivan-James. I thought I raised you better than this.”

“What is it mom?” he asked, getting worried.

“Annie is not feeling well and you are not even here to take care of her. Don’t you dare say you had work to do. And even if you’re busy with work you could have called me to come to take care of her. You know family comes first, right?”

“I had no idea she was not feeling well, mom. I still talked to her last night and she told me she was fine.” Truthfully, he had wanted to call Annie this morning but his mind was pretty occupied with the meeting he had to attend.

“How do you know mom? Are you with her?”

“Yes,”

“Please give her the phone.”

“Hey.” A very weak and tired voice said.

“Sorry I didn’t call to check up on you this morning.” he apologized sincerely.

“It’s fine.”

“So how are you feeling now? Should I come take you to the hospital?”

“No need. I just want to lie on my bed and slee….” She said, then sneezed.

“Sorry about that. I think I have a cold too.”

“I’m worried Annie. Have you taken anything for the cold?”

“No, I haven’t. I’m not comfortable with taking medicines. I don’t want anything to happen to the baby. But don’t worry, your mom called Doctor Myers. He has given her instructions on what to do. I’ll be fine.” She assured.

“Okay. I’ll quickly round up what I’m doing and come over.”

“No.” She groaned. “I don’t want you to get sick. Besides, I look horrible. You can’t see me like this.”

“You don’t expect me to stay here and do nothing Annie. I’ll be coming over later.” He said with finality.

“Okay.” She replied reluctantly.

“Alright my love, take care of yourself.” He ended the call.

“Your soup is ready.” Evelyn walked out of Annie’s kitchen with a bowl of chicken soup. She placed the soup before Annie who was seated on the dining table. She made the chicken soup less spicy for Annie to consume.

“Thank you, mom.” She said with a small smile.

“You’re welcome, dear. Now eat up or do you want me to feed you? I don’t mind doing that.” She said, taking a seat beside Annie.

“Thanks but I’ll manage.” Annie chuckled as she took her first spoon of soup.

Annie felt weak when she woke up this morning so the first thing she did was to call Angela Thompson, her manager, telling her she was sick and won’t be able to show up at work today. Then she placed her phone on silent mode and went back to sleep.

About four hours later, a knock on the door woke her up. She answered it and it turned out to be Evelyn, Eric’s Mother. she was surprised as to how she knew where she lived.

After Evelyn gave her a bone-crushing hug, she explained to her that she was in the neighbourhood and decided to stop by her beauty parlour for a spa treatment. When she got to the shop she asked for Annie but was told Annie was not around. Becca, Annie’s manager, recognized Evelyn to be Eric’s mom so she explained to her that Annie was sick and won’t be coming to work. She insisted Becca gave her Annie’s address and here she was.

“There you go.” Evelyn covered Annie with the duvet and took a seat beside her. “I’m sure you’ll be better by the time you wake up.” She smiled.

“Thanks for taking care of me.”

“You’re welcome. Now close your eyes and get some rest.”

“What about you? Who will keep you company?” She asked, feeling guilty.

“Don’t worry about me. I will be fine. I will just look after you until Eric comes to take over.” She replied and Annie nodded.

A few seconds later, Annie was sound asleep. Evelyn reduced the air conditioner in her room and walked out quietly.

She got to the living room and met her phone ringing. It was Eric so she picked it up.

“Hi, mom. How’s Annie?”

“She’s taking a nap. I made sure she finished all the chicken soup I made for her. I wanted her to take some medicines but she refused; She’s scared of taking any pill because of the baby. But I’m sure she will be okay when she wakes up.”

“Thanks, mom. You’re a lifesaver.”

“You’re welcome. Just hurry up and get your ass here. You know I have to get home early to go take care of my husband.”

“No problem mom. I’ll be there soon.”

Chapter 55

Evelyn made herself comfortable on the Sofa, brought out some sketches out of her bag which was pending her approval. Evelyn was the one in charge of her family's fashion house. The fashion empire was built by her grandmother and passed to her mother, then Eva; her elder sister but Eva wasn't interested so their mother passed it to Evelyn.

Since Evelyn was the head, her job was to approve designs, attend meetings and sometimes she participated in designing every new collection. Whilst going over the sketches, she checked up on Annie once every twenty minutes until Eric came to take over.

Annie opened her eyes when she felt someone showering her face with kisses. It was Eric.

"Heyy." She greeted with a smile.

He leaned closer to her and kissed her on her lips. "Feeling better?" He asked.

"Yes. Thanks to your mom."

"How long have you been here?" She asked him.

"Almost four hours."

"What time is it?" She asked, not believing she slept for so long.

"Almost seven-thirty." He replied.

"I overslept."

"Yeah. Mom said you needed your rest. I was under strict instruction not to wake you up but I couldn't take it anymore, that's why I woke you up" He pouted.

"So I assume you're staying for the night." She asked hopefully seeing he had changed from his office wear.

"Yes. I'm staying for the weekend."

She snuggled up to him. "Good, because I wasn't planning on letting you go tonight."

"Ella called while you were asleep. She was worried about you. She will be spending the weekend with Dylan and she said you should give her a call when you wake up."

"I will. I'm sure she must be mad at me for not calling her"

"She is."

"I got something for our baby," Eric said shyly as he scratched the back of his head.

"Really?" She beamed.

He nodded and reached for the package he placed on her nightstand earlier.

“Since we don’t know the gender yet, I picked a unisex colour.“ He said as he handed her the bag.

Annie looked into the red gift bag, and she came across a medium-size rectangular box. She opened it and came in contact with the cutest baby sneakers she has ever seen.

“Awww, it’s so beautiful. I love it.” She said as she admired the Nike made unisex snickers.

“Aren’t you lucky, Sweetheart? Daddy has great taste.” She said to her belly.

She turned to Eric who was grinning like crazy. She placed a kiss on his lips and his hand on her belly.“Our little one says thank you.”

“So are you hungry?” He asked after a while.

“Very much.”

“Dinner is ready. Let’s go downstairs and then we will settle for a movie.” He suggested and she nodded.

What an amazing way to start the weekend with the love of her life by her side.

Chapter 56

One month later.

After much contemplation, Annie decided to give in to Eric's plea and move in with him. It was a hard decision as she liked being independent but she decided to take the risk because of the love she has for Eric and besides, his mansion was more suitable to raise their baby.

Apart from that, Annie was already fond of Eric. She found it hard to sleep at night without his arms wrapped around her.

She had received a huge welcome party organized by Nano, Nora and her husband, Bernard. They were so pleased to have her as the woman of the house.

Annie and Eric's relationship have been full of nothing but love. There were times when Eric insisted on featuring in her YouTube videos. There was even a time he did a question and answer session with her; their fans went crazy, wanting to know how they met and if they plan on getting married.

The question and answer session was the longest video Annie ever put up on youtube. She and Eric tried to be as honest as they could when answering the questions posed to them.

They didn't answer all questions because some were personal, like the questions they got on Annie's pregnancy. Some people were asking if she was pregnant because of the way she was glowing and all but Eric and Annie did not respond to that.

There were times Eric would show up in Annie's Beauty House unannounced with Lunch. They would have lunch together and make small talk before he returned to his office.

Annie reached for her handbag, intertwined her hand with Eric's and made their way downstairs.

"Good morning." Nora greeted them with a smile.

"Morning."

"Good morning." They replied.

Eric took out a chair for Annie to seat and as soon as she was settled he took a seat beside her. Then Nora started serving them their breakfast.

Starting from the day Annie moved in with Eric, she had been eating more and healthier. Nora made sure of that and sometimes she would have lunch delivered to her at work.

"Annie I won't be able to join you for lunch today. I have a meeting I have to attend." He said nervously and she wondered what was making him so nervous.

“Sure no problem, Just for today right?” She pouted.

“Yes,” he replied. She nodded and continued her meal.

They finished their breakfast in no time, said their goodbyes to Nora, Eric dropped Annie at her workplace before heading to his office.

He worked till a few minutes to lunchtime when he told his secretary he wouldn’t be back until later in the evening.

He exited his company’s building, got into his car and headed to the cafe to meet the people waiting for him.

“Hi, Angela. Good day sir.” He greeted once he approached Annie’s mother and stepfather.

“Hello dear.” She stood up and pulled him into a hug; they officially met three weeks ago.

“Sorry I kept you guys waiting.” He apologized.

“No need, Son. We just got here.” David, Annie’s step-dad said.

Eric let out a sigh as he took his seat. “I’ll just go straight to the point. I’m in love with Annie and I want to ask for her hand in marriage. I know this may seem too soon but to make such a decision but I assure you I'm certain about what I feel for her and I know she's the one for me. I promise to take good care of her and our baby. She’s my world and I cannot imagine my life without her. I’m here to ask for your blessings.” He said sincerely.

Angela glanced at her husband then back at Eric. “You have our blessings dear. I couldn’t have asked for a better husband for my daughter. I have no doubt you will take very good care of her.”

She looked at her husband with teary eyes. “I can’t believe my baby girl will finally find happiness, her dream family.” She said and David smiled at her, remembering how Annie talked about finding Her Prince Charming, getting married to him and having beautiful babies.

“I want the two of you to be present when I propose to her. I want it to be a surprise so please let this be a secret between us.”

“No problem Son, when are you planning on proposing?” Angela asked excitedly.

“Actually,” He said as he playfully scratched the back of his head. “I want it to be as soon as possible. I’m thinking of Saturday which is three days away.”

“Okay then. Let’s know if you need any help in getting the surprise done.” David offered.

“Sure, Thanks.” He replied.

Eric called the attention of the waiter and ordered drinks. He told Annie’s parents of his idea about the surprise which they seemed to be pleased with.

Chapter 57

“Oh my goodness, this is the best news I’ve heard in awhile.”

“Gosh, I can’t wait to see Annie’s face when you ask her to marry you.”

“Honestly this is amazing. I’m so happy for Annie and you too Eric. You guys deserve all the happiness in the world.” Ella said at a go.

After Eric left the Cafe, he came straight to his best friend’s office. Dylan was happy to see him and he was even happier when he broke the news about wanting to propose to Annie.

“Honestly I was wondering why you did not do this sooner.” Dylan teased as he wrapped his arms around Ella. They were seated on the same couch.

“Maybe I was scared.”

“Of what?” Ella asked with her eyebrow raised.

“That she was going to say no and besides I’m still nervous. What if she refuses to marry me? I hope that doesn’t happen because I don’t think I will survive her rejection.” He said nervously and Ella smiled at him. ‘If only he knew that Annie had been in love with him for years.’

“You worry too much, Eric. Everything will be fine.” She assured.

“So let’s plan the surprise. What do you have in mind?” she asked.

“The venue, food, drinks, guest list and everything is ready. I just need you” He turned to Ella “To help me take her out to find the perfect outfit. You don’t have to worry about the price and of course, she must not know the main reason you’re taking her shopping.”

Ella grinned “Consider it done.”

“What about me. What do I have to do? I can help you choose the ring.” Dylan smirked.

“I already got that covered,” Eric replied with a bigger smirk.

“Damn, you’re way much ready than I imagined.” Dylan groaned and they all chuckled.

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Annie woke up from her nap feeling better but the pains in her lower abdomen have not subsided. She winced in pain as she stood up from her bed. She made a mental note to visit her doctor first thing tomorrow morning.

The pain started a few minutes to lunchtime. She wasn’t able to do any work after that and Becca, her manager drove her home to get some rest.

Nora was shocked to see that she was back at a very unusual time but she told Nora she was just tired and wanted to take a nap.

Nora and Eric were so protective of her, especially when she raised an alarm about being sick. The last time she had a fever, Eric stayed home with her for three days, giving her all his attention and abandoned his work as he kept on telling her she was his priority and work could come after she had recovered.

Annie took a glance at the alarm clock on the nightstand. It was a little past six pm. Eric should be on his way back home. She decided to go downstairs to feed herself. Not that she was hungry but she had to try and eat something for the baby since she missed lunch.

She got downstairs and saw who she wasn't expecting to see. Lucia. Heaven knew she had no strength in her to argue with Lucia, not with the pain she was feeling.

"Finally you decided to show your face." Lucia hissed.

"Lucia, you said you wanted to see Eric; since he isn't back why don't you wait in the study for him." Nora pleaded because she knew Lucia was a trouble maker.

"I will not be dictated to, on what to do in my brother's house." She replied rudely.

"Spoilt brat, you can never change." Nora murmured.

"When my brother comes, I'll tell him to fire your old rotten ass."

She chuckled. "You wish. I'm sure he'll fire you first as his sibling because you're of no use." She glared at her.

Lucia was about to reply to Nora when Annie intervened.

"Thank you, Nora. I'll take it from here. You can go continue with what you were doing." She said to Nora who gave Lucia a spiteful glare before she proceeded to the kitchen.

"How may I help you?" Annie folded her arms.

"Oh, you can help me by telling my brother that he's not the father of the thing you're carrying. You can help me by telling Eric that you're a gold digger who's only interested in his money and you can help me by leaving my brother the hell alone so he can finally find happiness."

Lucia has been bitter since she overheard her mom talking to Elaina that Eric was planning to propose to Annie. Since then, all she could see was red. Annie was always winning but this time, she wasn't going to let her.

Annie replied with anger "First of all, my baby is not A THING and you know what? Eric is the father and there's nothing you can do about that. I'm with him not because I'm a gold digger but because I Lo.....Ouch..." She screamed as she held her lower abdomen with her right hand.

“Ouchhhh.” Annie screamed again as her leg gave up and she landed on the floor. Tears were streaming down her cheeks. The pain in her abdomen was getting unbearable.

“H..help..me plea.please.” She managed to say to Lucia who hissed at her.

Nora ran out of the kitchen into the main entrance which led to the staircase. Lo and behold she saw Annie on the floor; a few steps away from the staircase, with her arms around her belly.

She ran to her and crouched beside her. “Oh My God, Blood.” She said in shock as she discovered Annie was bleeding. The pink nightdress she was putting on was stained with blood.

“Help me carry her, please.” She said to Lucia who was standing there looking unbothered about what was going on. “We need to get her to the hospital.”

“What? Me? Help her? No way.”

“Why are you so cruel? can’t you see she’s bleeding? Just do something good for once in your life.” Nora screamed at her as tears rolled down her cheeks.

“I don’t have time for all this drama. You know what, I’m out of here.” She said and turned around.

“Please Lucia. We need your car to get her to the hospital. Please, Julius is not around to drive us and I can’t drive, neither can my husband.” She pleaded with a soft voice.

“Sorry I can’t. I have a date and I don’t want to be late.” She said then stormed out of the mansion.

“S..sa..Save my b..Baby..” Annie said tiredly, her eyes slowly closing on their own.

Nora took out her phone from her pocket, dialled 911 and shouted at them to come as fast as possible.

Next, she called Eric to inform him about the situation.

Chapter 58

Nora and Benjamin were seated at the reception area of the emergency ward, waiting for the doctor to come out to update them on Annie's condition.

Tears rolled down Nora's cheeks as she silently prayed for Annie and the baby's safety. She knew how bad Eric wanted this baby and losing the baby will break him and Annie who was already attached to the little one.

The ambulance arrived six minutes after Nora's call and they brought her to Saint Mary's hospital.

"Nora, how is she? Is she going to be fine? How's the baby?" Eric asked with tear-filled eyes. His hair was scattered. You could tell he ran his hand through it so many times. He was in his office clothes but without his jacket. The first two buttons of his shirt were undone and below was his tired tie.

"We are still waiting for the doctor to give us an update. He should be out soon." Nora said as she wiped her tears. The more she wiped them, the more they kept falling.

Eric sighed as he began pacing up and down the reception area, praying for the worst not to happen. He was about to leave the jewellery shop when he received Nora's call. Immediately she told him what had happened, his heart sank. Nora had to beg him to drive safely on his way to the hospital.

About eight minutes later, the doctor came out of the emergency room. It wasn't Doctor Myers but another young Doctor with dark hair.

"How are they?" Eric swallowed painfully.

"The lady is fine but she lost the baby. I'm so sorry. She was brought in late hence there was no chance for us to save him or her. I will let you know when you can see her."

Eric stood still. It was as if the reason for his living had been taken away from him. Why? Why was life this cruel? hot tears rolled down his cheeks as he slid down the wall, sat on the floor, buried his face in his hands and cried.

Bernard squatted to his left to comfort his Boss. Since he started working for Eric, he has never seen him this broken.

Nora who was sobbing uncontrollably decided to give Eric her support too. She squatted by his right side and gently patted his back.

"I'm so sorry, Eric." She swallowed painfully. There was nothing more painful than losing a child. She knew there was nothing she could say that would take Eric's pain away. But still, She wanted to be there for him.

“Please be strong. I know it’s not easy but I believe you can go through this. Remember you have to be strong for Annie; she will need you now more than ever. I’m sure she will try to push you away, blaming herself for what happened but please don’t let that happen. I believe in what both of you feel for each other. I believe you two will go through this.” She said in tears as Eric sobbed even more.

Nora and Bernard tried to console Eric for over twenty minutes. They succeeded in making him sit on a chair and they sat beside him.

“Thank you.” He said with a shaky voice. His eyes were red and his face flushed from crying. “I appreciate your support.”

“No need to thank us son. We’ll always be here for you.” Bernard said.

“You can go home now; I’ll stay with Annie for the night. I’ll call you if I need anything.”

“You sure? We can stay with you.” Nora offered.

“I’ll be fine. Thanks.”

Eric reached for his wallet. He wanted to give them some cash to transport them back home. They came with the ambulance and had no way to go back home. He wasn’t sure if they had money on them. Everything was just sudden.

“Don’t worry about that, Son. We can manage.” Bernard declined his gesture.

“You sure?” He asked and Bernard nodded. He pays them well for their services, takes care of their food and housing. Darn, their salary was even more than enough.

“Alright my child, stay safe. I’ll be here tomorrow morning.” Nora said, giving him a light squeeze on his shoulder. Bernard did the same, then they left for the mansion.

By now Eric was having a headache. He took out his phone from his pocket, thinking of who to call. Of course, he couldn’t call his mom. Apart from the fact that she would be so heartbroken, she would insist on coming right away. Same goes for Annie’s mom. He decided to call Dylan and since he would be out of office till God knows when, Hopefully, Dylan will help him take care of his business.

Dylan picked up almost immediately.

“What’s up, bro?” He asked cheerfully.

“Dylan.” He said painfully as another set of tears welled up in his eyes.

Dylan could tell from his voice that something was wrong and he got worried immediately. “What is it, Eric?” He panicked.

“Dylan...An..Annie..She... She” He said in tears.

“You’re scaring me. Is she okay?”

“We lost our baby Dylan.” He broke the news then burst into uncontrollable tears.

“Jeez. I’m so sorry Eric.” Dylan replied in a shocked voice.

“You’re at Saint Mary’s right? I’m coming over now.”

“No, don’t worry. It’s late. I just wanted to let you know because you’ll be helping me work out things in my company. I don’t know when I will be back to work.”

“Don’t worry. I’ll step in for you.” He replied in understanding. No doubt he and Annie need time to heal.

“Does mom know?” He said.

“No she doesn’t, Just you, Nora and Bernard. I’ll inform the rest tomorrow,” he replied.

“You sure you don’t need me there? I don’t mind spending the night at the hospital.” he offered.

“Don’t worry Dylan but thanks anyway.”

“Okay, bro. I’ll come to see you tomorrow before I go to work.”

“Okay. Bye.”

As soon as Eric ended the call, a nurse came to him and directed him to Annie’s ward.

Remembering he has to be strong for her, he wiped his tears before he walked into her room. The ward was one of those VIP wards which were made to the patient’s comfort.

Annie’s back was turned from the entrance. Eric could hear her soft cry as soon as he stepped into her ward and it broke his heart.

“Annie."He called out her name and she sobbed even more. He took a seat beside her, scooped her upper body in his chest and hugged her. Her eyes were red and her face flushed and puffy from crying.

“I’m so sorry. Our baby is no more because of me, I’m so sorry Eric.” She sobbed. Eric did not say anything, Instead, he embraced her more and patted her back. He was in tears also. He knew they needed this. They needed to let it out. They needed to mourn the loss of the little miracle they never had the chance to meet.

After they cried and there were no more tears left, Annie pulled away from his embrace and looked into his eyes to apologize again. “I’m so sorry.”

He caressed her cheeks. “It’s not your fault.”

She bit her lip to stop herself from crying. “If only I had paid more attention, maybe we wouldn’t have lost him.”

He raised her chin to make her look at him. “You’re the sweetest person I’ve ever met. You would never do any harm to others even when they hurt you. You didn’t take our baby’s life; It

just happened. Life happens. This is a trial of faith and we will go through this together." He assured, but she wasn't convinced.

"You should be mad at me, blame me for what happened to our child and not care about me."

Eric sighed as he remembered what Nora told him. 'She will do all she can to push you away but don't let that happen. Be there for her.'

"You trust me right? Don't you?" He asked her. She nodded.

"Then trust me when I say you're not guilty of what happened. If you are thinking I'm going to leave you now that our child is no more, you're wrong. Like I've always said, you're stuck with me and I will never let you go."

Annie didn't say anything further. She buried her face in his chest and cried more. That was all she did till tiredness consumed her and she fell asleep.

Chapter 59

He knew she wasn't feeling okay but he still wanted to ask. He was worried about her falling into depression or doing something crazy. This was what happens when one loses a child and most importantly feels guilty for it. She had not even said anything since he walked into her ward and began examining her.

"How are you feeling, Annie?" Doctor Myers asked. He was pained when he heard the news. His favourite patients who were like children to him were going through a very hard time and he was determined to be there for them.

"I feel incomplete; like a part of me is missing. I feel horrible, I feel guilty." She whispered as a tear rolled down her cheeks. Eric sighed as he wiped them off.

"Annie, it isn't your fault." Eric chipped in.

A sad smile crept to Dr Myers lips. Knowing Eric was there for her gave him hope that everything was going to be fine.

Doctor Myers took Annie's hands in his. "Miscarriage happens to a lot of women out there. I know it's very hard for you to accept that you have nothing to do with it because of the bond you've created with your baby."

"Before I came here, I was going through your reports which showed everything was okay. That means you did all you needed to do."

"But it's still my fault because I had felt pain in my abdomen throughout lunch. I should have known then. I should have brought myself to the hospital. If I had done that, maybe my baby would still be with me."

"Maybe not my child, most of the cases I've dealt with, only a few babies survived. I'm sure your baby will not be happy wherever he is to see his mama being distressed. I'm not saying you should forget about him and move on as if nothing happened. Just look at it from the perspective that he or she is with your Dad in heaven."

"Our focus now is for you to get better. A nurse will be here anytime from now to clean you up or can you manage yourself?

"I think I can." She whispered.

"Don't worry, Doctor Myers. I'll take care of her." Eric assured.

"Take care, dear. I'll be back to check on you before my shift is over."

"Thank you." Annie and Eric said to him. He gave them a nod before walking out of Annie's ward.

As soon as Doctor Myers left, they had another visitor. It was Nora. She came in with a basket of food and change of clothes for them.

Eric was grateful she thought of bringing things for them without him giving her any instructions. He walked towards her and collected the items she was carrying.

“Thank you, Nora,” He said.

Nora took a seat beside Annie and took her hand in hers.

“Thank you for everything,” Annie said with a sad smile which Nora returned. She could tell Annie was trying to be strong.

“You have nothing to thank me for, my child. Make sure you get better. Everything will be fine.” She assured. Annie nodded.

“I made your favourite breakfast. Please make sure you eat them.” She pleaded.

“I’ll try,” Annie whispered.

“Sorry I can’t stay long for now. I have to go to the grocery shop then back home to prepare lunch and dinner and then back here to feed you guys.”

“Thanks again, Nora,” Eric said.

“No Problem, my child. I’ll be back later in the day.” She said then left for grocery shopping.

Eric helped Annie stand up from the bed and he carried her into the adjoined bathroom. He made her seat on the bathtub after which he went back to the room to take the bag Nora brought for them.

Eric searched the bag for Annie’s toothbrush. He applied some paste on it and handed it to her. She said a small thank you as she accepted it and began brushing her teeth.

When she was done, Eric handed her a pair of clean dress, underwear and a towel then she stepped into the shower while Eric brushed his teeth.

She came out of the shower minutes later with her brown sundress on and her wet hair tied with a towel. Eric assisted her in blow-drying her hair and braided it into a ponytail. He could see her eyes were dull. The sparkle was no longer there. He saw the way she looked at her belly in disgust. He sighed, cupping her face. “We will go through this Annie, I love you and I promise to do all it takes to make you smile again. We will try for another baby whenever you’re ready and we will let him or her know that he or she has an elder sibling who will always have a special place in our hearts.”

“Promise you will not leave me.” She whispered nervously.

“I promise I won’t.”

“You want to have breakfast now?” He asked

“I’ll wait for you to take a shower.” She replied, then exited the bathroom.

Eric took a quick shower and changed. He arranged all their clothes and items into the bag and walked out of the bathroom.

Annie was not on the bed but was lying on the sofa that was in the opposite direction of the hospital bed.

Eric Placed the backpack on a chair then reached for the food basket Nora brought earlier on.

He served Annie a small portion of breakfast and ended up feeding her.

Eric was trying to cheer Annie up by watching a movie when another set of visitors arrived. It was Ella and Dylan.

Ella rushed to the sofa where Annie was seated and pulled her best friend into a hug. Annie hugged her back. They stayed like that for a while before Ella pulled away.

She looked into Annie’s eyes. “I will always be here for you. I promise we’ll go through this together. This is just a trial, I believe something greater is in store for you and Eric.” She assured Annie.

“I hope so” Annie whispered. She could see tears in Ella’s eyes.

“I believe so. Your little miracle brought so much joy to our family. He or she will never be forgotten.”

The men decided to give the ladies some alone time so they walked out of the ward.

“What happened?” Ella asked.

“I started feeling pain in my lower abdomen yesterday at lunch. Becca drove me home and I took a nap. I woke up and decided to go have dinner downstairs, that’s when I came across Lucia. We got into a heated argument and it happened. I felt a sharp pain in my stomach which I couldn’t hold anymore. I remember asking Lucia to help me but she didn’t. Before I fell unconscious, I remember hearing Nora begging her to drive us to the hospital because she and Bernard couldn’t drive even though cars were readily available in the mansion.”

“I wonder if my baby would still be alive if she had helped me. But Doctor Myers said it doesn’t matter that in cases like that most babies don’t survive, only a few.”

“How did Eric take the news?”

“I thought he was going to blame me but he didn’t, he has been my pillar of support and I don’t even know what I would have done without him.”

“He’s a good man.”

“Yes. And I pray he doesn’t leave me.”

“He won’t. I don’t think he’ll be able to live without you by his side.” Ella assured.

“Just get better okay.” She said to Annie who responded with a nod.

“I can’t believe how my life has changed in the last twenty-four hours. The love of my life was pregnant, I was at the ring shop trying to finalize the fitting of the ring and suddenly I got a call from Nora telling me Annie was bleeding."

“It will be fine bro.” Dylan gave him a light squeeze on his shoulder.

“Have you informed your mom and Annie’s mom?” He asked.

“Yes. I’m sure they will be here at any time from now.”

“I just can’t believe my blood will do this to me,” Eric said in Anger.

“Who? Lucia?”

“Yes. After I pleaded with her to respect Annie, She couldn’t even help when Annie was in pain. She knew the woman I love was dying and instead she chose to go on a stupid date with some random idiot.”

“I already cut her off. I have nothing else to do with her. Right now I only have two sisters, Laura and Elaina. I sent her a text telling her to stay far away from me and never set foot in my house or any of my offices. I also cut off all her allowances from me. Whatever she needs, she should direct her request to mom and dad. I’m seriously tired of her stupidity.”

“Eric I think you went too far. You shouldn’t make decisions when you’re angry.”

“Honestly Dylan, I don’t want to talk about her. She’s nobody to me.”

Dylan knew better than to press on the matter when Eric was in a bad mood.

They talked some more about business and decided to go join the love of their lives in the ward.

As soon as Eric opened the door, he was greeted by Annie’s Soft laughter. He was happy she was slowly coming around.

Chapter 60

Eric pulled up in the driveway and went to open the door for her. “Welcome home sweetheart.” He smiled as he lifted her in a bridal style.

“I’m happy to be home.” She said, snuggling against his chest. She was tired of staying in the hospital and Doctor Myers made her stay a day extra to ensure she was perfectly okay before she was discharged.

Eric walked into the mansion with Annie in his arms and placed her on a couch in the living room.

He squatted towards her. “What do you want for lunch?”

“Anything yummy.” She replied.

“And I want a chocolate cake for dessert.” She requested.

Annie has been trying to get back on track since the incident occurred and no doubt Eric has been a great help. He has never left her side, only when he had to go take a shower.

“Welcome home beautiful people.” A familiar voice said. They turned around and saw Elaina who was holding a tray of juice and cookies.

“I thought you had gone back to your apartment,” Eric said surprised.

“Yeah. I just decided to take a break. I called in for an extra three days. So I hope you’ll accommodate me here.”

“Sure,” Eric replied.

“Yeah, I could use some company,” Annie added.

Both Eric and Annie’s parents visited Annie at the hospital two days ago. It was an emotional encounter. Tears were shed, words of hope were given to Annie and most importantly, they tried to cheer Annie up before they left.

Shortly after they left, Elaina appeared; she stayed with them till night time before leaving for her hotel. Seeing that she was still around was kind of a surprise because they expected her to have back gone to her apartment which was in the next city.

“I’ll be right back, ladies. I have to get the bags from the car.” He kissed Annie before he departed.

Annie couldn’t believe he had the nerve to kiss her in front of his sister. She was kind of embarrassed about it; her cheeks turned a little red as she started looking everywhere except Elaina.

Elaina teased. “You don’t have to be shy about it you know.”

“I’m working on that.” She replied shyly, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear.

“I need to tell you something Annie,” Elaina said, kind of nervous.

“Sure, I’m listening.” She encouraged.

“I’m seeing someone. His name is Jace. We’ve been together for two years now and he proposed to me last week.”

“Really?” she asked and Eliana nodded.

“Congratulations Elaina. You’re a very loving person, beautiful in and out and you deserve all the happiness in the world.”

“Thank you.” She replied shyly.

“Does that mean you’re hiding your ring?” Annie asked and Elaina sighed.

“I didn’t know how Eric would react, that's why I took it off.”

She took out her small black purse and searched for the ring. She found it and showed it to Annie.

“Wow. It’s beautiful.” Annie said as she admired the diamond ring.

“So I take it that Eric does not know about Jace.”

“No, he doesn’t. I did not tell him about Jace because I was scared.”

“Of what?”

“Of Eric not approving him for me, I wouldn’t blame him though, because most guys I’ve dated were just with me for my family’s fortune.”

“But honestly, Eric’s blessing means so much to me as my parents’ blessings.”

“Do you really love him?” A familiar voice said which made Elaina freeze. So he heard all that they were saying.

“I do.” She whispered as she looked at the ring.

Eric walked towards where she was seated and squatted towards her. “I know you’ve been with Jace for two years now.”

“How?” She asked, surprised “Did mom tell you?”

“No. Let’s just say I have my way of looking after my sister. I did a background check on him and to my disappointment, there was nothing I could use against him. I know he loves you. You love him too right?”

“I do.”

“Then your happiness is all that matters to me. You may put on your ring and if it will make you feel better I was aware he proposed. I was just waiting for you to come clean to me.”

“Thank you, Eric.” She slipped on her ring and then pulled him into a hug.

“So when can I meet Jace? I want to give him an official warning not to ever hurt my sister.”

Elaina smiled, “I may have invited him to dinner tonight.”

“Okay then. I’ll be expecting him. But for now, you have to excuse Annie and me. We have to take a shower.”

“Oh really.” Elaina teased. Annie’s cheeks turned red.

“Whatever, keep yourself entertained. We’ll be right back.” Eric said as he and Annie departed for their room.

Chapter 61

Annie tried her best not to laugh as she watched Elaina glare at her brother. Annie and Eric were seated on a couch in the living room and opposite them were Elaina and Jace on another couch.

Eric had not said a word since Elaina introduced him to Jace but Jace was so uncomfortable by the look Eric was giving Him.

“You didn’t ask for my blessing before proposing to my Sister. May I know why?”

“Eric.” Elaina groaned but he ignored her.

“Hmmm.” Jace fiddled with his fingers; He was shy and intimidated by Eric. Jace was handsome, tall and smart. He was also from a rich family but not as rich as the Ivan-James family. He works in his father’s company and since he was the only male child of his family, no doubt he will be the one to take over his father’s company when the time comes.

“I’m sorry I didn’t approach you before proposing to her. I assure you I love Elaina and I’ll never do anything to hurt her.”

“Ladies please excuse us,” Eric said as he stood to his feet. “I’d like to have a private discussion with Jace.” He said and then led Jace to the study room.

When they departed, Elaina grumbled and took a seat beside Annie. “Why does my brother have to be difficult?” She frowned.

Annie smiled. “He just wants you to end up in safe hands. I’ll say he’s doing his duty. You’re so lucky to have him as a brother. He cares so much for you.”

“Yes, I know.” She rolled her eyes. “And you’re so darn lucky to have him as your boyfriend.”

Her statement made Annie blush. They haven’t made it official. She knew he liked her and so did she but she could not define their status right now especially when they just lost their baby.

“So, my brother told me about your cosmetic line which you will be launching soon,” Elaina stated.

“I don’t know about that,” Annie responded.

Elaina took Annie’s hand in hers. She understood Annie’s point. She just lost a child and was unsure of moving forward or when to move forward.

“He or she will always have a place in our hearts. Without him or her, we will not be here today. Your little miracle brought my family and yours together.

“I just wish I didn’t lose it. I wish I had the chance to know if it was a girl or boy. I wish he or she was still here with us. I don’t know how to move on without him or her.” She said as she freed her hand from Elaina’s own and wiped the tear that fell.”

Elaina pulled her into a hug. “It will be fine, Sis. I know there are better days ahead. You will go through this.” She assured.

“I know” Annie replied as she pulled away from the hug. “I will still go on with the launching but I’ll push it to a later date.”

“You can always count on me,” Elaina assured.

“Thanks” Annie replied with a sad smile.

Their conversation was interrupted by a sound of laughter. It was Eric and Jace laughing at what Jace was saying. That eased Elaina’s tension. She wanted her soon to be husband and her brother to get along.

Chapter 62

Eric stretched his hand to the other side of the bed and noticed it was cold and empty. He slowly opened his eyes and Annie was nowhere to be found on her side of the bed.

Eric adjusted the duvet and made his way out of the bed. His first stop was the bathroom but Annie was not there. He was about to go downstairs to go look for her when something caught his attention. He heard someone singing; He followed the voice and traced it to their baby's bedroom where he found Annie sitting on a rocking chair beside the window.

He sighed in relief, shut the door quietly behind him and walked towards Annie who had a baby's blanket wrapped around her shoulders.

The baby's room was quite scanty except for the items Annie's mom bought a few weeks ago and the few items Annie and Eric bought just last week.

Eric found himself a chair, placed it in front of Annie and took his seat. He took her hand in his and that was only when she noticed his presence.

"Hey." She said with a sad smile.

"I was worried about you."

"Sorry. I couldn't sleep so I decided to come here." She said and he nodded in understanding.

"You know you don't have to blame yourself for anything?"

"I'm not. I just miss him or her a lot. I guess I got so fond of him."

"I do too. I miss talking to our miracle at night."

"Miracle?" She asked, confused.

"Yes. He or she will always be our miracle baby. He brought the two of us together and I will forever be grateful for that."

She smiled. "Me too, I was thinking of what to call him or her and you just gave me the right name. Baby miracle."

"Annie, I want to tell you this again. I'm never going to leave you, you're my life and the person I want to spend the rest of my life with and I'm ready whenever you want us to start trying for another baby."

"What did I do to deserve someone like you?" She asked.

"No. I'm the one who is lucky to have someone like you."

She smiled. "I love you."

"I love you more." He sealed his declaration with a kiss.

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Two Months Later

"I'm sorry I won't be there for the launch of your product." Eric apologized for the uncountable time.

Annie, who was still in her nightdress walked towards him, placed a kiss on his lips and adjusted his tie.

"Honestly, I feel so sad that you won't be there but it's okay. You've apologized and I accept your apology. The whole event will be captured by Emmett so you can watch it when you come back from your trip."

"Okay then. But I already made sure all our loved ones will be there even though I'm absent. Your parents, my parents, Ella, Dylan, Elaina, Jace, Jace family, I also asked for permission for Claire, Jayden and Laura to be there tonight, they will all be there to support you. And I may have extended the invitation to some of my colleagues."

"I think that's too much of a crowd for the launching, but it's fine."

He wrapped his arms around her waist and kissed her lips "I'll miss you"

"I'll miss you too, handsome. Make sure you call me as soon as you get there." She kissed him some more.

"Okay, it's time to go. I'm sure Julius must be waiting for you." She began chasing him out of their room.

"Besides you know I have to get ready, Ella will soon be here." She reasoned.

"Have a safe trip sweetheart. I love you." She kissed him, didn't wait for him to reply, pushed him into the car and shut the door. She waved as the car exited the mansion.

When Eric gave her the news that he wasn't going to be there for the launching of her cosmetic line, she felt bad at first because she was looking forward to his support. But she understood because he had to travel to finalize a deal.

To be honest, Annie was so excited about today. She had put in a lot of work in making her dream come true and she couldn't wait for everyone to try out her products.

Annie rushed into her bedroom and got into the nearest dress she could find and as soon as she finished applying her makeup, Ella arrived.

"Ella. You know you don't have to take me shopping. I can just make use of one of the dresses in my closet." She reasoned.

“No way.” Ella rolled her eyes. “Tonight is a special night and you’ll be putting on a new outfit picked by me.”

“Whatever. Let’s go.” She said, picking up her purse.

Chapter 63

“I love this one” Annie said as her eyes never left the dress.

Ella sighed as she turned to look at the dress. Lo and behold it was just the perfect dress.

“Can she try it on?” Ella asked the sales representative.

“Sure,” She said and guided Annie to the fitting room.

Ella sighed as she collapsed on a nearby chair. Shopping was really stressful but a smile found its way to her lips when she remembered all the efforts will pay off in a few hours.

Annie had been so picky about her outfit tonight. She practically rejected all the long dresses suggested by the sales rep saying she wanted something she would be comfortable with because she will be moving around a lot.

“So how do I look?” Annie said as she walked out of the fitting room and posed in front of Ella

“Wow. This is so beautiful.” Ella smiled then she turned to the sales rep. “Can your best friend ever...?”

“Of course not.” The sales representative replied and they all burst into laughter.

Annie looked gorgeous in her red dress which stopped right on her knee. It was an off-shoulder dress which showed the right amount of cleavage.

“We’ll be taking it, Stella. Have it packaged for us.” Ella said to the sales rep.

“Okay,” She said and guided Annie back to the fitting room.

A few minutes later, Annie came back from the fitting room looking grumpy.

“Is anything the matter?”

“The price of that dress is ridiculous. Maybe I should go for something else.”

“Don’t worry.” She smiled.

“Okay. I’ll pay half.” She suggested.

“No way It’s all on me.” She winked at Annie. “Come on.” She got up from where she was seated and pulled Annie along with her. “We still need to look for a pair of matching heels.”

“You seem very excited about all of this. Is there anything I should know?” Annie asked curiously.

“Oh, you sure don’t know how excited I am for tonight.” She giggled.

Annie finally settled for a pair of black gorgeous heels which design matched her dress. After that, they stopped by a restaurant to have lunch then they left for her mansion.

“I miss Eric.” Annie pouted as she plopped down on one of the couches in the living room.

“He’s not even gone for up to six hours and you’re cranky.” Ella teased.

“I know. I think I’m just.....”

Ella chuckled “Obsessed with him.”

“No. I won’t use that. Even though I think about him all the time I don’t want him to think of me like a clingy girlfriend. I think I’m just used to him. I love him so much that I can’t even imagine what my life would be like if he ever breaks up with me.”

Ella smiled as she watched her best friend talk passionately about the love of her life. In all their years of friendship, she had never seen her talk about someone with so much adoration”

“I’m sure he feels the same way about you.” She assured.

“I think it’s time to get ready,” Ella announced. “You know I’ll have to dress you up, do your hair and makeup. So get up girl. You don’t want to be late for your big night.” Ella shooed Annie upstairs to the direction of her room.

“I officially crown you as the most beautiful woman in the universe,” Ella said as she did the finishing touches of Annie’s make up.

“Your products are great Annie. You put in so much work and I’m so damn proud of you.” She commended.

All the makeup she applied on Annie’s face was part of the product she’ll be launching tonight.

“Thank you, Ella. Thanks for being my rock. Thanks for pushing me in moments I almost gave up. Thank you for everything.” She hugged her.

“You’re welcome Boo. Now let me go get dressed; our ride must be waiting for us.”

In twenty minutes, Ella was ready and they were both good to go. She wore a short dark dress with matching heels.

Ella approached Annie and handed her a small box which was beautifully wrapped. “This is for you”

Annie collected it, opened it and came across a pair of silver earrings.

“This is actually from me, Congratulations on your success best friend.” She cheered.

“Ella, what will I do without you? thank you so much. I love you.” She said then pulled Ella into a hug.

“You’re welcome hon. let’s get going. Our ride is waiting.”

They found their way down the stairs, then to the door.

“What’s going on?” Annie turned to Ella, shocked to see a chauffeur standing right outside a limousine.

Ella shrugged. “I don’t know.”

“Good evening Miss Annie, Miss Ella. I’m Andre, your chauffeur for the night. I’ve been hired by Mr Ivan James to take you to the Your venue.

“Uh okay.” She said unsure as she was expecting to see Julius and the Bentley Eric agreed to lend her for the night.

“Let the party begin.” Ella squealed as she stepped into the limousine and Annie followed suit.

Chapter 64

They got to their destination in no time and Annie was surprised. As soon as the chauffeur opened the door, there were flashes upon flashes.

Her heart started beating faster at the amount of press that was at the entrance of the hall.

She turned to Ella. This is more than I expected to cope with."

Ella chuckled. "I guess that's what you get when you involve Eric as your event planner. It's your night girl; go make every bit of it count." She winked.

Annie sighed and came out of the limousine with help from the chauffeur. The press went crazy with her appearance. They told her how beautiful she looked, she did a lot of poses for them and she included Ella in some of the pictures.

A few minutes later, Annie was ushered into the big and beautifully decorated hall. She was happy a lot of people turned up. The press were all over, interviewing people and most people were checking out the products to see which ones they would buy after the products had been officially launched which of course would take place after Annie's speech. Annie hired a couple of beauticians for the night that would assist the customers in finding the shade that fits them.

"Congrats Sis. This is so huge. Now everyone knows me as the sister of the owner of Ann's Cosmetics." Claire said proudly as she hugged her sister.

"Thanks, baby Sis." She returned Claire's hug.

After Claire left, a bunch of teenagers approached Annie. They were six in number and were all beautifully dressed.

"Hi." They greeted shyly.

"Oh hi," Annie smiled.

"We want to thank you for inviting us. It's really an honour to be part of something this huge. We love you so much and we truly admire you." The shortest of all the girls said and Annie recognized them.

"Oh my God, it's you guys." She exclaimed and started pulling them into a hug one after the other.

"Thank you all for supporting me." She said to them. Annie wanted to give a few invites to some of her loyal fans. She noticed the six of them and had sent them private messages inviting them to the launch of her product.

"You're welcome. We admire you and we are proud of you."

“Thank you. You girls are amazing too and there’s nothing you can’t do once you set your mind to it. It can be pretty challenging but you just need to focus, keep pushing and never give up.”

The girls nodded.

“Come over here let’s take some pictures.” She directed the girls towards her and called the photographer’s attention. One of the girls also gave her phone to the photographer to take a shot and they also took selfies with Annie.

“Ok girls as a gift from me, you all will be getting my eye shadow vintage collection and any lip kit of your choice.” They all squealed and gave Annie a joint hug.

“Look at my beautiful baby. I’m so proud of you sweetheart.” Angela said as she hugged Annie.

“Thank you, mom.” She returned the hug.

“Congratulations Honey. We’re so proud of you.” David, her Step Dad said.

“Thanks, Dad.” She smiled and pulled him into a hug.

Annie joined the crowd and interacted with a lot of people. She was happy everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves, but she was secretly missing the love of her life, only if he was here to share this moment with her.

“Annie Bear. It’s time to make your speech.” Ella announced and Annie made her way to the stage. The audience gathered around the stage.

Annie’s speech lasted for about six minutes. She told them what inspired her to start her cosmetic line, the challenges involved. She assured them about the quality of her products and finally, she encouraged everyone to never give up on their dreams no matter how big it might be or how ridiculous it might sound.

“Finally, I want to thank my family for their support. Laura, Claire, Jayden, you guys are the best teenage siblings in the world.” She said then blew a kiss to them across the stage.

“I want to thank my best friend, Emmanuella. Honestly, I can’t imagine my life without you in it. Thanks for being there for me and please give a kiss to Dylan for me. I appreciate you guys' support.” She said and the audience chuckled, some clapped a bit.

“I want to thank everyone in this hall for making time out of your busy schedule to come to support me today. It means a lot to me and I love you all. I want to thank every member of the Ivan James family and finally, I want to thank someone very special to me. He couldn’t make it because....” She started to say but stopped because of the loud cheering of the audience and huge smiles on their faces. She wanted to continue her speech but the cheers only increased. Some people from the audience started pointing for her to look behind her. She did and was surprised to see the love of her life.

Annie was very happy, she threw her arms around his neck and hugged him. Squeezing the bouquet of roses Eric was holding. Then she gave him a long passionate kiss which earned a loud cheer from the crowd.

She turned off the microphone that was attached to her dress before she spoke. “I don’t know how you did it but thanks for making time to be here. It means a lot to me.”

“You’re welcome, babe. He handed her the roses. I’m happy I made it too. I won’t want to miss this for anything in the world.”

“Thank you.” She said and then turned on the microphone to continue her speech.

“As I was saying before I was surprisingly interrupted, I want to thank this gorgeous man beside me for being my pillar of support.” She turned to him and said, “Thank you, honey.” Then she gave him a kiss on his lips which made the crowd go crazy.

The waiters and waitresses made their way through the crowd and distributed a glass of wine to everyone to make a toast.

Annie smiled as she looked through her crowd. They were all focused on getting themselves a glass of wine. Her Mom, Step Dad, Ella, Dylan, Eric’s parents, Laura, Jayden, Claire, Elaina and Jace stood at the very front. They were all smiling at her and suddenly she saw Ella take out her phone from her purse and set it on ‘was it a picture or video mode?’ Annie could not tell. Claire, Annie’s younger sister also brought out her camera but it seemed she was recording and not taking pictures.

Suddenly, there was silence in the Audience. Everyone was focused on the stage where she was standing. Some had smiles on their faces and for a while, Annie thought she saw tears in some people’s eyes. The press were at alert, recording everything and she noticed some people in the audience taking out their phones to take pictures or so.

Annie heard soft steps coming towards her and she assumed it was the waiter who was to give her a glass of wine so she would make the toast. She turned to collect the wine and was surprised by what she saw.

Chapter 65

Heaven knew she had been in love with him for a very long time. It all started as a crush when she was in high school, and after high school, she was the most updated person whenever it came to any news about him.

When she first got pregnant and heard he was the father of her baby, she didn't know what to expect or how to react. It was as if fate was playing with her feelings because she couldn't imagine how someone so perfect could be tied to her.

He owned up to his responsibility, surprised her in ways she never expected and most importantly decided to give them a chance.

She, however, dreamt of something like this but the vision wasn't clear especially after she lost their first child whose memory will ever remain with them.

He was the best thing that could ever happen to her. She tried to push him away but she failed. He stood by her till she got better, assured her things will be fine and if possible, he loved her more.

How on earth does she deserve such an amazing person by her side? And here he was, on his knee, proposing to her.

Annie's eyes began to water as he spoke. There was total silence in the crowd. Everyone was eager to hear what Eric had to say.

"Now, when I begin to think of it, I cannot imagine how I lived my life without you in it all these while. Annie, you're the best thing that has ever happened to me. You give me so much joy and there is nothing more that I want than to wake up next to you for the rest of my life."

"I want you to be my other half, the mother of our future children. I want our union to be blessed before God Almighty. I want you and me to explore the world together. Honestly, I want so much more with you. You've been the Queen of my heart since the first day I watched your video. Annie Emerald Christina Davis, will you marry me?"

She replied, trying not to let her tears fall. "Yes. I'll marry you." The audience cheered. Some people were in tears as they could not get over how sweet the soon to be couples were.

Eric slipped the ring on her finger, kissed her hand and then stood to his feet.

He pulled her into a hug and whispered in her ear. "Thank you for making me the happiest man on earth."

"Oh Eric, You make me so happy. Thank you for choosing me and loving me this much."

"You're welcome, the future Annie Ivan-James." He smiled.

“I love the sound of that.” She smiled and gave him a long passionate kiss.

“So,” Eric started talking as he raised his glass of wine. “I just want to say I’m proud of the love of my life and I wish her many more success in this new business. Cheers to the most wonderful woman in the world.”

“Cheers!!!” The Audience said as they tapped their glasses with their neighbours’ own then took a sip of their wine.

“Cheers my love,” Eric said as he and Annie tapped their glasses together then took a sip of their wine after which they made their way down the stage.

They were greeted with so many congratulations from their loved ones, fans and the press. Eric did not allow Annie to leave his side. They went everywhere together. Even when Annie was attending to her customers in helping them find the right shade of the products they wanted, he was there to help in any way he could. He also took personal pictures and videos of her doing her thing.

“We are sold out, babe. I’m so fucking proud of you!” Ella pulled Annie into a bone-crushing hug.

“I know. I’m so excited too. I couldn’t have done it without your support.” Annie said, pulling away from the hug.

“Aren’t you lucky?” Ella teased as she admired the ring on Annie’s finger.

“You knew about it all these while and you couldn’t give me a hint.”

Ella smirked.“Then it wouldn’t be a surprise.”

“He loves you so much. Gosh, you guys are so perfect for each other.”

“I know. I’m just grateful to have him in my life.”

They talked a little more, Ella excused herself to go to the restroom then Annie’s mom approached Annie.

“Congratulations on your engagement, my love.”

“Thanks, mom” Annie returned her mother’s hug.

“I have a feeling you knew about it all these while.” She said and her mom affirmed by nodding.

“He came to ask me and David for your hand in marriage. That was even before the miscarriage. He wanted you to heal which was why he waited this long to pop the question. He’s a good man Annie and someone like him is hard to find. Honour him, love him and cherish him. Let him know when you’re bothered and not happy about something. Trust him well enough to hear his side of the story. I wish you all the happiness life has to offer my child.”

“Thanks, Mom” Annie hugged her mom again

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“I can’t wait for us to get married,” Eric confessed as he lifted her in a bridal style.

“Same baby.” She replied as she wrapped her arms around his neck.

“So when do you want us to get married?” He asked as he made his way into their home.

“I'm ready anytime you're ready. I can’t wait to officially be yours.”

When he got into the mansion, he took her upstairs to their room and made her stand to her feet.

“I’m so proud of you, babe and I have no doubt you’ll achieve so much more as time goes on.” He possessively snuck his arms around his waist.

“Thanks for your support.” She said and then kissed him on his lips.

“We are going to celebrate your success tomorrow. You and I will be going on a vacation to one of my private beach houses.”

“I love the idea.”

“I knew you would, which was why I planned it. Just the two of us, no phones, no third party.”

“So how long will we be staying for?”

“Three weeks. No need to pack anything. I’ve got everything covered.”

“Aren’t you amazing?” She asked as she caressed his face "I still don't know what I did to deserve you."

“I think I’m the one who is lucky to have you.” He gave her a long passionate kiss. They couldn't get enough of each other.

“Annie.” Eric managed to say between kisses. “We should stop now. I don’t think I’ll be able to stop myself if we go further.”

Annie turned deaf ears to what he said as she deepened the kiss. They both released themselves for some air and then she whispered, “Please don’t reject me; I want you so bad.”

“You sure about this?” He asked, looking into her eyes which were full of lust and desire.

She nodded in affirmation.

“You don’t know how long I’ve been waiting for this Annie.” He kissed her earlobe then down to her neck. “I've had to take so many cold showers because my body can’t help but react when you’re around me.”

“Then just take me. I want you so bad Eric.” She whispered with her eyes closed as she enjoyed the pleasure he was giving her neck.

Annie took a bold step by taking off his jacket. She unbuttoned his shirt, took it off and caressed his upper body with her hands. Her desire for him increased as she caressed his six-packs.

“Mine.” She whispered, placing a kiss on his chest.

Eric was turned on by her gesture, he could feel his manhood rising. Oh, the things she does to him...

He drew Annie closer to him and undid the zip of her dress. He helped her in taking it off and she was left in her black sexy lingerie. She wanted to unhook her bra but he stopped her.

He picked her up in a bridal style and gently placed her in the middle of the bed. Eric removed her heels and threw them across the room. Then he got down from the bed and removed his pants. He left his brief on and climbed on top of her.

His lips connected with hers and they both explored each other’s mouth. Slowly, he released his lips from hers and trailed kisses down to the middle of her breast. He slowly unhooked her bra and came across her perfect breasts. It was a little bigger than the last time he saw them.

“Sorry, they’re small.” She said shyly.

“They’re perfect.” He said as he played with the right nipple. Then put the left nipple in his mouth.

Annie threw her head back and enjoyed the pleasure he was giving her on her.

Her moans grew louder when Eric began to suck harder. When he was done, she guided his mouth to her right nipple to give it the same attention as he did on the left. She slowly ran her fingers through his hair as he pleasured her.

Eric undid her panties which were already soaked. She turned her face to look elsewhere when he realized how wet she was. She was embarrassed as to how her body reacted.

“There’s nothing to be shy about Annie.” He smiled at her.

Chapter 66

Annie thought she was going to die of pleasure when Eric's mouth came in contact with her womanhood. He pleasured her and when he noticed she was about to cum, he stopped, leaving her frustrated.

Eric removed his brief and Annie smiled at what she saw, her soon to be husband was endowed and she couldn't be more proud.

He placed a kiss on her lips and her hand went to his member. She took her time to feel it; it was hard, big and long. She stroked it gently and smiled at the way he reacted to her touch.

Eric slowly guided his cock into her; he waited for her to get comfortable with the size after which he began to thrust into her. It started slowly but ended up at a faster pace. They both came together with him emptying his seeds in her making their body become one.

"That was amazing." He whispered, gently pulling her closer to him. Eric felt some wet drops on his chest and he didn't take long to realize that she was crying.

"What is it, my love?" He asked worried as he raised her chin. "Did I hurt you?" He sounded guilty. "Oh my God, I hate myself right now." He said as he buried his face in his hands. The last thing he wanted was to make her cry.

"No Eric, you didn't do anything wrong. It's all tears of joy. I've never been pleased like this; no one has ever worshipped my body this way. Thanks for making me feel like a Woman."

Eric sighed in relief and placed a kiss on her forehead. "I love you."

"I love you too, baby." She replied as she rested her head on his chest and wrapped her arms around his waist.

He stroked her hair until she fell asleep.

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Eric woke up fully erect because Annie was stroking with his cock. When she saw that he was awake, she whispered to him. "What time is our flight?"

He replied. "8.45 am."

"Good. It's just a few minutes past 5 am. Do you think we can have some fun before we prepare for our trip?"

Eric smiled as he made his way on top of her. "My pleasure darling, I love this side of you."

He took his time to explore her body and made love to her not once but twice.

Chapter 67

Evelyn Ivan-James sighed as she pulled up in her second daughter's driveway. She had come to see Lucia. She received a letter from Lucia's College. It was a mail of concern. She was told Lucia had not been attending classes for almost two months and she did not show up for her test and exam. The head of school was concerned because Lucia was known for her academic excellence. They tried to get in touch with Lucia but they did not succeed so they sent a letter to her parents wanting to know if everything was okay.

Evelyn was the first to see the mail. She read it then showed Austin. But Austin didn't seem affected by what he read. Clearly, he was still angry at Lucia.

Evelyn begged her husband to accompany her to go talk to Lucia in her apartment but he declined, saying he had things to do instead of going to talk to Lucia because he was certain she was never going to change.

Evelyn reached for her handbag and got down from her car. She made her way to the entrance of Lucia's apartment. It was a bungalow apartment, two bedrooms, one bathroom, Kitchen and a not so big living room.

Evelyn wanted to respect Lucia's privacy, even though she had the key to her apartment, she decided to ring the doorbell but after standing there for almost three minutes without Lucia opening up, She used her key to open the door. She had insisted on having a spare key when she and her husband got the apartment for Lucia.

Evelyn walked into the living room and found her daughter on the sofa with a blanket over her body. Her hair was in very bad shape and even her eyes were puffy and red from crying.

She sat up when she saw her mom approach her. To say she was surprised was an understatement. She never expected any of her family members to come to look for her. Not after what she had done. She was expecting the person knocking on her door to be one of her colleagues from school that was why she refused to open up.

"Morning Mom." She greeted and at the same time avoided looking into her mother's eyes.

The last time she spoke to her mother was when Evelyn called her, telling her how disappointed she was. Evelyn had even said some hurtful words to her. After breaking the news that Annie lost her baby, Eve told her she regretted giving birth to her and that all she had always done was to bring sorrow and shame to the family.

Since then, Lucia has stayed away from everyone. None of her family members got in touch with her. Eric was the last person to call her, he told her how cruel she was and declared that he no longer considers her as a sister so she should stay far away from him.

Austin, her Dad cut her off. He stopped sending her weekly allowances. He only paid her tuition fees and her rent. Even Eric stopped sending her allowance.

It was only her mom who sent money to her bank account once every two weeks.

Evelyn placed her handbag on a table and took a seat beside Lucia. Then she did what Lucia never expected. She pulled Lucia into a hug and then Lucia sobbed uncontrollably.

"I'm so sorry Mom. Please forgive me." She said repeatedly as she cried in her mother's chest.

It took a while for Evelyn to calm her down. She passed some tissue to Lucia to wipe her tears which she did.

"Why haven't you been attending classes? You didn't sit for your exams too."

"I don't feel at peace with myself. If I attend a class I wouldn't concentrate. Even though I ended up not going for classes, I tried studying to take the exam but I couldn't make any sense out of what I was reading. My life is just a mess." She cried.

Evelyn took her daughter's hand in hers and that was when she noticed a wound on her left hand which was bandaged. Lucia intentionally cut herself with a broken bottle.

"I feel you have something to tell me." Evelyn encouraged her to let it all out. And then she started.

"Please forgive me, I know I've been a horrible daughter and I swear I'm going to change. But right now, this guilt is killing me. It's because of me that Annie and Eric lost their baby. You were very right about me. The only thing I know how to do is to bring pain and shame to the family." She cried.

Evelyn wiped her tears as she knew what Lucia was talking about. She remembered saying things she shouldn't have said but she was angry that day and couldn't control any of it.

"I don't regret giving birth to you, my child" Evelyn assured which was true. Apart from the fact that she was troublesome, Lucia's record in her academics was second to none which was something her parents would forever be proud of.

Chapter 68

She said, crying, “It’s true that Annie asked for my help as soon as she started feeling pain but I refused to help her. It’s also true that Nora asked me to drive them to the hospital and I refused. If I had helped in any way I could maybe the baby would still be alive. I can’t believe I killed my niece or nephew.”

“I knew Annie was in pain but instead of helping her I didn’t because I felt she deserved all the hurt because of the way she hurt me in the past even when I knew it was all unknowingly. But mom, I thought the pain was something temporary. It was only when I was ten minutes away from the mansion that it hit me that she was bleeding and that it could probably lead to a miscarriage. I pulled over and drove back to the mansion but an ambulance was there already. I was so ashamed of my action which was why I drove straight to my apartment. I couldn’t bring myself to face any of you after what happened.”

“My heart broke when Eric called me and hurled cruel words at me. I don't blame him because I know I deserved everything he said.”

“It made me rethink my life. I’ve been living a pathetic life, a life full of unnecessary hate and jealousy which includes me hurting people that don’t deserve to be hurt.”

“Growing up among my siblings, I felt less loved. No one paid attention to me.”

“That’s not true Lucia, Your Dad and I loved you and your siblings equally” Evelyn replied. The poor woman was trying to keep her tears at bay. Seeing her baby in so much pain hurt her so bad.

“That’s what it may seem like to you guys. But I felt less loved. Eric was always over pampered because he was the only son and I perfectly understand. Elaina is your first female child and I understand why you and dad are overprotective of her. But when it comes to me, it’s nothing. The love ended the day you gave birth to Laura. It was always about Laura, Elaina and Eric but never about me. There were countless times you went shopping and came back with nothing for me, claiming they didn’t have my size. Then my other siblings got everything you shopped for.”

“That’s not true Lucia,” Evelyn said in tears. Never had she ever felt like a bad mother in her life. She didn’t know her daughter was going through something like this.

“I thought if I worked harder in my academics and maybe became the best student, you and Dad would notice me but that didn’t work either. Instead, you guys sent me off to a boarding school so you could spend more time with Eric, Elaina and Laura”

“You're wrong, my child. When you were in grade 5, you were so quiet, independent; you were your own person wanting to do things your way. You were never the type that loved mingling

so your dad and I thought sending you to a boarding school would change your mindset and let you learn how to mix with your peers. Trust me, Lucia, letting you go to a boarding school at that young age was one of the hardest decisions I have ever made in my life."

"Instead you turned wild and that was what made us withdraw you from boarding school," Evelyn said hoping her daughter would understand things from her point of view.

It was true Lucia turned wild when she was enrolled in boarding school. Since her intelligence couldn't get her her parents love and attention, she decided to be the stubborn kid who never stayed away from trouble.

"Well, that was not how I felt. Eric and Elaina never went to a boarding school so I felt I was sent away so you and Dad could spend more time with them. That was how I chose my lifestyle but I didn't stop working hard whenever it came to my school work because I loved being top in class. Even though you, Dad, Eric and Elaina never celebrated me for that I was okay with the recognition I was given in school and representing my school for competitions gave me so much joy."

"Oh, Lucia," Evelyn Cried. "You could have talked to me about it, I never knew you were going through a lot, my love. Please forgive me; I'm your mother, I should have known. I'm so sorry my child."

"Then, Annie came into the picture. Y'all loved her so much that it drove me crazy. She became the family's favourite and I, on the other hand, was completely forgotten. I know how I treated her was wrong but it was out of desperation." She cried harder.

"You see, Your Dad and I did not plan on having any more kids after you. But it happened, I got pregnant with Laura and we decided to keep it. After Laura's birth I tried combining things; Taking care of a newborn, being a good mother to you and your siblings, a good wife to your father, taking care of the house and at the same time heading the fashion house. But it seemed I didn't do my best. I failed you and I'm sorry. I should have known from the way you never had a close or good relationship with your siblings. I should have known better, my love, Please forgive me." She cried and pulled Lucia in for a hug.

"I'm sorry Mama. Please forgive me too." Lucia cried in her mother's chest.

Chapter 69

Evelyn continued her conversation after she and her daughter had calmed down a little.

“Your father and I have wronged you and we’ll try to make it up to you.” She declared. Lucia nodded.

“Ca...can you talk to Eric for me?” She voiced out.

“Don’t you think you should be the one to talk to him?”

“I’m ashamed, mom. I’m scared too. He warned me not to come anywhere near him.”

“You were wrong and you should take responsibility for your actions. Approach him; let him know how sorry you are.”

“I don’t think he will forgive me. Even if he does, I don’t think Annie will ever forgive me. What I did was unforgivable.”

“Just take the first step. Apologize and let them know how sorry you are.”

“Thanks, mom.” She pulled her mother into a hug. “I love you.”

“I love you too dear.”

“So how do you feel now that you’ve let it all out?” She asked.

“I feel better. I will find a way to apologize to Annie and Eric then I’ll go back to school to take the tests I’ve missed, and above all, I will work on being a better person. I know I can’t change what happened but I hope Annie and Eric forgive me. Thanks for hearing me out mom.” She said sincerely.

“You’re welcome, baby” Evelyn kissed her forehead.

After their emotional reunion, Evelyn forced Lucia to take a shower after which they both left her apartment to have lunch in a restaurant. After their lunch, they went grocery shopping then headed back to Lucia’s apartment. Evelyn helped in arranging the items they bought and made dinner with Lucia’s help.

Talking with Lucia made Evelyn think things through. She felt guilty her daughter had to go through all of that alone. Thinking about it, she had only been to Lucia’s apartment once which was the day Austin bought the apartment for her, so she decided to spend the night with Lucia.

Lucia was taking her bath when Evelyn took out her phone and called Austin to let him know she would be spending the night with Lucia. She told him there was more to the whole issue and that she will discuss it with him when they see the next day.

Evelyn was done setting the table when Lucia walked out of her room in her pyjamas dress. She broke the news to her that she would be spending the night with her and Lucia's joy knew no bounds.

Her face lit up like a kid whose dream eventually came true. Her reaction was something Evelyn never saw in her for over fifteen years.

They ate their dinner, did the dishes together and spent the rest of the evening watching movies and having a mother-daughter talk.

Even though there was a guest bedroom, Lucia insisted her mom slept with her in her room. She had one of the best sleep ever, having her mom's arms wrapped around her possessively.

The next day, Lucia offered to make breakfast for herself and her mom. They ate, watched a movie then Evelyn started preparing to leave.

"I'll always be here for you honey. If you ever need someone to talk to or if you need anything, don't hesitate to call me okay?"

"I'll mom. Thanks for staying over. It means a lot to me."

"You're welcome, my baby girl. Be good, Mama loves you and make sure you come home often to check on us. No more spending your holiday alone in this apartment."

"I will mom." She replied. Evelyn pulled her into a motherly hug and kissed her forehead.

When Eve got home she told Austin all that transpired between Lucia and Her. The old man was in total shock. He didn't know Lucia was going through something like that. He didn't know she had always felt left out as he tried his best to show affection to all his four children.

Austin confessed after a long silence. "I feel terrible."

"I felt the same way when she opened up to me. She's sorry about everything. She promised to apologize to Eric and Annie and get back to school to take the tests she missed."

Austin sighed as he buried his face in his hands behind his desk. No doubt he was not happy with what Lucia went through. He was not from a rich home either but he had the love of his parents which encouraged him to work hard to achieve all he has today. Now that he was thinking about it, he realized he has done more for all his other children than what he has done for Lucia. Honestly, it wasn't intentional and even her behaviour in the past made everyone stay away from her and only attended to her when necessary.

Evelyn noticed her husband's behaviour, She stood up from where she was seated, went over to him and comforted him.

"Please don't feel guilty about anything. I promised Lucia we will make it up to her. I don't know how but we'll figure it out."

Austin sighed then asked, “Can we go spend the weekend with her?”

She smiled. “If that’s what you want, I’m in.”

Austin nodded, reached for his phone and dialled Lucia. She picked up when Austin was almost giving up that she wasn’t going to pick up.

“Good Afternoon, Dad.” An unsure voice said from the other side.

“Munchkin, how are you?” He asked and a tear rolled down Lucia’s cheek. The last time her dad called her that was before Laura was born.

“I’m fine Dad.” She managed to say.

“I’m sorry Lucia, your mom just told me everything and I realized we didn’t handle things the way we were supposed to. Please forgive me, honey.”

“It’s okay Dad. I forgive you. Please forgive me too for all the pain I’ve caused you and Mom, I promise to change.”

“It’s okay. Your mom and I were thinking of coming over for the weekend.”

“Are you sure Dad? I mean aren’t you busy with work or something”

“Family first Lucia, So what do you say?”

“It’s fine Dad. I’d really appreciate that.”

“Okay love, be expecting us on Friday. Take care of yourself, I love you.”

“I love you too. Bye.” She ended the call.

“I can’t believe I have my baby girl back,” Austin said as a tear fell from his eyes. He couldn’t believe he just had a proper and emotional conversation with Lucia.

Chapter 70

“Babe you look different, you’re glowing” Ella exclaimed as she hugged Annie once more.

Annie chuckled. “I guess that’s what happens when you take a vacation.”

“I need to warn Eric not to take you away for that long. Gosh, Annie, three weeks without me talking to you. Damn, I almost died.” Ella said which made Annie chuckle.

Annie and Eric just came back from their three weeks’ vacation the day before. It was a beautiful one. No cell phones, no internet, no third party, Just the two of them enjoying themselves and loving themselves more on his private island.

“I missed you too, Boo” Annie confessed.

“I don’t need to ask you how the trip was because I can see it all over you. You look happier, your eyes are shining, you’re glowing, if I’m not mistaken it seems you’ve added a little bit of weight. Eric must have pampered you so much. I’m sure you did not want to come back.” Ella said.

“Calm down Ella.” She chuckled. “Even though we wanted to stay one more week, we had to come back. Remember Eric has a business to run and so do I.”

“I’m sure you guys had lots of hot sex.” She teased and Annie’s face turned red. She tried to look everywhere else except Ella’s face.

“No need to be shy about that, my love, in a couple of weeks he’s going to be your husband. Anyway, have you guys finalized the date?”

“No we haven’t, but we’re looking at two to three months.”

“Not bad,” Ella said then stood up to go get two cups of coffee for her and her friend.

Annie and Eric came back from their vacation yesterday afternoon. So she decided to spend the whole Sunday with Ella. Eric would be picking her up later.

Annie felt ill as soon as she inhaled the smell of coffee. She felt like throwing up. Ella noticed her going pale for a while then she rushed to her side.

“I feel like throwing up. The coffee’s smell is making me uneasy.”

Ella nodded and went back to the kitchen with the two mugs of coffee. She emptied them and came back with two glasses of freshly squeezed orange juice.

“Thank you,” Annie accepted the juice and drank half of it.

“Better?” Ella asked and she nodded.

“Are you sure you’re okay Annie?” Ella asked curiously as she took a seat beside Annie on the Sofa. “Coffee is like your favourite thing in the world and you’re reacting badly to it.”

“Not only the smell of coffee but the smell of meat too, Eric said when you take something a lot, there are times you react negatively to it. I think that’s the phase I’m going through.”

“Anyway, I bought something for you.” Annie changed the topic as she handed Ella a surprise bag.

Ella wasted no time in digging into the bag. The bag contained a pair of red heels with a matching purse and Jewellery.

“These are beautiful. Thanks, Sis.” She hugged Annie.

“I’m sure they are very expensive.” She said, pulling away from the hug.

Annie shrugged. “I believe my best friend deserves the best.”

“Also, Thank Eric when you see him. He paid for them while I chose them.”

“Sure. But I believe Eric owes me more than this. But I’ll discuss it with him when I see him. What do you want for Brunch? Spaghetti and my favourite sauce?”

“Yeah. Anything will do.” She replied.

Annie and Ella spent their day doing what they loved most. They watched movies; Ella helped Annie edit her latest YouTube video which she filmed during their vacation. Annie helped Ella select her work outfit for the week, they discussed some of Annie's new lip kit collection and they ended up making dinner for four because Eric and Dylan would be joining them soon.

Soon enough, the doorbell rang and Ella excused herself to go open the door.

“Hey, Babe.” Eric greeted as he walked towards Annie. He kissed her forehead then gave her a long kiss on her lips.

“Aren’t they cute?” Ella giggled in Dylan’s arms.

“Of course they are.” He kissed her cheek.

Dylan unwrapped himself from Ella and went to hug Annie.

“You look different.” He said and Annie gave him a questioning look.

“I mean beautifully different.” He corrected. “The vacation did well to you and Eric.”

“I told her the same. Can’t you see how she’s glowing? It shows this man over here.” She pointed to Eric. “Is taking very good care of my best friend.”

“Don’t mind them, honey; they are just jealous” Eric said.

“Anyway, dinner is served, everyone to the dining table,” Ella announced and they found their way to the dining room.

Chapter 71

As soon as Annie set her eyes on the food, she lost her appetite and was suddenly craving for something different. She was craving for pizza. But she couldn't voice it out. Ella had spent so much energy in making the food and she didn't want to upset her best friend by not eating it.

They had small talks in between dinner but Annie didn't eat much.

"Sorry guys, I'm out of Alcoholic wine so you guys will have to manage this one" Ella said as she placed a fruit wine on the table.

"No problem," Eric said as he opened the bottle and helped everyone pour some in their glass cup.

Soon enough they finished eating. Ella and Dylan offered to do the dishes while Eric and Annie went to the living room to keep themselves company.

Dylan and Eric joined them later; they talked about the wedding and other stuff. At nine, they said their goodbyes because they all have work tomorrow. But Dylan was sleeping over at Ella's place.

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"Ella said I've added a little bit of weight. How true is that?" Annie asked as she climbed on the bed and snuggled closer to Eric.

"I think she's just teasing you. I love you the way you are." He kissed her forehead.

"I think you're not telling me the truth. I'll resume my daily exercise tomorrow. You made me overeat during our vacation. I need to burn off some calories.

"I don't want you in the gym, wifey. You're perfect and I love you the way you are, okay?" He said sweetly to her and she nodded.

"So how was your day with Ella?"

"Fine, we did a lot of fun stuff. I can't believe I stayed away from her for three weeks without any communication whatsoever."

Eric chuckled "She threatened me after dinner not to take you away that long again. She's a good friend. You're so lucky to have her."

"I know and I think the same goes for you and Dylan. How was your visit to him?"

"Fine, we ended up going to visit my parents. They sent their regards to you."

"I will try to see them this week," Annie said. "Is anything the matter?" Annie asked after noticing a change in his mood.

He sighed "When Dylan and I got to my parents' place, we discovered they were just coming back from a trip. They went to spend the weekend with Lucia."

Annie slowly sat up to look at him. She was kind of nervous to hear what he would say next. This was the first time they would be talking about Lucia since her miscarriage.

"Lucia missed half of the semester in school. She didn't show up for any of her tests or exams. Her head of school got worried and wrote to my Parents. Then mom went to check on her. Mom told me some things that were so unbelievable."

Annie swallowed painfully. "What did she say?"

"That Lucia was not in a good state and that she's deeply sorry for what she did to you. She's sorry for not helping you to the hospital on-time and she feels guilty for what happened to our baby."

"Mom said Lucia explained the reason for her behaviour. Lucia said mom and dad never showered her with so much love the way they loved Laura, Elaina and I. She turned wayward thinking mom and dad would notice her that way. And now Mom and Dad feel guilty about everything. They feel like they've failed as parents."

"Honestly, when I think about things now. I realized I don't have many memories with Lucia as I do with Laura and Elaina. I only stepped in when Lucia was in trouble or so. We were never really close, neither was she close to Elaina. Laura is even the worst, I don't think she regards Lucia as her sister at all."

"All these while, her actions were as a result of hatred and Jealousy. She got more furious when you came into our lives and my family loved and accepted you even more than her."

"After what happened to you, I cut all ties with her. I stopped sending her money and I told her not to regard me as her brother anymore. Dad too said he stopped sending her money. He only paid for her tuition and house rent. Only mom sends her money once in a while."

"Now my Parents feel so guilty that I cannot even begin to explain how to you. They feel they've created some sort of enmity among their children."

"I know mom and dad do love us equally but Lucia was just hard to deal with. She never shares anything with anyone; She was always on her own."

"See for instance, on our way back from our vacation, we branched to a mall to get something for our loved ones and I didn't even put Lucia's name on the list."

"I noticed but I picked up a few things for her too." Annie voiced out.

"You did?" Eric looked into her eyes.

She nodded.

“Aren’t you meant to be mad at her?” he arched a surprised brow.

Annie sighed “Eric. It’s all in the past and I’ve moved on. The most important thing is that she’s sorry for what she did. The Lucia I know will never miss her test or exam for anything in the world. Now, look at what she has gone through. She’s been depressed all her life, feeling like the lesser one.”

Eric sighed as he buried his face in his hands.

“Honestly I feel guilty too. I felt I should have known she felt that way. I felt I should have spent more time with her the way I did with my other siblings. We never took her birthday seriously to celebrate her and neither did we celebrate any of her achievements.”

“It’s not too late. You all can still make amends. You don’t have to wait until her birthday before you throw her a party. Surprise her anytime you want but most importantly let her know you love her and you will always be there for her.”

“She might show up at your workplace tomorrow to apologize.”

“She’s welcome. Perhaps she might get a free Makeover from me.” Annie smiled.

“Your heart is so pure and kind. A woman like you is rare to find. Thank you for everything.” He smiled and placed a long kiss on her forehead.

Chapter 72

Eric was busy replying to his emails when his Secretary informed him that his sister was here to see him. He told her to let her in and she did.

Almost immediately, Lucia walked in. She wasn't sure what to do. She was embarrassed and guilty as hell. She was unsure as to how to face her brother.

Eric sighed and got up behind his desk. He walked to where she was standing which was a few steps away from the door. He pulled her into a hug and that was when her tears fell. "I'm sorry Eric. I'm truly sorry. Ple...please forgive me."

"It's okay Lucia. You're forgiven." He patted her back and tried to calm her down.

He guided her to a couch that was on the other side of his office. They both took their seats.

"I'm truly sorry." She whispered as she wiped her tears.

He took her hand in his, looked into her eyes and spoke. "I also have a lot of things to apologize for. I apologize for not being the elder brother who you could always count on and that is going to change from today onwards. I apologize for not paying more attention to you just like how I did to Laura and Elaina. Maybe I have a bad way of showing it but Lucia I love you and I wouldn't replace you with anyone in the world. You're amazing, brilliant and I have no doubt you'll make a difference in this world."

"Forget all I said during our last conversation. I was deeply hurt and I take responsibility for that. But trust me I didn't mean any of it. We all make mistakes Lucia, we just have to learn from it and move on."

"Thank you." She hugged him.

As soon as she pulled away from the hug, Eric reached for a gift bag which was beside the couch and handed it to her. "Annie picked them for you."

Lucia collected the bag and reached for the items in it. There was a pair of black heels, two bottles of Victoria secrets' latest fragrance and a knitted sweater.

"I feel so bad for how I treated her. God, I'm so horrible." Lucia said as another set of tears welled up in her eyes.

"Don't cry Lucia" Eric pleaded.

"She's a very nice person and all I've ever done is to hurt her."

"You've apologized to her. Haven't you?"

“Yes. I can’t believe she forgave me. She has a heart of gold. Please cherish her and never let her go.”

He smiled, “You can count on me for that.”

“She asked me if I will be one of her bride’s maid at the wedding.”

“And what was your reply?” He asked as he tucked a strand of hair behind her ear.

She replied with a sad smile. “I was shocked, but I said Yes.”

“I didn’t get to congratulate you for your engagement. So congratulations Bro. I wish you and Annie more love and happy married life in advance.”

He smiled, “Thank you. But I believe you owe us an engagement gift.”

“I’ll definitely get you guys one.” She smiled.

“So how’s school?”

“Fine, I’ve taken most of my tests. I just have a few left then I’ll take the exams.”

“Are you sure you can cope?”

“Yeah. It just means no holiday for me. I’ll spend that time studying for the exams I missed”

“I have no doubt you’ll do well. Any news from Elaina?” He asked.

“Yes. She called me yesterday and we talked. We’re cool now.” Eric nodded.

“How about we go get something to eat? You pick any restaurant of your choice.”

“Hope I won’t be disturbing you? I mean aren’t you busy with work?”

“Family first, baby Sister, now let’s get going.” Eric rose to his feet and Lucia did the same. He reached for his car keys and jacket and walked hand in hand with his sister out of the building.

Chapter 73

Days Later

“Good evening Nora.” Eric greeted as he walked into the kitchen with his work clothes on.

“Welcome Son.” She smiled at him. “How was your day?”

“Stressful.” He answered and reached for a bottle of water in the fridge.

“How’s Ben?” He asked after her husband.

“He’s fine. I was about going to the guest house to join him before you walked in. Dinner is ready. You just need to warm it up or I can do it for you if you want.” She offered.

“Don’t let me stress you, Nora. I’ll sort myself out.”

“Maybe now that you are around, Annie will have dinner with you.”

“What happened?” Eric asked, confused. “Is she sick again?” He panicked.

“I don’t know my Son. She has been in the room since she came back from work. I took dinner to her but she said she was not hungry.”

“Thanks. I’ll go check up on her.” He exited the kitchen, then went in search of Annie.

He entered their room expecting to see her lying on the bed but she wasn’t there. Instead, he noticed her side of the bed was rumpled with the duvet slightly apart.

He took quick steps towards the bathroom and knocked on the door.

“Annie? Are you okay??”He waited a while for an answer but he got none.

He raised his fist to knock again but stopped halfway when he heard a loud sob. Out of curiosity, he opened the bathroom door and saw Annie sitting on the floor in her nightdress, crying her eyes out; her face was buried in her hands.

Eric rushed to her side, knelt before her and raised her head. Her eyes were red and puffy. It got him worried.

“What is it, my love?” He asked sincerely, worried at the same time of what her answer might be.

Annie tried to speak. Her lips were moving but nothing could be heard. Instead, she buried her face in Eric’s chest and cried.

He sighed then comforted her by patting her back and hair.

“Annie you’re scaring me. Please tell me what is going on.”

She removed her head from his chest, reached for the items that were placed on the bathroom counter, she stared at them once more and handed them over to him.

Eric collected the pregnancy sticks from her and looked at what it said; (Pregnant.)

It took a while for Eric to process what he saw. Isn't God a great God?

Tears welled up in his eyes as a faint smile found its way to his lips. He pulled Annie closer to him and hugged the hell out of her.

"Eric, I'm out of breath." Annie chuckled. He released her and kissed her forehead.

"This is amazing." He smiled.

"It is. I was expecting it to turn negative but when I saw the result I didn't know what else to do but to cry."

"It confirms why you've been falling sick. You're carrying our baby. God, I'm so happy right now. Thank you, my love."

"Me too. Bu...but I'm scared Eric." She whispered. "What if I lose this baby? I don't think I'll be able to live with myself if that happens."

Eric sighed and got comfortable on the floor. He pulled her on his lap and made her look at him. Then he assured her. "Nothing is going to happen to our baby this time around. I don't mind telling you to stop working for the main time neither do I mind working from home until the baby arrives."

"I still drank wine about three days ago. What if...." He didn't let her complete her sentence. He knew she was scared because of their first miscarriage so he understood her insecurity.

"I promise you. Nothing will happen to you and the baby. We'll visit the hospital tomorrow to see how he or she is doing." He told her and she nodded.

"Can I ask you something?"

"Anything." He encouraged her to say whatever she wanted to say.

"Can we keep the pregnancy a secret? We will tell our family about it after my first trimester."

"I think that will be the hardest thing I'll ever do but I'll do anything for you, my love." He said and kissed her forehead.

"Nora said you haven't had dinner so let's go downstairs." He said and she nodded.

Honestly, Annie wasn't hungry because she was still overwhelmed about the whole situation. But she knew she had to eat something because of the baby.

Eric made sure she washed and dried her face after which they went downstairs for dinner with his arms around her waist protectively.

Chapter 74

The Next Day

Annie and Eric woke up early, dressed up for work, had breakfast and left for the hospital. They got there on time because they had no appointment and were hoping the doctor would slot them in.

Fortunately, the first person on the doctor's list called in to cancel so she was able to attend to Annie.

Doctor Alicia Grey attended to both Eric and Annie. Her blood and urine sample was collected for the test and here they are waiting in Doctor Alicia's office for the result.

Soon enough, the middle-aged doctor walked in with a smile on her face and congratulated the amazing couple that were seated before her.

"Congratulations. The results confirmed you're four weeks pregnant."

A proud smile made its way to Eric's face. Even though the pregnancy stick revealed it yesterday, he wanted to hear the news from a doctor. Eric was truly happy; He took Annie's hand and kissed it.

"I still had alcohol four days ago. I was unaware of the pregnancy."

"It's fine Miss Annie. It has happened to many of my patients. They drink when they don't know they're pregnant. Your baby is fine ma'am. Just make sure you don't take it again." She warned and Annie nodded.

"I'll write a few prescriptions for you which will help the nausea and any future morning sickness. If you feel any pain or notice anything unusual, inform me as soon as possible."

"Please Doctor, assure my fiancée that nothing will go wrong with our baby." Eric pleaded; perhaps if Annie heard a word of assurance from the Doctor, she will be calmer.

Doctor Grey smiled. She remembered Annie told her they lost their first pregnancy. "I know how you feel Miss Annie and it's normal for you to feel that way. Feel free to go along with your day to day activities, avoid stress, eat good food and take lots of water, everything will be fine."

"I will, Thank you Doc." She said.

"I would have suggested that we do an ultrasound but I'd like us to wait. So your next appointment will be three weeks from now. You'll get to hear your baby's heartbeat."

"Any more questions?" She asked as she began to write down something on the chart."

Annie replied, “I think you’ve told us everything we need to know.”

Doctor Grey nodded. She handed Annie her prescription, meal plan she should follow and a complimentary card which contained her phone number in case they wanted to ask any question.

They thanked her and made their way out of the hospital.

Even though Annie and Eric planned on going to their workplace from the hospital, they changed their mind immediately they exited the hospital. They decided to spend the day together and celebrate their pregnancy and most importantly, get used to the idea that in the next eight months, they will be welcoming their baby.

They stopped by a pizza shop and bought three boxes of pizza, Annie said she wanted Ice Cream so Eric bought five tubs of her favourite ice cream. He bought chocolates too. Because they are what she has been craving for a while. Then they went back home.

Immediately, they got home, they changed into their swimsuits and went for a swim in the pool after which they changed into casual clothes and settled down in the living room to enjoy their pizza.

“Thanks for spending the day with me. I needed to be pampered.” Annie smiled as she placed her head on his lap.

“Anything for you, my love.” He said as he stroked her hair.“I enjoyed spending the day with you.”

“I’ll cut down my work hours even though it means employing more staff. I want to take things easy and enjoy this pregnancy.”

“Good. I’ll also cut down my working hours in the office. Whatever it is, I’ll do it from home.”

“So when can we start baby shopping?” He asked excitedly.

“Isn’t it a bit too early?” She replied with a smile as she placed her hand on her belly.

“I think the earlier we start shopping, the better.”

“You know we don’t have much to buy. We still have the things my mom bought in the room upstairs and the things we bought too."

“I know. I just want him or her to have everything. I love him already.” He said then placed his hand on her belly and smiled."

"I’ve had those pregnancy tests for four days but I couldn’t bring myself to take them." Eric nodded in understanding, knowing how scared she must have been.

“I just want to shout it out to the whole world that we are expecting a baby but I have to respect your wishes. But won’t my mom find out since she’ll be the one designing your wedding dress?”

“I’ll figure it out when the time comes. Hopefully, she won’t be the one to take the measurements. But since the wedding is in a few weeks, I’m hoping I won’t show that much.”

She took his hand in hers and kissed it. “I know how you feel and I feel the same. I just want to cross my first trimester before telling anyone. And besides, I want the two of us to enjoy the news first before everyone starts fussing over it.”

“Anything for you Babe.” He kissed her lips.

Unknown to them, Nora unintentionally overheard their conversation. The old woman was internally screaming for Joy as tears of joy welled up in her eyes.

Chapter 75

Eric was not lying when he said keeping Annie's pregnancy a secret would be the hardest thing he will ever do.

There were days where he would be talking to his mom on the phone and would be tempted to spill the beans but then he would remember his promise to Annie.

Annie was also finding it difficult to keep her pregnancy a secret. She was just a little over two months and she already had a small well-defined bump which had been the reason for her baggy outfit. Keeping the news away from Ella, her best friend was even harder than she thought and because of that, she had been avoiding hanging out with her.

Thankfully, Evelyn, Eric's mom was not in charge of taking Annie's measurement for her wedding dress. She only designed it and was there for the fittings so Annie was able to hide the small bump from her soon to be mother in law.

They never wanted a bachelor or bachelorette party but their friends insisted they must have one. So both bride and groom-to-be have been separated for two nights now. Annie was with the girls; Ella, Elaina, Lucia, Claire, Laura, Melissa and a few close friends. They all occupied the luxurious guest house of the Ivan James mansion.

Angela, Evelyn and her sister Eva occupied the main house as they were busy with making sure everything was in order for the wedding. Eric made sure they were in charge of everything so Annie wouldn't have to go through any stress. She was only called upon when they needed her advice or opinion on the arrangement.

Eric was in Dylan's house with some other close friends. They had gone to the bar earlier tonight to have some fun but he was careful not to drink too much as he didn't want to end up misbehaving. Besides he had to be Sober because he would still have to talk to Annie tonight.

Annie sighed as she entered her bedroom. She was glad the girls finally released her. She had to tell them she was tired and needed her sleep so she won't have a tired face for her wedding tomorrow.

The first thing she did was to take a shower and change into her comfy pyjamas and then dialled Eric hoping he would pick up. They weren't able to talk to each other all day. She made sure she had the conversation in the bathroom so as not to be disturbed or to prevent anyone from eavesdropping.

It took a week for them to find out that Nora was aware of the pregnancy. Well, she didn't tell them exactly but her actions made them suspicious. She was more protective than ever over Annie and would always make sure she ate well.

After confessing that she overheard their conversation, she congratulated them and assured them that she wasn't going to say anything to anyone.

"My love, I miss you," Eric said softly.

"I miss you too handsome." She said to the other side.

"How are you? How was your day?" He asked.

"It was fine. The girls made my day. We spent the day talking and having fun, they organized a small bachelorette party for me and I got so many pre-wedding gifts from all of them."

"You?" She asked him how his day went.

"Pretty much the same. But instead of throwing a party for me, we went to Caleb's club to celebrate. But we didn't stay there for long." Caleb was Dylan's cousin and Eric's close friend.

"Cool. I miss sleeping in your arms."

"I miss it too my love. Don't worry by this time tomorrow we will be in each other's arms.

"I can't wait." She replied with a yawn.

"Me too baby, I think I should let you rest, you sound tired."

She chuckled as she rubbed her belly. "I am. I get tired easily with this pregnancy. I think we'll be having a big baby."

"Why do you say so?" He smiled.

"I think my bump is bigger for a little over two months old pregnancy. My first pregnancy lasted for two months and I hardly showed."

"It shows you're eating well and the baby is healthy." He said.

"Even though I get tired very quickly, I'm thankful I'm not always nauseous."

"I can't wait for him or her to be here." He moaned.

"Me too, If it's a boy I want him to have your beautiful eyes."

"And if it's a girl I want her to look exactly like you," Eric said.

"Honestly, Annie, I don't know what my life will be without you. We've been through so much together and I know there's so much happiness waiting for us in the future."

"Me too Eric. I love you so much."

"I love you and our munchkin more. Tell him or her Daddy says hi and that Daddy misses talking to him."

She smiled. "I will. See you at the Altar tomorrow."

"I'll be waiting for you, my love. Sweet dreams."

Chapter 76

Annie made sure she set her alarm before she fell asleep. She woke up when it rang, said her morning prayers, thanked God for everything and committed her wedding day to God's hand. Then she proceeded to the bathroom to do her business. She dried herself and got into her underwear and covered herself with her robe.

Immediately she walked out of the bathroom there was a knock on the door. She opened the door and saw her mom and soon to be mother in law standing there with bright smiles on their faces.

Annie's mom was with a tray of breakfast while Evelyn was holding a brown leather box.

"Good Morning Mommies." She greeted them with a happy smile.

"Morning my child" Angela kissed her right cheek, then she walked into the room and placed the tray of food on the nightstand.

"Good Morning Beautiful." Evelyn gave her a side hug.

"Excited about today?" Angela asked.

"Yes but I'm kind of nervous." She replied as she plopped down on her bed.

"It's normal sweetheart, but you'll be fine. I can't wait to see you walk down the aisle. This is a dream come true, my princess." Angela said excitedly as she sat on the bed to Annie's left and Evelyn sat on the other side leaving Annie in the middle.

"Mom." Annie groaned. "How many people did you invite?"

She smiled. "Not too many, about 28."

"My guests are more than that," Evelyn added. "Austin only invited his family members and close friends and I think Laura and Claire invited a couple of their school friends."

Annie sighed. "It's truly a big wedding."

"Anyways I have a gift for you," Evelyn said and handed her the medium size leather box.

"Thank you." She said as she collected it. She opened it and saw a Silver necklace. It was very unique and beautiful.

"My father bought it for my mother and my mom passed it to me so I want you to have it."

"Are you sure you want me to have it? I mean you have three daughters. Why me?" She asked politely.

“You are my daughter too, Annie. Besides, my mom wanted me to hand it over to the girl who would be lucky enough to capture Eric’s heart.”

“It’s beautiful. Thank you.” Annie said, then hugged her.

“Now I’m in conflict with which to wear today,” She said as she pointed to the necklace she was putting on; the one Eric gave her on their first date.”

“Wear this one for the wedding and after the wedding, you can change it to the one Eric gave you.” She advised.

Annie ate her food while Angela and Evelyn engaged in some random discussion. Soon enough the hired makeup artist came and they started preparing the bride for the wedding. Angela and Evelyn left halfway through Annie’s dressing to go get ready too.

“I bless God for choosing you for my baby boy,” Evelyn said as she stared at Annie who was fully dressed in an elegant white wedding dress designed by her.

“You’re so beautiful my love,” Angela told her daughter with tears in her eyes.

“Mom, don’t cry. You’ll make me cry too.” Annie pouted and her mom gently wiped her face with a tissue given to her by Evelyn.

Oh, Evelyn personally made her dress and Angela’s dress. It was the same design and style but in different colours.

Evelyn had two wedding dress designs for a while. Even though she headed her family’s fashion house, she had never been involved in all the wedding dresses made by other designers in the house.

So she invited Annie and Elaina to the office one day and showed them sketches of the design and asked them to choose one each. Since Elaina was the next in line to get married, she was allowed to choose a perfect design for her wedding dress.

The design Annie chose was beautiful too. It was a modern v neck off shoulder Wedding dress which showed the right amount of cleavage and she looked incredibly beautiful in it.

Evelyn made a mental note to start working on two more designs for Lucia and Laura.

Annie opted for her hair to be put up in a fashionable messy bun style.

“It’s time to go. Austin told me Eric is nervous as hell by the aisle.” Evelyn announced and they all chuckled.

Annie and Eric decided they wanted a church wedding. They wanted their matrimony to be blessed in God’s house. So they settled to get married in Annie’s Church. It was a very big and modern church.

Eric, on the other hand, was nervous as hell. He wanted today to be perfect. Not for him but for Annie.

Eric, his Dad, Best man and the groom's men got to the church on time. By then most of the guests had arrived and had settled down.

Dylan and Eric made their way to the aisle and soon enough it was announced that the bride was around. It was only then Eric let out a sigh of relief.

Chapter 77

The whole congregation stood to their feet upon the announcement. First to step in was the little bride and the ring bearer.

Gemini, the four-year-old girl was carrying a basket of beautiful rose petals which she dropped on the floor every few steps she took. Lyndon, the ring bearer walked beside Gemini with a tiny pillow which contained the rings.

As soon as they reached the aisle, Eric squatted to their height and kissed them on their cheeks. He hugged Gemini and gave Lyndon a high five. Gemini and Lyndon were twins; they were Angela's sister's children.

Dylan, the best man, collected the rings from Lyndon and guided the two little cuties to a seat in front which was reserved for them.

Eric considered himself the luckiest man on earth as soon as he set his eyes on Annie. The word Beautiful wouldn't do justice to describe how she looked. He couldn't stop staring at her as her Step Dad walked her down the aisle.

"Make sure you take care of my daughter, cherish her and never make her cry" David warned before he handed Annie's hand to him.

"I will, Dad," Eric replied with a smile.

"Hi, babe." He greeted as they made their way towards the priest.

"Hello Handsome, we missed you." She whispered.

Before he could tell her how beautiful she looked, they were interrupted by the priest's voice.

The ceremony began as the priest started preaching about the blessings of marriage. He blessed the soon to be couples and soon enough it was time for them to exchange the rings and say their vows. Eric went first.

First of all, he sighed which earned a chuckle from the audience. Even though he had practised what to say severally, he felt that wasn't enough. He decided to forget about all he had practised and speak from his heart.

"Annie Christina Davis, my life was grey without you in it but when you came, you filled it with so many colours. I just want you to know that I love you more than anything in the world and I can't wait to start a family with you." He smiled as he remembered no one was aware of their little secret. Well, except Nora.

"I promise to be faithful to you, I promise to cherish you, protect you and be there for you even when you don't need me. I promise to be your best friend, your number one fan and I promise

to always put a smile on this pretty face of yours. I love you, sweetheart." He completed then took the ring from Dylan, the best man and slipped it into Annie's finger. He kissed her hand afterwards.

There were a lot of awes from the audience and some people were trying to hold back tears of joy too.

"Eric Christian Ivan James, You have no idea how much I've dreamt of this day, to be married to the best man in the world, handsome, caring and supportive. I have no doubt you'll be a wonderful father to our future children and I can't wait to start a family with you. I feel so blessed to have you by my side, Eric and I promise to be a good wife to you. I promise to be faithful, I promise to support you, be there for you at all times and most of all I promise to love you unconditionally. I love you, Babe." She completed and collected the ring from Ella and slipped it into Eric's finger.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, I present to you the latest couple, Mr and Mrs Ivan James. You may now kiss the bride." The priest said to Eric with a smile.

Eric nodded, wrapped his arms around Annie's waist and kissed her.

There was loud cheering and whistling from the crowd.

"I love you, Mrs Ivan James." Eric declared.

She smiled at him."I love you more Babe."

The newly wedded couple walked out of the church and were congratulated by everyone. Annie and Eric received a lot of hugs and they took pictures with almost everyone.

After that, they proceeded to the reception which was beautifully decorated by Lucia who headed the team. She had begged Annie and her brother to give her the opportunity to be in charge of decorating the reception venue and no doubt she did an excellent job. They were all so proud of her.

Before Annie stepped into the reception with Eric, She changed her wedding dress into a more comfortable white long dress which had a slit by the left side. The makeup artist then retouched her makeup and she was good to go.

"I will continue to hail myself because I married the most beautiful woman in the world. My darling Annie, You're Beautiful, You're Gorgeous. You're Sexy, You're Adora...."

"Eric." She chuckled. "Our guests are waiting for us." She reminded.

"Okay baby. Let's go." He took her hand in his and ushered her to the reception.

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Eric could not help but feel lucky as he stared at his gorgeous wife who was asleep with her head on his lap. He knew she was tired from the day's activity so he let her sleep. She needed all the rest she could get now that she had a life in her who depended on her for everything.

The wedding reception went well, They were congratulated, pictures were taken, a toast was made, food, drinks and cake were shared, the guests presented their gift to them, they had their first dance as a couple. Then they changed and left for their honeymoon.

He didn't want to wake her up but he had to because they were landing soon.

"Sweetheart wake up." He whispered and Annie opened her eyes.

"We'll be landing soon." He told her. She sat up while rubbing her eyes with the back of her palm.

Eric buckled her up then handed her a bottle of water which she gladly accepted. Since he knew about the pregnancy, he had been making sure she stayed hydrated.

Soon enough, they landed and Eric ushered Annie out of the Jet. Eric was putting on his usual shirt and pants while Annie was putting on a pair of jeans and an oversized sweater.

"Thanks for bringing me here." She placed a kiss on his cheek.

"Anything for you my love but we'll be going to Paris after a week here in Dubai." He informed.

Their luggage was transferred into a car and they settled in too. The hired driver greeted them and drove them to the most expensive hotel in Dubai where their reservation was.

"This place is amazing," Annie said as soon as she was done touring the room which of course was a VIP suit. Then she went to stand by the window to admire the scenery. Even at night, it was very beautiful.

"Sure it is." Eric walked towards her and wrapped his arms around her waist.

She turned towards him and kissed him. "I think our wedding night should start now Eric." She said in between kisses. "Please make love to me." He could see the desire in her eyes. He was so damn sure he had the same desire in his eyes too.

He took his time, explored every inch of her body and made passionate love to her. Their wedding night was truly a night to remember.

Chapter 78

After spending a week in Dubai, two weeks in Paris and a week and a half in Rome, Annie and Eric returned home. Their honeymoon was a memorable one. They spent time exploring the word together and also made love on most nights except when Annie was tired. Still, there were times she would wake him up at midnight and beg him to make love to her. She would use the baby as an excuse for making her horny as hell.

Annie and Eric decided to tell their families about the baby as soon as they got back from their honeymoon.

Annie's bump was now very obvious and there was no way she would be able to hide it for so long.

They got home on a Thursday night and woke up early on Friday to meet up with their Doctors appointment.

Doctor Grey was very happy to see them. She had grown closer to the couple. Annie felt comfortable opening up to her with everything concerning her pregnancy. She and Eric had even invited her to their wedding along with Doctor Myers and his family.

Alicia ushered them into the ultrasound room for the check-up.

"So how are you?" She directed to Annie. "Noticed anything strange since the last check-up?"

"I'm fine Alicia. Nothing much except I get tired easily. And I don't know, I have this weird feeling that my bump is bigger than usual. Maybe I'm going to have a big baby or if that isn't the case I feel Eric is feeding me too much. Maybe I'm getting fat."

Eric chuckled and kissed her cheek. "You're not fat babe."

"I agree with him. But an ultrasound will make us know if you'll be having a big baby."

Annie got on the scale on Alicia's instruction, weighed herself then Alicia wrote something down on her chart. It turned out that Annie had gained an extra three kg since her last check-up. Then Alicia ushered her to the stretcher where she laid down for the ultrasound. Eric took a seat beside her and held her hand.

"Okay, let's see." She said as her right hand was on Annie's belly controlling the wand while her focus was on the Monitor.

"Your baby is fin.....Ohhhh!" She exclaimed.

"What is it?"

"Is anything wrong with the baby?" Annie and Eric asked.

Instead of Doctor Grey answering them, she more like talked to herself. “How come I never noticed?”

Tears were already building up in Annie’s eyes. She concluded something was wrong with the baby.

“I just want both of you to listen,” Alicia said which was followed by the baby’s heartbeat.

After a few seconds of listening to the heartbeat, she turned to them and said: “Baby A is very healthy, now let’s listen to Baby B’s heartbeat.” Then the room was filled with the sound of another heartbeat.

“No way!” Eric grinned as he looked at Annie who was shedding tears of Joy.

“I can’t believe it. We asked for one and He gave us two. Thank you, God” He kissed Annie on her lips.

Annie could not even explain how she was feeling. She was overwhelmed; She knew her bump was bigger than usual so She was expecting the doctor to confirm her prediction that she was going to have a big baby and not Twins.

“It’s okay Baby.” Eric smiled at her and wiped her tears with his thumb.

“Congratulations to you both.” Doctor Alicia Grey smiled. She was truly happy for them.

“Thank you.” The soon to be parents replied.

Alicia grinned. “I hoped that confirmed why you have a big bump.”

“Sure.” Annie chuckled.

“So would you like to know their Gender?”

Annie looked at Eric and she could tell the answer from his eyes. She knew if she said NO, he would respect her decision. That was how much he loved her. Hell, she wanted to know so badly so she replied Doctor Alicia.

“Yes please.”Eric kissed her cheek.

Alicia was busy studying the monitor for a while then she turned to them and announced their babies' gender.

“You’re having Twin Boys.”

“Damn, I’m the luckiest man in the world.” He turned to Annie. “Thank you for giving me these precious miracles, thank you for bringing so much joy to my life. You’re the best, babe.” He placed a long kiss on her forehead.

Alicia excused herself to go print copies of ultrasound.

“I’m so happy,” Eric beamed.

“Me too.” She replied.

“I love you guys so much.” He said to her belly and kissed it before pulling down her blouse.

“I still can’t believe it,” Annie said as she sat on the ultrasound bed and Eric sat beside her.

“Me too. I can just imagine the joy in mom’s face when we tell her about the twins.” Eric brought her palm to his lips and kissed it.

“She’ll be so happy. I think we should tell them soon because I don’t think I can keep this awesome news a secret anymore.” Annie said.

“Sunday is Mom’s birthday and it happens to be Mother’s day too. Elaina and Lucia are planning a small surprise dinner party for her. Fortunately, your Mom, Dad, Dylan, Ella and my aunt Eva are already invited so I think it will be a perfect time to tell them.”

“Don’t you think we would be robbing mom of her spotlight. It’s her day you know.”

“Trust me. It’s going to be the best birthday gift she would ever receive. I’m sure she wouldn’t mind.” He winked at her.

Alicia Grey walked in. “So I made many copies for you both.” She handed them a big brown envelope. Inside it were copies of their babies’ ultrasound.

“Thank you.” Annie smiled as she collected them.

“So you have to be extra careful, eat more and avoid stress. Since you’re expecting twins, it’s normal for you to go into labour like a month earlier before your initial due date. Your next check-up is in three weeks, congratulations once again.” She hugged the happy Couple.

Chapter 79

It was night-time; Eric and Annie were in their matching pyjamas, having a family talk on their bed. They were seated side by side, their head resting against the headboard. Eric had his laptop on his lap and a notepad and pen beside him while Annie was flipping through a baby magazine. They decided to start preparing for the arrival of their bundles of joy.

“You know Annie I’m kind of scared.”

“Of what?” She asked.

“Of the fact that I won’t be able to recognize our babies. What if they are identical?”

Annie chuckled. “You worry too much, Eric. No matter how identical they are. You will recognize them because you’re their father.”

He sighed. “I hope so.”

“So I’ve ordered everything on the list. We’ll go pick them up tomorrow.” He said as he passed over the laptop to her to cross-check if anything on the list was missing.

“I think that’s all for now.” She replied after a while. She and Eric spent the day making a list of what they had and what they will need to get and now that they were expecting twins, they needed double of everything.

Eric collected the laptop from her, shut it down and kept it on the nightstand along with the notepad and magazine.

Annie snuggled close to Eric. She rested her head on his chest.

“So what names do you have in mind for our munchkins?"

“Eric chuckled. I haven’t thought about it. Do you have anything in mind?”

“I had a different name in mind until we both discovered today that we are expecting two instead of one.”

“What do you think about Xander and Xavier?” She asked him.

“Not bad, maybe Carson and Carter too.” He suggested.

“Julian and Sebastian seem co.....Ouch.” Annie screamed a little as her hand went to her belly protectively.

“Are you in pain?” He asked, his expression changing to that of worry.

Tears of joy welled up in her eyes. She felt some sort of movement in her stomach and the feeling was amazing.

“The babies moved.” She said with a smile then placed Eric’s hand on where she felt the movement a while ago. He felt a kick against his hand and he smiled. He couldn’t be more proud.

“Wow.” He chuckled. “This is amazing.”

“I know. I’ve waited for this moment, to feel the baby kick. Now my babies are kicking and it feels so wonderful.”

“I think they’re hungry or maybe they liked the name you mentioned.”

“Maybe, it feels so real now.” She showered Eric’s face with kisses. “You and the boys are my life. You guys mean the world to me. I promise to be a good wife to you and a wonderful mother to them.”

He smiled. “I have no doubt you’ll fulfil your promise, babe and we promise to be good boys.”

She kissed him on the lips. “I love you.”

“And I love you more my Queen.”

Chapter 80

Annie and Eric kept themselves busy the next day by going for baby shopping. They went to the mall to cross-check all the items they booked online the previous night and they also bought some things they thought the babies would need which they forgot to add to the list. By the time they got home, Annie was tired. Eric made lunch for her and made sure she took a nap.

While Annie was taking a nap, Eric offloaded all the things they bought to the twins' room and as soon as Annie woke up, she joined Eric and they ended up deciding they were going to change the theme of the room to a more friendly colour.

They spent the rest of the evening watching TV and before they went to bed, they wrapped the gift they were going to give Eric's Mom.

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SUNDAY EVENING

During their honeymoon, Annie had shopped for some beautiful maternity clothes so she didn't have a problem getting the right clothes to wear. But since they would be revealing the babies' existence tonight, she decided to wear a bodycon dress which perfectly showed her curves and baby bump and she placed a maternity designer Jacket over it with matching sandals. The Jacket really did a good job in covering her bump; it didn't look like she was pregnant at all. She bought it in one of the maternity stores in Dubai.

"You look yummy, babe." Eric approached her, placing a kiss on her cheek.

"Thanks, sweet. You don't look bad also."

They made their way out of their house into the Car.

"You know, Dylan wanted to come over yesterday. I had to stop him and convinced him there was no need since we would be seeing each other tonight at my parents' place."

Annie smiled. "Same with Ella, but I told her we were still on our honeymoon cruise so we agreed we would see each other tonight."

"I'm sure she must have been suspicious about me but I know once she knows the reason, she'll understand why I've been kind of avoiding her."

Soon enough, they reached the Ivan-James mansion and from the cars parked in the driveway, they could tell most of their visitors had arrived.

Eric helped Annie out of the car and they walked into the mansion hand in hand.

Laura was the one who opened the door for them and she literally pulled them into a bone-crushing hug. Well, Annie was mindful of her bump.

“I missed you guys.” She grinned.

“We missed you too.” They said together and jointly kissed her cheek.

“Come on, everyone is waiting for you guys." She ushered them in and as soon as they got closer to the living room, she announced. “The honeymooners are here.”

“Oh man, I was thinking you weren’t going to show up,” Dylan said as he gave Eric a brotherly hug.

“Of course I would.” He defended.

“Hi, babe.” He smiled and hugged Annie, giving her a kiss on her cheek which caused Eric to glare at him.

Eric and Annie hugged and greeted every other person in the room; Austin, Lucia, Elaina, Jayden, Angela, David, Jace, Aunty Eva, Uncle Robert, Melissa and Toby.

“Hi, babe.” Annie smiled as she walked towards Ella who has been kind of avoiding her since she arrived.

“Hi,” Ella replied uncomfortably with a smile that didn’t reach her eyes.

Before Annie could say anything further she excused herself.

Unknowing to them, Dylan was watching. He approached Annie as soon as Ella walked away.

“You two okay?” He asked, concerned.

“I don’t know but I guess so.” She said unsure.

Dylan sighed. “She was at my place two days ago, crying her eyes out.”

“What happened?” Annie’s voice showed concern.

“She said that her relationship with you isn’t the way it used to be. She said you've been avoiding her. You’re tired of your friendship with her, you want to cut it off but you don’t know how.”

Annie was shocked. She never knew her distance from her best friend, trying to hide her pregnancy hurt her so much.

“I promise you, Dylan. It isn’t any of that.”

Dylan shrugged. “But that’s what she thinks. She thinks she has offended you somehow. She said she called you to hang out with you when you came back from the honeymoon but you kept on giving excuses.”

“This is so messed up. I need to talk to her.”

“Please do. She has been so grumpy lately. I want my girlfriend back.”

“Girlfriend?” Annie questioned as a smile crept to her lips. “I never knew you guys were official.” She teased.

“Well,” Dylan playfully scratched the back of his head. “We made it official a few days after your wedding.”

“Make sure you take very good care of her or else you will have me to deal with.”

“I will.” He assured.

“Congratulations.” She hugged him. “I have to get going. I have someone special to apologize too.”

“Calm down young woman. Who are you apologizing to?” A sweet voice teased.

Annie turned around and saw her mother in law. Evelyn.

“Happy Birthday, Mom.” She hugged her and kissed her cheek. “Long life and prosperity.”

“Thank you, my child. I wasn’t expecting this you know. I was thinking of spending the day all alone in the house after church but I was surprised when I came home to so many visitors, decorations, food and cake.”

“You deserve it, mom, Happy Mother’s Day.”

“Thanks. I just feel so happy because my children planned this for me.” She pointed to the Minibar in the living room where all her four children stood.

Elaina was filling up Eric’s cup and beside them was Laura who was making a video of them on her camera and in front of them stood Lucia who was saying something they were all laughing at.

“I’m so happy they are getting along well.”

“Me too,” Annie added.

“Did you like your present?”

“Sure! Thank you very much, dear. Eric gave them to me earlier on.” She smiled and hugged Annie once more.

Chapter 81

After secretly searching for her, Annie found Ella in the kitchen. She was seated on a stool, resting her back against the counter, slowly sipping her wine.

“I’m sorry Ella.” Annie apologized. “I never wanted to make you feel like I don’t value our friendship anymore. You’re my only friend Ella, there’s no one except you and that means I can never break my friendship with you. We’ve come a long way you know.”

“Then why have you been avoiding me?” Ella asked as she placed her glass cup on the counter behind her. There was still some wine in it.

Annie sighed. “Maybe I’ve been avoiding you a little but it wasn’t intentional.”

“So we’ve gotten to that part in our Friendship where you cannot trust me with anything anymore?” Ella sounded hurt.

“Not that Ella. It’s so hard for me to keep things away from you.”

“Then tell me what’s wrong.” Ella persuaded.

Annie sighed then she took Ella’s hand in hers. “I was hiding from you because of this.” She placed Ella’s hand on her bump.

Emmanuella felt the bump and her eyes went wide. Sure she was happy and surprised.

“Wow.” She chuckled. “Even though I’m angry I’m just learning about this, trust me I’m so happy for you.”

“But Ann, how can you keep such good news to yourself without informing me?”

“It was the hardest thing I’ve ever done Ella. When I found out, I was insecure; I was scared, afraid that I’m going to lose this one too. That’s why I never told anyone except my husband. I want to reveal it when I’m sure he or she is out of danger.”

“This was why I made silly excuses whenever you invited me over. Please forgive me. I need my best friend now more than ever.” She apologized sincerely.

“Make sure this is the last time you keep anything away from me.” She warned and Annie nodded.

“I forgive you because of this little cutie.” She said as she pointed to Annie’s bump which was covered in a magical jacket.

“Don’t you think you are being a little unfair?” Annie pouted.

Ella asked, confused. “What do you mean?”

“You said little cutie when there are two in there.” She grinned.

“Whattttt!!!!” Ella screamed.

“Twins?” She whispered and Annie nodded proudly.“Twin boys.”

“Oh my God, I'm so happy for you.” Ella pulled her into a hug, happy tears welling up in her eyes.“This is so much to take in,” Ella said after a while.

“Yes. We weren’t expecting it either."

Ella took her best friend’s hands in hers and looked into her eyes sincerely. “I know you have a wonderful husband who will always be there for you but I’m here whenever you need me. No matter what or how crazy it seems, you can always count on me.” She assured.

Annie hugged her.

“So how about I steal you away from your husband next weekend, for us to have a girls night? I’m sure Eric will manage without you for two nights.” She smiled.

“I’m in and I guess Eric has no choice but to give in.”

“Okay, Boo. We’ll continue our conversation later. I’m sure everyone is expecting us at the dining table.” She said and they left for the dining room.

Lo and Behold. Ella was right. Everyone had settled down. They were the only ones left. The two best friends settled on the two empty seats in between Eric and Dylan. Before Ella took a seat, she whispered something in Eric’s ear which made him blush. “Father of Two, Congratulations!!!”

Annie smiled sweetly at him. Eric’s father said a short prayer and they dug into their food. The meal was very delicious. They made conversation in between.

Chapter 82

Just before they had dessert, Evelyn was presented with a Mother's Day cake courtesy of her girls, Elaina, Laura and Lucia. She thanked them after which they took pictures and shared a piece of cake to everyone.

"Sorry, mom. I think we might be stealing the spotlight from you a little." Eric warned as he rose to his feet.

"And why is that?" Evelyn playfully challenged.

"Oh, I'll let my wife tell y'all then I'll make a toast after that."

Eric turned to Annie who was seated to his left "Sweetheart, over to you."

Ella giggled as she knew what was about to happen while everyone else looked a little bit confused.

Annie rose to her feet. Instead of doing the talking, she let her actions speak. She started unbuttoning her jacket and took it off. Then she placed her hand on her visible four months old bump.

"Oh, My God."

"Wow."

"They are expecting a baby."

"This is the best news I've heard all week."

"Congratulations."

Everyone was ecstatic.

"This is the best birthday gift ever" Evelyn burst into happy tears.

"There's more guys." Eric pulled his wife closer to him, kissed her forehead and spoke. "We are expecting Twins, Twin boys." He announced proudly and the whole family went crazy.

Evelyn sobbed even more. Angela, Annie's mom, had no choice but to shed some tears too.

"Congratulations man," Dylan said as he pulled Eric into a hug.

"Thanks, Bro." He replied.

"How come you didn't tell me earlier?" He playfully accused.

"I wanted to but Annie wanted to cross her first trimester successfully before we announced it. Sorry man, trust me this was the hardest thing I've ever done. Sometimes I'll just wake up and

want to tell everyone that I'm going to be a father but then I'll remember the promise I made to Annie."

"I understand. Wow, two boys. You're going to have your hands', full man." Dylan teased.

"So that means you were pregnant during the wedding. How come I never noticed?" Angela, Annie's mom said as she wiped her tears.

"Because I hid it pretty well, mom. I felt so insecure. I didn't want you all to go through another heartbreak. That's why I decided not to say anything until after my first trimester and Doctors confirmation that the baby was free from danger."

Angela and Evelyn gave Annie a joint motherly hug.

"So when did you find out you were having two babies?" Claire asked excitedly.

"My last check-up which was two days ago."

Lucia came to Annie and gave her a sisterly hug. She had tears in her eyes too. "Congratulations Sis." She said sincerely.

"Thank you, sweetheart," Annie replied.

"Okay, Time to make a toast," Lucia called for everyone's attention as they gathered in the second living room. She filled everyone's glass cup with wine and Annie's own with a fruit juice and led the toast.

"Life has been one hell of a roller coaster to us all. First of all, I want to give all glory to God for giving us the strength to go through everything and most importantly for sending Annie into our lives. Her presence in this family has brought so much joy to us and has even brought us closer than ever. Also, we'll not forget her first bundle of Joy, Baby Miracle, who we all believe is in a better place. Thank you for everything Annie, Thank you for loving my brother unconditionally, Thank you for forgiving me even after all I put you through, Thank you for loving my family just as much as you love yours and most importantly, Thank you for blessing us with Twins. This will be the very first set of twins in Ivan James's lineage." She raised her glass and made the toast. "To Annie and the Twins."

Chapter 83

EPILOGUE

Annie smiled as she watched Eric cradle one of the boys to sleep. She couldn't tell which of her boys since his back was facing her.

Fortunately, everything went well during her pregnancy. She received so much love from everyone, most especially her husband, Eric, who kept up with her unusual demand and mood swings.

Annie gave birth to her twins naturally. It was indeed very painful but Eric was there to encourage her. She could remember seeing tears in his eyes when she was pushing.

Ethan Ryder Julian Ivan-James came out first. He was six pounds two ounces. Immediately the nurse placed Ethan on his mother's chest, he stopped crying and Annie's heart melted but unfortunately, she couldn't hold him for long because his younger brother wanted to come out so Annie had to push.

Immediately the nurse took Ethan back in her arms, he started crying again. Eric was torn between staying beside Annie and attending to Ethan.

Fortunately, Evan Ronan Sebastian Ivan-James came out almost immediately. He was Five pounds six ounces. Eric was asked to cut the cord which he did proudly.

Evan was placed on his Mother's chest while Eric went over to the nurse who was attending to Ethan. He placed one of his fingers in Ethan's hand and the little guy instantly wrapped his tiny hand around it.

Eric watched as the nurse took his footprints, cleaned him up and did a total check-up for the little guy.

As soon as they were done with Ethan, he was wrapped in a baby blue blanket and handed over to Annie who was happy to receive him. While the nurse and Eric cleaned Evan up.

The nurses helped Annie in cleaning up too after which she was transferred to her ward. She breastfed Evan before falling asleep while Ethan was given his formula.

Waking up to this beautiful view of her husband rocking one of her babies to sleep was truly a blessing.

One thing Annie was grateful for was that both her babies were fine, no complications whatsoever and she was perfectly fine too.

Eric smiled as soon as he saw Annie was awake. He took quiet steps towards her and kissed her. He took a seat beside her with Ethan in his arms. The little cutie was fast asleep already.

Annie smiled as she watched her baby in his father's arms. "He's so beautiful. They both look like you." She said to Eric and gestured towards Evan who was asleep in his crib.

"I know." He smiled. "And I love them so much. I now recognize them," he said proudly.

Eric found it a little bit difficult recognizing them at first. He had to check the baby tag on their leg to confirm if he was holding Ethan or Evan.

"Even though they have my hair and eye colour, Ethan's hair is darker while Evan's hair is lighter than Ethan's own. I know it's not a strong proof but with time I believe I'll be able to tell them apart. Besides, I think Ethan is clingy. Immediately you fed Evan and the nurse burped him, he dozed off but Ethan needed me to rock him to fall asleep. Not that I'm complaining though" He smiled.

"How are you?" He asked her.

"I feel very sore but I think it's all worth it." She smiled as she lovingly caressed Ethan's rosy cheeks. He looked so adorable sleeping in his father's arms.

"I think I should lay him down in his crib." He said and Annie nodded in approval.

She watched him as he stood up and gently laid Ethan in his crib. Eric came back to Annie, took a seat beside her and kissed her hand.

"Thank you for giving me these cute little munchkins."

Annie chuckled. "I can't believe we made them. They are so beautiful, so perfect. I want them to be like you when they grow up, Loving, responsible, handsome and successful." She confessed.

"Honestly, I thought being successful made me fulfilled but looking at our babies makes me feel more fulfilled. The feeling is so amazing. I have two people to look up to me and I promise to take care of the three of you."

"No doubt you'll be a good Father." She smiled at him and he placed a kiss on her lips.

Their little make-out session was interrupted by Doctor Myers who walked in with the happiest smile on his face.

"How is my favourite patient doing today?"

"Fine Thank you," Annie replied. She remembered a nurse saying Doctor Myers was off duty when she was brought to the hospital at midnight.

"Feeling better?" He asked Annie as he walked towards her bedside.

"Yes, just a little bit sore."

"When will I be discharged?" She pouted.

Doctor Myers chuckled. "Tired of staying here already?"

"Maybe."

"I guess she misses home already." Eric chipped in.

"Well, I can't tell for now. We need to make sure you and the babies are perfectly fine before we discharge the three of you. If everything goes well, you should be discharged in two to three days."

"How are you able to tell them apart? They are so identical." Doctor Myers said as he looked at both babies in their crib.

Eric chuckled. "We are finding our way around it. We will surely get to identify them but for now, the name tags and their hair colour is helping us differentiate Ethan from Evan."

"Well, Congratulations to you two." He hugged Eric who was standing beside him and gave Annie a side hug. She was already in a seating position.

"Before I forget, your families are outside. I'm thinking if I should allow them in at once. I know this room is big enough to accommodate them all but I don't want them to scare these little cuties."

"It's fine. Please let them all in. I'm sure they won't be staying for long." Annie pleaded.

"Okay then. I'll see you guys later." He said then took his leave.

Ella was the very first person to walk into the ward. She giggled with a proud smile on her face as she took a look at Ethan and Evan in the crib. Then she proceeded to where her best friend was and hugged her.

Eric's Parents, Annie's parents, Dylan, Elaina, Jace and Lucia walked in next with gift bags in their hands which were for the boys and some congratulatory decorations. Every one of them took turns in hugging and congratulating Annie and Eric.

"You shouldn't have bothered." Annie pouted as Eric collected the gift bags from them.

Ethan and Evan had lots of presents and toys waiting for them at home already. The boys' playroom at home was full of toys, everything in twos. It got to a point Annie started giving out a notice that she and Eric were no longer accepting gifts because there was no space to put them.

"We couldn't come here empty-handed you know." Lucia defended as Elaina chuckled. They did a little shopping for their nephews together before they came to the hospital.

"Anyways, Thank you all," Annie said.

All eyes turned to Evelyn as she started shedding tears of joy. "They are so beautiful." She said as she admired Evan who was awake in her arms. The little guy was trying to study her face. "They look so much like Eric when he was born."

“I agree, from the pictures you showed me,” Angela added. She had Ethan in her arms. “But Ethan has your nose, Annie. Maybe if you give birth to a girl next she will have all your features like the way the boys have Eric’s features.”

Annie groaned. “Mom, I just gave birth and you’re already dreaming of baby number three.” She said and everyone chuckled.

“We’ll start thinking about that” Eric replied Angela which made Annie glare at him.

The visitors stayed a little longer, played with Ethan and Evan, The mothers talked to Annie concerning her health and gave her helpful tips about motherhood and taking care of the twins.

Ella, Elaina and Lucia took as many pictures of the twins as they could. Evan and Ethan were just so cute that they couldn’t help but take more pictures of them.

Their families reluctantly took their leave when it was time to feed the twins. A nurse brought in a breastfeeding pillow for Annie and helped her place the twins on it and she breastfed them.

Annie and Eric watched as their babies latched onto their mommy’s breast. Ethan had one of his hands on Annie’s boobs. He was truly possessive about what was his.

As soon as Annie finished nursing them, she burped Ethan and Eric burped Evan. They fell asleep almost immediately and they were placed in their respective crib.

After that, Annie and Eric had a sumptuous dinner. They made small talk in between their delicious meal.

Eric climbed beside Annie on the bed and cuddled her closer to him. It was big enough to fit both of them. Eric face-timed Laura who was now a boarding student along with Claire and Jayden, The trio talked with Annie and Eric and they were very happy when Eric showed them the twins who were fast asleep in their cribs. After the call, Eric replied to the congratulatory messages from his friends and colleagues. Annie did the same too and when she logged in on her Instagram, she had so many tags waiting for her, so many congratulatory messages about her babies and some were asking when she was going to post pictures of the twins which will definitely not be anytime soon. She smiled as she read the comments. She couldn’t reply all but liked as much as possible before she got tired and decided to log out.

Eric couldn’t be more proud as he watched the love of his life, the mother of his children fall asleep in his arms. He couldn’t thank her enough for walking into his life and adding colours to it. He kissed her forehead and fell asleep too. Few hours into his sleep, he was disturbed by Ethan’s cry who needed some food and cuddles.

Chapter 84

SECOND EPILOGUE

FIVE YEARS LATER

“Show me your eyes?” Evan asked Sienna. Sienna pouted for a while and then she pointed to her eyes.

“Good Job.” Ethan commended with a loud clap.

“Show me your belly?” Evan asked again and Sienna raised her pyjamas shirt to show her elder brothers her belly.

“Good job.” Evan commended.

“Sissy is a genius.” Ethan teased and tickled Sienna’s belly which made her giggle loudly.

“Show me your chin?” Ethan asked and Sienna looked lost but eventually pointed to her elbow.

“No Sissy, This is your chin okay.” Evan corrected, showing Sienna her chin and she nodded.

“Okay Sissy, last question. Show me your nose.” Ethan asked.

The little one-year-old happily pointed to her nose and her elder brothers cheered.

“Mommy, Sienna should come to school with us next time.” Ethan Suggested.

“Yes mommy, that way she won’t cry whenever we are going to school because we will be going together” Evan added.

“I think Sienna is still small to start school sweetheart,” Annie replied as she stood in front of the mirror in her room and applied her night facial routine. “She will start school when she’s two”

“But Zoe is one and Zoe is in daycare. Sienna can come to daycare too. She’s smart.” Ethan challenged and Annie sighed. He was always the strong-headed one; he does not take NO for an answer.

“Okay baby. I’ll discuss it with your Daddy when he comes.”

“Sienna.” Annie groaned as she walked towards her babies who were playing on the carpet in her room.

“I told you not to put those heels on again, at least not tonight.” Annie sounded kind of frustrated but Sienna smiled at her mom in return. She ran into her mom’s closet when her mom was in the bathroom and had put on her red heels.

“I think she loves them, mommy. Maybe you should buy a smaller one for her.” Evan suggested.

“She can’t wear heels now. She’s still a baby.”

“Come here Sisi.” Annie gestured for her daughter to come closer to her and Sienna obeyed. She took a seat on the carpet rug where the boys were seated and placed Sisi on her lap. Then she began to do her hair. Sienna refused to remove her mom’s heels so they were still hanging loosely around her small feet.

Motherhood was Annie’s greatest achievement. She would look at her babies’ every day and bless God for blessing her with an adorable set of humans. Ethan and Evan were three Years old when Sienna was given birth to. They were so happy when their younger sister was brought to the world. They are so protective of her and want to play with her all the time.

Sienna was born on Eric’s birthday. That made Eric love her even more and no doubt she has her little fingers wrapped around her Dad.

Annie was a week late when she was pregnant with Sienna and Sienna decided to come out on her Dad’s birthday, giving him the best present ever.

She thought Ethan and Evan were spoiled rotten but Sienna was even more spoiled by her Family.

Her children loved going to their grandparents’ house because they knew that was the only place they wouldn't get a No for an answer. They stay awake past their bedtime and get to eat as many cookies and sweets as they wanted.

“So do you guys want to tell me who Zoe is?” Annie asked her boys.

“Zoe is Annabel’s little sister,” Evan answered.

“Annabel is in our class. She’s five and she likes me.” Ethan said proudly.

“She likes me too.” Evan chipped in.

Before they could go further into their conversation, Eric walked into the bedroom.

“Daddy!!” The kids chorused happily as they ran to hug their Daddy.

Sienna stood up from her mom’s lap and walked as fast as her leg could carry her in her mother’s heels to go join the group hug.

Eric, who just came back from work, squatted to his children’s height and gave them all a hug and a kiss on their forehead.

“We miss you, Daddy,” Evan said.

“Yes, Daddy, We were waiting for you to come read us a bedtime story” Ethan announced.

“Sorry buddies. Daddy was busy at work but I’m here now and I’ll read you guys your bedtime story.”

Sienna insisted Eric carry her and he did just that. He chuckled as he saw she was putting on her mom's heels.

"She wouldn't stay away from my heels," Annie said as she approached her husband.

"Hi, babe." He greeted her and gave her a quick kiss on her lips.

Annie and Eric ushered their kids out of their room into their various bedrooms. Eric went with the twins into their bedroom, tucked them in and picked out a bedtime story to read to them.

Annie, on the other hand, took Sienna to her room, gave her some vitamins then tucked her in. It didn't take long for Sienna to fall asleep. Annie was hardly on the third page of Sienna's bedtime story when she realized her baby had fallen asleep. She kissed her forehead, reduced the room's air conditioner, deemed the light and set up the baby monitor.

Annie went straight downstairs to warm up Eric's dinner.

There was nothing that gave Annie joy than taking care of her family. It was kind of hard for her to combine being a housewife, a mother of three and running her cosmetic line and beauty parlour at the same time but she found a way to balance her career with her duties as a Mother and Wife.

Her cosmetic company has been nothing but successful since its establishment. So far, Ann's cosmetics have won more than five awards among countless nominations. It was a dream come true for her.

Annie's relationship with Eric has been great. Of course, they do fight sometimes but they usually find a way to settle.

A few minutes later, Eric walked down the stairs in his usual sweat pants and shirt. Annie could tell he just took a shower because of the way his hair looked.

"Thanks, Babe." He kissed her cheek before taking a seat behind the dining table. He dug in immediately. Fried rice and grilled chicken with sliced plantain.

"How was work today?" She asked as she took a seat beside him.

"Fine, we were able to finalize the deal we've been working on."

Annie smiled. "I'm super proud of you, babe."

"Your boys Insist Sienna starts school with them on Monday. They said she's smart enough to be in daycare."

"What do you think about it?" He asked for her opinion.

"I don't know. I was hoping she would start when she clocks two which is in about seven months."

“Maybe we should try it. Perhaps she’ll like it over there. She’ll get to have friends outside our family.”

“Okay.”

“You’re having your hair cut tomorrow right?” She asked him and he nodded before raising a glass of water to his lips.

“Perhaps the boys should go with you.”

“Won’t you come with us?” He asked her.

“I don’t know for now. I haven’t gotten Gracie her present so I’ll have to do that tomorrow before her party.”

Gracie was Ella and Dylan’s daughter. She’ll be turning three tomorrow and her parents decided to throw her a princess-themed birthday party which they all have to attend.

Eric finished up his meal and cleaned up after which he and Annie proceeded to their bedroom.

Instantly, she cuddled closer to him. That was her safest place on earth. (Her head on his chest and her leg tangled between his.)

Eric announced.“Babe, we are going on a trip to Hawaii to celebrate our fifth wedding Anniversary.”

Annie looked up at him with a smile on her face. “Really?” She knew their Anniversary was around the corner but she was thinking they would celebrate it the usual way. That is, having a romantic dinner and buying gifts for each other.

They haven’t been on vacation for a very long time as they were busy with work and taking care of their children and family.

“Yes, dear.” He replied.

“For how long?” She asked excitedly.

“Two weeks.”

She frowned. “Isn’t that too long? What about the kids?”

“We deserve a break, Annie. The kids will be fine. Our parents will watch over them and I’m sure they will be more than happy to do so.”

Annie Sighed. “I know they’ll be fine. It’s just that I haven’t been away from them for so long.”

“You’re truly the best mother in the world. Our kids are so lucky to have you and I’m the luckiest person to have you as my wife.” He said sincerely then placed a kiss on her cheek.

Annie chuckled. “Who would have thought I'd end up with my long-time crush? I’m so blessed to have you as my man, Eric.” She confessed.

“And I’m super blessed to have you as my partner for life. I love you so much.”

Somehow Annie found a way to get hold of his hand and placed it on her belly. “We love you too, babe.”

Eric’s eyes widened in excitement upon the realization of what she said and did.