

# *Broken Dreams*



A Story By

**BAAWA ACQUAH**

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This is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to anyone, place or incident is purely coincidental. All names and places are works of the author's imagination and therefore no parts of this book must be used by anyone without the author's permission.

## **Acknowledgments**

I want to thank God for just being who He is.

I am also thankful to all my readers. I appreciate you so much. I pray I give you the emotional experience you expected.

I want to thank one of my biggest supporters, Bridgette B. Baah, thank you for riding with me.

*BAAWAACQUAH*

*I dedicate this to all my blog readers and my mom. I hope to make you all proud to have been with me from day one.*

"Hi, I'm Michael Porter, what's your name?" He said introducing himself.

"I'm Sally Turner."

"If we're done with the chit-chat can we go eat now?" Jackie interrupted rudely.

"Yeah sure. Go ahead. Talk to you ladies later" then he turned and walked away.

"You didn't have to be so rude, Jay" Sally reprimanded.

"Whatever thoughts you have about him. Put an end to it ASAP. He's really bad news" Jackie warned.

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## CHAPTER ONE

It was two days after Christmas. Sally had just moved into her own apartment prior to the beginning of the second semester of her second year in college. She was studying to be an accountant and that made her mom so happy. She and her mom, Elise were really close because they're all each other had when her dad left them when she was 5 years old. He just upped and left without a reason just divorce papers for Mama to sign. They never heard from him again. Her mom never remarried. She poured everything into building a successful career and raising her. They lived in the suburbs of Brockmin and Sally attended Brockmin College in the city. The commute was taking its toll on her so her mom decided it'd be wise for Sally to rent an apartment in the city close to school and to visit home over the weekend. They'd spent the weeks prior to Christmas searching for the perfect place which they found a week before Christmas.

She moved her stuff three days to Christmas and spent Christmas at home with her mom per their family traditions. But she had to go back to school for the student council meeting the day after boxing day so she left home midday boxing day.

The meeting day was finally here and Sally Turner was running late. She was too tired from the drive back and couldn't wake up on time. She had no outfit laid out so she just grabbed the closest things she could lay her hands on. She wore her favourite deep blue jeans with a grey t-shirt with the

inscription "Goal Digger" and topped it off with a dark blazer and black pumps. She grabbed her bag and rushed out of the apartment into her car and she was on her way.

She got to the auditorium during the breakfast break and the first thing she saw was this fine dark and tall chocolate brother on the podium having a chat with some of the council members. She had no idea who he was but she was going to find out.

## CHAPTER TWO

"Hey Sal"

She turned to see Jackie, her childhood best friend. She'd known Jackie since they were in diapers in preschool because their moms were both busy career women. In fact, it was their friendship that made their moms friends.

"Heya Jay," she said and pulled her into a hug.

"It really sucks to take time out of my holiday to be here" Sal complained since joining the council was Jackie's idea.

"You're late and you still got the mouth to complain?" Jackie joked rolling her eyes for effect.

"Well yeah! It's the holidays!" Sal whined.

"You're getting whiney. You probably haven't had anything to eat. Come on" Jackie said dragging Sal to the buffet tables.

As they were piling up their plates a voice said, "Hey Jackie" They turned and Sally came face to face with the guy from the podium. Her heart immediately skipped a beat. She's seen finer men but she had no idea why she reacted like that to him.

*"Man, he's too close. I can barely concentrate on what he's saying"* she thought.

"Earth to Sal," Jackie said moving her hands over her face.

"What?" Sal snapped.

"Girl, get out of dreamland. He's talking to you" she said pointing to the guy.

"Hey, I'm sorry. You were saying" Sal apologised to the handsome stranger.

"Hi, I'm Michael Porter, what's your name?" He said introducing himself.

"I'm Sally Turner."

"If we're done with the chit-chat can we go eat now?" Jackie interrupted rudely.

"Yeah sure. Go ahead. Talk to you ladies later" then he turned and walked away.

"You didn't have to be so rude, Jay" Sally reprimanded.

"Whatever thoughts you have about him. Put an end to it ASAP. He's really bad news" Jackie warned.

"I have no thoughts" Sal retorted defensively.

"Alright," Jackie shrugged.

## CHAPTER THREE

The council meeting went on all day much to Sally's disdain but she had Michael's voice to help her through because anytime he spoke on an issue, the butterflies in her belly flipped. She noticed he knew his way around too. He was speaking facts only. He seemed too wise. She knew Jackie said to stay away from him because he was bad news but he doesn't appear to be. He seemed like the sweetest man she'd met. Well, granted she was exaggerating but she most definitely didn't plan on staying away like she was told. Occasionally, she lived on the wild side and this seemed like one of the best occasions to live a little. When the meeting ended, she and Jay split up to work the room a bit and she magically found herself in Michael's circle. She caught Jay's side eye but she just shrugged it off.

They chatted in the group about the meeting for a while till everyone else moved away and it was just her and Michael.

"Hey, I'm sorry about what happened earlier with my friend" Sal apologised.

"That's alright. I know Jackie meant no harm" Michael smiled.

"Good"

They stood there for a few minutes in awkward silence.

*"I think I need to go. I'm so nervous right now"* she thought.

"So-" they said in unison and burst out laughing.

"You go first" Sal suggested.

*BAAWAACQUAH*

"Since it's the norm for ladies to be first and you are a lovely lady, would you do the honour?" with a bow.

She laughed, "I was gonna say it's getting late and I need to find Jackie so we can go"

"Right. Then please put your number in my phone and we can talk later" he winked.

She took his phone and dialed her number. They said their goodbyes and went their separate ways.

## CHAPTER FOUR

It'd been several days since the council meeting and Michael took her number. They'd been texting and calling each other since. She felt so guilty because she hadn't told her best friend. They were so close and didn't keep secrets from each other. That's why their friendship had lasted all through the years. They trusted each other but Jackie didn't really approve of Mike and she couldn't ask her why without her suspecting that she was falling for him. She really wasn't in the mood for her lectures when he was concerned. She'd never felt like this about anyone. It must be real, granted they'd just met over a week ago but still her heart couldn't be wrong. The school was back in session. It was a new year and she loved it already. If she played her cards right, she'd be boo'd up by Valentine's Day and she won't be messing with Jackie's plans. Every year since they'd been little girls, they'd been having Galantine's day with their mom till Jackie started dating Todd in high school and it became a tricky situation because she was still single. It wasn't that guys didn't look her way. They did but she got the attention of the bad boys and she'd rather not end up like her mom. She wanted a good guy like Todd or Mr Patterson, who was Jackie's step dad.

“Sal?” Jackie snapped her fingers trying to gain her attention.

“What's up?” Sal replied

“Where has your mind been lately? Are you okay?” Jay asked with a concern laced in her voice.

“I’m okay. One of my classes is just intense and you know how I get” she lied.

She had no difficult class. She was a straight-A student. She was everybody’s tutor. She couldn’t really tell Jackie what exactly was on her mind because she knew she’d hate it.

“Well, if you’re having a hard time then I wonder how the others are doing. You’re the smartest person I know.” Jay joked.

“We’ll figure it out. So, what were you saying before I zoned out?” She inquired.

“Todd and a couple of friends are going bowling this Friday, wanna come? There would be a lot of hunks.” She winked.

“Nah, I think I’ll just stay home and catch up on my reading assignments. I’m kind of falling behind” She lied again.

“Dang it, girl, since when did you fall behind? Where is my friend because clearly you aren’t her?” she joked.

“Told you this new class been giving me a beating.” She smiled.

“Well, study hard. I’ll have fun for both of us. I need to get going and so should you.” she said looking at her watch.

## CHAPTER FIVE

It was a Friday night and she'd agreed to go on a date with Michael. That was the main reason why she'd bailed on the group hangout Jackie suggested. Her only wish was that they go to a place Jackie would never go or at least they stay clear of the bowling alley downtown. She really had no idea where they were going and so she couldn't pick an outfit. He was going to pick her up at 7 pm and she'd been staring at the clothes in her closet for the past hour. She was so grateful she didn't have class on Fridays but she, however, had to tutor some students but she cancelled the appointment. She felt bad but she needed all the time she could get to get ready since she'd had to forego her stylist (Jackie). She spent the day at the salon getting her hair and nails done. Her hair was usually up in a bun because that was the kind of girl she was -a minimalist. But for the date, she had gone for a wash and her curls to be more defined. Her normal nail colour would be black but tonight she was a fire hot girl, she chose red and her nails looked awesome. Jackie would be so proud. She was standing there when her phone rang. It was from Jackie.

“Oh God, let her not be at my door”

“Hey Jay, what's up?”

“Sal, last chance to join us. Come on girl, live a little”

“Jay you know I have some reading to catch up on.”

“It’s Friday, though. You have Saturday and even Sunday to do all that boring stuff” she whined.

“I know but remember I have that family function this Saturday”

“Yeah. Welp, girl I forgot. I’ll have fun for both of us”

“Wait a second. Don’t hang up. Julie texted me she has a hot date tonight and the guy didn’t tell her where they were going so she wanted outfit ideas”

“Julie? The girl in your class? When did y’all get that close?”

“Does it matter? She must be desperate if she asked me” she laughed.

“You must be right. Tell her to put on a black midi dress if she has one. She can’t go wrong with that” she suggested

“It’s cold out. What kind of jacket should she pair it with? And don’t forget the shoes.”

“Well, ask her if she has a jacket that is suitable for a fancy restaurant and can be worn to a place like the bowling alley? She can wear black pumps. The guy should’ve really given her a hint at least.”

“Right? All this stress.” Sally complained.

“Tell her not to stress and to just chill and dress up for anything except the opera though, she’s gonna need a ball gown for that” Jackie joked.

“Alright, thanks, Sis. Have a fun evening. I’ll just be here reading” she whined.

“Bye babe. Read a ton” then she hung up.

After the call, she checked the time and she had an hour before Mike showed up and with the advice Jackie gave, she found the perfect outfit that fit her situation. She got into the shower and just after putting the finishing touches to her makeup, she heard a knock on her door.

She opened to find Michael looking snazzy in a business casual outfit and with her favourite flowers and chocolate.

“Hi, come in” she greeted.

“Hi, you look remarkable” he complimented handing her the flowers and chocolate.

“Thank you for that and these” she smiled.

“Ready to go?” he asked.

“Yeah let me grab my purse”

They left her apartment. On their way, she asked him where they were going and he said dinner at this restaurant that just opened downtown that

is all the rage among the campus folk. She panicked a bit about the campus folk bit but then she remembered that usually when they go bowling with the gang, they just load up on fries, wings and burgers at the alley. She calmed down just when they rolled into the parking lot of the *LaVida Restaurant*. He parked and helped her out of the car. He was such a gentleman. They walked in and as they were waiting to get a table, she heard her name and a chill ran down her spine. She turned around praying it wasn't who she thought it was but it was too late. She came face-to-face with Jackie. And to make matters worse, Michael also turned. She knew when he turned because of the expression on her best friend's face. Jackie stared at the two for a second and then turned and left the restaurant.

## CHAPTER SIX

"Jay, wait up. I can explain just give me a chance." Sally pleaded as she chased after her best friend and sister.

"I did give you a chance, Sal, and you lied to me" she shouted angrily as she stopped beside Todd's car.

Sally got to them just as Todd was about to unlock it.

"Todd, please give us a moment," Sal asked.

He looked at Jackie for a moment and then walked away.

"Jay, I wanted to tell you but you made it so clear you hated him and I didn't even know why" she explained.

"You could've trusted me, Sal, all these years together have I ever led you astray?" Jackie responded.

"No, you haven't. But-"

"But nothing," Jackie interrupted, "I am your best friend and sister from another mom. I have always had your back"

"I know but Jay, I'm not some child you can tell not to do something without a proper explanation," Sal said with a lowered voice.

"I know, babe, but that guy is really a piece of work" Jay scoffed.

"Why? Please tell me why because I am beginning to like him a lot" Sal begged.

"He's a serial cheater and abuser," Jay said looking down.

"What? He beats women?" Sal asked with disbelief.

"Yes, if you pay attention to the gossip being thrown around in the student council, you'd hear" Jackie stated.

"Gossip? How do you know it's even true?" Sal angrily asked.

"Because I have spoken to one of his exes and she confirmed it. That's why I said he was bad news. Now please stay away from him" Jackie pleaded.

"This is too much to take in. I need to think" Sal responded backing away from Jackie.

"Sal, Sal" Jackie shouted after her but she'd gotten into a taxi and driven off.

Jackie stood at the lot praying her friend heeds her warning and stays away from that psychotic man. Todd came and wrapped his arms around her.

"I just don't want her to get hurt," she said burying her head into his chest.

*BAAWAACQUAH*

"Just let her be. Whatever happens, we'll be here for her" Todd said placing a gentle kiss on her head.

"You know it" Jackie sighed.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

It's been over a week since that night at the restaurant's parking lot.

Michael has been trying to get in touch with Sally but every attempt had been unsuccessful. He'd called, texted and even gone by her apartment but still no sign of her. No one had laid eyes on her all week. She'd canceled all her tutoring sessions and missed an entire week of class. That was so unlike her.

*“What exactly did that troublemaker tell her for her to ghost me like this. I waited an entire year to be with this girl. Nothing will stop me from having her.”*

Michael Porter was the only son of the Porters, one of the most prominent families in the city. His dad was the state governor whilst his mom was mayor of Brockmin, a subsidiary of Easley State. He came from a long line of lawmakers in the city of Easley. He had wishes to be a part of the family legacy and that was why he was a law major in Brockmin College.

He remembers the first time he saw Sally. It was the first day of school for the freshmen and she was the most beautiful girl he'd ever seen. She was with another pretty girl but he only saw her. His heart had skipped a beat and no girl had ever had that effect on him. He knew then that was going to be the woman he was going to marry. Henceforth, he'd kept so many tabs on her. He found out she wasn't based on campus grounds and made a daily commute campus from the suburbs. She was also a grade A student by

her constant visit to the Jason Porter library and also with his peeking into her student records. He'd been watching her all those months and when he saw that she was going to be a member of the student council, he figured that was his chance to get close to her and now thanks to that Jackie, he couldn't find her anywhere.

"Hey, Jackie" he rushed to stop her as she got into her car.

Stiffening a bit, she turned to him, "What do you want?"

"Sorry to disturb you but have you heard from Sally?" he asked.

"No, I have not" she answered and turned to unlock her car.

"That is absolutely impossible!" He exclaimed.

"No, what is impossible is you still being here." She remarked.

"What did you tell her about me?" he asked angrily.

"I told her the truth." She screamed.

"What tru-" then it dawned on him what she was talking about. He became so furious.

"You little witch" he raised his hands

"Are you gonna hit me?" she taunted.

He realized where he was and what he was about to do and then he dropped his hands.

“Yeah, I thought so. Now get lost”

“This is the very last time you talk to me like that” he warned her.

“Are you threatening me?” she questioned furiously.

“Take it whichever way you’d like” he smiled sinisterly and walked off.

*“Today is not your day, Jacqueline Amber Brown-Patterson”*

As soon as he left, she dialed Todd. He answered on the first ring.

“Hello babe” he answered.

“Babe, can you come to pick me up?” I don’t think I can drive.” She asked.

“What happened? Don’t worry, I’ll be there. Where are you?” he asked.

“I’m at the student council parking lot. Don’t bring your car.”

“Okay, got it. Be there in five. Stay in the car”

Exactly five minutes later, he arrived with his best friend and her cousin, Ben, on his motorcycle. He rushed to her car. When he knocked on the car window, she jumped. She came out of the car when she saw him and buried her face in his chest. She shivered a little.

“Jay, tell me what has gotten you so shaken up.” He asked.

“Michael. He threatened me today” she said softly.

“Which Michael?”

“Porter”

“What?” he yelled drawing Ben’s attention to them.

“Hey Jay” he greeted, “Man, what was that for?”

“That sick son of a gun, Michael, threatened her,” he said angrily.

“What?!” Ben yelled in dismay.

“Bro, let’s go handle business”, Todd stated.

“Yeah man,” Ben agreed.

“No, you’re doing no such thing. He can hurt you both and I can’t handle it” she cried.

Ben signaled Todd and said, “Bro, take her home and I’ll catch you later.”

“Benjamin Brown, do not do anything stupid” Jackie shouted after him.

Meanwhile, “Sally, you’ve been here for a week and you’ve not said anything. I am happy you came to me but baby girl what’s going on in your life?” her dad asked.

“Nothing” she replied and continued staring out the window.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

It'd been a week since she'd been hiding out at her dad's place. Her mom would freak out if she knew she came there but that's the perfect place for her to hide out. She'd turned her phone off after she canceled all her tutoring appointments. She'd missed too much school and she needed to face everything. Jackie had never lied to her but she believed there was always two sides to a story so she needed to hear from Michael too. She was at the window again with a cup of coffee in her hand per usual since she came over to stay. She heard footsteps and she didn't have to turn to know it was her dad. His latest plaything has been avoiding her since she came over.

“Dad, I will be going back to school today”, she said turning to look at him, “Thank you for putting me up this week.”

“It was my pleasure, baby girl. I know I've been gone for a while but-”

“Don't. Let's not get into it right now.” She cut him off.

“Alright,” he said.

She walked up to the sink and rinsed out her cup and gave her dad a hug and peck and then she strolled upstairs to gather her stuff. When she came downstairs, her dad looked dressed and ready.

“Dad? You and Mabel got a date?” she asked.

“Nope. I’m driving you to your place. No need to call a cab or an Uber or any of those things” he said happily.

“Ummm, you don’t need to worry about that. I-”

“Please, let me do this for you” he pleaded.

“Okay, let’s get going then”

Unlike her mom, her dad was closer to her campus, the drive was a half an hour trip. They arrived at her building.

“Well, this is me. Thanks, dad. Wanna come up?”

“Not today. You seem to have a lot to work on before you begin your classes so I’ll visit some other time”

“Okay, no problem” she reached over and hugged him.

“I love you. Take this” he said handing her a couple of bills from his wallet.

“I love you too and thanks dad”

She got out of the car and watched him drive off and then she started walking towards the building from the parking lot. As she neared the entrance, a hand grabbed her and she cried out of fright.

“Hey, hey, calm down it’s me,” the voice said and let go of her arm. It sounded like Michael’s so she turned to see.

“What the heck did you do that for?” she asked angrily when she confirmed that it was him.

“Sorry, I’ve been trying to reach you” he apologized.

“So, you had to give me a heart attack?” she said without giving him another glance and continued walking up to her apartment.

“You just left without a word. I was worried” he explained.

“You have a very weird way of expressing concern” she unlocked her door and entered her apartment. She turned to invite him in and that’s when she noticed the bruises on his face thanks to the hallway lights.

“Oh my God!” she exclaimed, “What happened to you?”

“It was Ben” he answered.

“Ben? Which Ben?”

“Jackie’s cousin”

“Why would he beat you up? What did you do to him?”

“Nothing”

“Nothing? Ben isn’t some idiot that just goes around punching people for no good reason”

“I went to Jackie asking about you and the next thing I knew, Ben attacked me at my place later with a bunch of his & Todd’s friends”

“Right,” she said sarcastically.

“Are you gonna keep standing there?”

“You haven’t offered me a seat”

“You can sit anywhere”

“Okay, thanks,” he said as he sat on her sofa.

“So, about the almost first date. I-”

“Yes, let’s talk about that. Why did you leave and why have you been ghosting me?” he interrupted.

“If you let me finish my sentence, we’d get to it” she responded.

“Sorry, please continue”

“I found out some things about you that have made me hesitant in taking whatever is happening here any further” she stated matter-of-factly.

## CHAPTER NINE

“Did he hear her right?” He couldn’t believe what she said.

“What did you say?” He asked tentatively, hoping he misheard.

“I said I want to put an end to whatever is going on here”

“Why would you want to do that? What did I do to you?”

“You haven’t done anything to me in particular”

“Then why don’t you want to give me a shot”

“I found out something about you that truly terrifies me”

“What are you talking about? What have I done?”

“I found out that you are a serial cheater and also have violent reactions towards the women in your life”

“Whaaat!?” he exclaimed. “Where did you get that lie from?”

“Lie?” Sally asked taken aback with that particular info.

“Yes, lie. So, who told you?”

“Jackie”

“Jackie? Your best friend?”

“Yeah, that Jackie and she had no reason to lie to me”

“Maybe she didn’t lie but whoever told her that lied to her”

At this point, Sally was getting confused but she knew in her gut to keep trusting Jackie because never had she led her astray. Despite her wild side, Jackie was the more sensible friend. Jackie by virtue of dating a law student always made sure that whatever she said was verified and true. So, she didn't know what kind of game Michael was playing but she wasn't here for it.

"It really doesn't matter if it's true or not. I don't want to be mixed up in this drama. My life isn't a TV drama show"

"Sa-" her phone beeped.

"Nope, don't want to hear what you have to say. Please leave" she said walking over to the door to let him out.

He couldn't believe this was happening. He needed to fix this before it got out of hand. He walked out of the door, took one long look at her and got the door slammed in his face.

*"This isn't over. You'll be mine"* and then he left.

She let out a breath she didn't know she'd held as she slumped against the door.

*"That went easier than I thought"*

She took her phone and sent Jay a text, "Girl, I'm back at my place"

“Okay, I’m coming over” came the reply.

“No, not today”

“Sure?”

“Yeah, I have a lot of catching up to do”

“You’re not lying to me, right?”

“No, I am not. Trust me. I’m sorry for the last time. I just ended things with Mike”

“Girl, I need to come over. Are you okay?”

“I’m okay. I’ll see you later”

“Send me a selfie or something because I need to lay eyes on you”

She face-timed her, “See, I’m okay”

“Well, that’s good”

“Got to go. Love you”

“Love you too bud” and the call ended.

It’d been a week since she came back. Michael has been trying really hard to speak to her but she’d been really swamped making it impossible for him. But it seems his luck was about to change seeing as she saw him pacing in

front of her door when she got back to her place mid-afternoon Thursday after her classes ended.

“What do you want?” she questioned impatiently as she moved to unlock her door.

“Hi Sal” he greeted, “I’ve been trying to reach you”

“I know and I’ve been avoiding you” she responded

“Come on, Sal. There are two sides to every story. Don’t you want to hear mine?”

“No, not necessarily” she moved into her apartment.

“Okay, regardless of how you feel, I still deserve the opportunity to defend myself. The law states that you are innocent until proven guilty. And-” he explained.

“Well, clearly this isn’t the courthouse” she pointed out.

“It doesn’t matter. Just let me explain and then I would never bother you again” he pleaded.

He drove a hard bargain. She now had the choice of spending less than an hour with him listening to his side and never hearing from him again and sending him away only for him to keep showing up.

“Your offer is really tempting”

“Then accept it”

She thought about it for a moment and opened her door for him to come in when she made up her mind to hear him out. She knew she was making the right choice but something told her that she was about going to regret making that choice. No matter what she thought could go wrong with her life after lending him a listening ear, she wasn’t ready for the rollercoaster ride she just got on.

“Well, the floor is all yours” Sal announced when they’d both been situated comfortably.

“Thank you”

## CHAPTER TEN

He knew this was his last shot to get her to get with him. He hoped that whatever he says now will make her look on him a bit more favourably. He took a deep breath and went on to explain to her that the situation had been misrepresented and blown out of proportion.

“I’m not an unfaithful partner” Michael stated

“Okay, so why is your ex saying something else?” Sally asked

“She isn’t necessarily an ex because we had a special kind of arrangement in which the lines became blurred and she started taking certain liberties”

“Arrangement? What kind of arrangement?”

“Well, we were friends with benefits” he muttered

“I didn’t quite catch that,” she said

“I said we were friends with benefits” he repeated audibly

“Oh,” she said as the realisation dawned on her

“In the agreement, if one person begins to have real feelings for the other party and it’s not mutual then the arrangement comes to an end and they go their separate ways”

“Really? And you guys thought it was a good idea?”

“At the time it seemed good because neither of us was looking for a permanent situation”

“Wow, well that still makes zero sense to me but do you”

“About the abuse part, it never happened. She was just bitter that I ended things and she swore to get even”

“I-” she was interrupted by a knock on her door

She moved to check who it was because she was expecting Jackie to come over. Looking through her peephole, she saw that Jackie came with company. She let them in and that's when they saw Michael.

“I thought you were done with him. What's he doing here?” they questioned in unison.

“He's just leaving,” Michael said as he stood up

“Think about what we talked about,” he said to Sally and he left.

Sally closed the door and turned around to the questioning glances of her friends.

“Well, spill. What was he talking about?” Jackie questioned

“Have a seat, guys. I'll tell you everything”

When it seemed that everyone was somewhat comfortable with their seating arrangements, Ben gestured that now was the time for Sally to start talking.

“Well before you think I lied to you; I just came from class to meet him at my door” Sal explained

“So, he’s stalking you?” Todd asked

“Not necessarily. He just came to tell me his side of the story”

“You mean he came to justify his actions” Ben commented

Sally then proceeded to inform them of everything that Michael had said to her.

“So, do you believe him?” they asked

“No, not really but I’d like to talk to the girl in question and hear things for myself”

“It’s not necessary, Sal, I spoke to her already” Jay argued

“I know but-”

“But nothing. You don’t trust me” Jay said thickly

“No, Jay. That’s not it. I just want to meet her” she said drawing close to her best friend.

“Okay then. Just say when and I’ll take you there” Jackie agreed.

They hang out in her apartment for a while catching up on each other’s lives.

Meanwhile, on the other side of town, a young woman had just come home with her young child. After dropping off their things, she turned on the TV for the two-year-old boy to watch. She was just about to start preparing their dinner when the doorbell rang.

“Just a second” she responded as she dried off her hands to unlock the door.

Without even looking through her security window she opened the door and came face-to-face with her biggest nightmare.

“Hello there, Jane. Miss me?” Michael greeted mischievously.

“Wh-what are you doing here?” she asked gripped with fear.

“I came to ask you for a little favour,” he said as he rushed to grab her by the throat.

“Please let me go. I’ll do whatever you ask” she pleaded with tears running down her face.

“Fine then,” he said letting go of his hold on her.

They stood in the foyer of the house. She hoped Jason wouldn’t come looking for her. He didn’t need to see any of this.

“A beautiful woman would come and see you about our relationship. I really like her and I need you to tell her that the rumours about me being a

cheat and an abuser is nothing but lies that you came up with when our friends with benefits arrangement ended" he narrated with a wicked grin.

"Okay, I will do it" she agreed hastily so he would leave.

"Make it convincing or else we know who will pay for your mistakes" he threatened.

"Please keep him out of this," she said with a raised voice

Right after that, she felt the sting of his hand across her face.

"Grown a bit confident, have we?" he taunted

"Please, I'm sorry. I would do everything I can to be convincing. Just leave me and Jason alone" she pleaded

"We'll see" and then he turned and left just as he'd come.

*"How could I have gotten involved with that man? Because of him, I lost everything.*

*My only brother and his wife."*

"Mommy" Jason cried from the room.

She quickly dried her eyes and ran to him.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

It was a Saturday morning, Jane didn't have to go to work but she did need to get the house in order but nonetheless, she could afford to sleep in a little later than usual. She could feel tiny hands moving across her face. She began to smile. It was their morning ritual. She'd sleep late and Jace would wake her up by running his fingers across her face. It was a struggle on weekdays to get him up and ready for day-care, you'd think that on weekends, he'd actually sleep in but no, not her Jace. Her little man would be up bright and early at 6 am sometimes even earlier. He'd be ready to eat and play.

“Mommy, up,” he said

Anytime, he called her mom, her heart ached for the people who made him and had never gotten the chance to enjoy being with him. He was such a delightful little boy. Being in his presence always chased away all her problems.

“Alright, I’m up” she smiled at him and she grabbed him for a cuddle.

They got out of bed and into the bathroom to wash up a bit before heading downstairs. When they got down, she switched on the TV placed him in front of it. She proceeded to make him his breakfast which was consisted of a bowl of cereal and milk and fruits. He liked to feed

himself because he thought he was old enough so she left him to eat as she went about straightening the house. She had just put in another load of laundry in the washer when she heard the knock on the door. She peeped in to see what Jace was up to and found him glued to the screen watching his favourite show with the mess he'd made of his breakfast oblivious to him. With a little shake of her head, she opened the door smiling.

In front of her was Jackie, the girl who asked her out to coffee to discuss her relationship with Michael Porter.

*“Well, I know who one is but who is the other one?”*

“Good morning, how may I help you?” she greeted cheerily.

“Hello good morning, I am Sally Turner” the other woman introduced.

“And I am-” Jackie introduced

“Jackie Patterson-Brown” Jane interrupted

“Okay, I’m Jane Nelson-Jones. Come in”

She led them into the kitchen and offered them seats at her kitchen counter because that offered her the best view of the living room where the most important person in her life was.

“Would you like some coffee? It’s a fresh pot that I brewed this morning” she offered

“Yes, we would like some,” they said in unison

She poured everyone a cup and sat down.

“Well, let’s get to it then. How can I help you again?” she asked Jackie

“Remember my friend I was talking about the last time we met? She would like to hear the details about your relationship with Mike herself so I brought her.”

*“Is this who Michael was talking about? Well, there’s no way to find out without being suspicious. I just need to say what he asked me to say”*

“Oh, that!” she exclaimed fixing a broad smile on her face.

“We had a little arrangement if you know what I mean” she winked, “I violated the terms and he ended things with me. I was upset because come on look at me. Who wouldn’t love to be with me? So, I got even” she said contentedly.

Jackie couldn’t believe what had just been said. Her story would’ve been quite easy to swallow but the faded mark on her cheek gave her away.

“Oh, I see. I understand. We’ll be on our way now” Jackie responded

Sally was about to say something when Jackie nudged her and signalled her to let her be. Jane saw them out and leaned against her door and sighed heavily.

Once they were out, “I don’t believe anything she said” they both said

“Jinx” they cried in unison and burst out laughing

“Okay, why don’t you buy anything she said?” Jackie questioned

“Did you notice the faded mark on her cheek?” Sally pointed out

“Yes, I did,” Jackie said

“I think someone made her say that to us,” Sal said

“Someone? Or Mike?” Jackie asked

“Either way, I’m still staying away from him” Sal stated emphatically

“Good” Jackie agreed

They moved their car up the street a couple of houses away from Jane’s and called for reinforcements.

While waiting for them, Sal texted Michael that she was still uninterested in going further with him. Shortly after, he called but she rejected his call a few times. An hour later, they saw him speed onto Jane’s driveway. He jumped furiously out of his car and went banging on her door.

“*Oh my God! His plan didn’t go as planned*” Jane panicked.

She grabbed Jace and locked him upstairs in the bedroom amidst the boy's cries from being startled by the noise Michael was creating outside.

She said a prayer and opened the door and got greeted with a blow across the face.

“What did you tell her!” he asked furiously

“I told her what you said I should” she cried

“Liar!” and sent another punch her way

“Please, I’m telling the truth” she begged

“So why would she still say no to me?” he questioned

“I-I don’t know” she replied and received another hit

“I know why,” Sally said appearing in the doorway

He couldn’t have heard right. She couldn’t be here. His hands mid-air he turned and saw Sally staring at him with disgust. His expression turned to one of a deer caught in headlights.

“Your jig is up” Ben sneered

“Finally, the mask is off. I can finally see the real you” Sally said

“Help” Jane pleaded and fell unconscious.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

Mike was trapped. He could hear the sirens heading towards their direction. His family was definitely going to disown him. This was one mess up that he couldn't make go away. He handled Jane's brother very well because it was just that one man. Here stood four people and one of which was very dear to him. He could barely look her in the eye. His eyes searched the room looking for an escape route but he came up empty. The door was blocked by Sally and Jackie. He could see Todd and Ben had a couple of friends cover the other viable routes as well.

“The jig is up. You crazy son of a gun.” Ben snickered as he made his way over to secure Mike before he can run or do anything to endanger Sal and Jackie.

The EMTs and police rolled up and only then did Jackie rush up to rescue the crying boy from the bedroom he'd been put in. She came down to meet the paramedics rolling Jane out and the police taking statements from her friends.

“Hello Miss, I'm Officer McClein”

“Hello Officer, I'm Jacqueline Patterson-Brown, a friend of the victim”

They took their statements and the girls left to check on Jane and the boys went with the police to ensure that Michael stayed locked up.

They got to St. Peter's Memorial Hospital emergency room with Officer McClein to have the boy checked and to find information on Jane's condition. Jace was being examined when the officer brought them updates on Jane's condition.

"Miss Nelson-Jones will be fine. She did not sustain any major injuries but she would be admitted for a couple of days to ensure that nothing was missed" he reported

"Thank God," Sally said

"Right there with you" Jane added

"This young man is perfectly fine. He just needs a bath" the nurse said smiling as she handed him back to Jackie.

"So, is Jane awake? Can we see her?" they asked

"Yes, the nurse said she's in room 304" the officer replied

"Thank you so much, Officer McClein"

"Just doing my job here," he said tipping his hat and bidding them goodbye.

They arrived at Jane's door. Jackie was about to open and let them in when Sally stopped her and said, "What if she hates me?"

Jackie was taken aback by her question and responded with, “Why would she hate you? What did you do?”

“If I’d not messed with him, he’d never have come back into her life”

“True but look at it this way, because of you, he’s leaving her life for good now”

“That really doesn’t make me feel better”

“Whatever happens, you know better now”

“Got that right”

They went in to meet a now conscious Jane being propped up by the nurses. When Jace saw her, he stretched out his chubby arms and cried, “Mommy”

“Oh, my baby” Jane cooed stretching her arms to receive him wincing a bit.

She cradled her baby in hands and raised her head and looked directly into their eyes and said, “Thank you”

“Thank you?” sally questioned

“Yes, thank you. You ended my nightmare. I don’t have to fear the shadows”

They nodded and left the mother-son duo.

As she lay cradling her bundle of joy, her mind took a trip down memory lane.

\*\*\*\*\*

It was a hot sunny Saturday afternoon and she was running late to work. Her boss was going to chew her out because this is the third time this week, she'd been late. And to think she volunteered for this shift would even piss her off even more. Jane was exhausted and she knew she didn't need to take the shift but her tuition and bills wouldn't pay themselves. Her brother, Jason was helping out but he's married now and he and April were preparing to be parents. She was so psyched. A couple of weeks ago when they'd invited her over for dinner and announced that a niece or nephew was on the way she could barely contain her excitement. She was really happy for both of them. They'd been through so much. At least her brother had her but April grew up all alone. She had no family until she met her brother. It was love at first sight for those two. April was her best friend. They met when they both started waitress at a local diner downtown called *Pop In* when they were just about sixteen years old. They gravitated towards each other because of the similarities they shared with their childhood. She remembers finding out that day from April that she had no place to stay after work because she'd just ran away from the orphanage, she lived in two towns over and so she invited her to live with her and her

brother. From that day onwards, they became a close-knit family. She remembers bringing April home and introducing her to Jason and seeing that awestruck expression on his face. April was definitely a beauty and her brother was quite the catch himself who left April speechless as well.

It all seemed like yesterday but it'd been almost six years and her brother and April now owned *Pop In* and had been married for a little over a year with a bun in the oven. And here she was, almost done with nursing school. Things looked great for them now and nothing could ruin it for them. *Or so she thought.*

*“Oh, dear God, please help me get to work on time”* she prayed

It was a really hot day and she needed to get to *Star Hotel* in Bromwick before the clock struck 3 and she barely had 30 minutes to go and that junky old car of her brothers had finally died on her. The good thing about the breakdown was where the car broke down, it broke down on the highway. She just prayed she could hitch a ride to work. She'd texted her brother but he was too far to get to pick her up but he would handle the car.

She'd been at the road for a good ten minutes and it seemed all the cars had disappeared. Just when she was about to lose faith and call in sick, a black sedan rolled up to her. The driver rolled down his windows and asked her, “Do you want a ride?” he smiled.

“Yes, I would, assuming you’re not a serial killer” she joked.

“Oh, you got jokes. I’m Michael, Michael Porter” he said opening the door for her to get in.

“I’m Jane, Jane Nelson-Jones,” she said sitting down.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The car ride to Bromwick went by fast probably because they had a ball going there. It turned out they liked the same artists and so they were partying it up all the way to the hotel.

“Well, this is me,” Jane said

“It was really great riding over here with you,” he said sheepishly

“Back at ya” she agreed

“So, can I...” he let his words trail

“Can you?” Jane asked smiling

“You’re enjoying this, aren’t you?”

“Every second of it” she laughed

“Oh man,” he takes in a deep breath “Can I please have your number?”

“I mean that wasn’t so hard, was it?” she teased as she dialled her number on his phone.

“I have to go now, though” she announced gesturing to the locked door

“Right, sorry” he apologised and unlocked the door

“Thanks so much for the ride” she thanked him and left.

He sat still for a brief minute and drove off. His parents would not be pleased if he missed the function or showed up late.

It'd been over a week since she met Mike. In her opinion, she thought that everything went well and they had a great connection. He seemed to be enamoured with her or she misread the whole situation.

“He’ll call” April said startling Jane.

She’d come over to her brothers’ for their regular Sunday family dinners to reconnect.

“I’m not worried” she feigned unconcern

“Cut it out, Jane. You’re my best friend, remember?”

“Alright, I hear you”

“So, why don’t you call him? You exchanged numbers, right?” April inquired

“Um, nope. Not happening. Remember the last time?

“Yes, but-”

“But nothing, April. How are you and the baby doing?” Jane asked

“Well, doctors say everything is good but I need to take it easy” she replied

“Hey, everything would be fine okay” Jane assured her

She nodded.

A week after that conversation with April, Michael called.

“Hey, handsome, thought you forgot about me” she greeted

“How can I forget about you, Jane? Things have been crazy for me lately but I have thought about you” he replied

“Thinking about me isn’t going to cut it, handsome. Try a different line”

“How about you and me, dinner at any restaurant of your choosing”

“Nicely done. Pick me up in 30 minutes” she said

“I don’t know where you live”

“That can be arranged. I’ll text you. See you in 30” she said cheerily and hang up

He showed up just on time to take her to a restaurant she’d been dying to go to because she’d heard too many good things about their food. She was a sucker for food especially good food. They had a splendid time at dinner. Michael was the perfect gentleman and Jane was having the time of her life. He took her to all these amazing places and bought her all sorts of gifts just because. She could hardly believe how perfect he was.

He did so much for her and they’d barely even shared a kiss. He

definitely knew how to woo a woman because Jane had definitely been swept off her feet.

They'd been hanging out for almost six weeks and that was the longest time that Jane has been known to stick with a man. Usually, she gets bored and detaches and goes back to focusing on school and getting to where she wants to be as a person.

She'd been skipping out on Sunday family dinner to hang out with Mike and her brother was not having it this week. He'd called her to come over or she'd regret it.

So, here she was sitting at their kitchen with her head buried in her phone.

“Jane, why don’t you get your face out of that phone and talk to me about this new guy you’re seeing that has made you forget about your family” Jason said sitting down next to her at the counter

“Oh, come on, I haven’t forgotten about you guys”

“But you have” April chipped in

“April, I call and text you everyday”

“But I hardly see you and I miss my best friend” and then she started to cry

“Oh, honey I’m so sorry. I’d do better” Jane apologised

“You better” Jason replied

“Really?” April asked Jane

“Yes, really”

April proceeded to dry her “tears” and burst out laughing

“Oh my God, you guys played me!” she exclaimed at the laughing couple

“I’m so getting you guys back”

“Jane, April says you’ve been with this guy for over a month. When am I going to meet him?

“Soon, I just need to talk to him first and see where he’s at with his intentions with us” she said

“So, you don’t know his intentions and you’re over there accepting all the expensive gifts?”

“April!” she exclaimed, “What happened to girl code?”

“Sorry honey but girl code doesn’t work here. He’s my husband and your brother. He was worried about you”

Jane nodded and turned to her brother, “I didn’t ask him for them though”

“It doesn’t mean you should take it” April said quietly

“What if he uses them as leverage to make you do something you don’t want to do”

“He’s not like that”

“Well, how do you know? And how long have you known him?” Jason asked

“People pretend a lot these days to be something other than who they really are” April said

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

It had been a couple of weeks since she had dinner with her family. So much was said during that encounter but what April said about pretence just kept on ringing in her mind. No matter how hard she tried, she couldn't shake the foreboding feeling that statement gave her. She hadn't been able to go home because school and work were literally kicking her butt. Since then, she'd taken quite the number of tests and she was due for payment of some bills so, she worked quite the number of shifts. It had been such a feat to meet up with Michael. They, however, spoke on the phone frequently. This weekend she was through with a bunch of quizzes so she planned to decompress and she intended on doing that in her brother's house because she truly missed him and April. It was a Friday afternoon, she had no more classes for the day and she was going to take the bus home and pack up the necessities and hitch another bus ride home since her sorry excuse of a car had given up on her two days ago hours before one of the most important tests of her life.

She had just stepped outside the building basking in the warmth of the sun when her phone dinged signalling the arrival of a text message.

“Don’t move. You look otherworldly in the light. Let me get a pic”

She smiled and looked out to spot him and he waved her over in the parking lot. He was sitting on the hood of his car looking all yum.

She ran to him and he gathered her in a passionate embrace.

“Hey, I wasn’t expecting you”

“I know. It was supposed to be a surprise”

“Well, I liked it a lot”

‘So, what brings you by?’

“I was thinking since we haven’t seen each other in a while then we should go out and celebrate the end of a stressful couple of weeks”

“Oh, I love the sound of that. What do you want to do?”

“I was hoping you’d pick the activity since it’s for your enjoyment”

“Well then let’s go dancing!”

“I cannot dance to save my life, babe”

“Neither can I but I don’t let that stop me. Come on, it would be fun”

“Alright, let’s do that then”

She jumped excitedly.

“Let me text my brother really quick. I was supposed to spend the weekend with him and my sister-in-law”

“Alright”

She texted Jason and April who were sorely disappointed with the change in plans because they'd missed her.

“Aaaw, they are so sad that I can’t make it”

“You can still see them tomorrow, right?”

“Yeah. Let me tell them I am still coming but not today”

She informed them and they told her to have a fun night and they can’t wait to hang with her the next day.

“All done! Now, I’m all yours”

“Ooh I like the sound of that” he says as he grabs her by the waist.

Stopping in front of her apartment building, “I’ll be back later so we can have fun” he said

“Alright cool. I can pack my stuff for my brother’s place and maybe have a power nap before I get ready”

“Babe, you don’t know how to power nap”

“What? Says who? I can power nap. Text me when you come”

“Says me but okay”

“Catch you later babe”, she said pecking his lips

“Bye”

She had spent the next couple of hours setting her apartment straight and getting her things ready for the weekend at her brother's place. She was exhausted and she could really do with a power nap. She quickly grabbed what she wanted to wear tonight and laid it up on a chair in her bedroom. She then threw herself on her bed for a power nap.

She was sprawled across her bed deep in sleep. Her phone had been buzzing for an hour but she was too deep in dreamland to notice. It'd been an hour past her meeting time with Michael and he was worried. She wasn't answering the door and neither was she answering her phone. He stood out there knocking and calling till one of her neighbours got sick of the noise and came out.

“Hey, man, I’m Josh. Can I help you?”

“Yeah actually. Have you seen Jane? I’m Michael”

“No, I haven’t. Is there a problem? Michael huh” he answered giving him a once-over smirking

“Kind of. I dropped her off earlier so she can get ready for our date later but I haven’t been able to reach her since”

“She probably knocked out. She was supposed to finish her exams today. Let me get my key to open it up for you”

“You have a key to her apartment?”

“Yeah, we exchanged keys a while back”

“Wow, and I’m dating her and I don’t have a key? What kind of relationship do they have?”

Josh came back a few minutes with the key and open up the door and lo and behold, Jane was totally knocked out on her bed.

“I don’t think you guys are going for that date of yours. She looks really exhausted. Why don’t you go and I’ll let her know when she wakes up?”

Josh suggested.

Michael was taken aback by the suggestion but he could hardly do anything at this point so he took one last glance at her and then left her apartment with Josh who locked it after they exited and proceeded to his own place.

He sat in his car thinking about the events for a while and drove off.

It was almost midnight when Jane finally woke up. She sat up with a jolt and checked her phone. She had a ton of missed calls and messages, mostly from Michael.

She called him but he didn’t answer so she texted to apologise for missing their date. She was starving but then she knew she had nothing to eat because she hadn’t planned on being home this evening. She took a quick shower and went over to Josh’s place. He absolutely loved to cook and she loved to eat so she knew she’d be fine.

She texted him that she's coming over for food and he said she should come right over.

She went next door and after he'd served her some food, he excused himself to shower.

She was halfway through with her meal when Michael texted that he was at her door. She got up to meet him.

When she emerged out of Josh's instead of hers, his eyes widened. Just before he could get a word out, Josh came out looking like someone who had just stepped out of the shower.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

“What the heck, Jane!” Mike exclaimed, “You blew me off to hang out with your “friend”

“Calm down bro, it’s not what you think” Josh tried

His interference infuriated Michael the more. Jane asked him to go inside and she’d talk to him later. She moved the conversation to her apartment because the hallway was becoming crowded with nosy neighbors.

“Michael, you are overreacting. It’s not what it looks like. You need to calm down so I can explain?”

“I’m overreacting? I just saw my girl coming out of some dude’s apartment and he is in a towel half naked.”

“Would you chill? Damn!”

“What did you just say to me?”

“I said take a chill pill and let a girl talk”

Without another word, he smacked her on the face causing her to fall.

“What the hell?!” she screamed.

“Babe”

“You hit me?”

“Babe, listen”

“NO! You really hit me”

“I’m sorry. Please listen to me”

“GET OUT OF MY APARTMENT NOW!! How dare you put your hands on me?”

That was the moment that Josh rushed into the apartment. The walls in the building were pretty thin so when Jane cried out, he heard it and made his way to her place.

He barged in on them surprising both of them sidestepping Michael to reach Jane.

“Jane, you okay? What did he do to you?” he asked and right after he noticed the print he left on her cheek when he smacked her.

Without a word, he turned around and punched Michael in the face breaking his nose. A little fight broke out that drew the attention of her neighbors who successfully pulled the two men apart. Michael was then escorted out of the building to finally put an end to the altercation.

When everyone had finally dispersed, Josh and Jane sat down to discuss what had transpired.

“Thank you for taking care of the situation for me”

“No problem but why did he hit you?”

“I told him to calm down so I could explain why I was at your place.”

“And that’s why he went off? You need to stay away from him he has serious anger issues.”

“You may be right but I didn’t help matters either”

“Excuse me, what? Maybe right? I am right and this is not on you”

“Okay, I hear you. Now let me treat these injuries. He definitely got you good”

“Nah, you should have peeped his face. I did a number on him. He’s never hitting a woman again”

“Okay, Mike Tyson” she laughed.

After his injuries were attended to, she was still hungry so they went back to Josh’s place to eat and watch a movie. Josh offered for her to crash at his place because he thought that Mike would be back later on.

He wasn’t wrong.

Michael hadn’t left when he was escorted away. He circled round the block for a while and parked across the street watching them in her apartment. Their floor wasn’t really high up and thanks to the spying equipment he had in his possession he could see through the windows.

He watched them laugh and talk all the while Jane dressing his injuries when it should have been him.

*If Jane thought she was going to take him for a fool then she was sorely mistaken,* he thought to himself. A little while later he saw them leave her apartment. Unlike Jane, Josh didn't keep his windows open so he couldn't see what was going on. He sat there for a few minutes and then drove away.

The next morning, Josh prepared breakfast and suggested Jane hide out at her brothers' place for a while but she declined. She told him that would definitely arouse suspicion and he didn't want to stress them so she'd just tough it out.

They stepped out and she was met with a beautiful arrangement of all her favourite flowers and teddy bears outside her apartment. The bears spelt out, "I am sorry"

"Awww, this is so beautiful"

"Tell me you are not falling for this" Josh said with an eye roll.

"Come on, let's give him a chance here"

"Hold up, what are-"

"Wait, there's a note"

“My dear Jane,

I am deeply sorry for my behaviour last night. I reacted poorly to the situation and you didn’t deserve me putting my hands on you. No woman deserves that. I was raised better than that. I have been in such similar position before and later found out my girl was really cheating on me. It, however, is not an excuse for my beast-like behaviour. I want to apologise in person.

Please meet me at *La Comida Bonita* at 7pm tonight if you forgive me and give me an opportunity to say all this in person

Always,

Mike”

“Jane, you are seriously not thinking of going, are you?”

“Oh, come on Josh, everybody deserves a second chance”

“You must be kidding, right?”

“No, I’m not. I need to at least hear him out”

“Wow, you must’ve hit your head when he smacked you because you have lost your mind”

“No, I haven’t. Are you going to help me take these in?”

“Nope, you got it. Don’t come to me when it goes wrong”

“Really, Josh? I thought we were friends”

“We are but I will not support this madness. When you get your mind right, hit me up. Until then, goodbye Jane”

“*What just happened?*” she thought to herself as she moved the gifts from the hallway and into her apartment.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Soon, it was time for her date with Michael and she was so nervous. Maybe Josh was right about her just staying away from him. But her stupid philosophy that everyone deserves a second chance pushed her into getting dressed to meet up with Michael for their date. She put on a midnight blue mid-length dress she'd had forever but had actually never worn. she paired it with a pair of nude pumps and went minimal on the jewellery. She let her hair down and completed her look with red lipstick.

For someone trying to lay low, she looked really great. She wasn't in the mood to drive so she'd requested for an uber and according to her map, it was barely a minute away. She needed to get downstairs immediately. Just as she was nearing the curb, she saw the car park and hence began the ride to her doom not that she knew.

She got to the restaurant just in time. She met up with Michael at the entrance. He seemed to be waiting for her. She didn't know how to act.

“Hi” he said shyly

“Hi” she responded

“Thank you for coming, let's head inside. Our table is ready”

“Sure, lead the way”

Their table was at the back of the restaurant, a little bit isolated enough to grant them the privacy they needed for the conversation they were about to have. He helped her get seated before he sat down.

“Such a gentleman” she thought

Once they were seated, their waitress, who introduced herself as Linda, approached them with a menu so she could take their orders. She wasn’t really in the mood to eat anything so she ordered a salad and he chose to have what she was having.

After Linda left, there was an uncomfortable silence at the table. After a few minutes, Michael cleared his throat.

“I am very thankful that you honoured the invitation”

“Everyone deserves to tell their story”

“I am still thankful. First and foremost, Jane, I am deeply sorry for how I behaved that day. You did nothing to warrant such harsh treatment from me. I ask that you forgive me.”

“Seriously, though, what made you think that behaviour was acceptable?”

“I don’t have any excuse for my behaviour. It was completely out of character. It’s just that moment brought on so many bad memories for

me that take me to a bad place and unfortunately for both of us, that was the action it elicited.”

“What kind of memories?”

“*Yes! I knew that was going to work*”

“It’s a long story. I’d rather not get into it”

“No, sir, I got smacked because of that story. You are definitely telling it. I have all the time in the world for this.”

With a sigh, he began to tell a story that never took place.

“I had a girlfriend, Shelly, she was very close to her neighbour, Sam. I found their closeness quite odd considering we were in a relationship. They were way too friendly. I spoke to her about it and she assured me it was nothing I should worry about and so, since relationships lacking trust barely worked out, I chose to trust her because I needed us to work out. I later found out that my trust was greatly misplaced. In the initial stages, Shelly only considered Sam as her friend but as they spent an insane amount of time together, she developed such strong feelings for him that ended up with me finding her on top of him. I had spoken to her earlier that I would be leaving on a business trip with my father. She was very displeased considering we had already made some plans to take a trip to relax. She said she was at work so, I decided that before I left, I

would leave a gift in her apartment to cheer her up when she came back from work. I had a spare key so; I used my key and went into her place. The plan was to leave my surprise in the living room because that would be the first place she encountered. I, however, heard some noises coming from the bedroom and thought she was being robbed. No one except them were supposed to be around so, the room wasn't locked just closed hence the muffled sounds that caught my attention. I stealthily opened the door so as not to alert the “assailants” only to be met with my naked girlfriend on top of a man who wasn't me. My shock couldn't be sustained which led to me gasping so loudly that it caught their attention. You should have seen them, they looked like deer caught in headlights. I walked out and never looked back. So, that's how that ended.”

“Wow!”

“Crazy, right? If I didn't live it, I wouldn't believe it either.”

“So, she never reached out? Never tried to explain herself or apologise?”

“She tried to contact me but I never gave her the time of day.”

“Wow, I understand you well but you never had closure and you need that”

“And, I agree because when I saw that scene, I thought it was the same thing over again and my actions proved that I hadn't completely dealt

with the betrayal so I decided to get some professional help to deal with it”

“Nicely done. I hear you and I forgive you but you can never do that again”

“Thank you for forgiving me. And I won’t do it ever again. Trust me.”

With a sigh, “I’ll take your word for it and you need to believe me when I say that Josh is just my friend”

“I do, baby. I am sorry for distrusting you”

“That’s alright. Now, where is this food we ordered. I need to add more to my order. My appetite suddenly came back”

He laughed. He was very happy with himself. Things turned out much better than he thought.

*“This is going to be much easier than I anticipated”*

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The dinner was a complete success. In the weeks that followed, Michael and Jane were practically attached at the hip. They did everything together as long as it was possible. Michael was going above and beyond to get her to forget that he hit her and he was definitely succeeding considering where they were at the moment.

It was just a little after midnight, they stumbled into Michael's apartment. They could barely keep their hands off each other. The kisses were passionate mixed with sloppy caresses. Michael had been waiting for this moment for weeks and not even the world coming to an end would stop him from getting what he wanted.

“Good morning, beautiful” he greeted her with a smile  
“Good morning” she said shyly remembering what had happened between them

“I made you breakfast”

“Thank you” she forgot she had no clothes on and she got out of the bed. He was surprised with the way she nonchalantly walked off to the bathroom.

“Oh shit!” he heard her exclaim. He then realised she forgot she was naked. It was too late now though. He wanted her. More of her. He

made his clothes scarce and stalked to the bathroom for an encore performance.

It was dark outside when a phone call woke her up.

“Hello?” Jane answered without looking at the screen

“Where are you?” April asked

“April? Oh shit. I missed the appointment. I-”

“Save it. Let me guess? You were with Michael”

“Don’t be like that, April.”

“We are very hurt. We haven’t even met the dude even once. Since you met him, we’ve been really ignored. Not cool, Jane. We are your family”

“I’m so sorry.”

“This time, it’s not enough” she said and hang up.

“Ap-” the line was dead.

She was right though. She has been hanging out with them as much. She got out of the bed carefully and quietly got dressed. She needed to go see her family. She took Michael’s car keys because hers was still at her place and left him a note.

She drove to her brother’s house. It was late but she needed to talk to them so she made her way into the house using her keys. They weren’t

expecting her so when they heard someone breaking into their house, Jason pulled out his gun. He got that gun for a day such as this. He stood at the top of the stairs, “Don’t move or I’ll shot” he said cocking his gun.

“Jace, it’s just me.” Jane responded.

“Jane?” he asked flipping the lights on and uncocking the gun.

“What are you doing here? So late at night? Are you okay?” he embraced her.

“I’m okay, Jace. I am sorry I missed the appointment with the doctor.

We were supposed to find out the gender then.” She cried softly

“It’s okay. I’m not mad, a little hurt maybe but I understand the concept of new love.”

“But April said-”

April is pregnant and hormonal. She is a different story” he chuckled and was slapped at the back of the head.

“Is that so?” April said moving to stand by her husband.

“Ouch, babe” he whined as she rolled her eyes.

Jane stepped out of her brothers embrace. Walking to April with her arms open for a hug, “Do you forgive me?” she said with puppy dog eyes

“Yes! With this grand gesture, how could I not” she laughed hugging her

“I missed you, April”

“I missed you too, Jane”

“What about me?”

“Oh, shut up, Jace.” April said

“I missed you too” Jane said to her brother.

They settled down in the kitchen.

“So, do you know the gender?” she asked them

“Well, we decided to be surprised like the old days” April said smiling

“She decided and I just went along with because she said she’s the one who is actually pregnant”

“Well, she’s not wrong, Jace” she laughed at her brother

“You’re supposed to be on my side. I’m your brother” said with mock hurt.

“She’s my sister too” April chimed

“Yup and we have girl code” Jane stated

“Sisters before misters” they both said laughing

“Alright, alright. Whatever” he said sulking

“Come on, don’t be a sour puss” April teased

“I’m not”

“Are too”

“I’m-”

“Absolutely not. You guys are not about to do this” Jane intervened

“Okay, now when are we meeting this guy whose been taking you away from us?” Jason asked

“Soon”

“You’ve been saying that for a while now” April commented

“I know but it’s going to be sooner than you think. He just has a busy work schedule.”

“I came by your place two days ago. You weren’t there. Josh said you hadn’t been there in a while. Care to explain?” Jason asked with a n eyebrow raised

“Erm, I sort of live with Mike now” she whispered

“Pardon? I didn’t quite catch that. It sounded like you said you live with a man.” April said

“Because that’s what I said” Jane said lowly

“WHAT?!” Jason exclaimed

“Jason, please” Jane pleaded

The couple looked at each other and it seemed a decision was made because April spoke up.

“Why are you living with a man you aren’t married to?”

“You did it too”

“That’s different because I didn’t have a place of my own and you were sort of a chaperone. You were always here.”

“True but I like him and I love spending time with him. I lose track of time when we’re together.” She explained

“I don’t like him. Because a good guy would like to meet your family before he let you sort of live with him” April said and Jason nodded.

Jane could see that the conversation was going nowhere and unless Mike came over to see them, they weren’t going to approve.

“I’ll ask him to come around in the morning. Is that okay?” she asked

“Afternoon will be better. But it’ll be at the diner” April said

“Okay, that’s cool” Jane responded and April yawned.

“It’s time for you to sleep” Jason said and then they bid her goodnight.

“Goodnight, guys” she said.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Something stirred in her arms that caused her to open her eyes to see that she had indeed zoned out. Back to her current circumstances, she watched little Jace sleep soundly in her arms the events of that morning long forgotten not that he witnessed much of it anyway. Was it all really finally over? Was she free from him? She hoped so and if the situation hadn't changed, she resolved to put an end to it permanently. She can't let that chaos be all that Jace grows up to know. Ignoring it hadn't helped her in the long run. So, the best option now was to confront the problem head on like her brother taught her.

*Meanwhile, at the police station...*

“Young man, what were you thinking?!” his father questioned angrily. “You know what? this is all your fault”, his father accused his mother “How is this my fault? He learnt this from you”, his mother retorted He just tuned them out because he knew they were not going to stop. “I can’t help him without jeopardising my political career. You heard the lawyer the evidence is overwhelming.” His dad stated and got his attention “I expected nothing less of you”, Michael spoke up for the first time since his parents and lawyer arrived.

“So, he speaks?” his father replied sarcastically

“Yes, he speaks” he replied angrily

“And what right do you have to be angry right now after dragging my family name through the mud?”

He moved to respond when his mom shook her head signalling him to not worsen the situation.

“That’s what I thought”, his father said

“Let him plead guilty and serve his sentence. The best you can do is get a plea deal from the prosecutors anyway.” And then his father walked out.

“Mom, please I can’t go to jail”, he pleaded

“You should’ve thought of that before you lay your hands on a woman like an animal!” she shouted.

“I’m no different than the one you share a bed with” he retorted angrily which earned him a smack across the face.

“How dare you bring that up? Do you want your father to get you locked away forever?” she questioned

“He can’t lock me away forever. This is an assault case and not a murder case!” he shouted

“Michael Logan Porter! Keep-” his mom said sharply

“I most certainly can make it a murder case. Have you forgotten so soon what you did two years ago?” his father who was stationed at the door questioned.

“You can’t prove anything! There were no witnesses.” He stated  
“That’s what you think. If you don’t fix your tone, I will make sure that you are charged with the murder of Jason Nelson-Jones and the attempted murder of Joshua Taylor” his father answered calmly.

“Attempted? Josh is still alive?” he asked quietly.

His father smirked and walked away.

*Unknown to them, the room was bugged. And it was perfectly legal hence everything said could and would be used against them in the court of law.*

“Mom, what did he mean by that?” he asked

“Later, I need to talk to your father” and she rushed out of the room after her husband.

“Mr. Porter, can we carry on?” the lawyer, Miles Johnson asked

“No, just do whatever my mom tells you. I can’t concentrate right now” he replied

“Very well, excuse me” and the lawyer left allowing the warden to take him back to his cell.

Back in his cell, he zoned out to that night two years ago...

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He'd just gotten off a call that informed him of Jane's brother's decision to turn him in to the police for assault. He couldn't afford the news going public. His sister just scored major points from their dad by being the perfect daughter again by getting engaged to the first son of one of the major political families in the country, the Wesingtons. He may be the only son of the family but he learnt long ago that Alyssa Elaine Porter was the favourite child. She could do no wrong in their father's eyes. They both snuck out for a party as teenagers and he was punished because his father assumed, he dragged her there when in fact he met her there. He hastily left the family dinner held in Alyssa's honour. Considering the company, they had, his departure didn't sit well with his father so he had ordered someone to follow him to make sure he didn't do anything stupid to ruin his sister's future marriage. It seemed the heavens were smiling down on him because the clouds were gathering when he set out. When he finally caught up with Jason, he realised that he had another person with him which he quickly found out to be Josh. It's bad enough they were able to get him separated from Jane when she lost their baby. They weren't about to cost him his freedom and life as he knew it. He began to drive them off the slippery roads. He planned to cause a crash that will silence them for good. He wasn't

afraid that he could go down with them because he had car racing as one of his hobbies so he could definitely handle the situation. He pursued them relentlessly till he successfully caused Jason to lose control of his car. Luckily, there was no one on the road from his family house. They had snuck up to his cottage near the family house to take evidence that could put him away for the assault of Jane. He watched their car skid off the road and crash into the trees where it eventually seemed too catch fire and then he drove off satisfied. Unknown to him, Josh had been able to free himself before the car began to catch fire. The most damaged side of the car was the driver's side giving Jason zero chances of survival. The spy had watched everything take place but unlike Michael he moved closer to the crash site to check for survivors. When he saw Josh, he phoned his boss who instructed him to get him to safety.

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He sat in his cell wondering how he survived the crash and the fire. If only he'd gone back to check if they had indeed died. He wouldn't be in this mess. And how could his father have known this and how long has he known this and where exactly has Josh been hiding because considering how much he loved Jane, he should be by her side. He had no idea of how he was going to get out of this mess but he sure hoped his mom did a good job of convincing his father to drop the murder charges.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

The incessant knocks at the door woke them up.

“Who’s there?” Mr Porter asked groggily

“James, sir” came the response.

“Come in” he instructed as he moved to the sitting area of their bedroom.

“Good morning, sir, I’m afraid I have bad news” he said.

“What has happened now? Is it Mike?” Mrs Porter asked as she took a seat next to her husband.

“Good morning, ma’am. You could say that. He’s being accused of murder and attempted murder” James stated.

“WHAT?!” they exclaimed

“How could you do this to me?” Mrs Porter asked accusingly

“I did no such thing, Betty”, Mr Porter said defensively

“Oh, come on, William, who else had the information?” she asked

“Maybe I can supply the answer” James chipped in

“Then what are you waiting for?” they asked

He proceeded to show them the audio recording that got leaked out to the press from their meeting down at the police station.

“Oh my gosh, what are we going to do, William?”, Betty asked

“I don’t know, Betty. Do you think the Wesingtons know already?”

“Is that what you are worried about? The press will eat this up. Elections are coming up soon. Our careers are over, Will.”

“I don’t care about all that. What will happen to our daughter? Don’t you care?” he responded angrily

“I do care about our daughter but she will be fine. She is a woman in her own right. She has made great contributions to the Wesington name. Plus she’s pregnant and George Wesington adores her.” she stated calmly

“Well, you have a point but-”

“But nothing, William. Let’s find a way to get out of this mess, okay?” she interrupted

“Alright” he agreed

Turning to James, “What can we do?”

“Honestly, we can’t do much because names were mentioned in the audio and investigations have already began. Getting out unscathed is impossible but we can minimize the damage.” James answered

“Come on, James, is that the best you can say right now?” Betty snapped

“Ma’am, Mr Porter could’ve gotten away with his statement if he didn’t mention any names. We could’ve played it off as a threat from an angry father” James explained

“Why did you even bring that up after being quiet for so long?!” Betty asked William angrily

“Because I was upset! That bastard child of yours has always been nothing but a troublemaker!” he shouted

“My son is not a bastard! He wouldn’t have acted out if you had paid him any attention. The only time he had your attention was when he got in trouble so he kept doing it! This is all your fault!” she responded loudly

“Don’t pin this on me, Betty! I’m not the one who had an affair with her driver!”

“Sir, ma’am please we can just hold off on this argument?” James asked

“You haven’t been of any help at all. Just get out!” Betty commanded

James looked to William who nodded his agreement and then he left them to their bickering.

The weeks that ensued were really stressful for the Porters. They were called in for questioning and the media fueled by their opponents were having a field day.

When the news hit, Sally and her gang couldn't believe it. Jane, on the other hand was besides herself with grief and guilt. She could barely keep it together. The media hounding her at home and work for a statement didn't make any of it any easier. But one day, an old friend showed up and made the ordeal a bit bearable. They've been hiding out at his house since he showed up. The media was chaotic considering she hadn't been seen in a while. The heat was mounting on the Porters. The Wesington name couldn't do much for them. The case was yet to be heard in the court but the court of public opinion had passed its ruling. Mr and Mrs Porter had both resigned from their positions.

The first day of court was here. The prosecution was ready. The courtroom was teeming with media personnel and students from Brockmin College. The courtroom was filled with conversation. It was indeed a sight to behold but a hush fell upon the place as a group of people walked into the room. Many thought the judge had been ushered in through a different door but as the group broke away, it revealed Josh and Jane with Jace in tow. The conversations started right back up with whispers of "So, he's really alive?" to "Where has she been?". Some of the media personnel were about to move to interview them when the judge walked in. The session started right up with the opening statements from both sides. Anytime the prosecutors spoke, Michael was worse off. Off the bat, you could tell the jury was not

falling for any of the crap the defense team was dishing. Being in the courtroom was proving a hard task for Jane. She could clearly see Michael from her seat. It took every ounce of strength she had not to lash out at him considering all that he had done to her. The session had been going on for a while so the judge called for a recess. The prosecutors whisked the trio back in to the secured room fear of any harm befalling them before they can take the witness stand.

They were put in a room with Sally and the others.

“Hey, guys” they greeted

After the news broke out about her brother’s murder, she developed a stronger relationship with the people who helped her break out of the bondage and give her brother justice. They became a close knit squad because they basically couldn’t be with anyone else but themselves. With all the time they spent together, Sally was beginning to see Ben in a new light marking a new phase in their relationship. Jane and Josh picked up where they left off before he disappeared. It seemed that everything was finally falling into place for them despite their current situation.

Meanwhile, a fight had broken out among the Porters where Michael revealed where he developed his habit of beating women.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

Court was back in session and things were not getting any better for the Porters. Jane and Josh's testimonies basically buried them and the video evidence from the day Sally saw Michael for who he truly was was the final nail to the coffin. The ruling had been adjourned for the next day. Unlike the Porters, Jane and the others were in high spirits. Justice seemed to be on the horizon. Daybreak couldn't come any sooner. For both parties, the night was very long.

Finally, it was time to hear the ruling. Closing arguments had been made and the jury had returned with their ruling. The prosecution already knew that Mr and Mrs Porter were going to be off the hook because of a deal negotiated on their behalf by the Wesingtons. They basically threw their son under the bus in exchange for their freedom. As if that was not enough, they were supposed to cut all family ties with him.

"We the jury find Michael Porter guilty of all charges" the juror said. From that declaration, everything was basically a blur for Jane. She sat frozen while his sentence was given. Michael was sentenced to twenty five years in prison with no possibility of parole.

Looking straight at Sally and Jackie, he whispered, "*This is not over*" Oblivious to all present, Jane sat there crying. Mourning her lost family and everything she had to go through to finally be rid of Michael.

Unlike most, Josh was attuned to Jane, "Jane" he said

“It’s finally over” she cried into his arms

“Yes, justice has been served” he said

“But at what cost? Jason and April are gone! They won’t be coming back”

she cried

The others had slowly become aware of what was happening and they all came together in a group hug to comfort their friend.

“He won’t hurt you or anyone again and that is good” Sally said softly

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The weeks after the sentencing were a bit chaotic for all those involved but as new scandals popped up, the story became forgotten and life returned to normal or a new normal began. With Josh’s help, Jane finally went back to finish her last year in nursing school. Months after graduating from school with her degree, Josh asked her to marry him. He suggested they adopt Jace together as their son since he knew it was something Jane wanted to do.

Within a month after the proposal, they had married and moved out of her brother’s house to start their lives afresh. Josh liked to cook so while Jane was saving lives he managed *Pop In* and also spent a considerable amount of time with Jace. They were thriving. Life was good for them.

Sally had finally realized that Ben had feelings for her and had decided to give him a chance. He turned out to be a great guy. He was just the kind of man she needed. They were such an adorable couple. They made their relationship official at Jane’s wedding. Jackie was over the moon when she

found out her cousin and best friend had finally gotten together. She had known about the crush Ben had on Sally for years. She was always pressing him to confess his feelings to her but he kept putting it off and he wouldn't allow her to hint at it to Sally either. When he got accepted into the police academy, Ben and Sally got engaged. Wedding was set for when she graduated college. Life couldn't have been any better for them.

Jackie and Todd were living their best lives. He had graduated with honor and with his can do spirit, had also passed the bar. He got recruited to the Prosecutors office. He was passionate about bringing people to justice. He was with the woman of his dreams and he had gotten the job of his dreams. He was getting married in a couple of months to his long time soon to be an architect girlfriend. They were expecting their first child. What more could he want in this life.

Life seemed to be smiling at all of them. Everything was going exceptionally well for them. But same couldn't be said about Michael. Prison life was hard. The prisoners had somehow found out how abusive he was and he was at the receiving end of a lot of violent attacks. They were relentless with their maltreatment of him. His cellmates were the worst. He spent most of his time in the infirmary than out of it.

His mom, despite the instructions from the Wesingtons to stay away from him, couldn't. She kept communicating with him secretly. The only thing that kept Michael going was his thirst for revenge against all of those people

especially Jackie. Thanks to his mom, he knew what all of them were up to. Nothing irked him more than the fact that Sally, his Sally was set to marry that no good Ben who turned out to be a police officer.

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It had been almost four years since Michael was sentenced. Jane had finally calmed down. She had stopped jumping at the sound of the doorbell or knock whenever she was alone. She was almost seven months pregnant with twins. She was so excited. They had found out the gender. She was having girls. Finally, she was getting partners. Jace and Josh were as thick as thieves. Always doing boys stuff and leaving her out. Now, she gets to do girls stuff. Life was good. What made this pregnancy exciting was the fact that she was doing it with her girls. Yes, Jackie was pregnant again. This was her third child and her last according to her but they all knew that was untrue. In Todd's words, "She looks good pregnant". This time, she wanted to be surprised by the gender. She had two boys already. Todd wanted a girl because he kept whining that the boys were mama's boys. This was Sally's second pregnancy and she was terrified. The last time she was pregnant with quadruplets. She found out some weeks ago and she was dreading the doctor's appointment. She had cried so hard the day she found out she was carrying quadruplets.

"Girl, stop crying" Jackie said

“No” Sally replied

“It’s not that bad” Jane said

“It is actually” she cried

“I have four children already! Does it make sense that I am pregnant again?”

“I mean, yeah because you’re still having sex!” Jackie said laughing

“I’m on birth control though so how?” she questioned

“Are you really?” Jane asked with an eyebrow raised

“I mean I forgot to refill when I ran out” she groaned.

“Come on, girl. Ben’s waiting for you at the doctor’s for your appointment” Jackie said

“Ugh, don’t say his name right now. I am so mad at him. He probably knocked me up intentionally” she whined

“Girl, how?” Jane asked

“He also wants a girl” she replied and Jackie bust out laughing

“Those two are so devious. I like it” Jane said

“You have a boy already and you are getting girls soon. Josh can’t complain and so you are home free”

“Yup” Jane cosigned.

“If I’m carrying multiple babies then he’s getting a vasectomy!” Sally exclaimed.

“You better leave my brother’s family jewels alone” Jane joked

“That’s not a bad idea, Sal” Jackie cosigned

“Uhn Uhn, don’t do my brothers like that” Jane laughed

“They are going to keep knocking us up! I just got my body back!” they said in unison

“Stop whining and let’s go. My break is over” Jane replied

They huffed but they stood from their table and walked out of the restaurant oblivious to the man watching them.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Meanwhile, back at the prison, all hell had broken loose. There was a major fire outbreak in the kitchen. The extent of damage was incredible. Many had been killed and many more had been injured. None of the inmates and wardens present in the kitchen at the time of the explosion survived. Everyone was burnt to a crisp.

When the news broke out, the Porters and Wesingtons were in a state of mourning. Michael was a troublemaker and a disgrace to the family but he didn't have to die like that. The media circus had started back up again. The Porters and Wesingtons were set to hold a press conference. A meeting was currently underway at the Porter's residence to choose who would address the press.

"I think I must address them" the Patriarch of the Wesingtons said  
"Why must you address them? What did you know about my son? You are the one who banned us from seeing him! Now you want to speak for him? You must have lost your mind"

"Betty!" Will reprimanded

"Oh shut up! He wasn't your son so you were glad to be rid of him. He is my son! My blood! And I'm the only one allowed to speak on his death." she stated and walked off.

To say they were shell shocked is an understatement.

“Forgive my wife. She hasn’t been the same since the news broke about his death in the fire” Will apologized to old man Wesington.

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The crew got together weekly but an emergency meeting was held without the kids.

“Is it really over?” Jane asked

“No” Todd and Ben said

“What?! Why?” the girls asked

“I don’t know if you remember but I told you that I had a feeling that we were being watched at one of our gatherings” Ben said

“Yeah I remember and I told you that you were being paranoid because of your cop senses” Sally replied

“I wasn’t. I got a couple of people I trusted to keep an eye over you girls with the consent of your men of course and I was right. A group of guys had been watching us and they reported back to Michael’s mom” Ben explained

“Oh my gosh! Really?!” the girls exclaimed

“Yes, unfortunately” Todd responded

“Unbelievable. But why? Didn’t the Wesingtons ban them from staying in contact with him?” Jackie asked

“They did but she’s a mother. Look at us. Do you think anyone could stop us from being with our kids?” Jane said

“Right but we’re not raising psychos” Sally said and they all laughed

“Okay, so how does that explain the situation not being over?” Jackie asked

“I’ve been watching Mrs Porter. Prior to the accident, she made a lot of shady moves and for someone who’s son has just died she’s a little too calm for me.” Ben said

“We all grieve differently” Sally replied

“Yes but how she spoke of him in that press address of hers didn’t sit well for me. It was as if he was still alive” Josh stated

“Because he is” Ben said emphatically

“What makes you think so?” the girls asked

“I have this hacker source who hacked into the prison CCTV files as well as the surrounding areas. We found out that Michael caused the explosion. He had been in the kitchen for several times over the years and knew all about the place including a secret exit that had been supposedly sealed. The main footage showed him entering the kitchen area and few minutes later, an

explosion. Another camera caught him leaving the prison facility in a warden uniform" Ben explained

"Oh dear!" the girls gasped

"He's coming for me" Jackie stated matter of factly

"He won't get you, babe" Todd assured her

"Why you and not Sally or even me?" Jane questioned

"I exposed him to Sally. He's been wanting her for a while and I ruined it. Todd led the move to get him arrested" Jackie explained

"Hurting Jackie hurts me and he knows that" Todd said

"Okay so, can't we sic the media onto them?" Sally asked

"We can and we will but we need to take precautions" Josh said

"What kind of precautions?" they asked

"We aren't alone anymore. The children need to be kept safe. You ladies are even pregnant" Todd said

"And I'm even further along" Jane said

"Exactly but I have a plan" Ben said

"What plan?"

He spent the next hour laying the plan out for them and how it would all go down.

“This is crazy!” Sally exclaimed

“It’ll be okay, babe”

“Benjamin Brown, I am not ready to be a widow. You promised me that you will be by my side for years and we will raise all our children together” she cried

“And I will keep my promise. Trust in me” Ben replied and pulled her into an embrace as she cried softly

They were all quietly taking in the news and the plan.

“No more casualties! We have lost way too much! It is time they felt our pain.” Josh exclaimed

They all nodded their agreements and set off for their homes waiting for all hell to break lose once and for all.

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Several months had passed before Michael made his move. Jane had given birth to her baby and Jackie was due any day now. Sally was showing now. It was confirmed that she was carrying twin girls just like Jane. The day she found out it wasn’t just one baby as the previous ultra sound had shown,

Sally was inconsolable. The pregnancy was unlike the previous one because her peace of mind was mostly non-existent. She couldn't help but stress over the impending confrontation with Michael. Her doctors advised she be calm. For the past couple of months, she had been working from home. It was Monday evening and she and her mom had just put the boys to bed when a call came through that Jackie was in labour.

She notified Ben who assured her that it was okay for her to leave the children with her mom because they were being protected. She set off for the hospital but she never arrived.

Michael thought he had the upper hand because he was able to successfully grab Sally. He, however had no idea that it was all a part of the plan. They knew that the only way to finally put an end to this was to draw him out.

The night that they formulated their action plan, Jane let them know that even though Jackie had ruined his plans, ultimately, he still wanted Sally for the mere fact that he never got to have her in the sense that he wanted to and that in his sick mind, he knew that laying hands on Sally after all they did to keep her away from him would hurt them deeply.

After Jackie came out of the delivery room, the plan was set into motion. With the exception of Sally, all the women and children were sequestered in an apartment near the hospital with top security.

She finally opened her eyes and realized she was in some sort of warehouse.

“Hey baby” he greeted her with a smile

“Michael” she gasped

“Yes, Michael”

“I thought you died?”

“I know but here I am in the flesh”

“But how?” he pulled a chair closer to where he had her bound and told her the story unknown to him, he was being recorded.

A team had been discreetly hot on his tail when he grabbed Sally. They were waiting on Ben’s arrival to set the ball rolling.

As Michael kept talking, a car sped into the warehouse surprising them.

“Get away from my wife!” Ben shouted

“Oh , Benjamin Brown, way to make an entrance. Welcome to the party”

He said smugly

“I won’t say it again. Stay away from my wife!” he said with a warning shot

“Such a violent man you married, dear Sal. You chose that over me?”

“I did and I would do it a thousand times over” she spat out which earned her a slap across the face.

What ensued after was chaos. Ben charged after him like a bull. Punches and kicks were being thrown by both sides but Ben definitely had the upper hand considering how trained he was. He disarmed Michael and made quick work of setting Sally free.

They were about to get in when, “I wouldn’t do that if I were you” Michael said as he spat out blood. They turned and saw that he had Ben’s niece, Laura in custody.

“Dear Lord!” Sally exclaimed

“Go” he instructed

She hesitated.

“I’ll be right behind you” he assured her

She got in the car and drove out.

“Laura, stay calm” Ben said and without warning fired at the men surrounding her killing them instantly.

“Nice job” Michael complimented, “I was going to get rid off them anyway”

Ignoring him, he beckoned to Laura to come over to him which she obliged.

“You have no moves, Michael. I am going to take my niece and go”

“You won’t do no such thing!” and then his phone rang and he got distracted.

With that, Ben instructed Laura to slip out. Michael was too preoccupied with his call. The moment his body turned rigid was when he realized that whoever was on the other line had told him that the news had hit that he was alive and had come after Sally.

“You thought you were so smart, didn’t you?” Ben mocked

“I don’t think. I am” Michael retorted and charged at Ben

A second fight broke out and this time it was more intense. Ben barely made it out. He dragged himself out of the warehouse. Sally saw him coming and got out of the car to meet him and then there was an explosion that threw him like a rag doll across the lot.

“Ben!!” she screamed and then she passed out.

The scene was chaotic. The ambulance and fire brigade moved quickly. The fall had been dangerous for the babies and it seemed they were coming.

Sally’s heart had also stopped in the moment that she saw her beloved husband being thrown.

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It had been several weeks since the incident. In that time, Michael's mother had been arrested and Michael had been finally declared dead because this time there was a body.

“Hey”

“Hey”

“Don’t ever do that to me again” Ben said

“I promise if you promise” Sally said

“I do” he smiled and stretched to hold her hands

“Omg, you guys are awake!” Jackie screamed drawing the attention of the nurses.

It was a whirlwind of activity after that but the doctors told the expectant relatives that they were out of danger and they would make a full recovery.

Later on, they told them what had gone on when the warehouse exploded and how Sally’s heart stopped and went into labour but came back to life after a random suggestion about placing her hand on Ben’s heart would bring hers back which it did.

“My babies?” she cried

“In the nursery” Jane said

“Thank God” Ben and Sally said

“Right there with you” Todd and the rest said

“It’s over?” Sally asked

“Yes, finally” Todd assured

“How do we know for sure?” she asked

“I followed up keenly and Michaels’ body was part of the charred ones. It was tested several times” Todd stated

“Thanks man” Ben said

“No, thank you for coming back to life” Todd said

At that moment, Sally’s mom and Ben’s mom wheeled the twins in along with the boys.

Everyone excused them and they enjoyed some quality time with their children.

Sally looked over at her family and thanked God for ensuring that her dreams didn’t turn out broken.

THE END

BAAWA ACQUAH