

Despised at First Sight

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STORYPDF

Complete English text · US Letter reading edition

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About this edition

This StoryPDF reading edition contains the complete English text, with its original paragraph and section order preserved.

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Chapter ONE – THE RUSH

My mind is in a complete state of confusion because the cab I arranged to pick me up has disappointed me. The driver calls just 30 minutes before the pickup time to inform me that, he has to rush his wife to the hospital because she is in labor.

God, I indeed sympathize with him but couldn't he have called earlier? I just hid my disappointment and told him it's fine but I was crying inside. I step out of the shower and now I have less time to dress up since I have to go out to get a cab on a busy Monday morning. I know the traffic situation too so my head is spinning with thoughts of how to make it to this interview which means everything to me.

I have worked over the years from start-up to multinational companies, but I never had the chance of being promoted beyond Senior Officer, no matter how hard I worked. I am very ambitious and have worked throughout my college days either as a part-time typist or secretary so I have a lot of experience.

For the first time, I get an interview for an assistant manager role. If I get this job, then I am sure of getting promoted to the manager if I complete my Executive Masters in Business Administration course. I was so excited when I received a call from the lady who introduced herself as Ruby, inviting me for the interview. I want to make a good impression.

I finally manage to dress up as fast as I can, with simple makeup. I try ordering another cab via Uber but there are no available cabs at this time. I have to try a taxi then. I get to the street and luckily, someone has just dropped out of a taxi so I wave the driver to stop as I give him the direction card attached to my invitation for the interview. He glances at it, writes his fees on it, and returns it to me.

My eyes widen with so much surprise when I see the fee he has written. "Are you taking advantage of me or what. Why are you charging this much for a journey of less than an hour?" I ask.

"Ma'am, you know the traffic situation and I can't do anything about it," he says genuinely.

"Okay, let's go," I say, making myself comfortable in the back seat. As we begin the journey, I decide to double-check a few details about the company when my eyes catch the cloudy sky in front of me. What now, haven't I had enough already? Is nature also against me?

There is no doubt with the thickness of the cloud that it's going to be a heavy downpour but my mind is so occupied with the interview that, I did not notice it earlier to even pick an umbrella or a raincoat. I say a quick prayer in my mind asking to God to at least hold the rain till I get to the venue but it seems God is also against me as the rain starts pouring, making the traffic worse due

to visibility. At least I got a taxi before the rain started so I should thank God right? Maybe it might reduce or probably stop by the time we get there.

During the ride, my mind wanders to when my mum passed away. It was also on a rainy day like this. Dad had gotten into a terrible car accident and mum had preterm labor upon hearing the news. Aunty Joy called an ambulance but there had been some fallen trees due to the heavy rain, which had caused a truck to run over a Mercedes. This made five other vehicles to collide in the same spot. There were no survivors. It was one of the most horrible incidents of my life. We could not even have my Dad's body to give a befitting burial because it was burnt beyond recognition.

We could not get an ambulance so Aunty Joy had to drive my mum through some unauthorized route to the hospital since the main roads were closed. This made the journey twice longer and mum passed on ten minutes after reaching the hospital. Since then, my life moved from a fairy tale princess to what I can't even describe. The two people who loved me so much both died on the same day.

Aunty Joy took me in but it wasn't long before she was diagnosed with cancer. It was already at stage three by then so I lost her in two months. No family member wanted to take me in after that because they saw me be cursed. They didn't even want my parent's properties so one day when class was over in school and I made no attempt to go home, Sir Maxwell as we usually called him, asked me why I didn't want to go home.

After narrating to him the story of my life, he took me to meet his family. They were foreigners but they gladly accepted me and once again, I found a place to call home. Little did I realize that Sir Maxwell was the breadwinner of the family. He had two sisters and a brother. His mum and dad were both pensioners so he took up a chunk of the responsibilities. I didn't want them to continue with this suffering so, with careful thought, I made my suggestion. I was eight and the realities of life were gradually making me matured as the only child of my parents.

Sir Max, I called.

"Maya. Is everything alright?" He asked with concern.

Yes, I smiled. I am just thinking that, since you are taking care of me now, you should sell off my parent's house and cars to use to take care of all of us. I said.

"What?, No way," he responded with an angry look.

I insist because my parents wanted me to have a good education and a good life. If you do so, you can take better care of us. I don't mean to sound ungrateful. I know that you are trying your best but that can help too. After all, what is a house and car to an eight-year-old? I can't live alone or drive those cars anyway.

Upon further deliberations, he agreed. A month later, he handed me some documents and told me to keep them secret and since then, we moved to a bigger house. Not as big and luxurious as my parent's house but we were comfortable and happy. Then life was great, almost perfect until one day, Sir Maxwell and his family had to move back to their country. They wanted me to come along but I didn't want to go far from where I will have memories of my parents so I could not accept the offer.

To my surprise, he understood and didn't force me. Instead, he entrusted me with his best friend Jude. He gave him a lot of money which surprised me because the money he got from the sale of the house and car should have finished by now.

It's been five years since then. Yes. Five whole years. Jude, his mum, brother, and I went to the Airport to see Maxwell and his family off. It was one of the saddest moments of my life. As I hugged him and kissed his cheek goodbye, he whispered in my ears. "DO NOT MENTION ANYTHING ABOUT THOSE DOCUMENTS TO ANYONE". Then he handed me a card. "Call me anytime", were his last words.

We got home from the airport before the realization hit me, that Jude's family was not like Sir Maxwell's. They were so arrogant, selfish, and inconsiderate. Perhaps that was why Sir Max wanted me to keep those documents a secret. I was twelve years by then but I was smarter than a fifteen-year-old. Maybe it was due to Sir Maxwell's training. He gave me extra tuition at home and always made me take tests in the advanced class so I was already in my senior year in high school when he left.

Jude was always busy in the office so I offered to help him whenever I came on vacation because he was the only one who cared for me. I was never comfortable alone with his family because his brother Alex was making illicit advances at me, which made me uncomfortable. His mum was always engrossed in one fashion photo or the other. Bags, shoes, make-up, jewelry, whatever you can think of. His dad was always with the newspaper. House helps did all the chores so I had nothing much to do than study my books.

Jude had a big office and made the HR hire me as an intern to be his assistant so he thought me a lot about office practice, letters, mergers, and all. It made me sad when I had to go back to school but I knew that I needed my education as well. As the years went by, Jude got Married and his wife did not like me so I decided to rent a one-room apartment. I was fifteen but very mature. He got me a decent and well secure apartment even though he had wanted me to continue living with his family till I completed college but I knew I wouldn't be able to live with them, so I insisted and he didn't have a choice to agree. Sir Max called from time to time and I explained to him as well so it was fine.

Life was extremely lonely so I used the time to do a lot of research which helped me well in college. Only then did I remember the documents Sir Max gave me. For the first time, I gently opened the envelope and my eyes could not believe what was inside.

Inside that envelope were documents for the complete insurance of my education to the master's level. There was another kiddy account that had an investment made for me. So my whole education was being funded by the insurance he did. Then the cash investment could only be assessed when I was eighteen. So I got a part-time job to support myself when I got to college. By the time I completed my undergraduate, I could assess my investment account but I was so used to working that, I never touched my investment account till now. The only change is, I am working full time now, doing my EMBA part-time.

I am currently working as a senior administration/procurement officer. When it was time for me to be promoted to the role of Administrative Manager, I was transferred to another branch. Not only was it far from my home, but it was also extremely difficult to get to school from there so I started applying for a new job. That is why this interview means so much to me.

Ma'am, I am startled as someone taps me on the shoulder. I give him my full attention when he says, "we have arrived". Ohhh, thank you I say to him, as I get out of his taxi.

"Payment Ma'am," he says harshly.

Sorry, I murmured, shoving my hands into my bag, removing my purse, and bringing out money to pay him.

Keep the change. I say walking away. I didn't miss the broad smile on his face.

"You can take my number Ma'am, anytime you need a taxi, call me". He said grinning.

Sure. I take his number and head to the tall building in front of me. It's drizzling so I need to hurry. Just as I get to the security I freeze to what just happened...

Chapter TWO – THE INTERVIEW

I can't believe that the hem of my dress and my shoes are covered in mud. Then I see the car. The driver of that Black Bugatti has splashed water mixed with mud over me. Couldn't he slow down after the heavy rain? My thoughts are completely overshadowed by this breathtakingly handsome guy who looks through the window of his car. I never knew a guy could be this good looking, but my admiration of him ended with the words I heard coming out of his mouth.

"Hey, watch where you are going next time Bitch..." He said with arrogance. My jaw dropped open at his words. He is supposed to apologize and look what he said instead. Before I could even utter a word, he wound up his window and speed off. I watched him till his car disappears around a corner. How could he be so insensitive? I should have bought a car two years back when Jude advised me to. I didn't want to over spend because I have been saving all the money I made to start up a consultancy firm. This encounter making me think about going over that decision after I am through with this interview.

I wish I could reschedule this interview. How can I face a panel looking like dirt?

"Hello Ma'am," came the voice of the security guard. "Sorry about that. Let me show you the ladies, perhaps you could get some of the dirt off". He says with pity.

Ofcourse I responded looking at the time. OMG, it's already 15 minutes past my scheduled time for the interview. Ehmmm sorry Sir, may I go in first, to atleast register my presence, I said sadly.

"Okay. Walk straight and take the first turn in your left. You will see the receptionist there." He said. I thanked him and rushed to the direction he gave. I located the place easily and I instantly felt out of place upon reaching there.

As soon as the receptionist saw me, her eyes got widened.

"Excuse me Ma'am, how may I help you?" She asked.

I, I am here for an interview. My, my name is Maya, I said with an embarrassed look.

"Maya Jacobs, she replied looking on her computer. You are number five, you will meet the panel after the lady in the grey suit." She said.

Thank you but may I use the ladies first please, I need to freshen up.

"Sure you can and you really need to", she said sarcastically. Turn left, she added. I rushed to the washroom without uttering another word.

I stood in the washroom, looking straight in the mirror. I was a total mess. If there was a boutique close by, I will rather prefer buying a new dress as the hem of this one was completely ruined. I picked a tissue and started cleaning my shoe. I did a great job with cleaning the shoes as it looked as clean as before. Then the biggest challenge was the hem of the dress. Even though it was black, you could easily see the dirt.

I searched through my bag to see what I could use since using tissue will only worsen the situation. I found a the small face towel I usually kept to wipe my shoes when I had to walk to the junction. What a relief, I opened the tap and wet the face towel. Then I began removing the dirt, making sure it doesn't spread and even though it took a lot of time, I was glad at the result. Finally, I had to straighten my hair when I heard the receptionist by the door.

"Ma'am, you are next."

What, have I spent this much time? Okay. I will be out in a minute, I shouted. I straightened my hair as fast as I could and rushed out of the washroom. She directed me to a chair and I sat there nervously, holding my bag. I noticed a few people had come after me but they were not as executively dressed as the batch I met before rushing to the washroom. Perhaps they are here for a different role.

Then my eyes glanced to the glass door in the opposite direction. There were two ladies and a gentleman. I had seen them earlier when I walked in. But if they have finished with their interview, what are they still doing here?. Could it be that they have already qualified for the position? I was getting more and more nervous as these thoughts run through my mind.

Then the door opens and seated on the panel were three men and a woman. The men looked friendly but the woman had no smile on her face. Good morning, I greeted, as confidently as I could.

"Good morning, they chorused in reply. Have a seat", said the woman a bit friendly as she pointed to the chair in front of her.

Thank you, I replied courteously whiles sitting.

Then began their usual questions.

"Tell me about yourself". I have heard this question in every panel so I was definitely prepared for it but this time, I wanted to add more to suit the role. I used the opportunity to sell my ambition and leadership abilities. I saw nods from the panel from time to time as I glanced at their faces in turns. It seems i sold myself perfectly. Yes I know it when an interview will go well from experience. It always starts with the first question.

I had my first real interview during college. Even though I tried my best, I didn't get the job because they wanted me to work full time but I was a full time student so I wanted a part time job. I regretted not taking that opportunity as it was a multinational company. Since then I have worked in local companies till this opportunity came. So here I am, trying my best to make up for my foolishness.

Then came another question from the man in the middle

"Why do you want this role?" Another popular interview question. I thought questions for this role will be different from the ones I was used to especially as officers but it seems interviews are always the same. I responded to that question as well. Then came another one from the man to the extreme left. "What are your cooperate objectives?"

Now that seems like a question for this level. I had so many ambitions with relation to the corporate structure. The policies to put in place to ensure smooth and effective flow of work in the organization. I wanted to tell them about the effective communication structures I have developed and the policies to govern the staff and all but what if I don't get hired and they end up stealing my concepts? I didn't want to take any chances so I gave a general answer without any details and also made them aware I can give them the details if they employ me.

I guess it worked as the last question popped up. 'What is your salary expectation'? This question is kind of tricky even though famous because if I mention a figure too high, they might not give me the position and if it's too small, they will doubt my capabilities. So I decided to play safe and said, why don't you hire me for the first two weeks, then you can decide how much to pay me, I replied confidently.

"Thanks for your time, Maya, this is the first stage of the interview. Do you have any questions for us?" She asked.

Yes Ma'am, I will like to know who my reporting line will be if I get hired, I asked trying to hide my nervousness.

"That will be the CEO so he is going to pick who he wants to work with. The second and final stage will be done in his Office. Kindly wait in the room next to the receptionist".

As I headed to the direction given, everything started to make sense now. The group I saw were also going through the second stage of the interview. I became more and more panicked seeing that four people had qualified. I didn't know if I will get this job but I needed it so much to prove to myself that I can make it the right way. Jude is a business owner and knows the CEO. He wanted to give me a recommendation but I refused. I wanted to do this on my own.

Upon getting there, I sat on an empty seat next to the lady who was next in line. You guessed right. I was late so I am the last person to interview for this role. The man who had gone before us came out smiling. It made my heart ache, thinking he got my dream job. Then the lady who was next in line went in. It wasn't up to 5 minutes when she also came out with a smile on her face. I got more confused as I headed to the room.

The CEO is a man in his early forties. He looks matured and refined. He looks graceful in his Executive swivel chair as he beckons me to sit. I couldn't hide my admiration for his office. It was well organized and classy. He had a leather sofa setting on one side, then his desk on the other side. He had well designed cabinets for his documents and the blinds were black zebra stripes which matched his furniture perfectly.

I greeted him again and he responded in a husky and bold voice.

"Yes good morning Maya. I will go straight to the point. I have viewed your interview with the panel from here so I do not need an introduction."

What, he was watching us the whole time on his CCTV? That's awesome but also illegal. How can he do something like this.

"Don't worry, he continued, if you didn't qualify, you wouldn't be here." he said.

"I will be frank with you about this. We get numerous qualified candidates each year but none of them pass this stage. We did the internal advertisement and nobody passed so we had to go external. None of the candidates I have met today have also qualified so, looking at you right now, I don't know what to think." He said doubtfully.

I was speechless and just listened without speaking. If all those candidates didn't pass then where from those huge smiles they had on their faces?

"Are you ready?" He asked looking directly into my eyes.

Sure, I whispered. I couldn't even hear myself. But I think he did.

"Okay stand up."

What? Well that's all I could say out of the shock I had while getting up.

"Turn around", he said again in his usual bold voice. I just turned around without thinking or asking any question.

"Sit." He said again. I sat with a confused look in my face.

"Well...he started. I think figuratively, you look attractive and with a little polishing, you could move from attractive to mesmerizing. You see....he continued talking, as a company, we

sometimes reach our wits end where we have to take certain drastic decisions even if taking that decision means making a sacrifice. As the Assistant Procurement/Administrative Manager, we will sometimes require your help in the Sales and Marketing department so how far can you go?" He asked with a piercing look.

I am very sorry Sir, but I don't understand your question, I said trying to be firm.

"Playing hard to get ha?" He said, looking indifferent.

"Well what I mean is, he said harshly. This job will pay you 150,000k annually. You will also have an official car with a driver or driven by yourself. Whatever you prefer. You are also entitled to quarterly clothing allowance, 13th month salary and other fringe benefits and bonuses. We just want to know that, if the times comes where we require you to sacrifice your body to convince a client to invest with us, you will not hold back." he finally said, confirming my suspicion.....

Chapter THREE – THE TEST

Are you saying, that I have to prostitute along side my job, I asked trying my best to be sarcastic as I was losing my respect for him.

"You are a genius Maya, that's exactly what I mean. If you can do that, then this job is yours," he said shamelessly.

I couldn't believe my ears. What he was asking me to do is what others will do with great pleasure so why couldn't he get anyone else? Does it mean the world has grown more decent? I have heard about people ladies going to the extent of sleeping with people in authority to get the job of their dreams. Thanks for the offer but I think you are talking to the wrong person. Have a good day sir, I said as I picked my handbag and headed to the door.

"Are you sure about this, Miss Jacobs, that you will let this opportunity go?" He asked again, but this time with a softer tone.

Trust me Sir, if this was the last job on earth, then I'd rather be a beggar, I finally said harshly, as I stormed out of his office. I was so furious. I regretted stepping out today. Perhaps I should have stayed home when the cab driver disappointed me. All these were just signs that it was going to be a bad day but I was so obsessed with this interview that I did not notice. I had also gone through a lot to get today approved as a leave for me because there was a lot of work that needed my attention at the office. So I didn't want to waste my day.

"Hello Ma'am, you have to sign out here, came the voice of the receptionist."

"She is not yet signing out yet, came a familiar voice behind me. "

What? What will happen now? Am I going to be taken hostage? Why Sir, I made it clear that...before I finished speaking, he held my hand and gently pulled me back to his office. Before I could utter another word, he spoke.

"Congratulations, Miss Jacobs, you have passed the test."

What do you mean by, I have passed the test?

" I will tell you. Please have a seat."

I sat eagerly as I couldn't wait for a reasonable explanation to this offense.

" You see, when we choose our managers? We don't just choose anyone. We only want the best from every angle. We want the best personality, best ethics, best character and finally, best moral standard. The question I asked was only to test your moral level which all candidates failed but you

on the other hand, passed flawlessly without thinking twice. So as the CEO of this company, I have decided to not appoint you as the Assistant but the Manager instead. You exceeded our expectation in the first interview and you also succeeded in the second and most challenging phase. May I be the first to say, Congratulations! We can't wait for you to start work. The details of your responsibilities will be detailed in your Appointment Letter."

I could not believe my ears. So the second interview was only a test? I kept repeating it to myself. I don't know if I was trying to convince myself that I was not dreaming because it really felt so. Thank you, I said with a surprised look.

"So, when can you start work? He asked again, bringing me from my dreamland."

In two weeks Sir, I have to give a two weeks notice to my current employer.

"No problem, you can pick your contract letter from the HR department. Ruby will show you."

Thank you Sir..

"See you soon, he said."

Sure, I responded as I headed to Ruby's desk. After signing the documents she gave me, I headed to the HR's office as she directed.

"Congratulations, Miss Jacobs. My name is Lisa, the HR Manager. "

It's nice meeting you, Lisa, looking forward to working with you soon.

"Ofcourse, we have finished preparing your office. If you don't mind, you can take a tour. Jason will drop you home or wherever you want to go after you append your signature on the contract. You can study the contract in your office as you tour."

I finally got to see my new Office even before I start work. I have never been so proud of myself. After a careful study of the contract, I signed, when Lisa took me to see my new office. I was speechless. I could view the beautiful houses from my window. The design was breathtakingly. Even though it was smaller than the CEO's office, it had almost the same arrangement as his. I just wanted to start work immediately before I remembered I had to send a resignation letter to my current place of work.

I excitedly thanked Lisa and went home in my Audi E Tron. Yes I said mine because that is the official car assigned to me. Jason will be my driver till I perfect my driving skills but if I want to maintain him as my driver, there will also be no objection. I So much wanted to go to a very expensive restaurant to give myself a treat but I also knew that, my resignation letter should be submitted first thing tomorrow morning so I decided to call Sir Max and Jude share the good news. Sir Max was purely excited hearing the new but Jude was totally surprised.

"Are you really sure? He asked with surprise mixed with joy."

Ofcourse, why will I lie? Do you want a snap shot of the contract? I asked, trying to convince him.

"No, no, no, no, your contract is a personal document. I am surprised because, that vacancy had been opened for almost two years now with series of interviews held without any positive result."

Oh, it should be because of the test. You will never expect it to be a test.

"What test, he asked even more surprised."

Ask him, I thought the CEO was your bossom friend?

"If he had wanted to tell me, he would have told me but since he didn't, then I will not ask him."

Well, I explained everything about the test to him and heard the amazement in his voice as he spoke with bizzare voice.

"Thats a smart one. I never thought about this kind of test. So glad you pulled through."

When I reached home, we were still on the phone as I got out of the car. We talked a little more and hang up. Then I went to shower and got myself something to eat. I just realized it's been a long day and I hadn't had breakfast and lunch so I made some noodles as fast as I could. I went ahead to type my resignation letter, printed and signed it. Then I placed it in my handbag in other not to forget.

For the first time, I decided to check out some cool office wears to match my new position and started going through some online shops. I must have fallen asleep because, the next thing I heard was the alarm.

I woke up with several missed calls from my usual cab driver. I had completely forgotten about him. I had arrangements for him to pick me work every morning since I was transfered to this branch. I realized how uncaring I had been by not calling him to check on his wife but you can't blame me right? After everything that went in yesterday, I couldn't allow myself to feel guilty at all. He answered the phone on the first dial.

"Thank God, Ma'am, I was so worried because I could not get through to give you the good news. I even came to your house but you were not there. Is everything alright Ma'am?"

Yes, everything is fine. Don't worry let's talk on the way.

"Great, because I am already at your house."

Okay. I will be out in 30 minutes. I think you came too early.

"Yes, I know. I wanted to make up for disappointing you yesterday."

It was an emergency so no problem at all. I had a quick shower and dressed very well because I was sooo happy. I double checked on the resignation letter and found it just where I kept it. I got into the cab and was surprised by the driver's compliment. He never complimented me before.

"You look very beautiful today Ma'am, are you sure you are only going to the office or you have somewhere to go first.

No, I am going straight to the office, I giggled. Thanks anyway and how is your wife by the way?

" She's fine. We had a baby girl. I am very happy. "

That's great. You should have taken today off to spend some time with them.

" Trust me, I wanted to but her mum requested she comes to live with her for sometime since I was always on the road. Even though I will miss them, it's the best option."

Well, Congratulations to the newest daddy in town, I said laughing. I also got a new job, I blurted out.

OMG, double celebration. Congratulations Ma'am, he said with genuine smile.

Thank you very much, I said returning his smile. I am going to present my resignation today.

I am really happy for you Ma'am, so it means our direction will change soon right? He asked excitedly.

Yes, but I got an official car too so I might not be using your services after two weeks, I said carefully so that I'd don't make him sad. But his countenance briefly changed from happiness to sadness and then to his normal self again.

"I am both sad and happy. Sad that I will not be able to drive you again and also happy that, you got a higher position. Maybe once in a while when you need a cab, please don't forgot me."

Ofcourse not. How can I forgot you? And we still have two weeks right? As we were talking, he pulled over in the office parking lot as I got down from the car. As soon as I got inside the office, I couldn't help but notice the stares from all directions.

Chapter FOUR – YOU HAVE TO RECONSIDER, MAYA

I wonder if it was because of the way I dressed or if there was something else but before I entered my boss's office, someone pulled me aside.

"Hey, where were you yesterday? I called your apartment severally without any response."

So you should have tried my cell phone, unless you want to tell me that, you do not have my number, I said teasingly.

"Well in case you didn't know, research has proven that, over seventy percent of cell phone users tend to lie when they are talking on a cell phone", she said with a smiley and questionable look on her face.

Sounds like a great defense and..hmmm... a smart one too. But I really have something important to do now, I said trying to escape her gaze.

"Wait, wait, wait, not so fast". She said as she pulled me back. "Is it about the meeting with Mark Snowman?"

Crazy Tracy, she was my closest colleague at the head office before she was transfered to this branch. Just like me, she was transfered when it was time for her promotion. I have never known any marketing Personnel stronger than Tracy.

She always exceeds whatever target is given her. When I was also transfered a month later, our bond was rekindled despite her very busy schedule.

She will always have lunch with me whenever she is not out to meet a client, or pull me into a corner for a little chit chat like she is doing now. But with the way she always gets first hand information, I think she should have been a Public Relations Officer instead.

I don't know about any meeting, I replied with great confusion. Maybe it's my boss.

"No, it will be you because your boss already went but messed up the situation. They sent an email for you to be transferred back to the head office to prepare for the meeting."

How do you get all this info, What is this meeting all about, and who is this Mark Snowman you are talking about?

"Her eyes widened with surprise at my question." You seem like a stranger in this generation. Who doesn't know Mark Snowman?. His father owns three Banks, two telecommunications and they

are now merging with Shippers & Logistics, after he gets married to Tilda Shaw, the Heir. I heard it's an arranged marriage but they have no objections and are going to engaged in two months."

Why two months? Why not now?

"Hmmm...reliable sources have confirmed that Tilda is using that two months to catch up on the world, to do things she might not be able to do alone if she gets married."

Can't they travel together if they get married?

"Ofcourse they can but she wants to do all this alone and Mark has no objections to it as well. Let's talk when you get back. Mr. Stem is coming towards our direction."

Maya, good to see you, was Mr. Stem's voice from behind us. Tracy suddenly disappeared before he got close. Good to see you too, Mr. Stem. How do you do?

"How do you do, Maya. Can we talk in my office?

Ofcourse, I was even coming to see you. Mr. Stem is the Branch Manager here. Even though he has the highest rank, he is the most humble. He reminds me sooo much about my Dad. Even though my Dad passed on when I was very young, his memories are not completely deleted from my mind, just as my mum. Immediately I got to his office, he offered me a seat and poured himself a cup of coffee. Nobody offers me coffee because they know I am alegic to caffeine.

"Maya, I have received orders to transfer you back to the head office immediately. The company is merging with MAN Telecommunications so auditors are there auditing our accounts at the moment. There have been some issues raised in the Procurement department and Kira did not do a good job defending it but we have been given a second chance to defend our books and expenditures. "

"If this merger is complete, our company will stand the chance of surviving and maintaining most heads but if it doesn't, then it will be taken over completely, which means, we might have little or no say in its affairs."

I do understand that this company is going through rough times but I am very sorry, Mr. Stem, I will love Soo much to do that but I can't.

"What do you mean you can't? I know you are not yet a manager but we are working out your promotion. Management realized the foul play after your transfer and drastic measures are being taken to address issues." He said with seriousness.

I am really sorry Mr. Stem, I can't because I will be here for only two weeks more. I even brought along my resignation letter.

" You have to reconsider, Maya, it is not in my place to discuss the offer prepared for you even though I am aware of it but all I can say is, it's the best offer you can get anywhere, he said in pleading voice."

Can I ask you a personal question Mr Stem by? I asked him.

"Yes, ask anything he replied assuredly."

If GMAN Capital gave you an offer, double what you have now, will you take it? I asked carefully, looking him straight in the eye.

"Why not, only a fool will reject an offer from GMAN. It's an opportunity of a lifetime to get such an opportunity."....he replied truthfully.

Then you can understand why I can not continue working here.

"Wait a minute, you mean you got an offer from GMAN?"

I nodded in the affirmative. But please keep my secret, I said sternly.

"Indeed, but how possible? A lot of people fail their interviews. How did you pass?

Let's just say, God favoured me, I said almost in a whisper.

"So when a..."

His office phone rang and he picked it instantly, beckoning me to wait. "Hello, yes, she is here. Hmmm. You can ask her yourself, she is on her way." ". You have to leave now, the driver is waiting at the parking lot,". He said, placing the phone back on the hook. "All the best," he said, almost tearfully.

Thank you, I shouted, heading out of the door. As I headed to the parking lot, I heard Tracy calling me again.

"Maya...wait..."

Not now, Tracy, I will call you.... I promise. I got to the car and the driver sped of. During the ride to the head office, my mind was clouded with the events of today. I came to tender my resignation and I can't imagine all that is going on.

For years, I worked my as* off for this company only to be treated this way. Everybody knew that Kira did not deserve that promotion. There were also rumours that she went to the extent of f*****g the CEO to get the job but I never trust rumours. I always believe that if your ways are right, nothing will stop God from giving you what you deserve.

Even now, things are begining to change in my favour but I no longer have the desire to work here, especially after seeing my new office. I get super excited whenever I remember. Nothing will make me change my mind about tendering this resignation.

As I got to the head office, all the members of management were seated at the conference room. The receptionist told me they were waiting for me to arrive before they start the meeting. Why should they wait for me? I am not a manager yet.

Good morning, I greeted upon entering the conference room. Good morning, chorused almost all members of management, ranging from the CEO, Finance Director, Sales & Marketing Coordinator, HR Manager, Head of Risk and Procurement. What....did I say procurement? Kira isn't here which means I am the acting manager for procurement.....well, that could be the only reasonable explanation.

"Without wasting time, let me introduce you to our new procurement manager, Maya Jacobs. Maya will focus purely on procurement, whiles Kira manages the Adminstrative work." We will have our final meeting with Mark Snowman in 3 days and everyone will have to make an excellent presentation. We do not have room any mediocre presentation. We all have to bear in our minds, that a merger is what we want and not a complete take over."

As I listened to everything he said, I realized Tracy had given me hundred percent info. How does she manage to get information discissed in management meetings? Or....the only reasonable explanation will be that there is someone in this meeting who tells her everything discussed here. Hmmm.....I will surely find that out when we are through with this meeting.

May I have the permission to put something on the table? I asked after careful thought and conviction.

"Okay, go ahead," was the CEOs voice.

First of all, I am very grateful for the surprise promotion and I indeed thank you all for this honourable opportunity. However, it is rather unfortunate, that I cannot accept this offer.

The whole room turned quiet amidst stares and whispers I could not describe. I know that they might think I am so full or myself or ungrateful but you can't judge me if you have not been through what I have been through right? So I continued.

I came here today, to tender my resignation, I said, bringing out my resignation letter. I am very sorry but I have already decided. Thank you.

There was dead silence after I finalized the announcement. I did not want to raise their hopes. I don't know why it came so much as a shock to them anyway. Ofcourse I expected it to surprise them but I was rather seeing shock on their faces.

With all the politics going on here, I can't reconsider my decision. If Kira hadn't messed up on the presentation with Mark Snowman, they wouldn't have given me this position would they? It's not as if I am proud or ungrateful or anything but I always believe that, If someone doesn't make you a first option, don't accept the next available one. But what if I had not gotten this new job with GMAN? Would I have still turned this down?. Well, I don't know but one thing I know for sure is, since that incidence happened, i have never felt the same. I hate injustice.

"Fine, we will double whatever offer you have." Said the CEO with so much conviction in his voice.

"Yes, and there are other benefits as well"..the HR Manager added.

Once again, thank you very much for this promotion but I still decline this offer most humbly. Please don't get wrong. It has been great working with each and everyone of you but I want to do something new and different. Please try to understand.

"It seems to me, that your mind is made up, Miss Jacobs and none of us can change it," was the sad voice of the CEO. We will accept your resignation on one condition.....

Chapter 5 – NO KIRA, IT'S YOUR OFFICE

"It's nothing much, Maya. Since you are supposed to resign with two weeks notice per our company policy, we asked that you finalize your presentation within three days and submit it to Mr. Snowman's Executive Assistant. That way, he will arrange for you to have your presentation with other investors." He ended thoughtfully.

The way he said it, made me feel sorry for him. But why should I even feel sorry for him? If the rumours are correct, he mixed business with pleasure and now he has to face the consequence. If he had not been blinded by lust and given my deserved position to someone else, I wouldn't have even thought of applying for a new job. But in a way, I am glad he did because I eventually got something better.

How can you have a manager who cannot out together a simple report to present before your investors? Anyway, I still have an obligation to do whatever is related to my work within two weeks so I don't think I have the right to object.

Ofcourse, I will do so, I said with confidence.

"Okay," he said with relief.

"If nobody has anything else to say, then I suggest we review our HR policies together with our budget and prepare for a final meeting". He said, dispersing us. "And one more thing," he said when we were about to leave. "We will have another staff promoted to Manager role." There were mumurings as we left the conference room.

After the meeting, I went to sit on my old desk, thus, where I used to sit before the transfer. Just when I was about to turn on my laptop, someone tapped me on the shoulder. Kira, how...

"Hey Maya, good to see you again," she interrupted. This is my desk now, so you have to move to the office there," she said, pointing to her office or should I say, her undeserved office.

No Kira, that's your office, I tried to reason with her.

"Not anymore, Maya, I got demoted last week Friday. That office is all yours now."

Well, I also resigned so it's not mine, I said. She looked at me indifferently.

"But you will still be here for two weeks so you have to work in that office." She replied with an expression that I could not understand.

I really felt sorry for Kira because she used to be the talk of the whole company. She could talk her way out of every situation and she usually had a very bossy and egocentric attitude but today, I am

seeing a different person. She has suddenly become so humble which makes it easier to be around her but one thing we could not decide was who to be in the Manager's office.

Luckily, Sally the HR Manager stepped in and enquired what the problem was. I gave her a reasonable explanation from my end and so did Kira. Then she concluded that, I should move to the Manager's office to enable me get the quiet and serenity I needed to complete my report for the presentation. I couldn't help but notice that sad look on Kira's face.

That is when I realized that, even though she kept pushing me to move to the Manager's office, deep down, she wanted otherwise. So I started working on my report. I was very disappointed in the fact that, for just a few months that I have been transferred, things were messed up on the server and the files I had arranged for easy access were completely scattered.

This made it twice difficult for me to finish my work load so I had to work overtime. I called the driver to arrange for a late pick up and focussed on work. Realizing that I was atleast able to put things together, I assured myself that I might be able to even beat the timeline. I got startled when someone pushed the door open without a knock.

It's past lunch time, Maya, was a very familiar voice. The only voice that could bring calmness in the mist of every storm and I wondered what she was doing here.

Tracy! I exclaimed with surprise. What are you doing here?

"Ohhhh, so you want to be the only one promoted, ha? Came her usual teasing voice."

"Well, sorry to disappoint you but I got promoted too."

No way....

"Yes way and let's talk over lunch."

Oh my God, I didn't realize that I was so hungry. I was actually starving. Ofcourse, I responded forgetting the urgency of this report. But I needed to eat too right?

Tracy was very excited when we got to the office canteen. Like her usual self, she kept talking and talking even when we ordered our food and sat to eat. Then only did I realize the efficacy of this meeting.

"So, why didn't you tell me you were going to resign when I saw you this morning?" She said staring playfully at me.

How could I tell you when wouldn't stop talking and besides, everything happened so fast, I couldn't even catch a breath, I said apologetically, which made her giggle like a little girl.

"Well, don't bother, she continued. Since they are going for the final presentation, I was also needed. So they had no choice than to give me exactly what I deserve. I wish I had also got another job and turn down the offer the way you did." She said with a frown. Then she continued..

"But I was very happy when I heard about what you did. They surely deserve it. But you haven't told me where you are going."

I will tell you if you also tell me where you got all this info, I said with curiosity.

"That's simple, Sally gives me every info I request. You know she is getting married to my elder brother next month so we got close." She ended.

That surely makes sense. Sally is always in all the meetings so there is no doubt about that.

"So where are you going," she said, interrupting my thoughts.

GMAN, I replied excitedly...

"It's a lie, she said surprised.

Want to see my contract? I asked showing her a snap shot of my contract. He eyes widened in bewilderment.

" How did that happen"?

Let's just say, that favour located me, I said happily.

"Congratulations, Maya, I am Soo proud of you, she said hugging me Soo tightly."

Thank you, I said, pulling away gently to catch my breath.

"You know what, this calls for celebration so I am taking you out this weekend and all the bill is on me." She said admist her tear filled eyes. It was actually tears of joy as she never stopped laughing.

"I am really going to miss you. I don't know how I will be able to work here without you."

Come on, Tracy, we will always be together, especially during weekends. Don't forget we still have a date this Saturday. So tell me, where are we going?

"You'll know on Saturday", she said teasingly. Anyway, I can't wait for this meeting to be over with Mark Snowman. I heard he is a very difficult person.

Really?

"Yes, my boss says it wasn't easy in the previous meeting, which is why I have been added to the team this time around. Mr. Snowman wants value for his money so he will leave no stones

untuned until he is certain that what he is venturing into is the best. I don't blame him anyway. I will do same if I were in his shoes, she completed.

Who is this Mr. Snowman, we should Google him right? I said, bringing out my phone. OMG, I exclaimed. We have spent almost 2 hours here. We have to get going now.

"Yes, I have to work on my report as well. Call me when you are done." She said as we went to our various offices.

It's good I decided to work overtime because I really needed time to complete the report. I was so engrossed in my work to notice who had walked in.

Chapter SIX – MR. SNOWMAN

My CEO was at the door and right beside him was this incredibly handsome gentleman. The face looked familiar and I wondered where I had met him. Oh... I remember. The guy who splashed water and mud on me yesterday. How could I forget? I instantly started boiling with anger. What is he doing here anyway?...

He looked at me with an innocent expression on his face. Does he mean he didn't remember what he did? It's not as if it's been a year or more. It was just yesterday. After all, he was never the victim so how could he.

"Maya, this is Mark Snowman, the investor we talked about this morning. He passed by to see how we are preparing for the meeting." The CEO said.

Nice to meet you, Mr. Snowman, I said, faking a smile and stretching my hand for a hand shake.

"I don't have time for pleasantries, Maya or whatever you call yourself, I want results and nothing more. Excuse me," he concluded rudely as he stormed out of my office, leaving my hands hanging.

"Sorry about that, Maya, perhaps Mr. Snowman is still in a bad mood from last week's meeting. Please do your best," he said in a pleading tone, as he followed Mr. Snowman.

I was in utter shock at his behaviour. How rude...I thought of refusing to go ahead with this presentation but I have already promised to be there so what do I do now?. How can I have this presentation in his presence? I was in a state of confusion and try as I did, I could not concentrate on my work. I watched as time passed by, only to realize it was past 8pm and the driver was waiting outside. I went to Tracy's office to bid good bye but she was still engaged with her report so she waved me goodbye.

I got home feeling defeated and depressed. How could I meet path with him again... Now I am even more happy that I got a new job and turned down the promotion.

The next morning, I woke up to the sound of my phone. My CEO was calling. I was surprised because he never called me before or after our official working hours. But he is calling me at 5:30am. It must be something very serious.

"Maya, the meeting has been rescheduled to 3pm today. Mr. Snowman has other plans for next week so he moved it forward. Please finalize all your reports by 12noon for us to have a short review meeting before the presentation. The driver will pick you up at 6am." He hang up. Which means I have barely 30 minutes to get ready.

I called my cab driver to cancel our appointment and literally run to the shower. I hurried up and by 6:24, the driver had arrived. Throughout the ride, I was working on my laptop till I got to the office. I usually made my cab rides my only time for meditation but this time around, there was no such luxury.

As I got to the office, it was 7am but I realized everyone was already seated. Even Tracy only said Hi and rushed to her office. I worked through the morning and completed the report by 10am so I decided to review my work. I did so and saw a few mistakes which I corrected. It's good I did a first review.

Looking at the time, it was already 11:30am so I decided to grab something to eat before the review meeting. On my way to the canteen, I couldn't believe Mr. Snowman was already walking in with three other men all in black suit. They looked soooo admirable and I couldn't take my eyes off them. But the unfortunate thing happened when I bumped into Mr. Snowman as I was going out of the elevator. I thought they will use the CEO's reserved elevator but he came through where I was coming out from which resulted in me bumping into him. Why him and not someone else? My heart was beating so fast...

No, not again.... 'I am sooo sorry Sir, I said as I bent down to pick his files scattered around'. He is just a young guy of 28years but he carries himself like a middle aged man and wanting all the respect in the world, and yet not giving any.

"Never mind Ma'am, I will take care of it. Please go ahead" said one of the men behind him. He had a genuine smile and was really gentle so I stood up to leave to escape from this Jerk of an investor but my fate had it otherwise.

"No," came the rude voice from behind me. "You have to pick it up. Are your eyes only for decoration, can't you watch where you are going?" He said coldly.

Ofcourse, I said, picking up the files. After picking and arranging the files as fast as I could, I did not want to hand over the file to him but rather the gentleman next to him, who had treated me nicer earlier but it was just another big mistake.

"Does the file belong to him, why do you give him my files?" He asked in his usual rude tone. I took the files from him and handed it to Mr. Snowman, apologising again, looking down.

"It is very rude to look down when someone else talks to you. Don't you have manners?"

God, I wanted to slap him, see who is talking about manners. Does he even know the meaning of that word? Anyway, the company is at stake and since I have a few days to be with them, I want to leave the best mark possible. I don't want to be the reason why their merger didn't pull through

I did not mean to be rude Sir, I said looking into his eyes. He looked at me with a piercing look which made me walk away. I didn't look back, and he never said anything else.

This is the last time I will ever admire anything or anyone close to this Snowman. From now onwards, I have to avoid him at all times, I said to myself as I got to the canteen. I ordered for a cup of tea and some cookies which I ate hurriedly and went back to the office.

The look on everybody's face when I got there, clearly stated there was a problem. Tracy rushed to me.

"We are having the presentation now." She said hurriedly.

What....what happened to the review meeting? Everybody was tensed and it's obvious they kept their questions to themselves.

This time, we had our meeting at the conference room adjacent to the CEO's office. It's the biggest conference room in the building and mostly reserved for special meetings like this.

So the meeting began. I wanted to be the first to present in order to be less tensed and pay full attention to the others but unfortunately again, I was the last.

I was very surprised at the way Mr. Snowman asked detailed questions and his intelligent way of critically analyzing every presentation. He really earned my respect and he would have also earned a lot of admiration if he was more polite.

When it got to my turn, I gave it my best as I saw the smiles on the faces of the management team, as well as the investors who came along with Mr. Snowman. Yes, I got to realize they were co-investers. After my presentation, I was asked a few questions which I responded to confidently.

Yes. Knowing who Mr. Snowman is, I didn't leave any loopholes for him to attack me on. I learnt from my encounters with him that, if you want to kill a snake, you have to cut off its head. Looks like it worked. He didn't have much to say afterwards.

We were given a short break before the final decision will be made. Tracy hurried to me with excitement.

"Good job, Maya, you made him quiet for the first time."

Well, let's hope what happens next, I said with a little smile, remembering my humiliating moments this morning.

"What happened, you don't look happy," she said concernedly.

Yes. I can only be happy if the merger works and this company is not taken over completely....I said thoughtfully.

"You have a point, but you are not even going to be here so why worry." Tracy said confusedly.

I will not be here but I still want you to be happy and enjoy every benefit the merger will bring this company. I replied. Just then, we were all bekoned to return to the conference room. There was dead silence at the moment we were all eagerly waiting for the final decision. Then I heard Mr. Snowman clear his throat.

" Dear All, I have heard and seen every report and I can clearly discern, the extent to which you have all gone. I must say, that you have all exceeded my expectations, especially Maya," he said, making me shocked. Then he continued. "Therefore, ranging from all reports from budgets, and funds allocation, ranging from finance, legal, human resource, procurement, risk and sales and marketing, this is our final decision.

We confirm that we begin the documentation for the merger of both companies. I have therefore arranged for us to have lunch together today to begin celebrations but tomorrow evening, we will have dinner at a coded location which will be sent to your various emails.

So without much I do, let's move to the canteen. Everybody began cheering and clapping as we headed to the canteen. Even though we were at the canteen, the food was purely not from the canteen. The food had been ordered from a Chinese restaurant and the pastries were ordered from one of the biggest hotels. It was very obvious that good things were about to happen to everyone, well, except me because I will no longer be working here.

Everyone was happy and eating joyfully. I shared a table Tracy and Kira when one of the investors by name Tom walked towards us. Yes, strangely, Kira was being nice and wouldn't leave us alone for even a minute.

" Hi ladies, call me Tom." He said sweetly. Oh he was the one who tried to help me with my elevator drama with Mr. Snowman.

" Hello, Tom, Kira said flirtingly but he turned to me as he said.

"Maya, can I talk to you alone for a moment?.....

Chapter SEVEN – THE GAME

"Maya, can I talk to you alone for a moment?" Tom asked suddenly....

I choked on my drink as I asked 'Me'?

"Unless there is someone else called Maya"....he replied teasingly. I wonder how he clicks with Mark because they are totally opposite in character. He is very good looking like a cover page model but very smart, gentle and kind. He is a younger version of Sir Max and at the juncture, he made me miss Sir Max so much.

Ofcourse, why not, I said getting up from my chair. Right then, he pulled my chair backwards and held my hand.

"This way, he said". Leading me away from the table. Tracy was just staring at me like she had a thousand and one questions for me and for Kira, I couldn't understand her expression. Whether it was pain or disappointment.

So he led me to his table and luckily for me, Mr. Snowman was in a chat with our CEO so he was not seated with them at the moment. I sat there, feeling uncomfortable eventhough the third investor Marcus was also very nice to me. I think the reason why I was not comfortable was because I kept feeling that Mr. Snowman might return to the table anytime soon and put up another show.

I don't know what makes him this arrogant. He is rich, good looking, smart and intelligent but couldn't he add a little kindness? The more I thought of this, the more confused I was. But why should I care so much if he was good or bad? I should be hating him and not having good thoughts about him.

"So you've brought her here to challenge me....Marcus signed immediately I got to their table..

"Yes, I told you she is the smartest." Tom remarked.

Smartest? I thought to myself. What kind of games are they playing? I was even more scared and started having instant hot flashes but I decided to stay calm. Afterall, they cannot hurt me with all these people here. Tom is too good for that. Too good for that, do I even know him?

"Okay, Miss Jacobs, the rules of this game is very simple. Said Tom, bringing out a sticky note pad. Here, we will each write our questions relating to anything other than sports or business. Then we will pick randomly and anyone who gets the wrong answer, will have to answer a personal question from whoever's question he/she picked. Simple right? And one more thing, the answer must be an honest one?....He ended with a grin.

I think these guys have somethin up their sleeves. But perhaps I can get the advantage of knowing something related to Mr. Snowman. Okay, lets start, I said enthused. So we each took a sheet of the sticky note and wrote our questions, folding it afterwards. Then Tom took blank notes, folded them and mixed them all up.

"Ladies First", said Marcus Smiling.

I smiled and picked the first paper and opened it but it was blank. I Turned over so they could see. Blank, I said, so I nominate Marcus to Pick his question.

"Blank" he also said, turning it over and looking at Tom. It's obvious he was next.

"My question goes to Maya. Mention a country music from the 80s." He said smiling...

He got me there, didn't he... I love country music but I have never thought of which year they were released but I mentioned my favourite country music. 'Islands in the Stream' by Dolly Parton and Kenny Rogers. With the look on his face, I knew it was correct. Yes! I exclaimed.

"Hmmm...correct but were you even sure of the answer in the first place, you looked confused." Tom said teasingly.

Does it matter? I replied smiling. Now I wanted to get even so when I picked, I luckily picked a question this time and I directed it back at Tom. It was my question too...Hmmm. Tom, this question goes to you. He signed. 'Who is the oldest person in the Bible'?

"What, in the Bible?" He asked confused.

Yes, I said in a winning tone as I realized he had no idea. His gaze changed from me to Marcus who also shook his head meaning he didn't know as well. Should I tell you?

"Errr.....Yes," he said defeatedly as we all burst into uncontrollable laughter. We were so much in our own world that we had not realized everyone was looking at us. Everyone including Mark, as he gazed in our direction with an angry look on his face.

The answer is.... 'Methuselah'...I said with a winning voice.

"Wait, was Marcus curious voice. I have to confirm the answer", he said as he brought out his phone typing the name. Ohhhh she's correct, he said admist laughter. Good one, Maya," he exclaimed picking a question.

"My question goes to.....Maya! He said like a kid."

No, no, no, no, I retorted, that is cheating I said as we all burst into laughter again. This time, I saw Mark walking angrily towards us so I stood up to leave but Tom held my hand as he exclaimed,

"And where do you think you are going". Just as I was about to tell him, Mark yelled at me...

"What are you doing in my chair with my friends, he asked angrily."

"I brought her here Mark, we were just playing a game." Tom said in my defence with an indifferent tone.

He totally ignored Tom as he barked at me again. "I said, what are you doing here? Do you think that because you got your presentation right, it qualifies you to sit among my investors and chat with them like friends?"

The way he said those words, shattered my heart in pieces. Everyone was watching us and it was the worse embarrassment I faced with him. But Tom did not tolerate it this time. He stood up, facing Mark as he spoke...

"You heard me when I said I brought her here. Do you have a problem with that? He yelled as he continued. What does it matter to you who we want to be friends with and what is your business with her anyway? Ohhhh maybe you love her and you are hiding it because....

"Because what? Mark interrupted Tom but he was shouting this time around..If you have to know, She is just a low life girl. She is not worthy of my Love. Don't forget that I am getting married to the heir of the largest shipping and logistics company you have ever heard of and her name is Tilda Shaw. Now those are the kind of people you should mingle with, he said furiously as he turned to me again...and what are you still doing here? He said again, looking at me" with a stare that could burn my eyes like fire.

I stood up to leave only to realize Tom was holding him on his shirt collar as he shouted at him..."Don't you ever talk to her like that again. He said furiously, shaking him but thank God Marcus separated them, as Tom turned and held my hand, leading me back to my table.

I was very glad he accompanied me because I don't even know how I was going to walk all the way to my table with all eyes staring at me. I just wanted to disappear and appear on a lonely Island where I could cry my eyes out.

"I am very sorry Maya, please don't believe anything he said about you," He said as he gently pulled a chair for me and pulled one for himself, making Tracy and Kira give us some privacy, which I was grateful for. Please let me make it up to you, he continued, Let me take you somewhere tomorrow before the Dinner."

Thank you very much Tom, I only met you today but you have been soo good to me. I am very grateful for all you have done for me today but I am really sorry. I have decided not attend the Dinner tomorrow.

Chapter EIGHT – PARCEL DELIVERY

"No Maya, please don't refuse to attend Dinner because of what just happened. It's a great time for everyone to bond. After the HR Manager's presentation, we realized this company hasn't really had staff times out so there was no bond among all of you. That's why we proposed lunch and dinner. We even have plans for some staff retreats latter to help everyone rejuvenate." He carefully said, looking at me.

He was right about bonding times. The only person I have bonded with within my years of working here is Tracy. It's difficult to have time to talk to anyone about anything not related to work. We are always drowned in the pressure of meeting our monthly targets without any extra curricular activities. But I will not stay for long so what's the point in joining them?.

'Tom, I have already resigned from this company and the only obligation I had was the presentation which is done with. Now, I have to put my handing over notes together by next week.'

"You resigned? Why and when, he asked with a confused look".

So I told him everything about my resignation and my new job. I felt so comfortable around him and it's like we could talk about almost everything.

"Well, congrats. I am really proud of you but we are going to miss you here. Isn't there anything we can do to make you stay?"

No, I just need a change, I said thoughtfully. But you are an investor. You are not involved in the day to day Administration so what difference does it make?

"You have a point there but I just feel like I have known you for a long time." he concluded.

The feeling is mutual, I retorted. Aside Sir Max and Jude, I have never felt this comfortable around any man but they have been fatherly figures in my life so....

"Okay, if you will not go for the company, can you do it for me? Please? He asked with a pouted face interrupting my thoughts."

I will think about it....I said after careful thought.

"Well, I will just send you something to help you decide, he said getting up to leave."

Something to help me decide, what is you talking about? What...

"Maya, we have to go now, was Tracy voice behind me." That's when I realized most people had left. Even Tom was nowhere in sight.

Sure, let me get my handbag from the office.. "I already got it", she said shoving my handbag in my face.

So I finally got home. The only place where I could comfortably cry my heart out. The pain of Mark's words kept ringing in my head like a church bell. I tried to think of possible ways I might have done something to him to warrant this behaviour from him but I got none. I hugged my pillow tight as I cried my heart out. I heard the phone ringing continuously but I was in no mood to answer any call so I completely ignored it.

I must have dozed off because when I woke up, it was 4am in the morning and I couldn't sleep anymore. I had a painful headache so I decided to take a pain killer when I heard the phone ring again. I remembered how I had ignored my calls last night so I decided to answer it.

"Maya, you don't deserve what happened yesterday but please try to make it to the Dinner. We really need you." Then the line went dead. It was our CEO again. I wonder why he does that. Perhaps he doesn't want to give me a chance to even say no. I sat on the couch trying to read something to distract me but this headache wouldn't go away so I took a pain killer and drank a glass of milk.

I went back to bed and tried to sleep when I heard a knock on the door. It's 5am and I hardly get any visitors so I was quite surprised. 'Who is it?' I yelled.

"Why don't you open the door and see." Was Tracy's voice. What is she doing here at this time? I quickly opened the door before saying anything.

What happened to you....is your house on fire or something? I said opening the door.

"I had to see you this early because we didn't get to talk about what happened yesterday. I didn't want to be insensitive which is why I just kept quiet as we left." She said sadly.

If it's because of that, you still could have come later in the morning, not at dawn. Tracy.....I was looking straight into her eyes so she wouldn't lie.

"Okay, okay, okay....but I didn't tell you okay? She said apologetically. You were not picking Tom's calls and he was so worried. So he insisted I come and check you", she concluded.

That's sooo sweet of him but also unthoughtful. How could he let you come here this early? Anything could have happened to you....

"He didn't actually send me..., She said sheepishly. He came with me."

'What'?

I rushed to my window looking downstairs at the car park and there he was, standing in front of a white Mustang, waving at me. Just then, he bowed his head slightly and sat in his car, driving out of the car park.

I couldn't believe it. When I turned around, Tracy was looking at me with an apologetic smile on her face. "I'm sorry....she whispered.

It's okay, it's not bad having someone looking out for me.....I said genuinely. She came close and hugged me again, as she whispered, "thank you for understanding."

"So, I also heard you weren't coming to the Dinner party" ...she said releasing me from her tight hug.

Tom told you? I asked with mixed feelings.

"Yes but I also knew before then. I eavesdropped on a conversation between our CEO and Mark and I know you will like to hear it first." She ended excitedly like a little child who just passed her first exams."

If Mark is involved, no, I don't want to hear it.....I said sadly

"I will still say it anyway. You can put cotton bud in your ears so you don't hear me...she said, making me laugh.

I love you sooo much, Tracy, you are the sister I never had...I said looking at her.

"I love you too and you also have to know that, Mark insisted that you come to the dinner party. He told the CEO that he heard you telling Tom that you will not come to the party but he should make sure that you make it....she concluded with a sigh."

Try as I do to forget this Jerk, it seems something always happens to keep me thinking about him.....'why will he want a low life girl like me to be in a Dinner party where he is present.....I said sarcastically. All the anger I felt was suddenly returning. Why does he think the world revolves around him?...I added furiously. So that's why our CEO called so early this morning.

Well, I think he called you severally yesterday as well....she said thoughtfully, which made me to start looking for my phone. Yes there it was on the dressing table with seventy nine missed calls from our CEO, Mark, there was 5 missed calls from a strange number too and there were about fifty text messages. I deleted all of them without reading. I was trying to forget everything but it's just so difficult. Then again, a knock on the door. I looked suspiciously at Tracy. She shook her head signalling she doesn't know about it.

' Whose there', as yelled.

" Parcel delivery" was the voice from outside the door. I hurriedly opened it and saw a young guy of eighteen with a big box in his hand, wrapped with the most beautiful paper wrappers I have ever seen.

"Good morning Ma'am, are you Maya."

Yes, replied.

"Your parcel, he said with a smile".

'From who, I asked as Tracy hurriedly received the parcel from his hand.'

"You will find the sender's name in the box, he said with a wink".

" Wow.....you never told me you had a boyfriend she said, taking the parcel inside like it was addressed to her.

I closed the door and followed her inside as we began unwrapping the box together because it was quite huge. After unwrapping the huge box, we saw smaller wrapped boxes and started opening them one by one.

The first box had sandwich. The second box was a french toast. The third box had some other food I had never tasted. I didn't even know the name. The next box was lasagna...I was eagerly looking for the name of the sender. Then there was another box which had the most beautiful shoes I have ever seen. Another box had a very beautiful dinner dress. I was running out of patience. We opened another box and it was a Diamond necklace....Is it real? I heard Tracy ask with a look of admiration.

There was another knock in the door. This time, Tracy ran to get the door as I made no attempt to move.

"Sign here" I heard from outside the door.

"You bring them inside" I heard Tracy say excitedly which made me look in her direction. Was it, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven bouquet of flowers. Three of them were red and white roses. I hurriedly started checking the flowers attentively, looking for the small notes that usually come with bouquets and I found one. It read...

" I hope this changes your mind about the Dinner party. I need you there." I felt goosebumps on my body as I read the note. Then I saw Tracy staring at me inquisitively.

"Did you get the sender?" She asked curiously. Yes, it's Tom, I said looking at her with a smile.

"No way,"she said, walking towards me as she snatched the note from my hand.

"But there is no name so how do you know it's Tom"? She asked confusedly.

He told me yesterday that he was going to send me something and he hoped it will help me decide on whether or not to go for the Dinner....

Chapter NINE – OFFICE DINNER

"I think he loves you", said Tracy with a smile.

What....No...I think he just feels pity for me. Or maybe he feels guilty for what happened yesterday because he was the one who invited me to sit with them...I said defensively.

Tracy's POV

Listening to Maya only confirmed my suspicions. Tom is no ordinary guy and guys like that do not just show attention to people if they do have interest. The way he led her yesterday to their table and how he greatly defended her made everyone astonished including me.

But my problem is Maya. She is so naive. Ever since I have known her, she has never talked about any man than Jude and Sir Max who were big brothers or should I say guardians. Her life has been centered around education and work. She doesn't even have a social life and she has never had a boyfriend. I hope she doesn't break Tom's heart.

When Tom called last night that he could not reach her, he sounded so desperate. It was as if his heart was being pierced. He was so worried in a way that made me scared. I do care for Maya and I see her as my kid sister. I am five years older than her but she has achieved way more in education and work than I have. She is also more matured than her age but when it comes to relationships, she is completely naive.

I have to know her thought about Tom. I have to guide her so that she doesn't get hurt. I don't think she will be able to handle a heart break so I have to speak to Tom as well. If he breaks her heart, he will have me to contend with. He might be a billionaire whatsoever but I will plant my revenge if he ever hurts her. If he genuinely loves her, then he will have my full support.

I held Maya's hand and made her sit on the couch beside me. It's time for serious talk, I said with all seriousness. She looked at me with an innocent expression.

"Am I in trouble"?....she asked jokingly.

Well you might be if you do not clear your mind...I said, focussing on her.

"What are you talking about? She asked, looking at the roses.

Do you love Tom?....I asked out of the blue. I didn't see a better way to start the subject.

"I like him, he reminds me of Sir Max, she said truthfully.

What if he wants to date you?

" I haven't thought of that. Don't you think it's too early?"

I know it's too early but you have to prepare your mind. I know it when a man loves a woman and that's what I see in his eye.

" You know what Tracy, we have a long night ahead of us. Can we talk about this later? Let's eat now and search for cute hairstyles for the Dinner party...she said, avoiding my subject."

Sure! Anything you want, I replied feeling disappointed that she did not want to confide in me. But she has a point. What if he is doing all this to clear his guilt. After all he is the one who got her into all the troubles she had with Mark yesterday.

We ate breakfast together. Honestly, Tom has a very good taste for food. Every food tasted perfect and we ate so much till we couldn't eat anymore and still, there was left over which Maya kept in the fridge. I can't stop thinking of Maya.

I have been disappointed so many times in relationships. The most recent one was Dave. He left me on the altar on our wedding day. That was two years ago but thinking about it makes it feel like it happened just yesterday. Since then, I couldn't make up my mind to enter into any relationship.. Maybe that's why I am scared for Maya but our fate is different. The fact that I got left on the altar doesn't mean same will happen to her. We are different and Tom is a very respectable guy so I should stop worrying.

We continued opening the rest of the boxes and there was another dinner dress and another pair of shoes to match.

"I will wear this tonight, Maya exclaimed. You can wear the other one, she said making me surprised".

I can't wear it Maya, it's a gift and it must be special to you. I said thoughtfully.

"But I am giving it to you. Do you think he just bought two dresses and shoes for me alone when he had made you leave your house at dawn to be with me. How does he expect you to go back home to get dressed for Dinner and still being with me?" She asked with raised brows.

I thinks she has a point. Tom bought two dresses for both of us. He is really caring. 'Okay, I will wear it'. I finally agreed. The next box contained jewelries and the final box was filled with different varieties of chocolates, ranging from black ,white, peanut chocolates and anything chocolate you could think of.

Third Person's POV

So the two friends spent the day choosing hairstyles and catching up on the times they lost because of work. They had chit chats, gossips, girly stuffs till they decided to start getting ready for the

Office Dinner Party. Little did they know the new surprises on the way as there was another knock on the door.

Maya and Tracy looked at each other with a surprised look.

"Whose there, was Maya's curious voice.

'Sue Mozart, hair stylist and make up artist 'came the voice from the other side.

They looked at each other with raised eyebrows as Tracy screamed.

"OMG! She is a hair stylist and make up artist for actresses and models, she said with so much excitement.

Maya was too surprised to say anything as she raced to open the door.

"Tom asked me to transform you ladies into goddesses so here I aaaaam, she said excitedly. So who do I start with?

Me, Tracy yelled sparking laughter from all of them. Sue did an excellent job with Tracy. She looked like a super star and then it was Maya's turn. She could not believe her eyes when she looked into the mirror. It was a totally different person. She looked like an angel who has just descended from heaven to offer good news to mankind.

Sue bid them goodbye and as she stepped out, there was another knock on the door. Thinking Sue must have forgotten something, they opened the door without asking and to their amazement, was a middle aged man in black suit standing in front of the door.

"Good evening ladies, My name is Arthur and Mr. Tom Mckal has asked me to be your chauffeur for this evening. So if you are ready, may we?"

"Oui ofcourse, was Tracy as usual. They followed him to the white limousine parked at the car park.

Maya's POV

As we drove in the limousine to the Dinner Party, I kept thinking about everything that has happened today. Tom has done so much to put me in a very happy mood. I was so excited and anxious to meet him to express my sincere gratitude but I couldn't forget Tracy's question as well. Even though I tried to ignore the question, it was a genuine one.

Am I ready to date him if he asked? Then I thought about Mark too. He has been a jerk ever since I have met him but my heart was yearning to know who he is and why he treats me the way he does.

We finally got to the grand hotel where the event was taking place. I was so happy Tracy was with me because I wouldn't have been able to bare all the stares that met us upon arrival at the dinner

party. The purple flawless dress did an amazing job. I felt like a Princess. Tracy looks great in that hot pink knee length dress as well. She looks like a super star. Good choice Tom, you did great choosing these outfits for us.

I managed to catch a glimpse of Tom but he was talking with Mark and Marcus so I pretended I didn't see him and greeted some of my colleagues.

"You look ravishing, Maya, exclaimed Susan the HR Manager. There was George, Head of Risk and ofcourse, Kira. She looked very beautiful too. But there were faces I didn't recognize as Tracy whispered. "It's a merger, Maya. Those are Mark's employees. So we are one company now.

Ohhhh, everything makes perfect sense now. Just then, there was an announcement. Dear all, we have a guest appearance today. So let's welcome with an applause, Miss Tilda Shaw.

Chapter TEN – CHANGING PARTNERS

My jaws dropped when I saw Tilda. She was like a shining light. Her beauty was stunning. She had the fairest skin and the most beautiful dimples I have ever seen. I could understand why Mark loved her so much. I can't believe a woman can be this perfect and still be wealthy and famous too. I have never been envious of anyone but I was envious of her. Seeing her, I could not pay attention to the event anymore until I heard, can I have this dance?

It was Tom. His right hand was stretched to me as he bowed politely. Ofcourse, I said, as he led me to the dance floor.

"Maya, you are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen," he whispered."

Then you haven't seen Tilda, I whispered back. He gave me a surprised look as he pulled back a little and swang me around, then holding me close as before.

"You are smart and all, but you are still naive if you see Tilda to be more beautiful than you. Thirty plastic surgeries got her looking like that. How many have you had? He asked making me shocked."

That can't be true. If it is, how did you know"? I asked with utmost surprise.

"One day at a time, Maya. There's so much you don't know about me.

So much? What does he mean by that?

"I don't mean to scare you, he said looking at my confused face. I am not a serial killer and neither am I rapist, drug dealer or any bad thing on your mind. The things I know, are based on my experiences, he ended with a sigh."

He is getting me more confused. As he swang me around again to the rhythm of the song, I realized we were changing partners as well, as I landed in Mark's arms. My heart started beating so fast so I tried to loosen my grip and walk out of the dancefloor. I don't want anymore troubles. I have had enough. But he held me tight and pulled me closer as he whispered.

"You don't mind dancing with him like this but why don't you want to dance with me ha."?

I was totally speechless by what he said, I hope he is not drunk. How can he talk to me like that. I thought I was just a low life girl to him so why does he care who I dance with?

"Answer me," he grinned.

Okay, I will answer you, I said sarcastically. My only responsibility here is with your company. Who I agree to dance with, is none of your business. Now let me go...I whispered angrily.

"Not until you tell me what is going on between you two. Because if you must know, I don't encourage office romance.....he whispered with his teeth clenched."

Office romance, since when did he start working here? As long as I know, he is an investor and not a staff.

"Then let me make it clear to you, Miss Jacobs, stay away from my friends.." he ended.

Everyone was staring at us and only then did I realize that the music had stopped. Excuse me, I said walking away. I saw Tracy running after me, then Tom.

"Where are you going, the party has not even started." Was Tracy now catching up to me."

It's over for me, I said walking to the elevator.

" Oh No, it's not" was Tom as he stopped me from entering the elevator. Throughout this event, you are not leaving my sight, he said as a command but it was comforting.

"I got this Tracy, hurry one. Marcus is waiting" he told Tracy, making her relieved.

Why does he hate me this much? I couldn't help complaining to him as we joined the others at the Dinner table. I don't know how fate keeps treating me this way. The spot Tom had reserved for us on the round table was the same one Mark and Tilda sat with Marcus and Tracy and then our CEO and his wife. My head started spinning with this arrangement. I know that Mark won't let me be but with Tilda around, he was being nice to everyone on the table but Tilda was uncomfortable and I was wondering why.

She constantly gazed at Tom whenever he whispered anything to me. Mark was also furious anytime Tom whispers anything that makes me laugh or smile. I wanted so much to ask Tom if he had anything to do with Tilda but this wasn't the right place and time. I felt very comfortable around Tom and totally ignored Mark and all his warnings of me staying away from his friends. Suddenly Tilda asked from the blue..

"Are you two engaged?"

I choked on my drink at the question but Tom was just relaxed as he said," not yet. Why do ask anyway."

"Nothing, it's great watching both of you. You really get along well."

Thanks, I said shyly.

"What about you Marcus, are you dating her?" Asked Tilda again.

"You mean Tracy, no we are not dating. Why do you even ask a question like that when you know I am engaged....he asked with an awkward look on his face.

"So tell me Tilda, how is your relationship with Mark? Have you decided on the date for the wedding?" Tom asked her

"No I have decided we hold on till I return from my tour. I can get new ideas on how I want the wedding to be from the tour. She replied with a sigh."

" Then why don't you go with her Mark.?"

"Who will take care of things here if I go with her on a two months tour? He replied annoyingly."

"That's what managers are mearnt for isn't it and you have tons of them"...Mark tried to reason with him.

"I still prefer doing certain things my way".....he said warningly.

Afterwards, everyone ate quietly. Then Tom suggested that we step outside for fresh air. As soon as I got up, Mark rudely spoke again.

Why, are you bored at this dinner?

" No, we are not bored. We just want to have sometime alone."

"But it's a team bonding occassion so why will you like to spend time alone?"

"I will not be alone, I will be with Maya so we still make a team" Mark replied with a crooked smile.

" We will join you as well, Marcus said, getting up and holding Tracy's hand."

But....Mark was about to say something again when Tilda interrupted.

" Let them be Mark, atleast we will also spend sometime together."

" Sure, Mark responded with a defeated look. "

So we headed out to the garden. It was very beautiful and was also set up as an extension of the party space so there were people here already.

As soon as we got a quiet place together, I didn't resist the urge as I asked.

How do you know so much about Tilda?

"She was my ex he replied without hesitation."

Why did you two break up? I asked with great curiosity.

"It's a long story" he said, looking at the sky.

"We have all night, I whispered."

Then he started...

"We attended the same high school and she was the most beautiful girl I had ever seen. She was so stylish and a lot of guys wanted to date her. She was like a super star in school. My family wasn't rich and I didn't know her family background as well.

But I was so in love with her so I did a lot of research about her and realized she wasn't smart academically so I took advantage and offered to help her with her studies. We got close till she also confessed her love for me.

We chose the same college and decided to announce our relationship on our graduation day. When the day finally came, Tilda took me to meet her family and they outrightly rejected me. They called me all kinds of names and I expected her to defend me but she just stood there and watched them say all kinds of things to me.

Still, I loved her and forgave her and we kept our relationship secret until one day, she came to visit me and told me we had to end the relationship because her family doesn't approve of it because I was not from a wealthy home.

I begged her with all I had. I did everything in my power but she didn't change her mind. My heart was broken and could not be repaired till now.

But I was grateful to her because that heartbreak is what made me who I am today. I told myself that I will make it no matter what. I challenged myself by taking up three jobs and leaving on the income from only one, while saving the income from the two. Gradually I added the job as a real estates agent. Then with time I got accustomed to the work and started as a contractor and gradually expanding to the level I am now.

Fortunately, I don't hate her. I am grateful to her for making me challenge myself to be a better person, he ended with a smile."

Do you still love her? I asked

Chapter ELEVEN – COULD IT BE LOVE

Do you still love her?

Tom's POV

When Maya asked this question, it really got me thinking. All these years, I have worked hard and achieved great wealth. I wanted to be rich for revenge. To let Tilda know that I could make it, too but countless times I have asked myself this question. If Tilda had not left me, will I have been able to make it this big. I could not answer that question which is why I could not bring myself to hate her or revenge as I had planned.

When Mark told me he was getting married to her, I was happy for them, even though I knew they didn't love each other. I did not feel jealous. I only felt grateful that her rejection has pushed me to be a better person.

I wanted to tell Maya that the only person I loved now was her but I couldn't bring myself to do so. We just met yesterday but I felt a great bond to her as if I had known her all my life. She's sooo naive which gives her such innocent look and Tracy has already told me about her past when I called her as I could not reach Maya. I was very worried and I didn't know her house too. I have understood that her past has also brought her very close to two strangers who are her guardians. Now, she sees any man who gives her attention as those two men.

When I look into her eyes, I don't see love but I don't know what it is she sees about me. I don't know if I am ready for another heartbreak but if it comes from Maya I will understand because we are not dating so rejecting my proposal shouldn't be called a heartbreak but what will I call it?

I looked deeply into her eyes and she looked away. I think she felt uncomfortable..

"No, I don't love her anymore. But I don't hate her too. I feel grateful to her." I ended.

The real words I wanted to tell her was..."No, I don't love her anymore. But I don't hate her too. I feel grateful to her because, she left me and I found the rarest gem of all history. I found something new, something pure, something so affectionate and genuine and that is you.

I wanted her to know the peace that enveloped my heart when I saw her the first time and the rocking pace at which my heartbeats everytime I am around her but I had to swallow my words, knowing she wasn't ready for them yet.

What I don't understand is why Mark keeps treating her that way. I have always known him to be proud and arrogant but he usually doesn't take it on anyone on a personal level. Even in this

company, with the kind of things I expect him to frown on, he usually doesn't especially when we had the first presentation with this company.

I expected him to scold Kira when she was flirting with him during the presentation but he gently turned her off instead, but keeps despising Maya who has been decent and hard-working girl all along. She has done nothing from the onset but has always tried to be the best she can. I am not saying this because of my love for her but just analyzing her personality says everything. Anytime I ask him anything about how he treats her, he will brush it off but knowing my friend, it's very unlikely.

As I kept thinking about it, there he was again...

"What is so special about the garden, making everyone leave the hall...was Mark's voice bringing me back from my deep thoughts.

"I have to go now," Maya whispered in my ear as she turned to leave but I pulled her back and kept her close to me.

You don't have to be afraid of anything or anyone when you are with me, I said lovingly to her, making her relax.

"Do you mind if I speak with you for a moment Tom, I mean alone, he said looking angrily at Maya. I sensed he was up to something so I decided not to give him a chance. "

You and I are best friends. We talk everyday and we are at the dinner party where as you said, we have to mingle with others so if what you have to say is Personal, let's talk during golf tomorrow....I replied with an accused look.

"Since you don't want to make time, I will say it here. You and I have been friends for a long time and you know how hard it was to get to the top. So if I were you, I will stick with people who will help me stay at the top and not low life bitches who would bring you down the ladder of greatness, he ended looking disgustfully at Maya."

How dare he say such words about my Maya. I angrily moved close and almost slapped him on the face when someone caught my hands.

"No Tom, he doesn't deserve it. Please don't make a scene. It will only embarrass me more than his hurtful words." I restrained myself from what I had intended to do upon seeing her pleading eyes. But decided to tell Mark what he needed to hear.

Thank you Mark, for reminding me of how I got to the top. Yes, purely hard work with no one's help so no one can as well bring me down. If I am even lucky to marry someone like her, I said looking at Maya. I know my business will flourish better than it is now. But as for you, I feel sorry

for you, that you lack manners and think everything is about wealth and power. Tell me, how happy are you after all this achievement....I yelled at him.

"Mark, I got your drink but you were nowhere to be found. Come one now, we have to a few things to finalize before my flight tomorrow." Was Tilda who had appeared from nowhere, dragging him away.

Before he left, he looked at Maya. There were so many emotions. Pain, bitterness, jealousy, anger but the scariest of all was love. Could it be Love he was feeling for her all along? I can't believe it. Mark has been hiding all the love he feels for her under a mask. No wonder he gets angry when I get close to her.

I don't blame him. Just like Tilda, they care Soo much about wealth and power so he can't accept falling in love with a normal girl. Poor Mark, he accepted to marry Tilda to strengthen their enterprise. If they get married, all their companies will be joined together. I have never seen anything bigger than that. They will have a business empire. But will that bring the happiness or it will only be another eternal torture?

Life has thought me so much. My dreams are different. I want to find love and enjoy it in the most respectable way. But if I find love, I will always choose it over wealth and if I have both, then I am the luckiest. I don't know if Maya will ever be able to return my love for her but if she never does, I don't want to lose her friendship. She is very intelligent and easy to talk to. Her maturity is not easy to understand. Such a fragile girl yet so strong. This makes her very special to me.

Mark's POV

I don't understand my feelings these few days. Since I met her, my life has turned upside down. I can't get my head straight. Why did I have to meet her again? When I splashed water on her the first time, I felt sorry and wanted to apologize. When I got my head out of the window, she was Soo beautiful. Even with the mud on her dress and all. I knew she will be my weakness so I despised her, thinking it will make the feeling go away but it didn't .

It only grew stronger. Then when I kept thinking of how I will see her again, I saw her in that office. I wanted to hug her or even kiss her to tell her how much I loved her but again, I despised her to kill the passion in me. I am such a coward. How can I make her suffer for my weakness.

Wealth and honor are very important to my parents so I know they will not accept her. I have accepted to marry Tilda because we make a beautiful couple. We both want the same things and we are ready to get married to each other without any love between us. It seemed ok to me from the beginning but after meeting Maya, my heart keeps going in a different direction.

Please forgive me, Maya, I didn't mean to be a jerk. Seeing you with Tom breaks my heart. I know he can love you and treat you in the best way but I can't stand you being with someone else. Maybe I should tell her but I will just make her suffer more because my family will be against her. What should I do?

I think I should call off the wedding....

"Mark, what are you thinking about? We have called you three times already" was Tilda's disturbed voice.

Chapter TWELVE – I MUST SEE HER TONIGHT

What is the problem, Matilda, I was just trying to understand everything we are discussing, I tried to lie.

"That's not true, she replied accusingly. No matter what you have on your plate, you always get a grip on yourself". She was right I never drip of in a meeting no matter the problems around me.

"You always take prompt decisions that always turn out well and besides, you never call me Matilda because you said it was old fashion." She ended angrily.

Trust me Matilda, I was thinking about what we were discussing....I tried to defend myself.

"Please excuse me gentleman, she said dismissing our bankers. I know you very well Mark, and don't take me for a fool.....she continued as the bankers left. Did you even ask me how I got to know where you are? I heard your voice from afar when I excused myself from the meeting to get a drink. I turned around and couldn't see you and when I asked them, they said you had gone the other way towards the garden.

Going closer, your voice was louder and louder in my ears. You kept arguing with Tom because of Maya. Since when did you become a relationship expert and suddenly, you have started calling me Matilda"...she ended with mixed emotions.

I can't tell her the truth. This is not the right time and place. 'Please forgive me, Tilda, I just care about Tom so much"...I lied again.

I have began such a terrible liar today. Yes I care about Tom but in this case, it was my heart I was caring about. Maya has clouded my thoughts since I met her on Monday. Thank God the lie worked as Tilda finally succumbed.

"Well it clearly shows he doesn't want you caring about him when it comes to Maya so just stay away from their relationship"...she said with a bitter tone. But I don't think she meant it. She looked sad when she said it. Is she still in love with Tom?

You are right Tilda, I will not interfere in their relationship again. After all they are a perfect couple. They look good together and since I know Tom, he has never expressed such concern and admiration to any woman so this clearly shows how much he loves her. This morning, he sent her twelve bouquets of roses with a lot of gifts so I know he loves her so much. You know what I am going to do, I will encourage them to get married very soon, maybe before us.

All that I was saying was not from my heart. I was testing Tilda to see if she still loves Tom and she fell for it. She couldn't controll it as tears gathered in the corners of her eyes.

"Why, why are you crying my love, I said in a fake affection."

"Please excuse me," she said as she turned to leave.

OMG, we were so engrossed in this conversation and didn't realize we were speaking loudly. We attracted everyone's attention. This so embarrassing. It is clear they have heard everything we talked about and the worst was Tom and Maya staring at us with so much shock in their eyes. Only if they knew I didn't mean those words.

Tilda run through the crowd towards the washroom and I followed her as a means of hiding my embarrassment.

Tilda, I kept calling after her as I followed her to the ladies washroom. I held the door before she could lock it. Tilda, tell me the truth. In my heart, I was very happy that she still loved Tom. I could use it as a means to call off the wedding. But If I decide to marry Maya, I will not have my family's support and what will happen to the empire. I decided to rather make my relationship with Tilda work and forget the empire. "Tilda, let's talk like two adults, I know you had a past with Tom and I also know that it's over between you two, she signed, I can understand it if you still have feelings for him and it's okay.

I promise to help you get over Tom, I said affectionately and I meant it. I am ready to sacrifice my love for Maya to have the empire I have always dreamed of. This was the only way. She seemed more calm after I spoke with her. She smiled...

"I am really sorry Mark, I didn't mean to cause a scene. I thought I had gotten raid of my love for Tom until I saw her this evening with Maya. When we were dating, he had nothing but I loved him. I was pressured from my family to give up our love. I wasn't strong enough to go against them.

Seeing how great he has become, I regret everything because my family will not reject him if they see him now. He is even more good-looking than when we dated and seeing him with Maya only worsened the case. I am so sorry for hurting you but I promise nothing will change. I will deal with my love Tom and move on. This empire means everything to me and I know that Maya makes him happy too.

When I saw you arguing with him, it wasn't you I was angry with. I was angry with myself for letting him go. I felt jealous of the way he defended her and the way he spoke about her. So I decided to turn it on you but it only came back to me. I think my trip tommorow will help me to get over him....she concluded sadly.

I wanted her to confess her feeling for Tom so I could use it against her but when she finally did, I felt so sad for her because I understand that feeling. It's the same way I felt when I saw him together with Maya. Tilda has nothing to lose. If she marries Tom, she will still have her empire but if I marry Maya, I will be the loser. But Tom doesn't care about wealth or power. He only cares about his love for her. He is selfless when it comes to her and that is true love. I felt so disappointed at myself. In everything, I could not decide on what to do at this moment

I totally understand, Tilda, I said hugging her tight. She gave her best smile which shows how much she loved me calling her Tilda or Tildy. Let me take you home, I said, using my suit to cover her naked shoulder. I held her waist as she put her head on my shoulder. I know we look like a perfect couple but it didn't feel that way. I felt I was holding a friend and not a lover. God, what am I thinking?

Thank God the crowd had dispersed when we came out. Only few eyes were looking in our direction as we headed into the private elevator. He went down the basement which is the parking lot for this facility. I could not believe my eyes.

There was Maya, as Tom opened the passenger seat of his car for her. She was also covered in Tom's jacket as Tilda was covered in mine. This is so wrong. She is supposed to be wearing my Jacket and riding with me, not him. I felt my heart shatter into a thousand pieces. Where is he taking her? I immediately sent a quick message to one of my contacts to follow them and give me updates on their location as I opened the passenger seat for Tilda. She was also jealous when she saw them. It clearly showed in her eyes and she didn't question me anymore. I think we were both having the same emotions.

Our ride to her house was extremely quiet as I could not keep my mind off Maya.....I must see her tonight, even if it means going to her house, I promised myself. I don't know there but I can easily find out. We finally got to Tilda's house and I gave her a kiss on the cheek as she stepped out of the car. "Don't worry, I will drop you off at the Airport myself tomorrow." She giggled like a little child. Only if she knew that dropping her was my means of ensuring she really gets on board that flight. I need the time and space to put myself in order.

"Thank you". She whispered as she left. I watched as she entered her house and the security locked the gate. I immediately dialed my contact. "Where is she"? Sorry sir, she is still with Tom but I think he is taking her home. We are still following them. "Share your location" I said firmly which he did instantly.

I started driving towards the location with maximum speed. Thank God it was late and there wasn't any traffic to begin with.

My contact was right, Tom took her home. I stayed far from them but could watch from where I was. He lingered in front of her door for a while before finally hugging her. Then she smiled and closed the door. So you are smiling, Maya. Another man hugged you and you smiled. You belong to me Maya and only me...I kept saying to myself as I jealously watched them from the distance.

Tom stayed at the car park till Maya's light went off. Then he drove away. I gave sometime and headed to the car park. Then I knocked her door.

"Tom, is it you?" As I heard her sleepy voice. Why Maya, is your mind filled with Tom. I know I caused it but now, I will make the correction. I knocked again without a word as she turned in the light.

"Whose there, she yelled again. Tracy, she called out. I know she won't open up if she hears my voice so I faked a voice and said, "Parcel Delivery."

"What? at this time of the night, it must be Tom again"... I heard her whisper as she opened the door slightly to have a view but it was enough for me to take action.

I quickly pushed the door open and entered which made her to almost fell.

"I am very sorry", I held her so she wouldn't fall.

"You" she yelled with anger.

Chapter THIRTEEN – PLEASE FORGIVE ME

The look on her face made me feel more guilty. I have totally turned her into a scared little thing. If I had not treated her the way I did this past few days, she would have perhaps given me a concerned look or even a loving smile. But all I could see was fear and a means of escape.

I am very sorry...I managed to say. I just want to talk please. Just listen to me for a moment.

"Okay, sit there on the couch and i will be back in five minutes she said as she went to her closet."

She came back wearing a long dress that covered every part of her body but she looked flawless like an Egyptian goddess. I was too desperate that i didn't take notice of what she was wearing before but I think she wanted to make herself comfortable.

"Tea, Coffee?...she asked as she walked towards the kitchen. "Coffee"...I replied gratefully. The way she treated me just made me feel even more guilty. How could she be so nice to me when all I did was make her life a nightmare? No wonder everybody likes her. she must be an angel.

She came back holding only one cup of coffee and offered it to me. "What about You", I asked taking a sip. It was good, just the way i wanted it. How did she know how I like my coffee?

"I am allergic to caffeine, she replied casually so what brings you here at this time of the night, she asked thoughtfully. I was dead silent as I didn't know where to start from so I tried to skip the question as I asked.

How did you know how I like my coffee I asked without answering her question.

"I prepared the coffee Sue served you before the final presentation. She told me how you wanted it." She replied like it was nothing...you still haven't told me why you are here, she added.

Yes, I said putting my coffee on the side table.

"Sorry, I will wait for you to drink up. It might get cold and you look tired."

Thank you, I replied with a smile picking up and drinking my coffee again. I glanced at her and she looked like she had thousand and I questions on her mind. I could understand that. Someone who has depised you from day one suddenly showing up in your house in the middle of the night. But one thing I also didn't understand was how she kept in mind how I liked my coffee even though I seemed to be her worst nightmare.

Maya, I started, after careful thought. I don't know where to start and I also know that you will not understand me but I have never hated you. When I splashed mud on you, I wanted to apologize but I was so scared Maya...

" Scared about what?" she asked with concern.

Let me put it this way, I have never loved anyone and I don't understand what it is to love and be loved. I was raised in a family that only cared about wealth and power and their legacy. I was thought to protect the family name which I have done over the years, including agreeing to marry Tilda.

I.....then her phone began to ring. "Please excuse me," she said as she went to pick her phone and answered it. I knew it was Tom as she turned round and looked at me. All she said was..."I am trying to but you woke me".....then she laughed. I wish I could make her laugh that way. I started boiling with jealousy as I walked towards her. "Alright, I will see you in the morning", she said hanging up.

Who was that, I asked as I got close to her. Is that why you came here? she asked moving away.

It's Tom, isn't it? I asked ignoring her question.

What if it is? She asked skeptically.

I came to apologize for the way I have treated you this few days we met. I despised you at first sight and I continued to do so. Please forgive me. I apologized Sincerely.

You didn't have to come all the way here to apologize and especially not after mid night. Anyway, I forgive you. Can I go to sleep now? She asked looking at the door.

Thank you...ehmmm....thank you once again for forgiving me. It really means a lot to me, I said in a breaking voice I as I turned away to go. I had so much more to say but I just couldn't at the moment because the time isn't right.

But why did you do that, she asked making me stop at the door.

What should I tell her now? I can't tell her that I love her. It can ruin everything.

It's a long story. You have to sleep now. We will talk some other time. I told her as I opened the door just as Tracy was about to knock.

Maya's POV

I was surprised to see him at the door. The only people I thought might be here were Tom or Tracy. I wondered so much what he was doing here. I was so scared initially because of the warning he gave me earlier. I Thought he was here to remind me of the warning again but I was

totally surprised when he apologized. I felt a bit relaxed and excused myself to go change. I felt comfortable after doing so. My night dress was just to my knee so it felt great in this long flair dress. It's actually my favourite dress because it always feels comforting.

I managed to hide my fears in his presence. After all, he was in my house. I always gave him maximum respect because of his position in the office but in my house, I am in charge. But then, the humility in which he spoke with me made me feel a connection. I don't know what that connection is but I know it's something deep that I cannot explain.

I didn't want to let my guard down or make him know how I felt so I pretended to be indifferent. It wasn't easy putting up with that act. I wanted to hug him to let him know I have forgiven him but I restrained myself. It was the most difficult thing I have ever done. Why am I feeling this way. Tom loves me so much. He has shown me the love no man ever has but I have never felt this way about him. God, what is wrong with me.

And when I asked him why he did what he did, I was expecting an answer but he didn't tell me. What could be his reason of not doing so? Wake up Maya, what if he is up to something again. Besides, he is getting married soon. Just as all these thoughts were going on in my head as he opened the door to leave, I couldn't believe Tracy was standing in front of the door. The look on her face said everything. How do I explain to her? I was covered with embarrassment.

But maybe, I read the wrong impression as she hurried to me passing Mark like he didn't even exist.

"Are you okay? Are you hurt?" Came her worried voice. But before I could utter a word, Mark responded.

"Yes she is fine Tracy, I might be so many things but I am definitely not a serial killer.."he said with his voice showing how sad and disappointed he was.

"I am sorry Mark, I didn't mean to..."Tracy was apologising when he interrupted again.

"I know Tracy, I deserve it somehow. Everyone sees me to be a monster because of how I have treated your friend these past days so I deserve it for sure. Good night ladies "he ended sadly and walked out closing the door.

I felt really sorry for him. I wanted to run to him and tell him we didn't feel that way about him. But Tracy stopped me. He didn't get a chance to tell me the reasons for his actions because I told him I wanted to sleep. But I have to know right? Deep down, I can feel he is a very nice person but he must be going through so much.

"Tom said you were not sleeping even though you said you were. So he wanted me to spend the night with you." She said with a tired smile. Poor Tracy, she has suddenly become Tom's good friend because of me. I don't know why she does everything he tells her.

So he's at the car park? I asked as my eyes widened.

"Yes," Tracy said, suddenly realizing what I was talking about.

Which means....

Oh no. I hope they don't get into another fight because of me. We have to do something.

"Let's create a distraction", was Tracy's suggestion.

"Go to the window and wave him. Once he knows you are fine, he will drive away or keep his eye focused on you so he doesn't notice Mark", Tracy continued.

Good plan, I gave Tracy a high five and went to the window and there he was, gazing straight at the window without taking off his eyes.

I waved at him and he waved back, just as Mark reached the car park.

I kept waving at him to prevent him from looking the other way.

Then I saw Mark walk towards his car which was two cars from Tom's.

Just then, I stopped waving and Tom started his car to drive out of the car park. At that exact moment, Mark also moved and what we have we feared was sure to happen. Tom got out of his car just as Mark got out of his. I suddenly started having hot flashes.... what is going to happen now?

Chapter FOURTEEN – DRASTIC CHANGE

Tom's POV

I was in a state of ecstasy when I saw her waving at me through the window. There were so many thoughts running through my head. I can see she is gradually beginning to like me but I don't know if she loves me as much as I love her. Women can be very difficult to understand. Even with my experience with Tilda, they seem like a blank book that need to be filled through one's own experience. There are sooo many things I wanted to tell you her, but I don't know if she can take it. I don't know if it will make you happy and bring us together or only dissappoint her and destroy our friendship.

After Mark was pulled away by Tilda during the office dinner party, I sensed her whole mood was destroyed. She couldn't focus on anything else so we decided to leave, just as we heard Mark arguing with Tilda. I was pretty sure it was about my past with Tilda. I couldn't help my notice the way she looked at me when she tried take Mark away from our little argument. I know her very well because she used to be my world and I knew that look. I know she still loves me but love is not what I feel for her anymore. The love we once shared is now dead and burried. Never to be resurrected again. When we got to the dinner hall, she was running to the ladies room with Mark running after her. Everybody was just staring without trying to interfere in anyway.

Since Tilda broke up with me, I have strongly guarded my heart against any other heartbreak but everything changed. Yes! because of Maya. There are things I don't understand about her because everytime, her eyes tells a different story. It's very difficult to read her. Even her friend Tracy is not able to. Just as I managed to start the car and begin reversing out of the driveway, I saw Mark's Car Moving out of the driveway as well.

I swear it can't be anyone else because he has his car custom made from the factory and no one else has the right to use that particular car. They don't even produce it for mass sale. He has a sole-purchaser right which he paid an insanely huge amount for.pppp

I immediately got down from the car at the same time he got out of his. 'What are you doing here?' I screamed with anger. But he was strangely silent. No, this can't be Mark. Why this sudden change? I have known him for over ten years and we became so close even though we had different views about life but we were both determined in our own ways when it comes to business. I think that was what actually brought us together.

I am asking you one more time, "What are you doing here Mark?"

This time, I was technically holding his shirt collar. "You followed her again? To tell her to stay away from me? Tell me something Mark? Did somebody cut your tongue? What do you want?"

He lifted his hand as a form of surrender but still didn't utter a word which made me more angry. How could he make me look bad and act like the good guy. Then I suddenly remembered that Maya was still looking out the window. Now here he is trying to act like the good guy. Finally, he spoke in a shaky voice.

"I mean no harm Tom, I only came to apologize to her. Trust me, I will never abuse her with my words anymore."

Now I felt so bad about how I behaved but who wouldn't have done what I did if they were in my shoes? He was a total jerk in the beginning trying to tell me who and who not to associate with so why wouldn't I suspect him in the first instance.

But why couldn't you do so in the morning or Monday. Why did you have to come at a time like this? I asked trying to cover my shame.

"I won't be able to sleep with all that in mind Tom".....he replied with tear filled eyes. Was it really tears? Mark never cries so what has caused this drastic change? Or is he pretending? For what will he pretend? The more I thought about it, the more confused I got. I finally let go of his shirt collar.

'I am sorry Mark....' I said apologetically....

"I know, Tom, I understand and I deserve it." He said responsibly, making me stunned. His behaviour has totally changed and just when I was about to ask him how he knew Maya's house, I saw the security officer coming our way. My screams must have drawn his attention.

"Is everything alright please...." He asked respectfully after getting close to us.

Yes, everything is fine...I replied confidently. We were just leaving, I added.

I think it's been a long night, I said to Mark, we have to leave now. It's already 2am. We should get enough rest before golf practises begin. He gave a weak smile as he nodded in the affirmative. I know he likes golf and our Sundays are always spent at the golf park together.

As we finally drove out of the car park, I noticed Tracy had joined Maya as they both waved at us through the window. It was so beautiful and satisfying to me and I felt like I had won a gold medal, just knowing these two.

Maya's POV

As I continued waving at him, I realized our plan didn't work out the way we wanted it. When I saw them drive out together and both got out of the car, I wanted to go down there to stop Tom from doing any harm to Mark but Tracy stopped me. She told me Tom could handle it. I wonder

how she knows Tom this well because, they were able to resolve everything before the security officer even got there.

I know that they have spent some time together in the process of showing me all the love and care but I feel there is something more than that. After they drove off, Tracy and I dropped immediately to bed. I didn't know we were this tired. When we work up to both our phones consistent ringing, it was almost 12noon. God, I have never slept this much and maybe its because I have never slept this late as well.

After having lunch together, Tracy decided to go home. I instantly felt sad and she noticed it.

" I thought you were used to living alone? "she teased.

I do but I have gotten used to having you around. Why don't you move in with me? I asked out of the blue making her shocked.

Are you sure about that? she asked doubtfully.

Why not? This bed is big enough for both of us and besides, it's safer. Mark coming to see me at that time makes me think about a lot of things and I don't think leaving alone is a good idea. What if it was someone else? Or what if he hadn't changed and did any harm to me. There are sooo many thoughts running through my head right now, Tracy.

"Okay. I will go talk to my parents and move my things in a few hours." She said excitedly.

Let's go together. That way, they will know you are not lying.

"Great," she said blooming with smiles.

I was so happy she agreed to live with me. Now I understand Jude's warning.

So, we got to Tracy's house and surprisingly, her parents didn't object. Afterall, she is an adult. So I helped her pack her stuffs and together we had dinner with her family. I understand why it was easy for her to get through all her heartbreaks and even when she was left at the altar. When she told me the story, I wondered how she was able to get over it but seeing her family, I had my questions answered. They are so wonderful that I wanted to change asmy mind for us to stay here instead.

But we made up our mind and left after a few chats with her younger siblings especially Dan. He won't let his sister go. I felt so sorry for taking this decision. Tracy is not like me. She has a family that loves her so much and I am taking her away from them.

I was about to tell them Tracy will no longer stay with me when her mum spoke. Come on Honey, she was supposed to get married two years ago. If that had happened, she wouldn't be here today so

she will still leave us anyway, even if it's today or tomorrow. Her words gave me an instant release from my guilt.

Whether she left with me today or she got married tomorrow, her family will still miss her right? So I don't have to feel bad. Dan followed her to the cab I had arranged. Then she gave him a long tight hug and promised to visit him frequently and also call him every morning. It worked like magic because, his countenance changed immediately and he was beaming with smiles. I couldn't help falling in love with him too. He is sooo cute and looks like his mom. A very handsome boy. Tracy told me he will be six in two weeks so we decided to plan a surprise birthday party for him as we were on our way to my apartment.

When the car pulled into the car park, I was speechless when I saw a lot of police men with about eight police cars with sirens everywhere. Most people had come out of their apartments as it seems the police were asking them questions pertaining to something. I saw most of the occupants I had never seen before. Few of them I met at the car park a couple of times. Life around here is centered around work, family and few close friends so there is literally nothing to encourage socialisation which is why we hardly see one another.

"What's going on?" was Tracy's confused voice mixed with concern.

I don't know but I think something bad has happened else we won't see a lot of police around. I replied carefully, Trying not to cause any panic. I searched around steadily with my eyes, looking for the reason for presence of the police but I saw no one, Not even a caution tape in any area so I decided to ask one of the police men close by.

Excuse me Sir, I tapped the shoulder of the police officer. He turned around facing me and asked. How may I help you ma'am?

"Is there a robbery or something? No ma'am we are looking for two missing ladies?

Missing ladies?

"Yes, I was told they were in room 509. Do you live here?"

Yes I do, I responded looking at Tracy who almost burst into laughter when I signalled her to stop.

So do you perhaps know anyone by name Maya and Tracy? He asked again.

Sure I do.

He nodded, great, great, while signalling the other officers to come. So where are they? He asked with expectation'.

Here, I said trying not to laugh as Tracy was facing the other way. I knew she was laughing.

Ma'am, I am very serious. I was told the victims must have been kidnapped.

What? I couldn't control myself anymore as I burst into laughter, drawing the attention of the other police officers.

I...we went over to her house, I said, pointing at Tracy but she wasn't there. How could she have just disappeared like that? My eyes kept searching through the crowd trying to know where she is.

So you mean...all this while, you were the ones we have been searching for and you weren't kidnapped?

Before I could answer, I heard Mark's commanding, domineering and angry voice from the crowd.

I didn't pay you to just come and hover around. I guess his last words got stuck in his throat when his eyes met mine....

Chapter FIFTEEN – SEND OFF PARTY

"Where the hell have you been Maya"? were his first words when his eyes met mine. Even though he was angry, his eyes were filled with so much pain and genuine concern. Why will he be so concerned about me? Yes he apologized for everything and I genuinely forgave him. I didn't expect him to be my new guardian or anything.

"We went to my house to pick my stuffs" Tracy responded from nowhere before i could even speak. Where did she come from all of a sudden?

"So you both decided to leave your phones unattended?" He asked again, this time calmer. His eyes looked sunken and his hair was all messed up like he hadn't slept in days. But he still looked so attractive in his white T-shirt. This is my first time seeing him dressed casual and it suited him so well. I couldn't keep my eyes off him till Tom showed up also in a white shirt and looking tired as well.

"Are you girls okay" he asked catching his breath. He must have really searched for us.

Yes, we are fine, I replied apologetically. We left our phones. I asked Tracy to move in with me so we went to her house to get her stuff. But what are you guys doing here so worn out?

We called you girls again and again to find out if you were okay but when we had no response continuously for two hours, we decided to come and check. After we got here, we questioned security but he didn't even notice when you went out. He thought you were still in there. So we kept knocking and questioning people. We even had to request for police officers to give us warrant to breakdown the door.

Please don't make us worried like this. The way he spoke made us feel so guilty. I didn't know they cared so much. If we had been in trouble, I know help would have found us somehow and it really gladdened my heart.

"We are very sorry", was Tracy and thanks for coming to check on us...She said shyly."

" Well if you don't mind, why don't you join us for coffee? You guys look tired." I added without thinking.

"Okay but let me disperse the crowd and the police...."said Mark as he moved to the crowd. He spoke to them, thanking them and all. Then I saw the police went to sit in the cars and started driving out whiles other neighbours went back to their rooms.

So, instead of coffee, Tom ordered food when Mark was dispersing the crowd. Tracy and I could not eat much because we had supper in her parents house. But the way Mark and Tom ate, I think

they hadn't eaten the whole day. I felt so sorry and guilty. We were eating and enjoying the night, while they were here searching for us. How unthoughtful of us.

After eating, Mark and Chris left after giving security the obligation of keeping eyes on us. We also retired to bed shortly since we had to go to work the next morning. The next couple of days were quite normal. There wasn't anything new. I proceeded with my handing over notes and Mark only came to the office once. He was casual and not his usual bossy self. Tom called to check on us everyday as well. I didn't notice anything different till Friday when I got to the office. I had finished my handing over and was returning my office tools when I noticed Mark and Tom come to the office.

Shortly after that, there was an email for all staff to assemble at the conference room thirty minutes before closing time. I thought it was going to be a brief staff meeting to announce to everyone that today was going to be my last day so I put closure on every pending work. Tracy had come earlier to inform me to get ready so I was expecting her to come and escort me to go to the meeting when the door opened suddenly.

Mark? I called, trying to hide my excitement. Since he apologised, he has become one of the sweetest people I have ever known.

"Yes", he replied with a smile while walking towards me. He has this effect on me whenever we are alone. I just can't think straight and my heart keeps beating so fast. I wanted to escape an awkward moment so I asked what he wanted so that I could get it for him very fast and join the others. I was also praying in my head for Tracy to come in at any moment but it seems my prayers never got out of the window.

Can I help you, I asked him, looking away.

"Yes, he smiled again, coming close to me. I was thinking if we could hang out after tonight."

Hang out? I repeated with surprise.

Yes, unless you have other plans, he said sadly.

On one condition, I said, trying to find out his reason for despising me before.

"Shoot"....he said with so much expectation showing in his eyes.

If you promise to answer the question I asked on Saturday night..before I could finish, he interrupted.

"About why I treated you badly in the past?" He asked making me astonished.

How did you manage to guess so fast

"I knew you wouldn't want anything more than having that knowledge."

So, you promise?

"Hmmm...Sure", he said doubtfully. There was pain written all over his face.

"But I also want you to know that you look so beautiful...I mean, you always do"...He completed just as he walked out the door.

God, I could not believe my ears. Did he just tell me that I was beautiful? I was so flattered and frozen to the spot. How I have longed to hear those words from him and when it came, I am so happy but also confused.

Am I crazy to think that he loves me? No. He possibly can't. He is engaged too. Could it be true that he doesn't really love Tilda? Maybe he just said it as a friend. While I kept thinking about his last words, there was Tracy.

"Come on, we have to leave now. Everyone is waiting", she said, grabbing my arm and dragging me through the main office to the conference room. At the door, she insisted I open the door which made me suspicious but knowing Tracy, it will just be useless to argue so I opened the door but the whole room was dark.

Immediately the lights came on, all I could hear was a loud shout hitting my ear drum.

Surprise!!!! came the thunderous voice of all those gathered. There were banners with write up of Send of party, We will miss you, you are one of a kind and so on. There were dozens of different kinds of flowers all around. My mind suddenly went to the day Tom sent me the dozen roses. Could he be responsible for all these? I don't remember the last time we had a party for any of our former staffs. But I felt within me that Tracy will have first hand information about this. She must have been the main planner.

Every staff was at the party and my jaws started to ache with all the smiles and the number of thank you responses. I even received a gift from my CEO and many others. Have they known all along? How come I didn't have any hint of this event? Almost everyone had a gift for me. I never knew I was this important to them. The CEO hugged me and gave me two kisses on the cheek as he whispered. "We have lost a gem. You will always have a position here if you ever wish to come back. We will miss you so much". His words filled my eyes with so much tears.

The HR Team did a short presentation for me on my relationship with colleagues and how I work. It was the funniest I have ever seen as they animated me as a workaholic who didn't have a social life. The Sales and Marketing team, Operational team, legal team, even the stakeholders were there. This is my first time of attending a party totally dedicated to me. I was on cloud nine. Kira

called me to cut the cake as the others cheered on. I will never forget this day. I don't remember any day that I laughed this much.

I saw Tom slowly approach from the group of investors as he came over and gave me a big bear hug. Then he gave me a gift and surprising asked me to open it. I had not opened any of the gifts presented to me so far so I felt strange opening this gift. It was a very huge box. I opened it and saw a big box smaller than the first one. I lifted my head and looked at him as he smiled sheepishly. I couldn't help but notice the anger on Mark's face. He grew cold the instant Tom gave me that hug. He wasn't angry when our CEO hugged me but when it's Tom, It's different. It made me uncomfortable but I continued to open the box.

Another box again. Everyone was eager and kept shouting.....OPEN! OPEN! OPEN!

So I opened again and it was a smaller box. I looked at him with a confused look and he smiled again. So typical of Tom. He has a very cunning way of sending his gifts.

The shouts didn't stop so I proceeded to open the box and for the fifth time, it was a box but this box was weigh smaller. If its a prank, then he got me because I was beginning to think its a complete empty box and I was as well getting annoyed with opening all these boxes.

I unwrapped the small box and this time, there was a case in it. It looked like a jewelry case so perhaps its and necklace or earring. I excitedly opened the case and met the biggest surprise of my life. Could it be real? The stone on this ring should cost a fortune. A pink diamond ring....I couldn't help but hear comments from all angles.

"Maya is getting married?"

"How long have they dated"?...was Susan's voice.

"He must love her so much to give her such a ring"...was Kira

I was speechless as I looked at Tom's hopeful eyes when he took the ring and went down on one knee as he spoke. The whole room was dead silent now.

"Will you"? His voice echoed in my ears.

"Will you marry me"?

I noticed Mark had stormed out of the gathering. Yes he was this much angry but why?

Tom has put me in a very uncomfortable position. we are not dating or anything and he proposes from the blue? I like him a lot but I have never thought of getting married to him. I just don't feel the bond. I see him more like a friend. How do I tell him in front of all these people that I will not marry him? It will be so embarrassing but can I also accept the proposal and pretend to love him? What a mess.....

Chapter SIXTEEN – I DON'T CARE WHAT I LOSE

Tom, can I speak to you alone please....I asked looking him in the eye

"No, Maya, I want everyone here to be a witness to what we have to say to each other. If you love me, I want to know how deep it is. Are you willing to spend the rest of your life with me?" He asked with a pleading stare.

I looked at Tracy speechlessly begging her with my eyes to say something but for the first time, I was left to my fate. She had warned me earlier right? But I never took her warning serious. Right then Mark came back. His eyes were covered with so much pain and anger.

"Please Maya, I have loved you from the very moment I set eyes on you. Since that day, you have taken over my mind completely. I am always at peace whenever you are around me. Please I want to live with this peace forever. Please grant me this wish, he kept pleading."

I don't know what to say Tom, I don't think I am ready yet...was all I could say.

But the look in his eyes said it all. He was clearly disappointed as he looked at me straight in the eye making me uncomfortable. "I will not give up Maya", he said and without uttering another word, he finally walked away.

How could a very happy day turn this way? Thank God Tracy came to my aid.

"It's okay," she whispered.

"You told him the truth and that's all that matters," she added with concern. I looked at all the faces around as they clearly showed disappointment except for Mark who had a little smile on his face. I think I have had enough for today. Lets go home, Tracy.

Sure, but let me check on Tom. He seems to be in so much pain Maya. When she disappeared round the corner where Tom went, Mark signalled me to follow him. All eyes were on me but I didn't care anymore. I needed some fresh air. Thank God today is my last day here and I won't come to the office with people gossiping around me. I don't think I will be able to take it. They can gossip behind me for all I care.

I followed Mark from where he signalled me as he went out of the conference room to the elevator, holding the elevator door for me to enter.

Where are we going? I asked when I entered the elevator.

"Where do you want to go?" He asked.

Home ofcourse...I said

"So you forgot about our time out?"

How could he bring that up after all that has happened tonight. This guy is so insensitive but I don't know why I feel comfortable around him. As we stepped out of the elevator, he held my hand leading me to his car as he told the driver to go home. His action sent shivers down my spine.

Where are we going at this time of the night, I asked myself.

I have lived in this town for years but I have never been to this park. The night was cool bringing out the fragrance in my favourite flowers planted along the sides of the park. 'The Queen of the night' flowers smelt so good enveloping the whole park with it's fragrance. The carpet grass was well mowed with lovers benches around. There were few couples there as well so I felt comfortable.

I sat on one of the benches as Mark sat beside me. It felt so good after all that has happened tonight. This moment is just right for releasing all the tension. As I sat there thinking, Mark sat beside me with two glasses and a bottle of wine.

I don't drink alcohol.

"I know, this is non-alcoholic".

My respect for him grew so much. He didn't buy an alcholic drink. But how did he know I never took alcohol?

He gave me a glass of wine and I took a sip. It tasted great and at the moment, everything seemed so perfect.

So, why did you turn down his proposal? Mark asked suddenly bringing my mind back with all the memories.

I don't know Mark, but I don't feel the bond. I know I have hurt him so much and I don't think I can face him anytime soon. Thank God Tracy decided to check on him. Atleast he will have someone to talk to.

"If you ask me, you did the right thing." Mark said indifferently.

Really, I asked, happy that he wasn't judgemental of me especially with the fact that Tom was his best friend.

"Well, you can't teach the heart to love who it doesn't love"... He said with a serious look.

That's true but what if that person has been so good to you and is always there at every point in time. It's difficult to lose such friendships you know.

"Yes, but it's even more difficult pretending to love someone when your heart belongs to another". This time, his eyes were tearful. Is he just encouraging me or he is sending a message?

After that, we sat in silence with both of us engrossed in our own thoughts. Then I remembered the question that has been long standing on my mind.

So why were you mean to me? I managed to ask.

He took a deep breath and started...

"You might not believe it but this is the truth Maya, from the moment I saw you, I knew you were going to be my weakness"

Weakness? I asked confused.

"Did you think I looked out the window of the car to despise you? I wanted to apologize for splashing the water and if possible, find a way to help you out. But when I saw you, my heart was singing a different song. I have never felt for anyone what I was feeling and I didn't want to end up losing Tilda so I pretended to be rude which is why I despised you. I wanted to let you know that you were not my type but I was wrong.

I felt sad and angry with myself. I hated the fact that I could not get you out of my mind. I was afraid I might try to follow my heart and end up losing everything. I didn't want to lose my parents' trust as well. So when I met you in that office the next day, the feeling grew deeper. Cursing myself for not being able to control whatever I was feeling, I let it all out on you. But trust me Maya, for all the times I treated you bad, I never slept peacefully. I will wake up in the middle of the night sweating and thinking about you and looking for a way to apologize. Then I saw Tom trying to get close to you.

I got even more angry. Maybe jealous. Jealous of the fact that he didn't care about money and power and will easily let go everything for you if he has to. I felt like a coward and I always tried to convince myself that you are not the one for me. But that night after the office dinner, I couldn't go home without letting you know that I was sorry and I didn't mean any of those words. I was such a coward and could not tell you everything I had to say when I came there. I took comfort in the fact that you wanted to sleep and used it as an excuse to leave.

Please Maya, I am not in anyway asking you to love me the way I love you. I know that my life is already complicated right now. There are a lot of things I will need to adjust before I can publicly declare my love for you".....

Love, did he say Love? I wish I could ask him to repeat his last words. So he loved me too. I was so happy hearing those words. I think I got my evening back but just as he said, it's complicated. He is already engaged. It can't work. It won't work.

But it can't work, I said looking at him in the eye, you are engaged already.

"At that office dinner, I wanted to break up with her. But when I realized she had also made the same sacrifices as me, I had to reconsider. We don't love each other. She is still in love with Tom and here I am also in love with you but we decided to go ahead for the sake of our families and the business empire we want to build. But right now if you ask me Maya, I will not marry Tilda. I don't care what I lose. I can't go on like this. I will tell her everything when she returns from her trip. But Maya, I have to ask you something. Please give me your honest answer no matter what it is, I will respect it, I promise."

What?....I asked clearing my throat after quietly listening to him all this while.

"Do you love me"... I could feel my heart beat pause after hearing this question. Should I tell him the truth? He said he needs an honest answer. Before I spoke, He continued.

"I know it's too early but I also know that you can't get it wrong when you love someone. It starts from the first instance. Like the moment you see them and it isn't difficult to...

Yes, I love you, I said without waiting for him to conclude. I can't believe his whole being changed upon hearing these words. His eyes were glowing like a ray of sun shine and his mood was just unexplainable. Before I knew it, I felt his lips on mine. It wasn't a deep kiss but it was something I have never felt in my entire life. It had answers to every question on my mind. I knew this love is real and it's so pure.

We broke from the kiss but he still kept his head on my forehead as he spoke. I promise you Maya, I promise not to let you down but please let's keep this a secret until my breakup with Tilda. I don't want anyone to brand you as a girl who came between two couples and say things they don't know. I don't want them to know that you are the reason why I broke up with her even though it's the truth.

"I love you soooo much, Maya. He ended as he placed another kiss on my lips. This is my first kiss and it was so magical. I can't believe I got what my heart wanted. But I was also happy we were going to keep this secret for a while because it will hurt Tom so much if he finds out I rejected his proposal and dating his best friend who he has protected me from all this while. I don't know why the heart doesn't do what it's told. I am very sorry Tom.

"It's late, let me take you home. Tracy might be getting worried by now," was Mark's voice bringing me from my thoughts.

Oh my God, I had totally forgotten about Tracy. She said she was coming and I left with Mark.

"Don't worry, I will see you in the office on Monday" he said.

I won't be there on monday.

I am talking about GMAN. Isn't there where you got your new job? I have 60% shares there as well.

My jaws dropped open when I heard those words but I shouldn't be surprised any more right?

After all, he was going to build a business empire so why should I be surprised he has shares in GMAN as well.

When Mark dropped me home, he was right. Tracy was looking for me everywhere. She had my handbag which contained my phone so she could not call me. She said she asked from other workers who told her I was with Mark so she thought I will be at home so when she got back without seeing me, she had finally decided to call Mark when I opened the door...

Chapter SEVENTEEN – THAT INDESCRIBABLE LOOK

Tom's POV

Eventhough I had prepared my mind for possible rejection, I never thought it will hurt this much. I felt like ten daggers piecing through my heart at the same time. I knew it wasn't the right time to propose but I realized Mark was secretly in love with her and knowing he never loved Tilda, he will easily dump her for Maya. I confirmed my suspicion when he went to her office alone. I know that he went there to ask her out after the party because I heard him talking on the phone and making some arrangements.

Knowing that Tilda wasn't around, the only person he was making that arrangement for was Maya. I thought of taking advantage of her innocence and shyness before the crowd to accept me so that we spend time knowing more about each other before we finally settle down but No. She rejected my proposal in front of all those people.

Why Maya, why can't you love me for once. Why can't I be happy again? When I left the party, I was about going to the pub to drink my heart out but Tracy followed me. She was like, the only one who cared. Mark didn't come to console me like I thought so that their date will be cancelled. Instead, he went with her and only Tracy came to me. When I saw them walking lovingly to Mark's car like the perfect couple, my heart was completely shattered. It felt like I didn't even matter to her in the first place.

If Tracy hadn't been there, I swear I would have done something to myself. She didn't see them because she was hugging me with her back to them. I felt comfort in her hug but my broken heart could not be mended. So Instead of going to the pub, I made my driver drive me home. I took some sleeping pills and fell into deep sleep. How could I have slept without these pills? But somewhere in the middle of my sleep, I woke up to a call from Tracy. She was calling to see if I was okay and asleep. So caring of her. Then I went back to sleep.

I woke up with serious headache and had to take some pain killers. I even told the maids not to disturb me. I spent the whole day thinking about everything that happened yesterday. I will not give up. No, I will not let go so easily eventhough she easily gave up on me, I won't give up on her so easily. I will still be here friend. Just as I was about to call her, the phone rang and looking at the caller ID, I was surprised.

Maya, I exclaimed. I wasn't expecting her call in anyway. I thought it might be Tracy.

"Hi Tom, I am very sorry about everything. I..."

It's okay Maya, I cut in before she could say another word. I understand and It's my fault. I caught you of guard and you were not ready as well. Please forgive me.

"There's nothing to forgive Tom, you have not wronged me in anyway. Please take good care of yourself."

Thanks Maya, but what are your plans for today?

"Hmmm...Tracy and I have decided to stay home and arrange everything as we could not do so last weekend."

So can I stop by in the afternoon?

"Why not"? She smiled as she hang up. I don't know why but after everything, I still want to see her again. There is this calmness about her that makes me to always want to be around her no matter what. My phone rang again and I answered without even looking at the caller ID.

"Hey Tom, I wanted to know if you wanted us to visit our new restaurant. Today being a weekend will be a great time to know if we have made the right investment..he said"

I can't make it today. I told Maya and Tracy I was going to pass by in the afternoon.

"Well why don't we go to the restaurant together and we can meet Maya and Tracy afterwards?" He suggested.

OKay, fine. I gave up because I knew there was no way he was going to take No for an answer.

"Okay, I will be there in fifteen minutes. He said as the line went dead.

Damn, I hit my hand on the wall. Why did I even mention that I was going to see Maya knowing he doesn't want me around her. All those times of him telling me to stay away from her because she was a low life bitch was just his way of keeping her for himself. I hate myself right now for not being smart. I could have told him anything instead of the truth. I cursed myself as I stepped out to meet him.

We arrived at Maya's apartment earlier than I had planned. Tracy opened the door and gave me a heart warming hug, just as Maya also did same. I couldn't help but notice the look on her face when she saw Mark after hugging me. Tracy had welcomed Mark with a hand shake and was leading us to the room.

"I didn't know you got company..was Maya's voice after giving Mark a quick hug. I think a lot has changed after that apology. Mark acts more human now and is no longer as arrogant as he used to

be. I mean, around friends. He is also more caring towards me. If not of us loving the same girl, I know we would have been best friends.

"I could leave if I am not invited", Mark said jokingly.

"No, I didn't mean it that way. I am just surprised"....said Maya apologetically. She seemed uncomfortable with Mark's stares.

" Don't be hard on yourself Maya, am just joking...he laughed. You should see the look on your face"....he laughed again.

"Come on guys, food is ready", Tracy screamed breaking the awkward moment.

"I didn't know you guys had already placed an order", Mark said teasingly. He has become and talkative today and I am just wondering what happened to him. The Mark I know is usually cold and calculative. But he seems to show a complete different side today.

"No, we prepared these ourselves"....Tracy said excitedly as she sat next to me.

Maya sat next to Tracy which got her closer to Mark and I hated it so much.

" This is delicious....Mark exclaimed biting into his chicken.

I agree...The pasta was well cooked and the chicken was also well seasoned and grilled. The salad was professionally done as well. I didn't know they could cook this well.

So you girls really did this cooking? I asked teasingly.

"Of course, Maya made the Pasta and salad as I seasoned and grilled the chicken..Tracy concluded proudly". We chatted for some time after the food when Mark suddenly requested to speak to Maya in private. I was instantly angry. Well, can you blame me, I still love her eventhough she broke my heart.

Maya's POV

I was startled when Mark asked to speak to me in private. I mean, our relationship is not yet official and we don't want to create any suspicion so why will he ask that? Refusing to talk in private will only worsen the case so I led him to the balcony. I usually don't come out here. The view today was breathtaking. Maybe I was extra mesmerized because I had not been here for...I can't even remember the last time....Yes, that's how bad it is. I always stayed in doors to keep warm since I always lived alone. As the sunset down the horizon, the sky performed It's magic in blending colors of Orange, red, Yellow and a shade of violet.

" I didn't know you had a very beautiful view here"....Mark commented, interrupting my thoughts.

I Didn't know myself. Its been a while since I got out here. That door leading here is always locked, I said, twisting my mouth to the right. It made him laugh and I'm glad he saw it funny.

"Then you've really missed a lot, I think I could spend a whole day here reading my favourite books"....he said thoughtfully.

Why didn't I think of that? During the days I spent all my weekends reading or researching. I guess you are right and I've really missed out...So what do you want to tell me?

"Nothing..."

I don't understand. You requested for a private time to tell me nothing?

"You are beautiful...he said lustfully.

Thanks, I blushed. But I don't think people should be seeing us together like this. It will ruin the secret.

What if I change my mind? He said with his forefinger tucking a loose hair on my face behind my ear. What if I announce to the whole world right now that you are mine...he said staring straight into my eyes.

God, I was really enjoying this time with him but its not right especially when he is engaged to someone.

Well, Mr. Snowman, I believe you but I don't think the time is right.

"Why not, he asked holding my waist and pulling me close to him. This action made me feel things I have never felt before. I didn't want to come out of this embrace but coming to my senses, I tried to wiggle out of his warm embrace but I wasn't fast enough as the balcony door burst open and standing there was Tracy and Mark with that indescribable look on their faces.

Chapter 18 – THE CONFESSION

Mark's POV

There was no point hiding the truth from them. Tom is my best friend and Tracy is her bestfriend so I don't think we can hide it any longer. Maya's expression showed how embarrassed she was. It's no fault of hers. I can't keep my hands and eyes of her. I wanted us to keep this a secret and I was still the one to blow it all.

She had wiggled out of my arms in embarrassment but I pulled her closer again and with my right arm around her waist, we both faced Tom and Tracy. I am sorry you guys had to find out this way. I mean, we should have told you being bestfriends but I just wanted to trash out things with Tilda before I make our relationship public.

"So you two are dating"...Tracy asked but more of a statement to herself.

Yes, I said boldly, looking at Maya who was looking down shyly.

"Well, am not surprised",....Tom paused. Congratulations to both of you but if you", he shouted surprisingly.

" Thank you" Maya responded as Tracy hugged her, then turning to me.

"If you ever hurt her, you will have me to contend with" she said in a serious tone"

"Me too" Tom supported. "Since you've stolen my heart" he added. But Maya's happiness is more important to me so as long as she is happy, I am happy"...he ended joyfully.

Maya quickly enveloped him in a long hug as he stroke her back gently. Thanks Tom, she whispered in his ears but I heard it.

I felt lighter and happy to not hide this relationship from them but I also made them aware not to tell anyone till I officially announce it as they nodded in agreement.

Maya's POV

After Mark announced our relationship, I was totally embarrassment and shy especially in front of Tom. I know he loves me so much and I just broke his heart on Friday night and here I am on Saturday evening announcing a relationship with the man who used to despise me.

But strangely, he accepted it well and was very happy for us. I really can't understand him. I was expecting him to be angry but there he was, congratulating us. The rest of the night was great and soon Mark and Tom left.

Finally, Monday came by faster than I imagined. I dressed very well to suit my role. I was super excited and yet nervous.

I got to my new office thirty minutes before the reporting time. I was surprised to meet a full office. I thought I was an early bird but I bet my being early is a late time here. I have to double my effort now.

I saw Ruby the receptionist talking to some people around the desk but as soon as she saw me, she quickly excused herself and walked over to me.

"You look so good Maya" ...She said with a hearty hand shake.

"The CEO will see you in his office now" ..she said with a broad smile.

Thank you, I said walking toward the office where I had that nerve wrecking interview before. I didn't know if she was being nice because of my position or because of the way I dressed today. Oh yes, that online shop I checked after the interview, I ordered some cool outfits for my new role afterwards. Well, I don't mind spending that much considering my position. It was completely necessary.

Thank you, I said, walking to the CEO's office. I was still nervous from how everything happened the last time. I noticed there were other staff looking at me till I opened the door.

Hell No. I think I just got to a wrong office or something must have changed after the last time I visited.

Maybe, I should have my eyes checked. It can't be him. I quickly closed the door, without greeting, pretending not to notice who was sitting on the desk.

I went back to the reception as I confusedly asked, Ruby, I think I missed the direction. Can you remind me....I said hoping it's a dream where I will just wake up.

But you just went there, she looked at me with a more surprised look in her face.

Yes, I went there but the CEO is not there and I think there's...I stammered. I think there's some else sitting on his desk.

"Ohh you mean Mr. Mark Snowman", she said with relief.

So I was right. It's him. I wasn't dreaming...I thought.

"Sorry about that Ma'am..."

Call me Maya, I interrupted.

I mean, Maya. Mr. Mark Snowman is the CEO here but when he gets busy with his other companies, his father takes over. His father handed over this company to him three years ago. He was the CEO by then so we all still recognize him as such anytime he comes.

So you mean...

"I mean Mr. Isaac Snowman is the man who conducted your interview but you will be reporting to Mr. Mark Snowman, our CEO". She concluded with clarity.

No, this can't be. I have never imagined working directly under him. I can't mix business with pleasure, I thought.

"Are you alright Maya"...was Ruby's concerned voice.

Yes...Why?

"Because he is waiting for you", she said pointing at the door. I didn't notice Mark was standing at the doorway.

Hmmmm...thanks for the clarification. I will be on my way. I scorned myself severally in my head for not doing a proper research on the company website. If I knew Mark was the CEO, I will never take this job. Yes, I love him but this is business. But why didn't he tell me? He only said he has shares over here. He never admitted he worked here as well. Maybe am just overthinking. He has a lot of companies so he definitely won't be here all the time.

Welcome to your first day at GMAN, Maya....He said professionally. Thank God he is being professional. I can't even let him know how angry I am when he gets to his usual bossy mood.

Thank you, Mr. Snowman...I smiled.

He went ahead to explain the role and what the company expects from me. We were supposed to meet on Mondays with my detailed work program, from which I will submit a report on everything on Fridays. He took me to the HR Manager who introduced me to the rest of the staff and the team I was supposed to work with. Not bad. I appreciated him for his professionalism in the office.

Being my first day, it wasn't easy as I had to learn their cooperate culture and all. I was completely exhausted when it was time to close. Jason came to confirm my time of leaving the office just as Mark walked in with a devilish grin on his face as he excused Jason.

"Leaving so soon?"

Yes, I need adequate rest for work tommorrow.

"So, you won't join me for dinner?"...he asked with a wink

Are you asking to take me on a date?

"If that's how you understand it"...he shrugged.

And if I say No, I asked jokingly.

"Then I will go hungry and I know you won't want that....he grinned.

Not more than two hours, I said with seriousness as I walked out of the door.

So we went for dinner and I wasn't surprised at Mark's choice of a restaurant. Seeing the prices on the menu, I had completely lost my appetite. Everything here is just so overpriced. It's not as if I can't afford it but being the good cook I am, I don't like to waste money on things I can do so well.

I finally surrendered for Mark to place the order for me. He sure had a good taste. We ate in silence. I guess we were very hungry.

"So, How was your first day, "Mark asked when we started with dessert.

I can't complain. I think today is good.

"I like your work. I am not saying it because you are my fiancée", but as your boss." He said.

No, I am not your fiancé. We just started dating and it's not even official.

"Well, it's going to be by tomorrow." He gave a mysterious smile.

What do you mean by tomorrow? Tilda is gone for two months.

"Wrong. She booked a flight and is returning tonight. I even have to pick her from the Airport after dropping you home. But I will tell her everything tomorrow." He ended.

Why is she returning so early? I asked with concern.

"She said there was something very important she wants to tell me." He said.

Might be very important if she has to cancel her trip. But you are not going to lose a lot if break up with her?...I asked with genuine concern.

It's for the best Maya. What good is it if I have all these and don't even have the joy to enjoy them. I always thought my life was perfect. But you have shown me what life really means and that's why I am not going to get engaged to you. I am going to marry you straight away. We will start planning our wedding tomorrow....he said making me speechless.

Chapter NINETEEN – I WILL KEEP MY LOVE

During the ride home, my mind was filled with so many thoughts. I can't believe everything is happening this fast. I never imagined getting married anytime soon. I know people date for years or months before the proposal and then engagement before wedding. But Mark is just something else. Who wants us to start planning our wedding tomorrow.

Sure I am excited. I want everything to be perfect. I will be all his, in spirit, soul and body. What a lucky girl I am. I felt like Cinderella going to the ball after meeting her fairy god mother. This seems to be a dream.

But I could not seem to take my mind off Tilda. How will she take this news? I know they don't love each other but since both of them agreed with both families support, it will be terrible to call off the engagement. This is such an uncomfortable situation and I felt sad thinking about it.

Mark's POV

Seeing Maya drives me crazy. It makes my blood boil like a volcano. It's always very hard to resist her when I am with her. But since our little encounter at the balcony and how embarrassed I made her feel, I decided not to put her in that situation anymore. At the office today, she looked stunning. I mean, she always had this angelic look but there was some kind of innocence with sexiness I have never seen in her. Her new style of dressing was perfect. I know that we will face a lot of challenges after I break up with Tilda but with every challenge, I am ready to go through with her by my side.

I won't let her go no matter what. I will fight for her with my life. These were the thoughts going through my mind as I drove to the airport to pick up Tilda. I know she will be sad about this decision but I can't go on like this. I will not sacrifice the love of my life for wealth and power.

When I got there, Tilda was already waiting for me. I think I was late because I should have been here before her flight landed. I noticed a very sad expression on her face. I could not tell what it was. Maybe she is just tired.

She gave me a quick hug when I got out of the car but she didn't make any eye contact. That's very unusual of her. Since we decided to get married, we both tried everytime to act as the perfect couple whether or not we were surrounded by people. But for her cancelling the trip and how she looks, I felt really sorry for her.

Are you okay, I asked her as I closed the door of the passenger seat where she just sat.

"I am fine", She replied weakly and just like that, she closed her eyes and slept.

I decided not to disturb her because of the news I was going to break to her tomorrow. I hope she will understand.

"Tilda", I whispered when we got to her house but she was still sleeping. She could barely open her eyes. I carried her to her bedroom and left her a note that I will see her tomorrow. This is the first time she slept during a car ride. Something doesn't seem right but I just can't get my head on it. Maybe she is just tired. I should stop worrying unnecessary.

I Could still see Maya with her angelic smile. She captured my mind from the very first day I met her. Maybe we should have the wedding by next week, I thought. I want to make her mine immediately.

The next day, I went to see Tilda. She looked refreshed. I think she was just stressed out yesterday.

You look good today Tilda

"Thank you, " she said giving me a warm hug.

How was your trip? I asked

"Good, but something came up so I had to return."

What came up? I asked curiously.

"Nevermind, I will tell you at the right time. So what did you want to tell me? You sounded urgent."

Hmmm...I cleared my throat as I started. Tilda, I don't know how you will take this but I want you to know that I am really sorry and if there was any otherway, I would have opted for it. I paused.

I cannot marry you Tilda...I said looking straight at her. I was expecting her to be angry or anything but she rather had a relief look on her face.

"Is it because of her?" She finally asked after a moment of awkward silence.

Who?

"The new girl who works in your company. The same girl you told Tom to stay away from."

How did you know? I asked with surprise

Come on, Mark, walls have ears.

"It's fine with me but you just have to find a way of breaking the news to both our families. I will support you in my own way but don't count on it. You are the one to face the consequences coming with it," she ended as she stood up to leave but rather fell right into my arms.

Tilda, I shouted panicked, attracting her parents' attention. She has passed out, call an ambulance I yelled at her mom as I began checking her pulse. I couldn't understand the calmness on her mom's face. No parent will react so calmly to something like this, especially with an only child. Could they be hiding something?

Reaching the hospital, she was sent to a VIP room instead of the Emergency Room but the Doctor ordered us to wait at the visitors lounge. As I kept waiting, her mother spoke all of a sudden.

"What did you tell her?" She asked

I just told her that we couldn't proceed with the engagement... I told her truthfully.

Ohhhhhh was all she said.

God, somebody bring it out. This people are hiding something. We weren't just getting married. It was going to be a very big time event. We were supposed to merge both of our companies. It's something both families wanted. Just then, my phone rang. It's my dad.

Hello, I whispered.

"Son, I want to see you and that girl in the next two hours. "

Dad, that's not possible. Tilda is in the hospital and I can't leave her.

"It's okay Mark, You can leave, we will take care of her." her mother said indifferently.

No, I am not leaving. Yes, I broke up with her but I am not a monster. Her welfare is still my concern.

"Trust me, it's for the best" was his father's voice behind me as he tapped me on the shoulder. This is the first time he has spoken to me today but I felt that they were really hiding something.

Okay, let it out, I yelled. What's going on here?

"You will know, but not from us. She will have to tell you herself. That's if she wants to." Her mom said.

Fine, I said defeatedly as I drove to the office, walking straight to Maya's office without even knocking. She was startled but relaxed when she saw me.

"What happened to you, you look terrible she asked with care. "

I am fine, Maya, Tilda is in the hospital

"What? What happened?" She asked with a lot of concern even more than Tilda's own parents.

Nobody will tell me and the next thing is, my family wants to meet you. She stood there, frozen to the spot without uttering another word.

Whats wrong? You don't want to meet them? I asked with confusion.

Ofcourse I want to but I have this strange feeling I've never had before. I think something bad is about to happen...she said with fear in her eyes.

I walked to her as I cupped her face in my hands. Nothing bad will happen. Don't worry about a thing. I am here with you. You just have to promise me, that you will not give up on us. It's two of us against the world, I said as I hugged her tightly.

I promise, I will not give up, she said burrying her face in my shoulder.

Reaching the house, Maya was holding my hands so tight as if she will fall if she lets go. I understood her perfectly. She lost her parents as a child and now she has to meet my parents who she knows will not like her because of her background. But I am ready to leave everything for her. I am ready to walk away and start my life afresh with her.

My Dad was already in the living room pacing here and there as if he was in a deep thought. Mom was trying to calm him but it seemed impossible for her. He walked to me immediately he saw me and slapped me on the face. I didn't feel the pain of his slap as much as the terror on Maya's face. She instantly turned pale as if she saw a ghost. She was completely terrified.

"How could you son, How could you do this to us?" He asked with rage.

I wonder when the information even reached him. I was supposed to tell him myself. I will find out who did this and what their reason is.

"If you call off this wedding, You cease to be a Snowman. I will take all your inheritance and give it to charity. He continued. Everything was going on well until she came around. He said looking at Maya. What do you even see in her? She is just a normal girl. Tilda is better than her in everyway, he kept on."

I could take it when he scold me but I couldn't take when he directed his anger at her. She is just innocent in all these.

Yes Dad, she is just a normal girl but she gave me what money could not buy Dad, She gave me a heart. She thought me how to be human. All my life, you thought me that wealth and power is everything but you are wrong. You are wrong. So take your inheritance and give to charity. I will keep my love...I yelled at him. It was the first time I ever yelled at him.

Mom kept trying to calm both of us but it didn't work. Maya was completely broken. she was crying like a baby. I pulled her closer to me as I hugged her tight ignoring my Dad's cold stares. You belong to me Maya, you are all I have I yelled as I kissed her tears, walking her out of our mansion.

Son, Come back, I heard my Mom calling but for the first time, I didn't respond to her calls. We sat in the car and I held her to my chest as I whispered.

"Everything will be fine".

Chapter TWENTY – STAY AWAY

Maya's POV

I knew that this was going to happen, but I was still hurt. Mark's father conducted my interview and even though he seemed naughty in the beginning, he turned nice when he admitted what he was asking me to do was a test. He seemed so different when we reached his mansion. He turned into a complete beast. I couldn't believe he slapped Mark in front of me. My poor heart ached for him so much. He was going through all this because of me and I felt so sad.

He didn't seem like the kind of person who will talk back to his Dad but he did that because of me. I felt like a bad influence on him all of a sudden. I wanted to tell him to go back to Tilda but my poor heart could not let him go. I can't stand losing him. It's as if he is carrying my heart with him. I let out all my tears as I buried my head in his chest. Why does life have to be so cruel. Mark has fought so much for me. In the beginning, he despised me just to hide what he feels. He tried his best to get over his feelings for me but he couldn't.

Now that he finally admits it and wants us to move on, life is staring at us with a million daggers. There seems to be no way out of this. I don't want him to lose his family because of me or for any reason. Family is a treasure. I know that because it hasn't been easy growing up without one. God, what should I do? Mark was quiet and allowed me to cry my heart out as he stroked my hair from time to time then he gently pulled away but kept looking straight into my eyes.

"Maya, I will never give up on us. I need you to be strong. Please don't cry. I will make you happy, I promise", he said truthfully.

I know. But what do we do now? I asked, trying to control my tears seeing how it broke his heart."

"We are supposed to have a party tomorrow and there, our break up will be officially announced. I want you to be there and also look your best because I am going to announce to the world about us"...he said with a twinkle in his eyes.

Is it a family party...I asked like a scared little cat.

Yes and that's why I want you to come. Just get ready. I will pick you up." He said thoughtfully.

But, I thought your father...

"Shhhhhh...he whispered putting his forefinger on my lips. Don't worry about anything. Just trust me. You can let Tracy come with you. I will pick you both." He said comforting me.

When we got back to the office, I couldn't concentrate on work anymore. I kept thinking about how I was going to get married to a man whose parents hate me. I felt warm tears run down my cheeks at the thought. I called Tracy and told her about the party but Tom had already told her so she was already planning to attend. Those two are becoming pretty close ha. But this wasn't the time to intrude and ask them to define their friendship. There is just too much going on at the moment.

Mark had to leave the office a few minutes after dropping me because he received a call from Tilda when she finally regained consciousness. I just felt in my spirit again that something bad was about to happen. Why would she call to speak with him after they have broken up? The thought of it gave me headaches but more of jealousy. I have to stay positive, I whispered to myself as I called Jason my driver to take me home.

"Mr. Snowman has told me not to drop you today. He said he was going to do that himself was his reply"

I know, but there is a change in plans I said, trying to be more convincing. I know Mark has a lot to take care of and might not be able to come back and he might also not remember to call and change the arrangement of dropping me home by himself.

"Okay", he said hesitantly. "I am ready when you are" he added in a respective tone.

When I got home, there was a parcel waiting for me. I didn't have to open it to know it's from Mark and I was right. In there was a very beautiful purple dress with a note. "Please wear this tomorrow". Love, Mark. He must be in the same habit with Tom. They really know how to shop for a girl.

"Another parcel for you girl" was Tracy's voice from the door

Parcel? I asked astonished.

"Yes" She replied giggling like an idiot.

"The delivery boy was about to knock when I got there so I took it for you," she said handing me the parcel.

Who gave this to you, I shouted with fear after opening the box.

"A delivery guy. I thought I told you," She said with a tease.

"stop him", I shouted.

He already left Maya...what's the problem she said looking me, and then at parcel.

You look pa....Oh My God, this isn't good.

In the box was a black ugly dress with a note. "stay away from Mark or your friend will wear this dress to your funeral".

"Who sent that"? she asked amidst fear and concern.

My suspicion only landed on one person. But I had to be sure as I did not want to be arrested for character defamation. Tracy called Tom who got here in less than twenty minutes.

Maya, don't worry I will take care of this, he said immediately he saw me as he hugged me to his chest.

"I think I know who it is but I have to speak to Mark first. Until then, I will get you girls two bodyguards each. Please do not go anywhere without them"..he warned. The body guards arrived earlier than expected. Tom gave them instructions before he left.

I realized Mark hadn't called me since he left and it was very unlikely of him. So I decided to call him to thank him for the dress. After calling him the sixth time without him answering, I sent him a message thanking him before being drowned in sleep.

Tracy was already up preparing breakfast before my alarm started beeping. I checked my phone and still no call from Mark. There was a missed call from Tom so I called him right away.

"Maya, I haven't been able to speak to Mark yet. I wasn't able to see him."

I called too but he didn't answer his phone.

"Why is he avoiding your calls?"...he asked worriedly.

I have no idea, I replied sadly. Are you sure he is okay? I asked him.

"Yes he is okay. I spoke to him on the phone and told him I wanted to meet him but he said he was busy and can't speak with me at the moment."

Can you take me to his house please? I asked hopefully.

"I can but aren't not supposed to be at work?"

I almost forgot when he asked that but how can I concentrate on work when Mark is avoiding me like this?

"Just go to work and we will surely see him at the party. He better have a good explanation for all these"..Mark ended annoyingly.

I was so eager to see Mark when I got to the office. I went straight to his office but it was locked.

He isn't at work Maya. He called to inform me that he will not make it today.

I could not hide my disappointment at her words. Mark called her but didn't bother to return any of my calls since yesterday. I walked slowly to my office when my phone rang. I answered it without checking the caller ID, thinking it was Mark.

"Don't you think it's rude to ignore your calls and not return them?" that was Jude's angry voice. My life has been a full load these few weeks. I saw several of his calls and completely forgot to return them. He has every reason to be angry.

Jude, I am so sorry.

"You should be." Are you alright? He asked with concern. No matter how angry he is, he still cared for me a lot.

I don't know...

"What's going on Maya?"

It's a long story Jude.

Okay, I will meet up with you tonight.

Not tonight. Maybe tomorrow.

"Why"? He asked confused.

I have a party to attend tonight

"That doesn't sound like someone who has a problem but whose party is it if I may ask?"

It's hosted by the Snowmans and since I work with them, Mark invited me...I said thoughtfully. I didn't want to spill out everything on the phone.

"Great. I will be there too so we can talk before the party begins if we arrive early."

That reminds me Jude, remember you told me the CEO was your friend. Is it Mark or his Dad?

"Mark but why do you ask?"

So you knew him all this while? I asked realizing how foolish I have been. I could have got more information from him concerning Mark.

"Ofcourse but why all these questions?"

Never mind. We'll talk tonight.

"sure"...He hang up.

After Jude hang up, I thought about how I was going to explain everything to him and I didn't know how he will take it. His little girl falling in love and being rejected by her secret boyfriend's family. I knew I will have to tell Sir Max as well. But if Jude is happy for me, I know Sir Max will be happy too. I was more and more scared as time went by. Then one of the bodyguards Tom hired brought me a white envelope.

"Ma'am, you have a letter". He said with a deep voice.

From who? I asked with fear. I don't remember the last time I ever received a letter. Parcels, Yes. But a typical letter? No way.

"A lady in a black dress said I should give this to you and drove of".

Can you describe her? I asked, hoping to catch a clue.

"She was sitting so I couldn't see her height but she had a jet black curly hair and had pieced her nose."

The description doesn't fit anyone I know so I just dismissed him as I sank into my chair opening the letter. It was the same handwriting from the first one but I was suprised by what it said.

Missed me you scared little kiddie cat? I see your hired bodyguards but no needfor that now. Mark has already taken the decision for you. You don't need to be scared anymore. XOXO.

I called Tom immediately and told him everything. He was just as confused as I was. But my suspicion was growing stronger and stronger.

"I suspect Tilda", he said, confirming my thoughts.

Do you think she can do something like this?

"Well, you never know a woman until she is heartbroken. Losing someone can cause a person to do a whole lot but I will talk to her, he said in a hurry. I will call you back." He hang up.

When he called back, he sounded defeated.

"It's not her Maya". He said helplessly.

So who is it?

"I don't know, I feel helpless but I will not stop". He said confidently

But wait, how did you know it's not her.

"I spoke to her and she denied it but I knew she was telling the truth".

I will call Mark again. If he doesn't pick up, I am not going to the party, I said annoyingly.

"You have to. It's the only place you can meet him and talk to him." He sounded like he was hiding something.

Have you spoken to him today?

"Yes" he replied sharply.

So he is fine and has deliberately refused to pick my calls?

"Am afraid you will have to find that out yourself. I will pick you ladies at 8". He ended the call.

After hanging up the phone, I realized something wasn't right. Tom knew something but he didn't want to tell me. I should find out myself? I will. I am coming for you Mark, you better be ready.

Chapter 21 – WHERE IS MAYA

Even though Tom said he was going to pick us, I was secretly hoping Mark will come as he had promised. I longed for his calls, and kept checking my phone literally every minute for even a text message but to no avail. I thought to myself what I did to deserve this treatment from him. Didn't he promise to come take me to the party? My mind was filled with all the negatives but I still tried to stay calm.

"You look stunning Maya, all eyes are going to be on you again, Tracy teased, pulling me from my thoughts. But you look sad, she continued. Hey, we are going for a party and not a funeral remember? What's with this sad face?" You know what, I know that Mark will come over. I think he is planning a surprise for you. She said pouting, when she noticed I wasn't talking.

I hope so, Tracy. I really do. I just have. I paused when she run off instantly.

"I will get it". Tracy yelled as she headed for the door.

I didn't even hear the knock. God, I think I have been in such a deep thought.

"Tom, You look great", I heard Tracy's compliment.

"And so do you, Tracy" I heard Tom respond.

"Just wait till you see Maya. She looks stunning she said walking towards me. Tom stared at me with both admiration and sadness in his eyes.

"Tracy is right. You look stunning but you are so sad" he said worriedly. I hope we will have an end to this whole drama tonight." He said looking away. I felt he was hiding something so I decided to find out.

What did he tell you? Don't lie to me Tom, I asked with expectation.

"We should get going or we shall be late." He said ignoring my question and I couldn't miss the guilty look on his face.

He is definitely hiding something I thought to myself but it doesn't seem like he wants to talk about it and I was bound to make him do so.

Third Person's POV

Maya determined to get the words out of Tom but he was a hard nut to crack. He wasn't giving in to any of her pressure. It was not easy ignoring her but he had to. Mark had warned him to stay away from their problems. He couldn't tell her that. He had to wait for whatever surprise Mark

had. Maya didn't stop showing her sadness and anger. She even rejected Tom's gesture of holding the door for her to sit in the car and ignored him through out the journey.

The drive to Mark's father's mansion was awkwardly silent. Even when they arrived, Maya refused to allow Tom to be by her side. She only allowed Tracy to be with her, making Tom even more sad. He hated to see her in this condition but he also couldn't do anything about it.

She was too sad and angry to even notice all the glamour surrounding her and even the people around. She will only respond when she is called and only wave when she is waved at. Her behavior made Tracy embarrassed but she didn't complain. She was her best friend and she wanted her to be happy.

She did all she could to cheer up her best friend but but it all went unnoticed. Maya felt someone tap her on the shoulder and she turned abruptly hoping it was Mark but again, she was disappointed but only this time, it was also somebody she needed to talk to so she was glad.

"Jude" she said excitedly with genuine smile as she quickly hugged him ignoring the dagger stares from his wife. She knows she has never liked her so it was nothing new.

"I think we should talk," Jude whispered in her ear after she introduced Tracy.

"Honey, didn't you say you were going to introduce me to some of your business associates? I think now is a good time" she said pulling Jude away from Maya.

Yeah, you guessed right. It's his wife Sarah. Jude had no choice. He had to go with her. He walked away, signaling Maya that they were going to talk later.

Maya couldn't help but feel more disappointed and sad. Finally, it looked like Sarah, Jude's wife was engaged in conversation with a few friends she had just made. So Jude had a chance to speak with Maya.

Maya was was looking around eagerly as if looking for something and got startled when Jude called her.

"Are you all right? It's as if you were looking for someone" Jude remarked.

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, the MC interrupted. We all know the reason we are here. But just in case you don't, we are here to witness the engagement ceremony between our own Mark Snowman and Tilda Shaw." The speaker announced excitedly.

The hall filled with applause from everyone present. Well except Maya, Tom and Tracy. Even Jude was so excited and wouldn't stop clapping.

Maya instantly turned pale as the speaker continued. So I will like to invite the couples now. As the speaker kept talking, the sound of his voice seemed as if coming from far away in Maya's ears. Her

vision was becoming blur. But she was sure she saw clearly, Mark coming walking to the stage smiling wholeheartedly and holding Tilda's waist. They looked like a perfect couple. Nothing seemed to be a worry to them.

"Thank you all for coming, Mark spoke into the microphone. We are happy to have you all here tonight to witness our engagement. As you all know, we have been together for some time now and have decided to take our relationship to the next level".

There and then, he went down on one knee.

"Miss Tilda Shaw, will you marry me?" He said loving to Tilda who looked like a goddess. She looked perfect. Nothing showed she had even been to the hospital yesterday.

Without any hesitation, she accepted and Mark slipped the ring on her finger. Standing up, he gave her a quick kiss before his eyes met with Maya. He showed no remorse. He just continued talking as if it was the first time he had seen her.

Maya was devastated. Is this what he wanted her to see when he invited her? How cruel, she thought to herself. She thought she had seen a enough.

She tried to control her tears but it fell freely down her cheeks and she made no attempt to wipe them. Her knees began to shake as she shivered. Her heart was beating fast as if she was running a marathon. Nobody noticed what was going on with her. Jude had given his full attention to what was going on in front of him. Tracy and Tom who knew about their relationship stood frozen with choke.

No one noticed when Maya went out because she could not hold her tears. Her knees could not hold her any longer and she collapsed in the garden where she went to cry her heart out and get some fresh air. Everyone was in doors and no one noticed she was in the garden.

Tracy recovers from her choke and begins to look for Maya. Mark follows her recovering from his own bit of shock. Tracy finds Jude and taps on his shoulder to get his attention. Jude who was listening to the speech and hadn't notice Maya leaving his side until Tracy asked him.

"Excuse me, Jude. I'm looking for Maya have you seen her?...Tracy asked with both worry and panic.

"Yes she is h-. He paused pointing to where she stood before the speaker began. I mean, she was here. I don't know when she left and to where. She didn't tell me." He replied confused.

Okay. Thanks, I'll go look for her. Tracy said not hiding her worry. Tom follows her with an alarmed look which made Jude concerned.

"Wait is there something wrong? He asks with great concern".

"We don't know yet but let's find her ". Tom said as he hurries through the door.

Chapter TWENTY-TWO – SO I PRAYED

Tracy's POV

I could not understand what was going on. The thought of it made me angry. Maybe my ears went dumb all of a sudden. I can't believe that Mark actually did this to Tracy. What explanation can he give for this announcement, no wonder he kept avoiding all her calls and text messages. Or could he have given in to the threats? Even if someone was threatening them, the two of them should have come to a reasonable compromise. The more I thought of it, the more painful was the aches in my head.

Maya, I remembered as if I was woken from a nightmare. I left her with Jude but I don't think that even he could comfort her and just as I thought, he didn't even realize she had left his side. My instincts told me that she needed me. I was so puzzled at the thought of where she might be at the moment.

Tom had already called the police and a secret agency. I searched, the washrooms and balconies which are the places any woman will go to cry her heart out but there was no sign of her.

Tom suggested we search the garden. The breeze was freezing cold when we stepped out of the back door to the garden. Tom had to cover me with his blazer. But I couldn't help admiring the plants in the garden. The hedges were trimmed to perfection with blend of colors of white, yellow, red and purple roses.

The view of the garden was divine. I would have loved to spend a lot of time admiring the lilies, acacia and my favorite one (Orchid). The carpet grass and water fountain made it look like heaven. But this wasn't the time for admiring nature's beauty. My best friend is in danger and I had to find her, no matter what it takes.

Even though the garden lights were bright, they were masked by the trees and hedges. It was quite difficult seeing through those hedges. I searched around the trees, and Mark checked the hedges. The garden was very big. Almost five acres of land if not for the portion used for a swimming pool.

I took off my heels since my feet ached from all the walk. I was gradually beginning to lose hope when I got to the water fountain. My feet were also getting numb from the cold so I sat at the foot of the fountain and buried my head between my knees. I was sad and restless. I didn't know what else to do as tears began to well up in the corners of my eyes. I decided to pray for a miracle as my mother thought me.

I remembered when I had those heartbreaks, mum told me to pray for God to take the pains away. She told me that, God is always there for us but we usually don't make time for him and end up following other things. When I realized I didn't have the strength to move on, I did as my mum said and prayed. God didn't just take the pain away but also gave me the strength to put it behind me and move on. Only then was I able to fully recover.

So I prayed like I never had, not caring if anyone heard me or not.

"God please protect Maya. If she is here, help us to find her. Please heal her broken heart and restore strength to her. But above all, keep her... "

Just as I was about to say the word safe, I felt something cold around my legs. I was scared but slowly opened my eyes.

I couldn't believe it when I saw the lifeless body on the cold floor. Mark, I screamed highly beyond the length my voice will usually travel. I removed the blazer and covered her, trying to get her up from the ground. She was dead cold and stiff. It seemed she's been here for over an hour. Tom immediately called an ambulance when he run to us and scooped her in his arms, as if she was as light as a feather and headed to the entrance. The ambulance arrived in no time.

After handing her over safely to the paramedics, Tom called his driver to bring his car but before then, Jude was there asking as to get into his car.

We sat in Jude's car and followed the ambulance to the hospital.

"What is going on", Jude kept asking but none of us could tell him anything. We were lost in our own thoughts. I kept praying that nothing happens to Maya. We waited anxiously at the hospital when Maya was taken to the ER.

"Tell me Tracy, Maya wanted to tell me something tonight. I have a feeling that you know about what she wanted to tell me". Jude kept talking endlessly. He was beginning to annoy me. I am here thinking and praying for my best friend and he was just asking me stupid questions. I was angry at him but tried my best not to show it. He is like a father to her after all.

Jude, this isn't right time to talk about it. The only important thing is for Maya to get well, I said annoying but that didn't stop him from talking.

"Does she have any terminal illness?" He asked with concern but it made him look so stupid and it irritated me the more. Anyway, I can't judge him. He doesn't know anything going on at the moment. So he can make his own assumptions but I couldn't help it and yelled.

"No. For as long as I have known Maya, she doesn't have any terminal illness. She is just heartbroken."

Heartbroken? By who?...Jude kept asking. Oh my God, can't he shut up for a minute?

All this while, Tom has been quiet. I was wondering what was going on in his mind but from the look on his face, I know he could kill Mark right now if he gets a hold on him and I will help him bury every evidence. I hated the bugger so much for what he just did.

Talk of the devil. Mark appeared from nowhere with Tilda.

"So, you still have the guts to show your face here again, Mark?" Tom punched him on the face. His nose began to bleed instantly as he staggered and almost fell from the punch. I guess he was taken by surprise. He didn't know Tom will go to that extent. Maybe he forgot that Tom still loves Maya. Sometimes I feel sad for him. Maya doesn't love him like I do but he still can't get his mind off her. I know he doesn't love me the way I love him but such is life. People find love in the strangest places. Had Tilda not been by Mark's side, He would have fallen face down. Right now, with the bruise and blood coming from his nose, he looked like a clown. I hated him with every inch of my breath.

"Get out of here," Tom shouted angrily at him. Secretly, I wanted Tom to punch him again. At least, that will change his look from a clown to a zombie

"No, I have to see her". Mark yelled back without any attempt to fight Tom. The nerve.

"And I say you can't." Tom shouted again and was about to give him another punch as I wanted but was held back by Jude. I hated Jude for interfering. Mark deserved at least three punches but he only got one which made me sad.

"Enough" Jude yelled. Stop behaving like a bunch of hooligans. Jude shouted at them. This is a hospital and my foster daughter is there in ER fighting for her life and all you two can do is fight and make a scene?" He ended with a tearful voice. His last sentence really made me sad.

He had a point. We should have respect for Maya. But this fight isn't over, I thought to myself.

"She is in ER because of me" Mark said regretfully with Tilda looking away.

"Because of you? I don't understand. When my business was dying, you helped me pick it up and because of that, I have respected you and called you a friend. But when did you start a relationship with her?" He asked with both surprise and sadness.

"Just a few weeks". Mark answered but before he could say something, Jude interrupted.

"So, that's why she was asking me yesterday if I knew you. I wonder what she wanted to tell me". He said thoughtfully.

"He promised to marry her but suddenly started avoiding her, only for her to come here today, and hear this heartbreaking news of his marriage to Tilda." I said mockingly.

"So my little girl fell in love with my friend who is in love with someone else?" Jude asked with a sad face.

"You don't understand", Mark tried to say but was stopped by Tom.

"Just get out of here. You didn't even have the guts to tell her the truth and left her to find out on her own. How wicked can you be ha? you were the one who even invited her in the first place. Get out before I break you neck this time." Tom yelled as Tilda pulled Mark by the arm, heading to the exit.

Jude has been quiet since that abrupt discovery when his phone rang. He stood up and walked a few meters to answer the call. I heard him arguing with someone over the phone and with the look of it, it was his wife and I thought he will leave but he ended the call and sat back at the same place he sat earlier.

After hours of waiting, the doctor approached us with news about Maya.

"Family?" He asked looking at Tom, then to Jude and Me finally.

Yes, we are her family, I said looking at Tom and Jude.

"Great. She is out of danger now even though she hasn't regained full consciousness but her pulse and her heartbeat are stable"...He announced making us relieved. We will move her to the ward now.

"Take her to the VIP" Tom ordered.

Okay. We will do just that. The Doctor replied turning around to leave.

Can we see her? I asked before he took another step.

"Okay", he responded.

Chapter TWENTY THREE – IT'S THE LEAST I CAN DO

Maya was sleeping peacefully when we got to the VIP ward. She was no longer stiff or cold. Even in her sleep, she looked so beautiful, even though her skin was still pale. She had on an oxygen mask and the beeping sound from the monitor was encouraging. The nurse came to change her IV. The one they had on her was almost empty when we got here.

It's unfortunate I couldn't see her deep blue eyes which always made her look like an angel. But the doctor said she might wake up any moment from now so even though I wanted so much to change into something more comfortable, I decided to stay till she wakes up.

Even Jude and Tom were still here. None of us have eaten or drank anything since we got here. We were anxiously waiting for her to regain consciousness. The doctor finally told us to wait at the waiting area but when I turned around, I felt a movement on my hand. My heart was warmed to a weak smiling Maya. She couldn't keep her eyes steady but she wanted to tell me something.

Maya, I cried, which made Jude and Tom turned around almost at the same time at the sound of my voice.

"Where am I", she asked in a voice which was almost a whisper.

In the hospital. The doctor said you need to rest so we will come back later I said with joy. Glad to see her beautiful deep blue eyes though they looked tired.

"Please stay", she whispered.

I looked at the doctor pleadingly and he understood and nodded in approval.

"You can stay with her but the men can wait at the waiting area". The doctor said firmly.

Few minutes later. Maya fell into a deep sleep so I managed to sneak out. I told Tom to keep an eye on her whiles Jude drove me home. I quickly washed down and got into something comfortable. I packed a few clothes for her and myself. I know she usually likes long loose clothes when she's at home especially when the weather is cold.

I quickly made some oatmeal with toast for Maya, just the way she likes it. Then I prepared some noodles with eggs and salad for four. I always like to cook with a little extra just in case of an unexpected visitor or somebody wants extra and in this case, the extra might do someone some good since no one has eaten or drank anything. I wanted to make some coffee too but remembered the hospital has a coffee maker so I decided to leave that out.

I quickly packaged the food and headed out of the house. Jude was fast asleep on the steering wheel when I got to the car. He refused to wait inside when we got here because of his wife's insecurities. I understood quite well. He slept so soundly that I didn't want to wake him but I didn't have a choice either.

He opened his eyes and lifted his head from the steering wheel immediately I opened the door to the passenger seat.

Tired? I asked with a smile.

"Yes", he replied in a hoarse voice while starting the car. We had a little chat on the way which made me realize that Maya took her work ethics from Jude when she used to help in his office. But I was surprised his wife didn't like Maya. What the heck. Maya is like the sweetest thing I have ever seen. She wouldn't hurt a fly. Jude pulled over at the entrance of the hospital and I alighted from the car while he drove to the car park to park the car.

Jude's wife was sitting by Tom when I got there. Thank God I carried extra food, I exclaimed under my breath. I know no one heard me and yes I didn't want them to.

Good morning, I greeted her as I walked to Tom and asked. How is she?

"Still sleeping", he said in a tired voice.

Good. I made all of us breakfast so I will just get some coffee from the coffee maker.

"I'll get the coffee, he said heading to the coffee maker", just then, Jude entered the hospital with a surprised look when he saw his wife.

Jude's wife was surprisingly calm and did not behave as she did last night. She was being more mature and caring. I liked her so much for that. She quickly walked to Jude and wrapped him in a warm hug. It's wonderful to see that they have settled their differences.

I brought out breakfast and we all ate in silence.

"Thanks for the breakfast, Tracy," Sarah complimented when I started cleaning up.

It's a pleasure and am glad you enjoyed it. I replied happily. I always liked it when I got compliment for my cooking. I don't know why but it always makes me happy.

"Let me clean up. You go check on Maya". Tom said before I could finish cleaning.

I took her food and went to the VIP room. I was so happy Tom chose the VIP ward. There was a single sofa next to her bed and I sat there after setting her breakfast on the side table. She was still in deep sleep but the nurse came to check her pulse and blood pressure and nodded positively.

"Tracy", I heard Maya's call after the nurse left.

Yes Maya, I'm here

"Where were you, I woke up and no one was here".

Sorry Maya, I went home to get you some clothes and breakfast but Tom was in the waiting area when Jude drove me home.

"Thanks. Can I eat"? She asked with a clear voice.

I was surprised to hear that before I remembered she hadn't eaten throughout yesterday. She was busy trying to get in touch with Mark.

'Ofcourse, I responded', helping her to a sitting position.

She started eating her oatmeal with such speed I have never seen her eat. I know what this is. Impulse eating. She is eating out her depression and it doesn't look good. Half way through her meal, she drops a question which confirmed my suspicion.

"Tracy, can I ask you a question".

Sure, anything I responded nodding my head.

"How were you able to get through the times of heartbreak"? She asked innocently. My mind raced to my past breakups which almost made me cry but I wanted to stay strong for her.

It wasn't easy. But mum thought me to pray and it worked.

"You believe in Prayer"? she asked with narrowed eyebrow.

Well I never did until it worked for me on two occasions.

"Which are"? She asked expectantly.

Getting through my heartbreak and finding you. I replied hastily. Then I began to explain. We searched and searched but couldn't find you. I got a miracle when I prayed. I knew that you were nowhere near when I sat at the foot of that fountain so opening my eyes to see you there was purely a miracle.

"So can you teach me"? She asked like a little child begging her mother to read her a bedtime story.

"Sure". It's as easy as talking to me. You just have to convert all that you are feeling to God. Just speak to him like you speak to me. You don't have to pretend or anything.

"Just like that"? She asked with a confused look on her face.

Yes, what did you think prayer was? I asked trying to read her mind.

"Well, I thought you have to go down on your knees and follow a specific pattern". She said calmly.

Some people do that but since I don't go down on my knees when I am talking to my mom or dad, I usually don't do that but it all depends on how you see God. He can be a father to you or a God up in heaven where you want to show all reverence. But it all depends on you and how you see him at the time of prayer. I ended trying to make sense out of my answer.

"Thanks Tracy" She said hugging me. I was about to say something when Jude, Tom and Sarah walked in.

Not just me. I said looking at them. They all care so much about you Maya.

"I thought we heard voices", Tom said with a smile which masked the tiredness on his face. He was looking more handsome than ever. I can't believe his whole face could change with just a smile. I couldn't take my eyes off him even if the only woman his has eyes for is Maya.

"Yes you are right". I responded. Whiles Maya smiled. We were having a little girls talk.

"How are you"? He asked looking at Maya.

"I am fine, only sleepy" she said yawning.

"That should be as a result of the medications we gave you to help you relax." It will wear off by the time you wake up. Here, the doctor checked her eyes and then the pulse. Her IV was also almost empty so he signalled the nurse to take it off. You should be discharged tomorrow if your test results are good. He said smiling. It was the first time I saw him smile since we got here.

"Thank you Doctor. How do I get my bills". Maya said making me annoyed. How can she be thinking of paying her bills when she has all of us around. I know she is used to paying her own bills but during a time like this, who does that? I was about to respond when Tom spoke.

"Don't worry about the bills. It's taken care of." Tom sighed.

"You didn't have to Tom". Maya said.

"It's the least I could do". Tom said with those charming smiles again. God, does he know what it does to me when he smiles like that?

"I should have been by your side" he said regretfully.

"No. It wasn't your fault in anyway, even I wanted to be alone especially when you won't tell me what I wanted to hear." Maya said Pouting but thanks anyway, she said with a childish smile.

"Maya, I'm so sorry for pulling Jude away when you wanted to speak with him. Maybe he would have given you extra attention if he had known what happened and you wouldn't have been in this situation, Sarah said with genuine regret visible in her voice.

"It's alright Sarah, I understand you are only trying to protect your husband. Maybe I would have done worse if I were in your shoes. She said faking a frown. Her words made everyone laugh. Okay, Jude, Tom, you guys look terrible with all those circles underneath your eyes. You should go and get some sleep. Thank you all for being there for me". Maya said gratefully.

No, we'll stay Jude argued..

"Don't worry, Tracy will take care of me and trust me, I am fine". She said stressing on her last three words.

It's alright guys, I will update you if there are any changes, I added.

"Okay". Tom said reluctantly with another look at Maya before they left.

"I always thought your family were the ones who helped you overcome your breakups". Maya began talking immediately the door closed.

"Yes. I had the family support, care and all but trust me it doesn't take away the pain. Right now, is your pain less because I am here?" I asked.

"Not really". She said

That's exactly how it is. I replied.

"I don't know what I will do if I see Mark right now but the first thing I am going to do when I get out of here is send my resignation letter. I can't work in a company where he will be my boss". She said with a scoff.

Well, he came here yesterday and you should have seen how Tom redecorated his face with one heavy punch. I said jokingly.

Chapter TWENTY-FOUR – MY GREATEST FEAR

Maya's POV

I was trying to imagine how Tom dealt with Mark and I didn't know if I should be happy or sad. I didn't remember most of what happened last night when I woke up this morning.

I remembered the announcement and Mark proposing to Tilda. Heck. I went to the garden and then, I woke up in the hospital. It would have been better if he had killed me. The first man I ever loved was also the one to tear my heart in pieces.

The pain was just unbearable. Tracy told me to pray but I stopped believing in prayer because I felt my prayers were never answered. Anytime I prayed for something, I got the exact opposite. For instance the time that my mother was being driven to the hospital, I prayed that God will bring her back safe with my baby brother or sister but they never returned. Same as the time my dad died. So you see, it's just been like that. But since I didn't have any other option, I decided to give it another try. It will be better than nothing.

I can't get my head straight anytime I am alone and keep thinking of him. My mind wants revenge but my heart tells me to give him a chance to explain. But what if his explanation only makes things worse? The fears and insecurities kept creeping into my heart when all I wanted was to forget everything as if it was a bad dream.

I left the hospital with both Tracy and Tom. They tried everything to make me happy but all I could feel was intense pain and betrayal. They kept talking about random stuffs. Tracy even reminded me of her kid brother's birthday next week and asked about how we were going to surprise him. She knew that will make me happy and it did. It was the only chat I contributed to.

They took me to the park, the beach and even the open gardens. Just my favourite places but even those never made me happy. Jude came over a few times with Sarah. We talked about old times and all yet, it never took away the pain.

It's 2am already and I realized I have been up for two hours with so many thoughts in head. I got down from the bed and drank a glass of water. Tracy was fast asleep. She hasn't slept for a few days so I didn't want to disturb her.

I went to the living room and without turning on the light, I sat on the couch and then I cried out my heart in prayer just as Tracy said. It was as if the tears were washing away the pain and all the

anger. All the heaviness in my heart were replaced with a lightness I have never felt. I must have fallen asleep in the couch because I felt someone tap me.

Tracy, good morning, I said with genuine smile. I felt so happy and I didn't know why.

"It's afternoon, Maya. I didn't want to wake you but I thought you should eat something", Tracy said.

Wait, you mean I've slept for that long? I asked with total surprise. I felt like I was asleep for just thirty minutes. I never thought hours have passed.

"I don't think it's too long. I just think you weren't able to sleep last night so you were catching up." She smiled.

How do you know I couldn't sleep when we went to bed together.

"Seriously? Yes, we went to bed together whereas here you are in the couch. Isn't it obvious? He joked.

I smiled shyly.

"It's okay. Tom left an hour ago." She said.

You mean Tom was here? I asked trying to remember anything.

"Yes. He brought us some food but didn't stay long." She replied.

Hmmmm...interesting, I muttered

"So what's on your mind?" Tracy asked me.

Nothing, I said heading to the bathroom.

"Nothing?" Tracy said following me.

Yes. For the first time, I feel like a baby. I said smiling as I took out a tooth brush and tooth paste.

"Good for you. She said with raised brows and asked again. So what happened"?

"Hmmm somebody told me to pray remember? I think it was a great advise.

"You did not", she said

I did.

"How did it feel", she asked.

When I started, it felt awkward but gradually, it turned serious and since I let out my heart, I felt so much peace. It's like, I am not afraid anymore. I said and started brushing my teeth.

"Happy to see that smile return." Tracy said before turning around to leave the bathroom.

"Well it feels great and if you don't mind, I will eat and go back to sleep. I said after rinsing my mouth.

"No way we have to prepare for tomorrow", Tracy said defiantly and continued. The letter, remember?

Oh no. Where is my phone?

"It should be in your purse." She said, walking to the closet to pick my phone from the closet.

What? One hundred and fifty messages and one hundred and eighty one missed calls! I exclaimed after switching on the phone after I took it from Tracy and inserted the charger. Good thing it went off.

Most of the calls were from the office, then Sir Max, Jude, Tracy, Tom and even Mark. I cleared the whole call log. Then I checked the messages. Most of them were from Mark. I deleted all of them without even reading. I didn't want anything to change my happy mood.

From today, it will be a new me. I don't know if I will ever be able to love again but I will restructure my priorities.

First, I typed out my resignation. Well, Tracy technically did. I just edited. She made the content so strong but I just let her know it wasn't a big deal. She was surprised at my behavior. Well, its not as if I was completely over Mark but knowing that he belongs to someone else is more than enough reason to move on.

I won't fight a losing battle. He made his choice so I will also make mine. What am I even saying? What choice do have I made. I don't know. I think I am yet to.

I sent a soft copy of the letter through email and went to the HR to return the official phone and laptop. It was a resignation with immediate effect. The HR Manager asked of my reasons for resigning. Well how could I tell her? My reasons are not official so I had to lie. I just told her I was starting my own company.

Instantly, I thought of doing just that so I guess it wasn't a lie after all. It actually brought the idea. But now, I had to face my greatest fear and I didn't know if I was ready for this.

Before leaving the HR. She told me that as part of their procedures, I am supposed to have an exit interview with the CEO. Who does that? It must be one of Mark's plans but what if he wasn't even there? It could be his dad. Stop being paranoid Maya, my inner self yelled.

I walked briskly out of the HRs office through the main office to the reception and then the corridor to the CEO's office. I did well to look my best today. If I should be remembered, I should be remembered this way.

I was wearing a black suit with a white shirt and black knee length skirt. My black heels were four inches. My first time of wearing heels that long. My maximum used to be three. I had my hair in a pony tail but with a heavy make up. I didn't want to look miserable. I picked up a black gucci leather bag to accessorize. Well, I wasn't sad but I wasn't happy coming to this office so I chose black. It kind of gave me an authoritative and powerful look. I heard the gossips behind me even though I wish I didn't.

"So she's leaving, after getting the position we wanted. What an ingrate."

"She thinks she's better than us."

"She's so full of herself."

"Look at her all dressed to kill."

"HR didn't have to beg her to stay, we are better off without her."

Surprisingly, I wasn't hurt or anything. This heartbreak, is the worst thing that can happen to anyone and comments from under achievers was nothing to weigh me down.

Yes under achievers because no serious person will gossip about what they don't know and keep on insinuating stuffs like that.

I knocked on the CEO'S door hoping it's Mark's Dad. But did I really wish that? He was even worse than his son. Maybe not worse but what will you think if you were in my shoes?

Mark was sitting on the executive swivel chair with his back to the door. He was looking out of the window but quickly turned around when I opened the door.

His handsome face looked so pale. His eyes were red and sunken. I don't know why he decided not to sleep because that's what he looked like. Someone who hasn't slept for ages.

He forced and smile when he saw me which I quickly ignored. Thank God for the heavy make up because I knew it hid any sorrowful facial expression.

"Please have a seat Maya," he said, standing up to pull a chair for me. Where does he think we are anyway? A restaurant? I thanked him for his kind gesture and sat with an indifferent look.

To what do I owe this interview if I may ask? I said trying my best to be polite.

"Won't you even ask how I am doing? " He asked sadly.

I am sorry but that is no longer my business. Besides, this meeting is official and not personal. His face grew dark and I thought I saw tears in the corners of his eyes but who is he kidding?

Is he expecting me to sympathize with him after what he did? I am the victim here but he is turning it against me. I just ignored him.

He pulled out a decorative envelope from his drawer and handed it to me. I am not taking anything from you, I said sternly.

"Please take it before you hear it from anyone else", he said looking away. I don't like where this is going. I thought this was going to be an official meeting.

I took the envelope from his hand and I couldn't believe what I saw. It was like my heart stopped and I forgot to breath.

Chapter TWENTY-FIVE – HOW CAN YOU BE SO CRUEL

I felt my heart beat racing faster as I saw the names written in gold. It was as if a dagger had been pushed through my heart and the pain was just unbearable. Even more painful than the heart break.

How could you do this to me Mark? I sobbed. What did I ever do to you? I cried. The wound which I thought was beginning to heal in my heart was rather opening deeper at that instant. I took a second look at the words with my vision blurred with tears. Mark & Tilda's wedding ceremony. I didn't only feel a knife stabbing my heart but also hatred. Hatred for myself. For ever trusting him. I thought my heart was healed and I could take anything but this was different. It would have been easy if I had heard the news from elsewhere but not from him.

"I'm sorry Maya, I thought you saw my text messages. He said with regret. Did he take me for a kitten. I mean, he clearly proposed to a girl he claimed not to love right in front of me and now, he seems like an innocent soul but I won't allow my self to get fooled again. I yelled at him as I kept a firm hold on the collar of his shirt.

So you even have it in you to tell me through text that you were getting married to her?

"I was merely asking for your permission." He said in a tear filled voice.

Shut up Mark? What difference will it make? Did you tell me before proposing to her? That is what I am to you right? A joke. I was just a joke to you from the onset. I cried releasing his collar. I sat back in the chair covering my face with the palms of my hand

"No Maya, you got it all wrong. I didn't know how to...." He tried to continue as he got closer to me and held me in the shoulder but I shoved him away.

Enough Mark, you have done enough. Keep your explanations to yourself. I screamed heading to the door but he quickly blocked the door and locked it, keeping the key in his pocket.

"Maya, you have to hear my explanation before you get out of this office." He tried to talk again.

I said I don't want to hear it. Now open that door, this minute. I said with visible anger in my voice.

"Fine if you won't hear my explanation, then let me drop you home. I can't let you go like this please". He said with a miserable look on his face.

I would have appreciated it you just had the courage to break up properly with me. I would have felt respected enough. But what you did, was an insult to my personality. I said in a soft but serious tone and instantly took out my phone and sent a text message to Tom.

"Please pick me up. I'm locked up in Mark's office." I pressed the send button before he whisked the phone from my hand.

Did you message someone? He asked nervously like a scared cat. I wonder what he was hiding because the Mark I knew was never scared. I mean, he scared the hell out of people but I didn't care to know anything else.

None of your business, I said.

"You messaged Tom?" He said with a look of disappointment.

So? It that a problem for you? We have nothing to talk about. Just stay away from me. I said.

"Maya you must listen to me this minute. Before Tom's gets here." He pleaded

I loved you Mark, you told me to trust you and I did. How could you do this to me? Is it because I am an orphan and don't have the kind of wealth Tilda has? The last word kind of choked in my throat because I didn't know if I should blame Tilda. From the onset, they were going to get married eventhough they claimed not to love each other so if I have to blame someone, it has to be my stupid heart, for believing a fantasy.

"Maya, you don't understand. It's very hard for me to take this decision. God knows that all I ever want is you and what I did, I -."

Stop it, stop lying to me. I screamed before he had the change to complete his statement.

"Maya, are you okay", was Tom's voice behind the door.

Please get me out of here Tom, I pleaded.

"Open this door, you asshole." Tom yelled.

"Stay out of this Tom," Mark yelled back.

"Don't worry Maya, I'll break down the door." Tom said boldly and was interrupted by Mark.

"No need, You may go but just remember that you are mine." Mark said before opening the door.

You seriously have no shame, I said just as Tom walked in with anger and rage evident in his face and voice.

He looked at me and his eyes followed my gaze. The wedding invitation card was on the floor. Tom picked it up and looked at it. His expression was unreadable. He looked at Mark with disappointed look but his gaze softened immediately he looked at me again.

"It's okay Maya, I got you. He said.

"Tom," Mark wanted to speak but was stopped by Tom.

"Stay away from her Mark. You have hurt her enough. How can you be so cruel?" Tom said sadly.

"This is none of your business Tom, it's between Maya and I. She is mine. She will never love you." Mark responded with anger.

Tom ignored him and dragged me along. As we sat in his car, I burst into tears ones again. Knowing that it's really over between us and I will never see him again. Tom pulled me into a gentle but warm embrace. It felt comforting and was all I needed. I was very grateful to Tom. The drive home was smooth with so many thoughts in my head. I had to find ways to forget about Mark. I thought of relocating, then completing my EMBA and also starting my own company.

I wanted to fill my mind with things to take my mind off him. I will no longer be a cry baby. I will be strong. I needed that much for myself anyway.

Weeks passed and I continued in prayer and the peace returned as before. Tom and Tracy's friendship was priceless. They were always there for me. Jude will also call sometimes and I met with him once in a while. Sir Max also called but I didn't tell him anything about my short relationship and heartbreak.

Mark called like twenty minutes everyday and also sent text messages which I never read and never did I answer his calls.

Despite how much I wanted to avoid him, the date of his wedding was fast approaching. I was looking forward to it so much. I don't know whether deep down, I was hoping it doesn't come on or I really wanted it to.

After our surprised party for Tracy's kid brother, I decided to inform Tracy about my plans. I was going to graduate from my EMBA program in a week so I suggested we move into a condo I had eyes on for sometime now. It was insanely expensive but I didn't mind spending on anything the will help me forget about Mark.

Tracy was thrilled with the idea but then again started thinking of the cost. I told her it was nothing but she insisted on contributing forty percent so I accepted.

I also decided to start a consultancy firm which Tom was ready to invest in.

I started getting busy everyday with the hope of forgetting Mark but everytime I found myself alone, I ended up thinking about him.

Please don't blame my stupid heart but as the idiot I am in love matters, I couldn't stop my heart from doing what it wanted.

Finally, the day came for Mark's wedding and I decided to go. Tracy and Tom strongly advised against it but I didn't know why I always went where I knew I was going to get hurt.

I mean, if I have moved on, then it shouldn't bother me right? But it did. The mere thought of seeing him with somebody else was something I couldn't fathom.

You are stronger than this Maya, I kept encouraging myself when I got dressed for the big day.

Tracy helped me to curl my hair into small waves which made it look shorter and gorgeous. I decided to wear a floor length white dress which hugged my curves perfectly. I didn't have to put on a lot of make up. I looked stunning.

On arrival at the venue, I realized who ever planned this wedding must have planned lots of royal weddings. The trend of different specialties of flowers was endless with works from the world's best florists.

Soon, Mark was walking down the aisle. I sat five rows from the front seat, somewhere in the middle so our eyes don't meet. I don't know why I came here when I didn't want to see him. He looked handsome as always. He looked around nervously. His father seemed to be the happiest person at the wedding. After all, he got what he wanted right?

The next was Tilda in a pure white backless princess wedding gown. I must admit it was the most beautiful gown I have ever seen in my life. She looked like an angel descending from heaven. They really suit each other, I thought. I watched on as they exchanged vows, and rings and ofcourse the inevitable part, kissing the bride. Yes i felt that stink of jealousy but it no longer hurt as it did before. I don't know if it was because I already knew it was going to happen or if I was gradually beginning to get over Mark.

Finally, the bride and groom had to take their first dance and this is where my jealous heart couldn't continue to endure so I wandered off to find a place to drown my sorrow. Before then, I decided to go to the washroom first which I regretted. Before reaching to the washroom, I felt a hand cover my mouth as the other hand pulled me into a room. God, just kill me was my only prayer.

Chapter TWENTY-SIX – STUPID MAYA

Maya, please don't scream, was the sound of Marks's voice in my ears. I quickly wiggled myself out of his arms and slapped him hard on the face.

Don't ever touch me again. I warned him sternly.

"Please you have to hear me out. I know you are hurting but I am hurt ing, even more, Maya, you have to believe me." He said regretfully.

Well, it doesn't look so to me. You seem to be enjoying every bit of it. I turned to leave but he quickly grabbed my hand and pinned me to the wall. I could feel his breathing so close. I started to have those flutters in my stomach again.

No way. I can't be his side chick. Leave me alone Mark. You made your decision to stay away, I yelled, trying to get out of his grip.

Okay. Just listen to what I have to say. Whatever you decide to do afterward, I will respect it. What could he want to tell me? I am trying my best to move on and I just have a feeling he might say something to get me all confused again, and then raise my hopes before finally crushing them. I won't let that happen.

I am sorry. Whatever you wanted to tell me, you should have said it before the engagement but for now. I don't want to hear another word. Go and take care of your bride. She should be noticing your absence now.

"Maya", He wanted to say something but the door burst open and Tom stood there staring at Mark with an angry look but Mark continued to speak when I made my way to Tom.

Maya, just to let you know, I don't love Tilda. You are the only woman I have ever loved.

"Good one Mark, tell that to the dogs," Tom said sarcastically. Instantly, I evil plan came into my head and I wanted to exert revenge. So I turned around and looked at him.

One more thing Mark, Tom, and I are getting engaged, I winked before holding Tom's hand. The look on Mark's face when I said that was priceless. I know that I succeeded with my plan. I was happy beyond measure.

But the confused look on Tom's face as we went to look for Tracy brought me back to the reality of what I have done. How could I do this to him? I was playing with his emotions because deep down, he truly loves me.

Stupid Maya. I have to make this right.

Tom, I began

"Don't worry Maya, I know you just want to make him jealous but I was just confused because I didn't know you had it in you." He smirked.

I was so relieved by his words. Thank you so much, Tom, I said pulling him into a tight hug.

"But you don't have to worry about me falling head over heels in love again because I kind of moved on but I will need your help." He said with a mischievous smile.

I couldn't help but feel happy Tom wouldn't take my stupidity seriously but when he said he needed my help, I didn't know what it could be.

"Shoot". I said, eager to hear his proposition.

I'm in love with Tracy but I haven't told her yet so I was wondering that, after I help you execute your jealousy plan, you also help me with making Tracy mine and you also have to keep men away from her in the process so she doesn't end up falling in love with someone else, he said.

"Consider it done," I said emphatically because I knew that wasn't a problem at all. I know Tracy loves him so dearly so it won't be a big deal. Now I had to find a way of keeping away from Mark.

So we found Tracy and I wanted to find out if she still had any love for Tom so I told her Tom and I was getting married. The look on her face told it all. Her face practically turned beet red with jealousy. I knew I wouldn't have a hard time doing what I had promised Tom. I proceeded to tell her about the plan to make Mark jealous and to also make him stay away from me. She was instantly relieved by my final confession.

So weeks passed after Tom's wedding and I had my graduation too but things were not going as planned since Mark kept harassing me every chance he gets. He even made it to my graduation without invitation. He also came to my house a couple of times so Tracy agreed we move out faster than we had planned.

We moved into my dream condo and I started my consultancy firm as well. I got a lot busy with the registration and all and I didn't know starting a company was this difficult. But I couldn't give up. This was my future. Tom invested and also agreed to be a partner. I wanted to get a few staff on board after the registration process was completed. Aside from that, I had to work on the clientele as well.

Since we told Mark about our engagement, it's been almost three months and we hadn't made any progress so he started suspecting it was a prank and kept finding ways to talk to me. We decided to have a formal engagement to keep Mark off my back and set the date to two weeks but that could not be possible because something happened.

Mark had kept track of my movements unknown to me so it wasn't difficult for him to locate our new home. He got there and saw Tracy and Mark in a passionate kiss. So I have to pretend to be offended and postpone events a bit. It gave him the upper hand to keep trying for us to get back together but what future is there for us? One day, I decided to hear him out once and for all so we decided to meet at the garden where he proposed to me and talk once and for all.

He requested to pick me up but I refused because I didn't want anyone to see me hanging out with a married man. Thankfully, I also took Tom's advice and got myself a car. I didn't want to keep being at anyone's mercy when it comes to transportation.

Though Tom wanted to come with me, I strongly advised against it and decided to end things with Mark once and for all. I have never given him the chance to explain himself but I think this was the right time. We needed to have this last talk like two civilized people.

I got to the venue at 7 pm just as we agreed but seeing What was waiting for me, I immediately decided to change my decision. I hope this isn't too late.

Chapter TWENTY-SEVEN – NOTHING

Mark had set up the same way he did when he proposed to me the first time but more. The floor was grassed with the words, 'Please forgive me'. I also noticed instrumentalists waiting a few meters away. There were garden lights heart-shaped lights in the trees. They looked like enchanted fruits. I always heard that the most beautiful place was heaven. If that's true, then this place showed heaven on earth.

What the heck! This isn't a romantic dinner. What is he planning to do? I thought. This isn't what I perceived and I suddenly felt uncomfortable so I decided to leave instantly. I turned around but a strong hand pulled me back making my head bump into a hard chest of other than Mr. Mark Snowman. He was dressed formally in a tuxedo with a red bow tie. I must admit he looked too handsome. I could look at him the whole day.

I stared into his crystal blue eyes for a long time. I think time must have paused because I didn't keep track of the amount of time I spent just staring at him. The instrumentalists played a soft tune and I was completely lost in the moment. I suddenly forgot all the pain I once felt towards him. Everything was just perfect. Wait. Did I die and go to heaven? Because in the real world, there was too much at stake.

"Please let me explain", he said looking deeply into my eyes. It was as if a magnet was pulling us together. Our lips almost touched which brought me back to my senses.

Snap out of it, Maya, he is a married man, I thought.

Okay, I will hear you out. But don't think it's going to change anything.

"Thank you because you hearing me out is more than enough for me". He said pulling a chair for me. He looked so perfect. I wish I could wake up and realize I had a bad dream in which he got married but it was real. My Prince charming got married to another. I kept having these hard thoughts when he poured me a glass of wine and poured some for himself. His way of doing everything was just making me fall more and more in love with him.

We were supposed to be together. It was meant to be us. What happened. I was ready to hear his explanation but it wasn't as if it was going to change anything. The guy is married and I will not be foolish to break another woman's home no matter the reason. Marriage to me is a divine bond. It goes beyond the physical.

"Maya, I never lied to you about my feelings. I did not get married to Tilda because I love her. It was merely a contract." He blurted out the words like it was nothing. How can marriage be just a contract? I am not thirteen anymore. I am twenty-three years for God's sake.

I continued listening to him in silence. I thought of letting him say everything he wants.

"I know you might think that I am crazy but trust me, I am not. This marriage is only a contract to fulfill our family's demands so it will be over in two years." He chuckled.

Okay. First I thought he was insane but now, he has lost it. I know stories about fake marriages in which the couples fall in love in the long run. Hello. Are they out of their mind? I am not playing this game but I will like to know more so I decided to play dumb and ask every question on my mind.

So what if Tilda doesn't give you the divorce after two years?

"She will, but she might not even have to." His face tightened to a frown when he said that. It was more of a saddened emotion and I couldn't understand why the question affected him this much.

His face became dark all of a sudden when he continued to speak.

"I am sorry Maya but I can't tell you more about Tilda". I was hurt by those words. After all the pain, I think I deserve a clear explanation right, but he was being evasive. I couldn't push him to talk about it further so I tried as much as possible to oust the thought out of my mind.

"So what do you want from me? I asked trying my best to hide my disappointment.

He cleared his throat before speaking.

"I want you to wait for me for two years. After two years, you are free to do whatever you want. I know that you loved me Maya, and I know you still do. Please give me two years to make things right for us." He said in a pleading tone.

Two years? I thought. I know I made my life plans around my career. I never planned for the time and age I want to get married but I just wasn't ready to go through the pain I felt before.

Can I ask you a question? He nodded in the affirmative.

Why didn't you tell me all this before getting married?

"I wanted to tell you but Tilda insisted it might make people know our real intentions because she knew once you knew, Tom and Tracy will also know, and three kinds of becomes a crowd so a secret is best kept between two people." He said.

Well, I would have appreciated it more if you had even broken up with me before you got married even if it meant holding back your reasons. But honestly Mark, I moved on. I am happy with Tom. I said after serious thought. I knew I lied about moving on but right now, I was ready to do anything to get him off my back.

"Do you still love me?" He asked staring straight into my eyes. I can't lie when he is looking at me like that so I avoided the question.

That is not important. You are married to someone even though you don't love her. So why can't I do the same? Who knows, I might grow to love him more, I mocked. But there was so much pain visible on his face when I said that, which made me instantly regret uttering those words but I couldn't care less. He is the reason why we are in this situation in the first place.

"But I told you that my marriage is fake." He said with pain and uneasiness.

Fake in your heart but genuine on paper. There is a legal document showing you are married, Mark. I won't spend another day thinking that I have a chance with you when I know that you are legally bound to another.

"Okay. If it's hard for you, can we be friends? I promise I won't harass you or anything." He said with a smile. It was tempting to be friends but I knew it will only bring more hurt to me.

You know what Mark when you love someone, you can't be just friends with them. I said sadly.

"So what are we now?" He asked with a glint of hope.

Nothing. I replied with a straight face.

Mark's POV

I knew I hurt Maya so much. But I was hoping she will understand my explanation. Little did I know the depth of my decision. I couldn't stand to lose her but she won't barge too. I was so frustrated. Thinking deeply about it, she has every right to be angry with me but I know that very soon, she will understand that I never took her love for granted and that she is the only woman I love.

I couldn't also tell her about my reason for giving in to Tilda's plan. I wish she could trust me again. But how could she forgive Tom and Tracy and not forgive me? They betrayed her. But I thought of one thing. If she wasn't willingly going to wait for me, I will find a different way of making her wait.

I am Mark Snowman. I have never lost anything and I will not lose the love of my life. Right now, she tells me that we have nothing but I know it's not true. In her eyes, I see the pure unadulterated love but she won't give me a second chance.

"Nothing? I asked in shock. Tom and Tracy betrayed you. I caught them in a passionate kiss and when I told you about it, you were upset but you quickly got over it and moved on. You are still planning to get engaged to him and I am here begging to even be friends with you and you want nothing to do with me? I think I was yelling because she was taken aback.

"Look, Mark, don't turn this around. Yes. It's easy for me to forgive them because I have faced the worst form of betrayal. At least they didn't do it in front of me, which means they respect me. But you, what did you do? You won't even pick my calls or respond to my text messages. Then you send me an ugly black dress threatening my life and that of Tracy with a note. Then you couldn't even keep your promise of taking me to the party and when I find my way there, I only realize that you are getting engaged to Tilda.

You should have killed me, Mark, you should have killed me that shattering my heart to pieces. I don't have any more love or regrets left. They died on that day. But I survived. I never thought I will make it but I survived. And assuming I wasn't able to come out alive, you would have had your happily ever after with Tilda right? After all, you had no objection to marrying her. I was the only obstacle. But now, you are free so just leave me to my misery." She yelled but broke into tears.

Chapter TWENTY-EIGHT – THEN WATCH ME

I wanted to hold her and kiss those tears away and tell her everything but the moment I tried to touch her hand, she quickly pulled it away.

This isn't going the way I planned. I never thought she was this tough. Even though she still loves me, she will rather let go and bear the pain than to follow her heart and destroy another woman's home. I know that's how she feels. I thought we could start afresh and take things one at a time but it doesn't seem so. She is so tough and stands her ground, no matter the consequence. Don't get me wrong, I respect her for taking this stand and that's why I will not give up because she is worth fighting for. So I decided to explain everything to her, hoping it will make her forgive and maybe, also give me a chance.

'To be honest with you, my phone mysteriously disappeared after I dropped you off at work that day. I even planned to call to check whether you liked the dress I picked but I couldn't find my phone to my dismay. You may think I didn't try harder to reach you but there was just so much to do for my Dad.

After I left the house angry with you. Tilda called to speak with me. I wanted to call to let you meet me to explain my plans but Dad asked me to prepare some reports to send to our stakeholders which took more time than anticipated so I was working in his office at home. I even fell asleep in his office and the next day was the engagement day.

I surprisingly found my phone in my closet just when I was about to call you, I realized all my messages, call log and intimate chats with you had been deleted. Before I could investigate, they were introducing us, so I had to come to the party.

Honestly, I never sent you an ugly black dress. I only remember sending a beautiful purple dress which I picked up for you myself and I never sent any threat or warning note. I concluded, hoping I made sense with my explanation.

"If you didn't send it, then who did? Could it be Tilda?" She asked suspiciously, wiping her tears. I wish I could wipe those tears for her but I know she won't let me.

Trust me, Tilda will do no such thing. She doesn't even, I stopped immediately as I didn't want to reveal Tilda's secret. I coughed slightly, trying to buy time to find the words to replace what I almost spilled out.

I mean, she doesn't even know your house. I managed to cover up.

"If it's not her, then who is it?" She asked with confusion.

I don't know but I will find out, I promise.

"No need", She objected.

Why? I asked with confusion.

"Because it's no longer important. You are married so that settles it." She said calmly as she tried to stand up.

Maya, I placed my hand on hers which she quickly pulled away. I ignored and continued.

There is something you have to know about me. I knew I sounded scary but I had to let her know I wasn't giving up on her. After all who will give up on such a girl. She is beautiful, smart, and intelligent. Above all, she is bold, courageous, and confident. I will not lose her for anything in the world.

"And what is that?" She asked.

The thing about me is, I don't give up. It's my principle. Just know that since you don't want me as a friend, I will never stop fighting for that special place in your heart.

And one more thing. I will do anything and I mean, anything in my power to keep you away from Mark.

I knew I was being a jerk but I had to let her know my intentions before it happens. I know that she is beautiful and can easily attract men to herself but she doesn't go anywhere. Her life is centered around home and work. Every other outing is official and I am almost always there so my only threat is Tom.

"You wouldn't dare Mark, it's over between us." She said with tearful eyes. It made me want to give her what she wants but that will also mean losing her to that bastard. One day, I will make it up to her and correct all the wrongs but right now, I have to be a jerk to get what I want. So I replied with all seriousness and anger.

Then watch me. With the best serious and scary tone I could.

Maya's POV

I believed everything Mark said. I remember how tired he was when he dropped me in the office on that day but we don't have a future together. I wanted to be strong. I didn't want him to know how hurt I was but I ended up crying like a baby. I don't want to continue like this. I want to move on but Mark makes things difficult. He won't get off my tail. I wonder how Tilda will feel with all the time he spends harassing me. Well, she might not even know.

How did my life reach this point? My usual carefree and solitary life has just changed in a blink. Even when I have made it clear that I want nothing to do with him, he still threatens me.

But I am not afraid of his threats. There is nothing between Tom and me and I am happy he is getting along with Tracy so I don't even have to try to bring them together. It's already done.

I got home from that beautiful and horrible dinner more confused than I was before.

Few weeks with no unusual things unfolding. I was preoccupied with my company and barely had enough sleep. My company wasn't big to start with. We got our license to operate so I hired an office manager, two sales and marketing executives, and one Accountant. I got a lot of clients with Tom's help so everything was working well.

One day Mark barged into my office without permission. I was in a very important meeting with Tom when he came. He got instantly angry when he saw Tom. But I was even angry that Lucky, my office manager who doubles as the receptionist allowed him in without informing me.

His jaws clenched with anger and his hands were tucked into a fist. Tom was angry too but I ignored them and yelled.

Lucky! I yelled.

Yes Ma'am, she answered at the first call.

What happened? I asked in a serious tone when she reached the entrance, but the look on her face was innocent as if she didn't know what I was talking about.

"I don't understand Ma'am", she stammered.

I mean why did you allow him to barge into my office?

"Do you mean Mr. Snowman?"

Who else? I asked. I didn't mean to be rude but she was seriously getting on my nerves. We have protocols in this organization but she ignored everything.

"Ehhhh...he is the President of SnowShaw Incorporated so I..."

I didn't hear the rest of whatever she was saying as I began to feel the heat all over considering the name she just mentioned. SnowShaw. Of course, it means Mark Snowman and Tilda Shaw. They finally merged their companies and he was made president which means he runs an empire.

I dismissed her and sat back in my chair. I don't know why I still felt jealous even though I knew it was going to happen.

"Are you okay?" Tom asked with concern.

Yes, I am fine. What are you doing here? I asked looking at Mark.

Chapter TWENTY-NINE – THE LAW SUE

Yes, I am fine. What are you doing here? I asked looking at Mark.

"I should be asking what he is doing here". Mark remarked, looking at Tom

"Get out of here jerk, you are not welcome, Tom retorted.

"The only one who is not welcome is you Tom so get the fuck out of here. I want to speak with Maya alone." Mark barked at Tom. I didn't like this at all. They had both lost their dignity and kept shouting like teenagers. At this point, I am more concerned about the image of the company. I had to speak before they start throwing any punches.

"No way Mark, Tom is my fiance, I said showing him a fake engagement ring I picked up. And he is also my business partner so you should say everything in front of him. He has every right to know". I said calmly and firmly.

"Well, I came to invest", Mark said indifferently.

"No point. All investor openings are closed." Mark said disapprovingly.

"Why Tom? Can't you stand a little competition? You know she still love right?" He smirked.

"Mark, please leave." I pleaded. I didn't want Tom to get hurt with Mark's words because I chose Mark over him and he still stands for me. I respect him too much to see him get hurt again because of me. I had to make Mark leave at all cost.

"Then you should walk me to my car". Mark said, teasingly looking at Tom who was completely angry and remind quiet.

"No will do." I said firmly. "You walked in here by yourself and you are going out the same". I said in one breath.

"Then I will stay right here," Mark says pulling a chair and making himself comfortable. His behavior was so irritating. I thought he will leave me alone after that dinner.

"Why do I have to walk you to your car?" I asked him, hoping to get a reasonable explanation.

"Because you embarrassed me in front of your employee. You hurt my ego so you have to pay". He smiled.

"You idiot, what exactly do you want?" Tom asked with fury. I clearly understood how he felt. Mark was being a Jerk. He ignored Tom's question and pretended to be doing something important on his phone.

"I did not embarrass you. I only wanted to know why she made an exception to our procedures and let you in without informing me?" I said. Hoping it will make Mark leave.

"Did it maybe occur to you that I must have scared her a little", he smiled again. That smile. It makes me lose control but I have to be strong and get him out of my office.

"How on earth can you scare my staff? That is not possible." I said.

"I think you are the only person who forgets my position and power. I may not use it when I am with you but your workers are no exception. I can fire them you know?" He said that coolly as if it was no big deal.

"You have no right in my company." I said firmly.

"Maybe you should know that I can defame their character and publish it. You will have no choice than fire them." He remarked. I always knew he was arrogant and had a very big ego so it was no surprise to me hearing him say that.

I can't believe I ever loved you. You are such a Jerk. I yelled at him.

When such words come from you, I can never get offended. You know why? Because I love you so damn much....He smirked. I hated this side of Mark. To end a long story, I decided to walk him out no matter what it may seem for my staff. Tom wasn't pleased but I didn't have a choice. I will rather walk him out than have him stay and make more troubles for us.

Mark held my hand immediately we stepped out of my office as if we were lovers. My employees kept greeting and saluting him as if he owned my company. What is heavens name? I know that he is well known and all but should he be respected above me in my own company? They never gave me that level of honour before.

Let go. I said immediately we reached the parking lot.

"of What?" He said innocently.

My hand you jerk. I said, withdrawing my hand from his.

"Oh, I kind of go to used to it. Too bad you don't feel comfortable about it.' He teased. I decided to tell him my piece of mind to make his stop coming to my office.

Mark with all seriousness, I want you to stay away from me. I will never have a reputation of being your side chick because I am nothing of that sort to you. Please leave and never come back...I said with all firmness and seriousness. He face instantly changed into a frown or was it anger?

"Let's have it this way. You keep Tom away from you and promise to wait two years before having any relationship and I will never bother you but keep Tom in this company and you will see my

ugly side." He said coldly before he added "This time, I mean it with all seriousness. You have three days to decide. Only three days". He hammered and sat in his car, then drove away.

I stood at the entrance so speechless and confused. Why did my life have to be this way. Ever since I met Mark, he has brought me nothing but pain. Why doesn't the heart do what the mind tells it to do. I must confess that I still have not gotten over him and even though Tom is my good friend, I always want to have him around. He helped me build this company. Intellectually, Financially and even motivationally so how can I tell him to stay away from me? You must be out of your mind Mark.

A few days passed and nothing happened. Mark never showed up again and he never called. I was happy but deep down, I wish I could just see his face or bump into him again somehow. Tom continued being relentless. Even though he had other companies, he devoted his time as if this was his only company. I should have fallen for him instead because we made a perfect couple. He understood me and supported me every step of the way. Even when I took wrong decisions that came with a heavy price, he will support me and get everything back in order. We grew closer and we thought it was time to involve Tracy full time to handle the Sales and Marketing Department. She was excited but had to wait for a month to help her handover properly at her current place of work.

One day, I got to the office to see a letter on my desk. That's strange. No one knew where the letter came from and the security cameras didn't capture whoever brought it. Looks creepy right? That's what I thought. I opened it and it was a law sue. So funny. I was being sued for Trespassing on S&S incorporated. How funny. But the details of the letter was convincing. It said I had attempted to claim the company by registering his company name in mine. Wait a minute. How did my signature get on all these documents.

Jesus, if this goes any further, I can end up with a jail term or lose my company all together. This is worse than I thought. My first question was how my signatures got on those documents. S&S incorporated is the largest business venture in the country and I don't stand a chance against them. Tom came as usual and I showed everything to him.

"Why did you sign this Maya?" Was his first reaction. This is the first time I ever saw him this angry at me. I hope I didn't disappoint me. I really need him to trust me, I thought to myself.

Trust me Tom, I never did. I mean, I don't remember appending my signature on anything like this and you know I will never do that.

Tom's POV

I know that Maya is so smart and she will never do a thing like this. But this is a very serious case. If we are not able to find out how her signatures got onto those documents, no lawyer will be able

to defend us. The court works with proof and that is what we need but looking at the name of the company, I have only one suspect in mind.

Chapter THIRTY – BUT WHY

I decided to go and speak to Mark. We should stop this cat and mouse game and behave like the adults we are.

"Maya, there's somewhere I need to be. I promise I will be back before you know it." Without waiting for an answer. I dashed out of Maya's office and went straight to Mark's office. As expected, he will not give me an audience.

I have shares in this company so I couldn't be denied access into the facility but Mark will not allow me into his office. I didn't know things could ever be this way between us. We used to be very close and after everything, I never wanted to be his enemy. I only wanted to protect Maya. She has been hurt enough and I could not see her continuously suffering like that. So everything I did, I did for her but I guess Mark takes everything personal. I can't even understand him trying to get back with Maya.

The bastard got married and broke her fragile heart. He has become so different from what he used to be. I never thought Mark will become a monster. Before I left, he sent his Executive Assistant to inform me that he knows why I am here and that it's too late. You will pay for this Mark, I thought to myself.

Maya's pov

I know Mark is definitely behind this. I never thought Mark could take things this far. I booked an appointment to speak to him in his office but he stubbornly turned down my appointment and told his Executive Assistant to tell me to say everything I wanted in court. Really?

I felt angrier than I have ever been. How could he set me up like this? I decided to have a meeting with my staff and find out who brought that letter. Since the CCTV cameras captured no stranger coming in or going out, it only meant whoever dropped the letter was in this company.

Tom suggested that we have individual meetings with each person which I thought was a great idea.

We started with the security, then the janitor, the operations, finance, and sales but we got nothing to hold on to. There was only one person we hadn't called and I knew she knew nothing about it being the office manager but Tom insisted we do.

So we called her in. After series of questions which she denied, we dismissed her but just before she walked out, I made her aware that, the content of the letter was a very serious one that could take

me to jail. She instantly knelt and began to cry asking me to forgive her. I told her to tell me all she knew and that was when she began to speak.

"Two weeks ago, when we ordered the new furniture, I had already signed for its delivery. But I brought you a cup of tea before bringing the documents. I told you they were for the furniture delivery and you signed without reading. I added something to your tea to make you daze." She said bursting into tears.

I opened my mouth to say something but no word will come out. I could not believe that I just heard. My most trusted staff did this to me.

"But why?" Tom asked the question that could not come out of my mouth because of how surprised I was.

"Somebody told me to do it. He said he was not going to hurt you and he was only planning a surprise for you. I didn't know it could send you to jail" she cried. I knew she wasn't lying. I know she did not read the content of the documents she dazed me to sign. But the least she could do was letting me know who put her up to it.

"Who asked you to do this" Mark asked.

"He will destroy me if I mention his name". She said frightfully.

"You have to tell us, Lucky. If we don't prove that the documents were forged, we won't have anyway to defend ourselves." Mark said pleadingly.

He said he will tarnish my reputation and that of my family if I told you and he also threatened to make me lose my job if I don't do as he said. I am the eldest child for my parents and since they will be going on pension soon, all responsibilities will be on me so I did not want to lose my job, She said amidst tears.

"I promise to protect you if you tell us," Tom assured her.

"But you will fire me" ..she cried looking at me.

"You confessed so we will do no such thing." Tom said.

"So will you now tell us who asked you to do all this?"

"Mr. Mark Snowman". She said.

"Thank you. You may leave." Tom said dismissing her.

"I am really sorry ma'am and I am sorry sir. She said walking out of my office. Immediately the door shut", Tom yelled.

"Damn you Mark".

"At least we have a witness right?" I asked with hope.

"No we don't." Tom said bluntly. I have never seen this side of Tom. I have never seen him this helpless. He has always found solution to every problem when it comes but I know his inability to have a headway with this is kind of frustrating him.

"If we put her on the witness stand, Mark will ruin her life. Besides, there's no proof to what she said. No video or document to show that Mark told her to do all that. He can flatly deny it and we will not be able to do anything about it. And knowing Mark, he might even sue us for character defamation." He said.

"What does he want from you?" He asked after the silence had fill the office with both of us being burried in our thoughts.

He won't speak with me. I said.

"And neither will he speak with me". He said

The last time he came here, he warned me to stay away from you or face the consequence. I said trying to remember his exact words.

"So all this is because of his jealousy? So childish of Mark." Tom said.

He had also told me to give him two years to make things right.

"How come you never told me?"

I didn't think it was necessary. Look, I want to stay away from him and I never knew he will go to this extent to keep me away from you. I explained to Tom. I couldn't bear him being disappointed at me.

"So when is the hearing?" Tom asked as if in serious thought.

In six months.

"Six what? What the hell? Why that long?" He asked with anger.

It's insane but I truly don't know. I think I should involve Sir Max, I said. Remembering his relationship with Mark's father. I doubt Mark's father has any idea of he knowing me. I think he could be of great help.

"Are you sure he can do something about a situation like this?"

Yes. Jude said he knew Mark's dad way back so he could pull some strings. I have never asked him for any favour since he left so I guess he won't mind helping this one time.

"Well, we have nothing to lose right"? He asked skeptically.

No and one more thing. Thank you very much Tom.

Chapter THIRTY ONE – LEAVE HER ALONE

It's exactly one year since Mark Snowman presented me with the law sue. We went for the first hearing six months ago and I was nowhere close to getting out of this problem. We have the second hearing tomorrow and Sir Max has promised to come for the next hearing if things don't improve.

Despite this big problem, my company continues to expand but unfortunately, we can't have certain partnerships because of the law sue. I have bumped into Mark a few times but he doesn't speak with me anymore. He ignores me like a total stranger. I feel hurt by his actions.

Even in court, I never hear his voice. His lawyer does all the talking. I am dying inside. Please don't get me wrong. I know that I always told him to stay away after the betrayal saga. I even rejected his friendship when he offered it. So why do I feel this way? Isn't this what I wanted?

Now, I am not just tensed but also sad because I miss Mark. It doesn't mean I will call him or anything. He is way out of my league. He is married so I should move on but I can't think of being with anyone else.

It's a week to our next court hearing. Sir. Max will arrive in three days. He wants to lodge in a hotel but Tracy and I have prepared the guest room for him over here in our condo.

We decide to relax by going shopping and then to the movies. Tracy will pick me up by 2 pm. Wait a minute, did I say 2 pm? I didn't know that time has elapsed this much. I have only five minutes to get ready but before I clear my desk, the door crashes against the wall.

"Maya, let's go". Tracy says and begins to help me clear my desk. " You are such a workaholic." She teases.

Look at the pot calling the kettle black. I am no different from you. I say putting the last document in a tray. And please don't break my door next time.

"Stop exaggerating. The door isn't close to breaking and besides, you trained me to be a workaholic like you". She says, arranging the pen. "I used to have a fun life after work before I met you. Now, I can't seem to think of anything but business, new ideas, and new concepts." She smiles.

That's a super great influence. I laugh.

"Maya, I want to ask you something personal," Tracy says as we walk to her car.

Anything for you, I said.

"Do you still love Mark? The question takes me by surprise. Even though she said personal, I wasn't expecting anything to do with Mark so I was taken off guard. I want to deny it but I know that Tracy sees through me. She is the last person I can be dishonest with.

Honestly, I do. I still love him. I know that you might think am stupid but I haven't gotten over him yet and I can't seem to do so.

"I see." That is all she said.

I see? Is that all you can say? I ask with a slight annoyance.

"What about Tom? I know he still loves you." She asks with sadness visible in her eyes.

"Tom is in love you someone else." I say pretentiously.

"Who?" She asks starting the car.

You. I say, looking ahead but she instantly steps on the break. Don't tell me you don't know, I said.

"Maya, she says, turning off the ignition and looking straight at me with her eyes boring into mine. I love Tom so much but all he ever talks about is you." I can feel the helplessness in her voice. Poor Tracy only if she knows how Tom feels about her.

You got it all wrong, Tracy. He says he was crazily in love with you. He wouldn't have kissed you if he didn't. I said. She blushed as soon as the words came out of my mouth.

"I love him but I want him to be happy. You make him happy. Even when we shared that kiss, he was absentminded. Please give him a chance." she says, startling me.

Don't be silly Tracy, what can he do to show you how much he loves you? I ask her. I know that Tom is only holding on to his proposal to her because of our fake relationship. I think I should call it off since Mark has stopped bothering me but I will discuss with Tom first, I thought to myself.

I don't know. I have been hurt so much and I don't want to be with a man who will continuously keep thinking of somebody else. I don't want to sound desperate but I don't want to be left at the altar again, she says.

I am sorry you went through that, Tracy. But you should know by now that Tom will never do anything like that to you.

"Can you do me a favor?" She asks. I didn't know if I should say yes, considering her insecurities.

I will do anything for you. I respond assuringly.

"I want you to tell Tom that you want to marry him for real. I want to know if he will accept it or confess his love for me." She asks with hope.

I am happy to announce to you that he will not accept it. Now listen. Remember the time Mark got married and he came back begging me to forgive him? Tom came to my rescue and to turn Mark off, I told him Tom and I was getting engaged.

To cut a long story short, Tom warned me that he is in love with you so after getting through whatever revenge I want to have on Mark, I should help him win your heart.

"He said that to you?"

I won't lie to you about something like this. I say convincingly.

"Awww, Maya, I love you so much. I thought he didn't want to propose to me because he was still waiting for you." She says pulling me into a tight hug.

No. I said out of breathing. I can't breathe, I hiss.

"Oh sorry". She says breaking the hug.

He made his intentions clear from the onset. I am happy that he moved on. If not, we wouldn't be best friends.

"But what about you?" She says starting the ignition again. Mark is married. Won't you move on?"

I was never afraid of singlehood and I never will. Besides, those kids at the orphanage take most of my time and also make me happy. I said, trying to erase the thought.

I hope so, Maya. I want you to be happy if it means you having Tom. She said.

I love Tom but it's more of a best friend kind of love. I don't feel my heart flutter the way it does when I'm with Mark. I confessed.

Soon we arrive at the mall. We buy stuff from clothes to shoes, groceries and all. We just kept buying. It's a while since we shopped. Well, a long time. As we reached the shoe session, I felt someone hold my waist. This can't be Tracy. The hand is too strong.

I try pulling off the hand and turn around. Alex, I screamed. I was alarmed to see him again. Remember Alex? Jude's junior brother. The one who used to make illicit advances at me when I was living with Jude's family. He was one of the reasons why I never wanted to live there.

Take your hands off of me Alex. I said, wiggling my way out but his hands are firm on my waist and I am unable to free myself.

"Come on, you've not changed, beautiful. Look at how you've grown. You look gorgeous." He grinned as if he has just served his thanksgiving turkey.

Thanks but take your hands off. I yell, pulling him by the finger to weaken his hands but he tightens his grip instead and pulls me closer to him.

"Take your hands off the lady". Tracy yells, coming to my rescue.

"Hey, I knew her before you. Didn't she tell you she had a crush on me?" He says. His words made me feel disgusted. I can never have a crush on a pig like him.

I gather all the strength left in me and move my right hand in all its strength and slap him hard. The sound draws attention from other shoppers but he just laughs as if being hit by a baby.

Let go of me, Alex, I yelled again but he pulls me closer and his mouth is just an inch from mine. People are just looking on, snapping pictures, and taking videos. What a world.

"I'll call security," Tracy says and hurries off.

I can't wait till security gets here. Think to myself. I have to do something. His grip becomes tighter so I gather my last strength and this time, using my foot, I step on his feet so hard with my heel but it doesn't move him. He laughs hysterically. Maybe he is drunk but he doesn't smell of alcohol. What do I do now?

"Leave her alone." A deep voice thunders, cutting through every corner of the mall, making everyone pause.

Chapter 32 – WHAT A NIGHTMARE

"Leave her alone." A deep voice thunders, cutting through every corner of the mall and making everyone still.

This time, Alex gets startled and frees his grip but does not let go completely of my waist. I began to thank God in my heart for sending someone to rescue me from this insane guy. I wonder what happened to him. His brother Jude is such a gentle soul but for him, that's a story for another day. But the voice sounds familiar. Why do I feel that I know this voice?

I knew I heard the sound correctly. Yes! It's Mark. He is standing there elegantly dressed but boiling with rage and tightens his fist. He is the last person I ever thought to be of help to me today. What is he doing here anyway? How did he know I had gotten in trouble? Alex shifted uncomfortably away from me and yells.

"Who are you and how dare you interfere?" Before he completes his sentence, I line widens across his lips with a broad smile.

"Hey, Mark?" He says as if they are friends but Mark stands there with the same gesture. Not smiling and completely furious.

"I said leave her alone." He said again. I know they might know each other because Jude is a friend of Mark but why does Mark pretend as if he doesn't know him?

"Come on, she is just my little crush." He said, tightening his grip around my waist again.

Mark's jaws tighten as if trying to restraint himself but before Alex utters another word, Mark harshly pulls his hand off me and pushes him hard. He stumbles and falls on the ground and Mark matches towards him.

"Sorry. I heard you", Alex says getting up and running off. Just then Tracy returns with the security and he begins to apologize but my focus was only on Mark.

He looks at me with mixed emotions and his eyes begin to soften. He wanted to say something but he seemed to swallow whatever wanted to come out of his mouth and without uttering a word, he starts walking away.

Mark, I call after him but he just ignores me to my dismay. All eyes are now focused on me. Ignoring all the stares, I scream behind him. Thank you and just as I guessed, he doesn't respond. I don't understand this guy. Even after helping me, he will not speak with me and he won't accept my appreciation.

"Maya, let's go", Tracy said. I was just following her like a zombie when she went to the cashier to make the payment till we sat in the car.

"Do you want my honest suggestion?" She asks with concern. I know that it hurts her even more when I am hurt or in pain so, I knew exactly what she wanted to say and I knew I wouldn't like it. I wanted so much to tell her not to say it but I could not because she loves me too much.

What could it be? I asked pretending to be naive.

"Forget Mark and move on". She said with all seriousness, confirming my thought. I knew she was going to say something like that but hearing it made me feel worse. I know she's right. I have to do something about it. I have to forget Mark and kill my feelings for him.

Trust me, I've tried. I have really tried and I think I am going crazy but I will try harder. I said, and I meant it.

"You know what? Let's head to the movies" she said. I think coming out with Tracy today is a good idea. Maybe going to the movies will help me clear my mind. I might be able to get over Mark gradually.

I think it's a great idea. I said and she gave me an encouraging smile.

I don't remember the last time I went to the movies. It felt a little out of place in the beginning. God, I need to catch up on life. I have been buried with work for too long.

I think we got to the movies too early so we had to hang out a little before going in. We had roughly fifteen minutes.

"I think we should grab some snacks." Tracy said, pulling me along.

Well, I think we should get some real food because I am starving, I said.

"Really". Tracy asked with concern and I nodded my head vigorously, indicating yes.

"They have a really nice restaurant around. Let's get some food then". She said.

We got to the small but cozy restaurant close to the movie theatre. We placed our orders and talked around a glass of fresh pineapple juice. My eyes caught up to a guy on the opposite table. He was looking at us so I asked Tracy.

Do you know that guy?

"Who?" She asked. Obviously, she hadn't noticed him so I pointed in the direction opposite us.

"No". I've never seen him before. When I was about to respond, the guy stood up and started walking towards us. He is tall and muscular with brown hair and brown eyes.

"He looks cute". Tracy giggled, warranting a warning look from me.

Not as cute as Tom, I said disapprovingly.

" of course, I didn't mean it that way", she said with a tinge of embarrassment.

"Hey ladies, my name is Edward. I am here to watch a movie but it doesn't start immediately so I came here to while away time. Do you mind if I join you?. He asked, shifting his glance from Tracy to me and back to Tracy.

" Sure, it's a public place," Tracy said courteously. Edward sits between Tracy and me and places his bottle of beer on the table.

"So, may I have the honor of knowing your names? Edward asked with a smile and guess what? He had dimples. I always thought dimples was a ladies' thing. I never saw a guy who had it but it's so cute.

" My name is Tracy and that is my best friend Maya. Tracy introduced us.

"Beautiful names. So you always come here to watch movies?

" No, we are always so busy. We haven't been here in years but trust me, you don't want to know the details." Tracy said.

"Maya, what do you do?" He asked me. I didn't expect him to throw a direct question at me like that. Tracy was doing a good job taking care of all the talking. Just as I was about to answer, the waiter arrives with our order.

Hmmm, smells delicious, I said, trying to avoid the question. I didn't want to tell a stranger so much about my life. He could be anything. I start digging into my food, taking my time to enjoy every bite of my grilled chicken with salad.

"I see your girls are very hungry." His statement made me steal a glance at Tracy who was also enjoying her food with soft moans. I thought I was the only hungry one. Edward continued drinking his beer while stealing occasional glances at us.

The waiter brings the bill and I reach for it but Edward begins to protest.

"You can't pay the bills when I'm here", he says trying to take it from me.

Wrong notion. We pay our bills with or without any man. I said while taking some cash from my wallet with a good tip. I didn't want to give that much tip in the beginning but I wanted to send Edward a message.

"Interesting fellows. First time meeting your kind. Rude girls" He said, making me astonished.

"First of all, we are not girls and second, we are not rude. We are just responsible." Tracy said sternly.

"Well, you are girls and you are rude because, one, a lady doesn't reject an offer, and two, it's rude to not allow a guy to pay the bills if he wants to." He shakes his head. "Can I atleast get your movie tickets?" He asked.

Tracy and I exchanged looks but finally succumbed and as if planned, the words came out of our mouth together.

"Fine". He let out a hysterical laugh which made us join in the laughter.

It's nice meeting you Edward, I said after breaking from the laugh.

" I am so happy to be in your team ladies, you two are one of a kind. He got our tickets and popcorns. We made our way to the theatre and made ourselves comfortable but before I knew it, Mark was sitting beside me with Tilda by his side. What a nightmare.

Chapter THIRTY – THREE – WHAT A NIGHT

Edward sat between Tracy and me. It was great having him with us. I sat down and tossed a few grains of popcorn in my mouth and sipped on my coca-cola. I was enjoying the moment as the movie was about to begin, never bothering to check the one sitting next to me until I heard his voice.

"Are you feeling cold, should I put my Jacket around you?" That's Mark's voice. Why does he want to speak with me now? I was about to speak when I heard a female voice.

"No, I'm fine. I'll just relax on your shoulder and keep warm".

OMG, this is going to be a nightmarish night. I don't know what else to call it. He didn't notice me sitting next to him so I think of a way of excusing myself. I will take a cab home and call to tell Tracy that I felt dizzy. I can't sit down here and drown in jealousy.

" Maya, Tracy is just telling me that you two live together and work together. She also said you are both single so I need to know this. Are you lesbians?"

I almost choked on my coca-cola when Edward asked that question. Was it a joke?

No, nothing of that sort, I whispered, not wanting Mark to hear me.

"Why are you whispering? The movie hasn't started. He said.

Yeah, I feel uncomfortable with your question but if you don't mind, I will like to use the lady's room. I said getting up.

" Wait! I'll take you there." He said

No, I'm going to pee. You can't go in there with me. So wait for me here. I said.

"Okay. Please come soon. The movie is about to begin." He said. What is wrong with him anyway? It's not as if we planned to come here together. We only met at the restaurant.

I'll be back before you know it, I said.

I walked out of the sitting area in the theater before I started breathing properly. Here I am obsessing over a happily married man. I feel so guilty for the way I kept thinking about him.

God, please help me get through this. I think I should go home but if I go home, I will only drown myself in misery. Edward seems like a funny guy. I will go back there and tell him to switch places

with me, then sit back, and comfortably enjoy the movie. Tracy will understand when I tell her my reason.

I feel so tensed. Let me wash my face. Might make me feel better. I walk to the ladies and turn on the tap. The water feels warm when I wash my face. I feel refreshed and walk out bumping into something.

"I'm sorry, I wasn't looking at where I was going."

It's okay, I wasn't looking either...Tilda.

"Maya". I'm sorry I didn't get to see you again after the wedding. Are you alright? I kind of bumped a bit too hard.

No, I'm fine. I said with confusion. I wasn't expecting to see her and the sight of her makes me feel guilty.

"Can you help me with this? I will be out in a minute." She says, giving me her purse before entering one of the washroom stalls. I feel so bad thinking about Mark all the time. She's so nice and she deserves the best. I held the purse she gave me and waited for her at the entrance. She could have gone in with it so I wonder why she told me to hold it for her.

The wait took forever when she wasn't out for almost fifteen minutes. It's weird. No one stays that long in the washroom stall. I went to tap on the door she entered.

Tilda, are you there? No response. If you don't assure me that you are fine, I might have to call security or force the door open, I yelled politely. Still no response. I bent down and peeped through the space under the door. I could see her hair. I was expecting to see her feet, not her hair. There must be something wrong.

I push the door hard trying to open it but no luck. I take off my heels and run to the auditorium and Mark looks at me worriedly after seeing Tilda's purse in my hand. He stands up and I begin running back to the washroom. I heard his bold steps behind me, making me shiver with fear. What could be happening to Tilda? I have never been this scared.

She went in but hasn't come out for some time now. I murmured. I peeped down and realized she is lying on the floor. Mark had a calm and relaxed look as if he already knew what the problem was. With one push, he breaks the door open and carries Tilda from the cold floor. Without calling or waiting for an ambulance, he heads to the parking lot. Following him with Tilda's purse in my hand, I had to run to catch up his long strides as if he was carrying a feather. It was as if Tilda weighed nothing.

"She will be fine, Maya, you can go." He said after placing her gently in the car.

No, I'll go with you to the hospital, I protested.

"No. Thank you, but I'll take it from here." Before I utter another word, he zooms off.

"What happened and why did you run off without your heels? Tilda asks catching up to me.

I don't know. I think Tilda passed out. I remember the day before Mark started avoiding me. He told me Tilda wanted to see him when she regained consciousness after passing out. It means it's nothing new and that's why he was calm about it. I wish I knew what was ailing her. She seems like a nice person.

" Now you are liking your rival. Does that mean you are ready to move on?

Time will tell but let's cut the night short.

"I agree". Tracy said. We bid Edward farewell and left him in the cinema hall but he took our cards.

"What a night?" Tracy exclaimed when we got home. "I think I'll just go to bed."

Same here. Good night. I said

The next day, I call Mark to find out how Tilda is doing but as usual, he didn't answer my call so we got ready and went to pick Sir Max from the Airport.

"My pretty little girl is now a beautiful lady". Was the first thing he said when he saw me, before pulling me into a big hug.

I miss you so much, I whispered and didn't realize when tears started rolling down my cheeks.

"I missed you more. I couldn't wait to see my daughter again". Sir Mark still looks handsome despite the grey hairs mixing the black on his head. He was still as jovial as he used to be.

Meet my best friend Tracy, I said introducing Tracy to him.

"Any Friend of Maya is a daughter of mine." He said before pulling Tracy into a hug. She was so surprised. I just shrugged. That's Sir Max for you, I giggled.

I wonder if Mark will go ahead with the hearing tomorrow with Tilda's condition. Tom didn't know anything about Tilda's condition so I couldn't tell how she was faring and I was really worried. He wanted to come over to welcome Sir Max but I preferred he meets us at the court to avoid Sir Max's endless questions.

We took Sir Max home and made him comfortable. We served him dinner and had a long talk about his life. He explains that he got married but never had a child of his own but he was still happy because he has me. I was so happy he loves me this much. After a long talk, we retired to bed.

I woke up early the next day to prepare breakfast and get ready for the hearing. I heard Sir Max talking on the phone when I was preparing the dinning table. I assumed he was speaking to his family back at home.

We ate breakfast and Tracy insisted on clearing the table alone since I did the cooking. I didn't argue because I still wanted to speak more with Sir Max.

"Maya, where are the documents I gave you?" I went to my room and brought out the documents. Here they are but why do you need them?

He shakes his head when he sees the documents. "You haven't opened it. You wouldn't be panicking so much if you had opened it." He said and before I could ask him why? He said, "Don't worry. I will explain in court."

Chapter THIRTY – FOUR – A DYING WISH

Mark and Tom were already seated in the courtroom when we arrived. I hated the way my coming into their lives has made them enemies. I wish I could take back the hands of time. I was also thinking of how Mark could still be here when Tilda was in the hospital. Is this hearing that important to him? I kept asking myself this question over and over again.

Tom's eyes brighten when he sees us and walks to hug me and Tracy.

"Who is he?" Sir Max asks with a questionable look.

"I will tell you about myself after the court proceedings," Tom says with a smile. Mark's Dad enters the court and I couldn't hide my surprise. He was never in any of the hearings and I wonder what changed.

He walks over to Mark and whispers something in his ear. Then what begins as a whisper, starts getting loud, as if they were arguing.

"What the heck son, you should have told me". He said.

"Dad, this is personal. You are not invited to this hearing". Mark said

"If it's personal, then you shouldn't complicate the company. Mixing business with private elements is wrong." His dad said.

"Dad, I have sacrificed everything for you. This is the only thing I get to do for myself so please trust me on this". Mark says with confidence. I was dumbfounded when I heard him saying that this was the only thing he was doing for himself. He must be hiding something.

"You don't understand the gravity of what you have done". Mark's dad scolds, signaling Sir Max

"He is here because of this case. He is the one who told me about everything and requested to see me here." No matter the arrogance and coldness, Mark could not hide the visible regret on his face. We sat there pretending we were not interested in the conversation but I think we were all eager to know what was coming next.

"Who is he?" Mark asked but the judge walked in and we all rose in unison. Fortunately, Mark requested a private hearing and has treated this case with maximum confidentiality, keeping the public, and media away.

The judge settles down and Mark walks to the front, whispering something in his ear, making the judge nod in the affirmative.

"I wish to withdraw the legal charges filed against Miss Maya Jacobs. I also want to apologize for the time wasted on all those present here. So if you don't mind, I'll take my leave." He was about to get up when his Dad pulls him down.

"It doesn't work that way son, you don't leave before the judge". He rebuked.

Inwardly, I was very happy with the withdrawal of the case. It hasn't been easy meeting Tom's lawyers every inch of the way. The smile on Tracy's face showed she felt the same way and even Tom looked relieved. But Sir Max had no expression on his face. I thought he will be happy for me but I didn't seem to see it in his eyes. Everything began to make sense the moment he spoke.

" Since we are all together, I think it's time to lay some stakes for my daughter, Maya."

"Your daughter"? Mark's dad exclaims.

Not biologically but Yes, she is the reason why I called to inform you to meet us in court." Sir Max said. So Mark's dad is the one Sir Max was talking to earlier.

"So you are the one who dragged my father into this? Look this is personal, not business. My dad had no idea what I was doing and I never meant to charge her or anything. I was merely using it to disorganize her a little." He said.

"Son, you are not making sense". His dad said.

" I know but you will soon understand." He said.

"If it's personal, then it involves me because she is my daughter. According to the documents here with me, she owns sixty percent shares in your company." Sir Max said stunning all of us. Well, all of us because I am not the only one with an astonishing look on my face. I mean, I never bothered to check those documents and I am just beginning to realize I own 60% shares in the company suing me. This means, even if Mark hadn't withdrawn the case, I could have won because my shares are enough to pay everyone off. I'm Just thinking but it's not something ill do. This news has left us speechless. The silence was interrupted by Mark's outrageous disagreement.

"That's not true. I know about the party that has been silent for over twelve years but the name is-"

"Maxwell Anderson", his dad responds.

"You knew this all along?" He asks with visible confusion.

"It's a long story son." His dad said.

"Which makes you agree to anything he says?" Mark asked.

"He bought the shares but I just realized he bought it in her name." His dad said.

"Because it's her money." Sir Max chips in.

"I don't understand". Mark said.

"I'll tell you." Sir Max said.

"Twelve years ago, your father's company suffered hardship. It became worse and he wanted to sell it off. I, on the other hand, was looking for a place to invest the money I got from her father's assets.

It wasn't the house and cars alone, Maya. Your father had a company too, was what I found out. I didn't have the know-how to manage it so I sold it to the Chinese. When I began searching for a place to invest, I met his dad. He needed almost the same amount of money for his company to survive. So I invested all the proceeds from your father's company. Since you were a minor. I made myself your trustee." He said, showing the document to the judge.

I know that my daughter is silly. She never opened the envelope for whatever reason I don't know but since I am here now, I will end my role as a trustee since she is of age and I insist that she has complete access to her shares. He said with a smile.

The courtroom went dead silent with everyone lost in their own thoughts. Nobody said anything till the judge finally asked a question.

"Do you have anything to say?" The question was directed to Mark and his dad.

"Yes. I agree that everything he said is true. We will give her full access to her shares." Marks dad said.

"I'll take my leave then." The judge said and left the court premises. Tracy was the first to speak after the judge left.

"I can't believe my best friend is a billionaire." She expressed excitement.

"Congrats, Maya," Tom says.

"What?" I heard Marks's voice. "I am coming over but I can't bring her." I looked in his direction and observed that he was speaking on the phone.

"Okay, I will try." He says and hangs up looking at me. He had an expression of fear and admiration in his eyes which I clearly understood after what he told me.

"Tilda will like to see you if it's okay", he said.

"Tracy, please take Sir Max home," I said. I didn't want to entangle him in any of our problems but he was more stubborn than I thought.

"No, we are coming with you." He said.

We arrived at the hospital and Tilda was lying on the hospital bed in the VIP ward. Wait, did she shave her hair. She had lots of hair two days ago.

What's happened to you?' I asked almost in tears. She looked so pale and sick. She had circles under her eyes and seemed to have lost weight. I have never seen her like this. She always appears like a goddess but today, she looked sick.

"I don't have much time, so I thought you should not the truth". She said in a voice that was almost a whisper.

What are you talking about? I asked.

"I've had cancer for some years now. It's a rare one and there's nothing specialists can do about it. I don't want you to feel pity for me because I have enjoyed my life to the fullest. I have toured the world and have also been opportune to marry Mark. I have been a good daughter to my parents and fulfilled their wishes.

I didn't call you to sympathize with me. I only called to tell you the truth. My marriage to Mark is fake. We only did it to make our parents happy and also fulfill my dream of having a husband before I die.

Mark has been more of a friend and nanny to me. He takes very good care of me but we never got intimate. It's been you, Maya. You are the only woman he ever loves.

He sacrificed his love to grant my wish and that of his family. But he never stopped loving you. He talks about you all the time. I caught him crying and cursing himself countless times for all the pain he caused you because of me. Mark didn't want to do this from the beginning but when his dad sent those threat letters to you, he changed his mind because one way or the other, your life will be in danger and he couldn't bear to see that happen. He wanted to explain everything to you before we got engaged but we hid his phone from him so he never saw your calls and messages.

Maya, Mark loves you so much. Please forgive me for borrowing him without informing you. When you passed out on our engagement day, we wanted to tell you the truth but we were not allowed to see you when we got there so after you recovered, we decided to keep everything a secret as before.

Now I have just a few days to live and I have only one wish. That wish lies with you because you are the only one who can grant it. If you grant me that wish, I will rest in peace but if not, my ghost will hunt you in your dreams." She giggled weakly showing she didn't mean those words.

I want you to make him happy. He spent all his time making me happy but you are the only one who can make him happy.

I want to witness your wedding before I die."

Chapter THIRTY – FIVE – A WEDDING BLISS

I wasn't in the least surprised at Tilda's words. Mark telling me to give him two years gave me some hope that something might happen but I just didn't think it will be something this sad. Sir Max was lost in the whole confession so I had to explain everything to him. It surprised him that I went through all that without telling him. He was disappointed but also proud of me. I know he always thought me to be strong and brave but this has revealed a different side of me. I saw the relief in Tilda's eyes. I knew she always wanted me to be happy. Tom hugged Mark. It was so priceless. My heart was filled with so much joy seeing those two being best friends again. What more could I ask for. Mark asked to speak with me. I wanted us to speak in private but he insisted on speaking in front of all these people. He said there was nothing to hide.

"I am sincerely sorry for all that I put you through", Mark said looking straight into my eyes.

No, you should forgive me for not trusting you in the first place. I should have trusted our love but I was consumed with jealousy.

"You don't have to blame yourself". "It's not your fault. I didn't explain things to you because I knew you will tell Tom and Tracy. I didn't want people to know about her condition." He said sadly.

I know, and I love and respect you for what you did for her. You are such a good person. I don't deserve you.

"No, I am the one who doesn't deserve you. What if I had lost you when you were admitted to the hospital because of my stupid secret? I could never forgive myself for that incident." He said with sorrowful eyes.

I don't know if I am still dear to you. But I promise to trust you if you give me a chance, I said.

"Are you saying that you will marry me?" He asked with hopeful eyes but I wanted to prank him a little.

Well is that your way of proposing? So unromantic, I said faking anger.

"Then give me a chance to spend the rest of my life making it up to you and turning everyday into a romantic moment. So Miss Tracy Jacobs, will you marry me and be the mother of my five children?" Wait. I didn't see that coming. Five? Not bad. I will love a big family, I thought.

Who else will I marry? We are stuck in this for the rest of our lives. I said and for the first time, I saw Mark truly happy with no fears or pride or arrogance. He was perfect. But the smile disappeared and there was an instant sadness before he popped the question.

"What about Tom and your engagement?" He said as his face became dark.

We were never engaged. It's fake. We only pretended so you will leave me alone. I said. The instant pop of laughter on his face made me happy about not moving on. it wasn't easy but it paid off.

"Oh my God, I hated Tom so much and I pressed all those charges against you to distract you from him. I stressed and made your life miserable for no apparent reason. I am sorry Maya, I did all that because I was jealous. I couldn't stand seeing you with anyone else but me." Did he say mean that? I was so happy to know that he never hated me.

But what about cold treatment? I jokingly asked.

"That was only to prevent me from kissing you when I meet you but trust me, it hurt me more. Especially when you wanted me to stay away from you." When he said that, I was beyond joy. He never for once gave up on me. All this while, he was just finding ways of respecting my wishes.

"I love you, Maya, you were the one, you are still the one and will always remain the one. I have engraved you in my heart. I can never stop loving you.

I love you too Tom. I said before he pulled me into a tight hug. How I longed for this. I never wanted it to end. But sooner than I thought, Sir Max spoke, making us break the hug. Mark has started respecting him as my dad.

"If you are going to get married, I want to walk you down the aisle before I leave so it better be quick and you don't want the ghost to also hunt you, I guess." Everyone laughed at his statement and I realized they were all caught up in the moment with tears of joy. Even Tilda was looking better than she was when we came in.

I just wish we could have a joint wedding. I mean, Tracy and I. I said sadly. I wanted happiness for Tracy too and when I said those words, my eyes travelled to that of Tom and I wanted him to get the clue and do what he had to do.

"But it's not possible," Mark said.

"It is," Tom interrupted. I guess he got the clue. "Tracy, now that you know the truth, I want you to know that I bought this ring a year ago and was waiting for the right time to pop the life-changing question. I don't think of a better time than this. Will you be my wife?"

"Yes! Yes! Yes! I will". She screamed. Hey, today turned out to be the best day in over a year.

We only had a few days to plan our wedding. Mark sent us a celebrity wedding planner and she was just amazing. I couldn't believe that I was getting married and the first guy I had a crush on. According to Mimi, the wedding planner, the gown I wanted could not be made within this short time so she gave us some already made ones to choose from. I thought it was even better than what I wanted. I wanted to look my best for Mark.

I am very glad that Mark pressed those fake charges against me because I never would have known the shares I had and best of all, I wouldn't have had Sir Max to walk me down the aisle. I chose the venue to be the garden where Mark first proposed to me and I was amazed at the transformation. I thought it was the most beautiful garden I ever saw but seeing it on my wedding day, took my breath away.

Mark's POV

I stood at the altar with Tom. We wore a matching white tuxedo with a cream bow tie. This is the biggest day of our lives. I was nervous and I could see that Tom was also nervous. We are both getting married to the love of our lives on the same day. We shall forever cherish this memory for the remaining year's of our lives. I watched as Tracy walked down the aisle with her father. I was so anxious when I saw her. She looked so beautiful and I wondered how Maya looked. Her gown was the most beautiful one I have ever seen so maybe, they will both wear matching gowns just like Tom and I, I thought.

Next. When Maya started walking down the aisle with Sir Max, my eyes instantly were filled with tears. I remembered all she endured because of me from the very first day. I despised her because of my pride and arrogance. I vowed to spend every single day, making it up to her. She didn't wear the same gown as Tracy. Well, it was almost the same. The only difference was the neck. Hers' was V-shaped and Tracy's was round. I couldn't believe that such a beautiful, sexy, caring, loving, and selfless girl, fell in love with an asshole like me. I don't deserve her. She is the most beautiful among God's creations and I am so blessed to have her.

Tilda came as promised and today is the happiest I have ever seen her. I don't care what you think but Tilda is a miracle. Thanks to her plan, we didn't have to disobey our parents. We both got what we wanted even though the process wasn't great but the result is exceptional. I love her so much as a friend.

After the wedding, Sir Max left the next day. I was happy to meet someone as close to Maya as a father. I know it wasn't easy for her to grow up without her own parents. We decided to stay for two weeks before going on our honeymoon. Tracy and Tom will go earlier, whiles Maya and I stay

to manage the company till they return. They will take over the company for us to also go on our honeymoon and that is how it's going to be in the future.

Another reason why we have to stay behind is that sadly, Tilda passed away the next day after our wedding. We intend to go to the funeral before our honeymoon. Tilda's death has been very hard on Maya eventhough she knew it was going to happen. It's as if they have known each other for years. I will allow her enough time to moan but when all this is over, she is going to perform her marital duties, atleast twice a day. Well, that's what I have planned for us. Call me whatever you want but guess what? I don't care.

Chapter EPILOGUE

"Mark, not this morning", Maya pouted. "I thought we made love last night?" She said, trying to wiggle herself from my arms.

That was last night, I said lustfully, rubbing my hands on her bump. It's always been twice a day remember? I asked teasingly. You see, a week after we got married, we never made love because we were moaning. So after the funeral, we decided to make sex a very important part of our marriage and so has it been as long as we wake up healthy.

"Don't worry, I haven't forgotten but you might be forgetting that, your elephant wife is seven months pregnant, and gets tired easily so once a day is fine but I promise to make it up to you after our baby is born," she smirked.

But I can't seem to have enough of you, I said, exploring her mouth with my tongue. She kisses me back passionately, encouraging me to slip my hand into her night dress. Mind you, you are not an elephant, I whisper in her ear, flipping my tongue around her ear lobe, earning a giggle from her.

"Yes I am, I've added so much weight" She said sadly. I don't know how to convince her that she looks amazing. She complains about her body but to me, she is flawless.

Yes you still look beautiful and sexy. I said, pulling her into another kiss.

"You are lying," She says catching her breath.

I don't tell lies. You look so beautiful, I complimented, kissing in between her thighs.

"No, definitely not now. Today is Violet's birthday which means, I have to pick her up from Tracy early enough to get her dressed for the party." She says after breaking the kiss.

I'll let you off this morning because it's our daughter's birthday but you have to make it up to me tonight. I said lustfully.

"That is not a problem," She said, Planting a kiss on my forehead.

Mark's POV

I never knew a day like this will come. We have been married for five years and its quite an amazing journey. I'm glad I married for love. I can't believe I had wanted to choose my career and not give love a chance. I would have been the most miserable man on earth. There has never been a dull moment with Maya. Even with our kids and our pregnancy, she doesn't neglect my needs.

We have built a business empire together with wonderful friends who are now family. Our story will never be complete without Tracy & Tom. Those two are the best people to be in our lives.

I chose love and anytime, any day, I will choose and fight for love. Maya is worth fighting for. I know I hurt her in the past but gradually I am making it up to her by being the best husband to her and the best father to our kids.

Yes we have three children. Violet, Jemima and Martin. We decided to have two more to complete our dream for having five children. It was actually my dream but she bought into it. I figured we should have a lot of kids because growing up as an only child was very boring and Maya agrees because she has also experienced the lonely life and wants more family.

Today is our first daughter, Violet's birthday. She happens to share the same birthday with Tom and Tracy's son, Damien. So we have to prepare for the party. Tom and Tracy lives a few blocks from us so the kids decide on where to spend the night. Today they are here and another time they are there.

My marriage with Maya has taught me a lot of things. Meeting her has given me the understanding that you don't have to be perfect to get a perfect partner. You just have to work on each other, every day.

I am no longer the proud, arrogant and egocentric jerk. I am more caring and a people person now. I have changed positively. I have also learnt about the need for patience and sacrifice. If you find the right person, never give up on him or her. Life is too short so enjoy it while it lasts.

THE END.