A perfect lie

Manuscript

Kevinen Naidoo

**Chapter 1**

The 20th of April was the date that Brielle had chosen to move into their new house. It was found on 4137, Raindrew street. The street was the most luxurious, and modern one in the neighbourhood and was known for its quietness. Brielle was in front of the two moving trucks as she was guiding them on the way to her house. Upon arriving, Brielle parked in the driveway and both trucks stopped in front of the house.

“Here we are. Our new home,” said Brielle with excitement, she was fair, with green eyes, black thin hair, and glossy pink lips, and was wearing a pair of jeans with a designer pale blue and white blouse.

Onna, their four-year-old, rushed out of the car with her teddy bear in her hand. “Is this our new home, mommy,” said Onna in her angelic sweet voice.

“Yes, it is sweetheart.”

Taylen, a tall, fair, handsome guy and who was wearing a pair of jeans and a white plain shirt, emerged from the other car behind the trucks and gazed at the house. It was Brielle who had chosen this house. She had fallen in love with it just by the sight of it. Its lawn was perfect, pale green, and had bushes around the border of the driveway, the house was painted all white, with its huge black windows frame and the pale brown wooden door was modern and elegant at the same time. And the house had an attractiveness that Brielle herself couldn`t explain when she first visited it. Taylen always agreed to his wife's liking as they are pretty good.

“Sir, can you park the car in the driveway, so that we can unload the trucks,” said the truck driver, as his car was blocking the swing door of the truck.

Taylen started his car engine and parked his grey Audi Q7 in his new driveway next to Brielle`s car. Just before stepping into her new house, Brielle could not stop herself from thinking that a new life was going to start ahead in this new home. It was just a new beginning. As Taylen came out of his car, Brielle called him while waving at him to come and as he joined his wife and daughter, Brielle turned the key in the keyhole and opened the brown door, Brielle couldn`t describe how happy she felt at that moment. As she opened the door, Onna rushed inside and started jumping all around. Both Brielle and Taylen followed her inside and they too were delighted to see how Onna was excited. The unloading of their stuff began. They kept all the boxes at the entrance. After the two moving trucks hit the road after they finished unloading all boxes, Taylen and Brielle opened some boxes and had to assign each room to a certain purpose. To the left of the main entrance door, Brielle would assign that space for the dining room as the kitchen was next to it on the left and on its right Brielle wanted it for the living room as it had huge windows and one wall was covered with rock tiles that made the living room look more modern. Downstairs every wall was painted in grey colour. Then Brielle walked to the left of the dining room, there was the open kitchen with a back door that gave access to the backyard and to its right, there was a bathroom and a laundry room. To the right side of the house at the back, there was a room that Taylen as he glanced at it, he knew that he wanted it for his home office. Between the living room and Taylen`s office, there was a u-shaped stairs to go upstairs, and on its right, Brielle found an empty room that would be perfect for Onna. The room had a personal bathroom and a wardrobe and it was already pink in colour, and the next room on the right had the same space which she would use sometimes for some private moments with herself and would also use it a guest room. In the middle on the left of those two rooms, there was a lot of space and Brielle thought that this place would be perfect for another TV room as she walked next to the room, then at the back on the left, there was the master bedroom with its enormous closet and bathroom. Brielle on the right side of the bedroom, there is a door and found a big terrace with a magnificent view of Raindrew Street. As Brielle knew each room's purpose, she came back downstairs and found Taylen and Onna, unboxing some boxes.

“Did u find your loner room?” asked Taylen with kitchen utensils in his hand. As he walked towards the kitchen, Brielle smiled and responded “I found it and I will use it as a guest room too”. Brielle wanted a room for herself and called it loner which made Taylen burst into laughter at the idea. As Taylen headed towards the kitchen, Brielle followed him, and upon seeing the kitchen being filled with utensils, plates, pan, and her appliances. She started to get impatient as her urge of cooking something was at its high peak as she just wanted to inaugurate her new kitchen. But she calmed herself down as she needed to wait till the evening, they had invited Taylen`s college friend Joey Green and his wife Rose Green. Taylen and Joey are best buddies since high school and, Rose and Brielle became best friends over the years of their husband`s friendship.

Two hours before their arrival, Brielle was in the master bedroom and was building her bed which was almost finished and Taylen was building Onna`s bed. As Taylen finished his task, he came to his room to see where Brielle was in her task and was shocked to see that the bed was almost finished. Taylen smirked at her and walked slowly toward her. Brielle was on the floor and Taylen grabbed her and helped her to be on her feet, moved her thin hair slowly, his face near her neck, and gently started to kiss her neck.

“Want to inaugurate our bed?” whispered Taylen to her ears.

A shy and smirking expression could be read on Brielle`s face. Meanwhile, Taylen was already removing her clothes slowly while the other hand was caressing her and Brielle liked the way that her husband touched her. The feeling, the tension between their bodies, the energy, and the breathing was arousing for her. Taylen was down and started to lick her private parts and Brielle could not stop herself from moaning each time that she felt his tongue. Taylen gradually got up while kissing her whole body and led her to their bed. Brielle laid herself on her back and Taylen slowly came on top of her, lean in and kissed her, and slowly with his hand, he spread Brielle`s leg and found himself between her legs. Taylen grabbed his underpants and pulled it down, and every part of him was exposed. They both got rid of their clothes, were both naked on the bed, and they started kissing each other and then slowly Brielle pushed a moan as Taylen entrusted her. Brielle felt that she was being dragged into heaven and she enjoyed every second of it. Taylen knew how to please her woman and Brielle was feeling good and was in pleasure. They both enjoyed the lovemaking and the pleasure that they were both giving and receiving. They were lucky as Onna was busy downstairs with her toys and did not come upstairs. They cuddled when both of them had orgasmed.

"Do you think that it was a good idea to move here," said Brielle.

"We did not have any choice, my new job here is better, schools are better and it is safer here" assured Taylen.

Brielle hugged him more tightly. They both were still in bed when they heard the doorbell ring. Brielle rose and was shocked when she realized that Joey and Rose were there and they were on time for the first time. Quickly Brielle dressed in clothes that she found on the floor and ran downstairs to the main entrance. She opened the door as she cached her breath, Rose gazed at Brielle who was wearing Taylen`s large, smelly and white shirt, instantly Rose figured out what was going on and she burst into laughter.

"How are you? No need to answer because I can see the answer," chuckled Rose as she entered inside. "Hey, seem you are enjoying the house," said Joey who was behind Rose. They all started laughing at the situation. "I have not even unboxed so many boxes and I haven`t even started dinner yet," confessed Brielle.

"That`s why we are here so that we can help. So don`t worry Brielle," assured Rose.

Rose and Joey marched towards the living room and sat on their grey sofa as Brielle went upstairs to put on some of her clothes. Taylen who was already dressed up came downstairs and greeted Joey and Rose.

“Do you want something to drinks guys” asked Taylen.

Rose replied, “No thanks, we are fine.”

Taylen sat on the sofa that was still covered in its plastic cover and turned toward Joey. They started talking about the current football match and he switched on the television and he realized that he did not plug the TV nor he has installed the cable to view the channel yet. “Let me help you and then we can watch the match,” said Joey.

Rose watched both Taylen and Joey working together to install the television programs and she heard Brielle on the stairs and looked in that direction, Brielle said: “come with me and let the boys figure the television out”. As they were in the kitchen, Brielle started to prepare her ingredients which were still in a box, and took them all out. Brielle and Rose started preparing dinner which led them to their usual conversation which was mostly about gossip or small talk.

"When are you resuming work, Brielle," asked Rose.

"The school has called and am starting on Monday" replied Brielle.

"Still going to teach that boring subject, Maths" chuckled Rose.

Brielle nodded her head in agreement. Brielle was a mathematics teacher with more than three years of experience. She was always fascinated by numbers and how they could tell things such as longitude, altitude, and planet position that many people could not understand. Everyone used to tease her because she did not need a calculator to solve any mathematical problem. She was one of the best mathematician’s students in her university where she got her first-class degree. But she did not continue her studies the way that she had planned, as she fell in love with Taylen the year after and she always wanted a perfect family too.

As Rose was stirring the tomato sauce which was diffusing a good smell around the kitchen and it seemed delicious. But as usual, Rose made a mess in the kitchen, spilt tomato sauce on the stove and the table, and, used a lot of plates and other appliances unnecessarily. Being a cleaning and organizing maniac, Brielle could not stand with that mess around her. She instantly started to clean. Brielle had obsessive-compulsive disorder and could not maintain having her house unclean and unorganized. She believed that when her home is organized and clean, nothing bad will happen. Everything needed to be perfect.

"Diner`s ready" shouted Rose from the kitchen. Onna came first and was jumping in all directions in the dining room. Taylen and Joey joined them in the dining room after the third call as they were busy watching their football match. After everyone was settled, "We are serving spaghetti and red sauce meatballs, Onna`s favourite," said Brielle with a big smile.

During dinner, Taylen talked about his cases that he had represented on Monday in the court. Taylen was a defence attorney in the firm of Gold Law Firm Limited. He has just joined this firm last week because his earnings and privileges are better. He had a charismatic nature in court that made everyone impressed in each trial that he took. He was the best attorney as he was cunning and could made relevant and excellent points during the trial that no one would ever think of. One of his biggest cases that he was narrating about was a girl who was killed by her uncle and was charged such as violence and molestation against him. It was a tough case as the girl was the mayor`s daughter. The evidence that was against the uncle was just a testimony of a man who did not even come to testify in court and Taylen won the case. The father went through depression and even resigned as mayor as he was too depressed by the loss of her daughter to maintain such a high position and not winning the case was more painful to him. According to Taylen, he said there was someone who framed the uncle and it was the father. But in his new case that he started talking about, he needed the help of Joey, who was a family attorney, and he agreed to help him. Taylen had his first new case from his new firm and he was thrilled and excited to see how things are here. After dinner, they went to the room that will be soon converted into a home office for Taylen. They discussed the case and the women in the dining room were busy gossiping about their previous neighbours and friends.

"We don`t know the neighbours yet. No one hasn`t come to visit yet," said Brielle.

“You just moved in, they won`t come now and I think you have to go around the neighbourhood to introduce yourself. Don`t you think so?” replied Rose.

“I will think about it.”

Onna went upstairs to play with her DS as she was full and couldn`t eat her vanilla flavour ice cream. Brielle told Rose that the realtor described the neighbourhood as calm, quiet, and peaceful to live in. "Hey, can we stay over tonight; Joey had quite some drinks tonight and is too tired to drive home" requested Rose.

"Ohh yes, we would love to have you guys as our first guests".

Taylen and Joey were still in the soon-to-be office room, discussing the case.

"How can we win this case" muttered Taylen.

Joey responded, while going through the file, “I don`t know man. It seems complicated.”

The boy that Taylen represented was accused, that he had made some sexual touch with his foster sister, Sarah Hayden who was sixteen years old. The boy's name was Diego Martinez and he was twenty-one-year-old. His family was on his side and believed him as much as Taylen did. Sarah in his statement to the police mentioned that he had also attempted to molest her but she successfully managed to push him away and ran. Joey advised him that he need to look into Sarah`s past, her previous foster homes, her friends, her relationship, and her birth parents. Taylen and Joey immediately started digging in files and papers. They soon noticed that there was a case that she had reported years ago when she was around eight years old that her foster father at that time had forced her to jerk him off and force her to suck his wiener. It happened more than once she mentioned. But in that case, Sarah had pleaded guilty and the foster was free of all charges against him. But in reality, Sarah was too young to understand what she was doing and her lawyer was a good friend of the foster father. Joey told Taylen to use this in court and made a point that she is doing all these scenarios so that she can obtain money.

"Why would she do this for money," said Taylen in a surprising tone. Joey took out a piece of paper that he had found in the file and said "Here`s an application for independent living and Sarah applied for it. If she wins, a certain amount of money will be given to her. She won`t need to work to meet up her expenses for two years at least".

“Do you think that she would do that for money?” said Taylen.

“You won`t believe what people can do for money.”

“But what would she do with that sum of money if she won. Like those independent living program have a system to help them,” said Taylen.

“If she is an ambitious girl, she has a way to college else she can afford things that she had prevented her from having.”

After one hour of talks, they both decided to head up to bed. Taylen headed to his room, Joey joined Rose in the living room who was waiting for him and they both headed to the guest room. Brielle was already upstairs reading Onna a bedtime story. Brielle walked into her room and found Taylen already in bed. Taylen seemed tense and he was muttering to himself, trying to figure out something. Brielle got into the left side of the bed and turned towards Taylen.

"Is the case that difficult, dear," whispered Brielle in Taylen`s left ear. Taylen who was lying on the bed, turn towards her and said "nope, 'because I know how to win this case".

“I was just going through all the points and facts that I have got to see clearly if they made perfect sense.”

As they talked about Taylen`s work, both of them fell asleep after.

In the morning, Brielle woke up to the surprise that Rose had already prepared breakfast.

“What are you cooking for us, Rose?” asked Brielle, delighted that she did not have to cook breakfast in the morning. Brielle walked towards the kitchen counter and her mouth fell open when she explored all the food that Rose has prepared.

"On the menu; there are scrambled eggs, bacon, sausages, bread, and baked beans. I cut the fruits such as the apple, strawberries, starfruit, white grapes, and peaches into small cubes for Onna and I have also prepared oatmeal for the men. It`s a typical British breakfast in some ways" said Rose while adding sugar to the orange juice.

"Thank you Rose a lot, I mean it`s a lot that u have done alone. You should have woken me up to help you.”

“No need, It`s a way to say thank you for letting us stay for the night” replied Rose.

"Thank you again, Rose, It means a lot to me. We still have a lot to unbox, and we need to get to work so that we can finish early. Making breakfast is a task off the shoulder for today," replied Brielle.

Rose proposed to Brielle that she and Joey would be absolutely happy to help them as on Sundays they usually didn`t have any plans. Brielle agreed with so much excitement that Taylen`s jaw drop as he watched how much his wife was excited. His mouth curved into a smile upon seeing Brielle that excited. After breakfast, Rose and Brielle started with the boxes in the living room compared to Taylen and Joey who were upstairs unboxing in Onna`s room. While opening some boxes, Brielle saw her wedding album which made her into tears. She realized at that moment that she had married the loved of her life who is a perfect husband, had a perfect home, good friends, and an amazing daughter. She was overjoyed thinking about all of this. Brielle felt safe and comfortable with Taylen. Rose saw her in tears and hugged her.

“Why are you crying, Brielle?” asked Rose as she grabbed the album from Brielle`s hand.

“Looking back made me realize that I had to sacrifice a lot to be here today. But I have a good husband and an adorable daughter” replied Brielle. Rose did not know what Brielle meant by saying sacrifice a lot and asked “what do you mean by sacrificing a lot?”

“It was my dream to continue my studies in mathematics and become a professor in some universities or work at some scientific lab where I could help a lot to discover new things” replied Brielle.

“But why didn`t you continue your studies?” asked Rose, curiously.

“Taylen doesn`t agree with that. He wants me to stay with Onna but thank god he allows me to work as a teacher and you know why he let me work because Onna is in the same school as I am” responded Brielle.

As she heard Onna's footsteps, she wiped her tears and as Onna stepped into the living room calling her mother as loudly and dramatically as she could. Brielle and Rose ended up laughing at the way that Onna was calling her.

"Mommy, there is a garden in the backyard and it`s left out with no proper care," said Onna. Brielle went to check it out and it is found near the back door of the kitchen. Brielle followed her as she walked towards the garden and as she saw the garden, Brielle got the idea of planting some vegetables like carrots, tomatoes, and green peas. And, it will be a fun and educational activity for Onna.

"Brielle, Rose, and Onna, do you want some drinks" shouted Joey from the kitchen window. Joey was back downstairs as they needed a break from all the hard work that they were doing.

They went inside the kitchen, grabbed their orange juice and they went back to their respective chores. After they finished unboxing everything and installing each item in its respective place, then Brielle`s favourite moment came as she waited so long to do that, to clean the house in every corner. As she was a pro at cleaning, no one wouldn`t even dare to miss a spot. But, it was fun for her and everyone agreed to help her and clean the house how she expected and how she do it. They had finally unboxed everything upstairs too and came downstairs to help to tidy up the house. As it was their first day, meaning a full hedge according to Brielle, they popped a bottle of champagne to celebrate after hours of cleaning. They had done all remaining task that was left as the following day, they will be back to work the following day and they won`t have time.

Monday was going to be a charging for them, the mode for stress would be on as it would be their first day at work. They got to bed early after saying goodbye to Rose and Joey at eight. Both Taylen and Brielle were sad that Rose and Joey were gone. But as soon as they got into bed, the night was going to be long for the Hills. Brielle woke up around two-fifteen in the middle of the night, with a loud bang that seemed coming from the kitchen downstairs. Panic-stricken and caught up by fear, Brielle tried to wake up Taylen who was lost in the dream world.

"What, what, what," shouted Taylen while he was still trying to open his eyes.

"I think there`s someone inside the house. They are downstairs" explained Brielle.

"You sure? I will go and check and go to Onna`s room to see if she is doing okay," whispered Taylen.

"Okay, I will be just behind you" replied Brielle with trembling lips.

Taylen took out his baseball bat from the closet and Brielle took the lamp from their nightstand drawer. Taylen glanced at Brielle as she hold the lamp tightly with her two hands.

"What, I need something to protect me too" whispered Brielle.

They both moved slowly and tried to make the less noise that they could. Brielle could sense a cold feeling going through her whole body. Brielle entered Onna`s room and checked under her bed, bathroom, and her closet and saw no one. Onna was still sleeping and she did not try to wake her up. Brielle gave a sign of relief and locked Onna`s room, took the keys with her, and joined Taylen who was slowly descending the stairs with his hand holding the bat raised. As Taylen reached the end of the stairs, he tried to get a glimpse of the kitchen by using his phone flashlight and viewed no movement in the kitchen.

"Wait, what if it comes behind us" murmured Brielle.

"Turn your back and keep an eye from behind and in all directions. Shout if you see anyone coming or hit it with your lamp" whispered Taylen while he was moving slowly toward the kitchen.

Taylen saw no one and went to check in the other rooms. Still, there was no one to be found. "Are you sure that there was someone inside the house?" asked Taylen. Brielle nodded in agreement who stayed in the middle of the house as she was too scared to move. Brielle went upstairs and Taylen went to the kitchen for some water. To his surprise and making his heart beat over 100, Taylen found that the kitchen door was wide open and his gun, a Glock 7, which he had hidden for years, was there on the kitchen table. Taylen face went pale. Without wasting any time, he grabbed the gun and went to his office, opened his secret safe behind a picture of the art that he had installed a day before they moved in. Then, he went outside the kitchen door to check whether there was someone and saw no one.

"Honey, what are you doing outside?" said Brielle from the kitchen door.

"Nothing, just checking" answered Taylen.

He came back inside and locked the door behind him. Taylen did not mention about the door being wide open and the gun to Brielle as she was unaware that there was a gun in the house. Brielle was someone who does not support violence, war, and guns, and telling her about the door would make her worried more as they would have a long day in the morning.

"Let`s go to bed, honey," said Taylen.

Taylen in bed, remembered that he had locked the door when Rose and Joey departed from their house. He was one hundred per cent sure that he had closed all doors and windows before coming to bed. Taylen found it difficult to regain his sleep as he kept thinking that someone who knew him well and about his safe, was in the house, but who was it, the question that he kept on asking himself till in the morning. He did not mention to anyone even to Joey about that safe.

Taylen was already up as he could not sleep at all and he already prepared lunch and breakfast before Brielle was up. Taylen was wearing his lucky grey suit with a white shirt inside and he used a black tie. He had enough time to go through his case to check whether he had missed some points and went through all his files to check whether something was missing.

"Are you looking for something, honey?" asked Brielle while kissing him on his cheeks and walked towards the kitchen counter grabbing the mango juice jar and pouring some in a glass.

"Yes, my keys and honey, I already prepared lunch and breakfast" replied Taylen while going through the drawers.

"Your keys are on your desk in your office - let me get them for you," said Brielle.

Brielle walked to his office, grabbed the keys on the desk, and handed him the keys as Taylen kissed her goodbye.

“Good luck on your case honey. I am sure that you will rock it” wished Brielle

“Thank you, honey, and good luck on your first day at work too. Do tell Onna the same for me.”

While watching Taylen getting in his car and driving away, Brielle made a little glimpse of their neighbours. They had not met any neighbours yet and Brielle wanted to know them. But Brielle had to go back inside as Onna was up and was calling for her. After they ate breakfast and finished dressing up, Brielle for her first day wore a tight flowery dress and Onna, the school uniform, they got into their car, a black Honda vetzel, and drove to school. It was their first day in a new school and both of them were super excited. Brielle and Onna had the same charming and friendly smile, which had always helped them to make new friends and acquaintances. Arriving in front of the school, Brielle could feel that it was the beginning of something new and that her experience here would be awesome. Saint George School had accepted them both and Onna was going to join their kindergarten section and Brielle in the middle school one. The school building was old, built with cut by hand stones, a lot of pine trees around, and full of students of different kinds of ages. The vibration and energy were different from the previous school where Brielle had worked. After parking the car, they marched towards the main office where the principal assistant approached them before they could reached her desk.

“You must be Mrs. Hills. And this must be the little Onna. I was expecting you and please have a seat here Mrs. Hills as the principal wish to meet you before you go to your assigned classes” said the assistant sweetly.

After five minutes of waiting, Brielle heard a crack and the principal opened his door, came out, and approached her as he lend his hand which Brielle shake, as the principal said: “Good morning Mrs. Hills, it`s a pleasure to have you here.”

The principal showed the way to his office and he welcomed Brielle by offering her some school materials such as the book that she would use in class, chalk in different kinds of colours, and pens. As Brielle was in his office, his assistant took Onna to her respective class.

"Well, we were very impressed by your curriculum vitae and I hope that you would bring the same efforts and hard work to our students too," said the principal with a sweet oily voice.

"Yes sir, you can be assured that I will give my best" replied Brielle.

“I hope you will”

The principal handed her the list of classes that she was assigned and upon seeing the list, Brielle was excited to start her classes. Brielle walked out of the office and headed to her first class with a big smile on her face.

On Taylen's side, he arrived at his new law firm after taking a detour to grab some coffee and he was more nervous than usual as he had the case of Sarah Hayden in the afternoon. As he entered the building, everyone turned around to see him and they seemed delighted to see him and were shaking his hands and welcoming him. He did not expect such a reaction from the other employees. Taylen had listened to at least hundreds of people telling him welcome since he entered the building. His boss, Mrs. Anna Margin came out of an office and walked toward him, welcomed him by shaking his hand. Anna Margin was a tall Latina woman, with brown clear skin, cupid`s bow lips, a pointed nose, and shiny black hair.

“Your win today would be the greatest achievement that the firm would achieve so far”. Said, Anna.

“Will you come to see me in the court?” asked Taylen.

“Of course, I will. It`s something that I won`t miss” said Anna, flirty.

Taylen had his own office next to Anna and he settled down as his assistant showed him where the files, the conference room, and the kitchen is located in the building.

In the afternoon, Taylen was preparing himself before entering the court chamber. Taylen's mind was still processing the intruder and wanted to know more but his thoughts got cut off when he heard in a cold voice,

"Well, good luck and I want to see you win," said Anna.

Her long black hair, her grey eyes, and her v-shaped body made Anna look attractive and even Taylen sometimes could not resist glancing at her. Taylen stared at her while she entered the court chamber and he followed after. Once the trial started, Sarah Hayden who was wearing a simple purple dress, always facing down and seemed shy and innocent, stared at Taylen as he was taking his files and papers out of his bag. As the trial began, the judge entered the courtroom and everyone was on their feet when he gave the signal, everyone resumed their seats.

“The defendants may start,” said the judge, toneless.

Taylen called his first witness on the witness stand, Sarah Hayden. Sarah got on her feet and walked still facing down the ground and sat down in the stand. She vows by placing her hand on the bible that she would speak only the truth. Taylen got off his seat and approached her and said “you said that my client had some sexual touch towards you, is that right Miss Hayden?”

“Yes, he did” replied Sarah to his question, firmly.

Taylen turned towards her and look her in the eyes and asked,

"Did or did not my client rape you as you described in your statement miss Hayden?" asked Taylen in a vivid tone.

"No, he did get the chance to, but when he tried to. I had managed to push him away and ran" replied Sarah, tears rolled down her cheeks.

“So, your honour, why is my client charged for rape if the plaintiffs mentioned that it was an attempt” argued Taylen.

The judge listened carefully to each argument.

Later, Taylen made his point about independent living and his previous foster homes. "Are you doing this for the money, as you did to your previous foster father? COME ON, TELL US THE TRUTH" lashed out Taylen.

"My client pleaded guilty as she did not know what she was doing. She was young my honour" pleaded her attorney on his feet.

“But why she didn`t try to open the case again? I will answer the question myself that`s because she got an amount of money at the end and she got to move into another foster home.”

“THAT`S A LIE, I DIDN`T TAKE ANY MONEY FROM ANYONE” shouted Sarah, on her feet.

“I did apply for independent living as I didn`t feel safe near him and wherever I go, it`s the same problem. You perv don`t know how to control themselves” said Sarah as she calmed herself.

“Well, you must be a supermodel then” expressed Taylen.

Some people who sat on Taylen`s side, Diego and his family burst into laughter about the comment that Taylen made. Sarah`s eyes was filled with tears.

“No, I am not and it`s wrong for you to say that to me. - I did not ask for any of that. Do you think that I am happy to be here, putting my dignity at a low just for money? - I know that I don`t have a family to support me, - I am all alone in this world and, - I just want to feel safe” replied Sarah, her voice crack during each pause.

After two hours of court, debating and arguments, the judge made his decision and found that Diego Martinez was innocent and free of all charges. The evidence provided that it was not enough to convict him guilty. Sarah burst into tears but she was going to receive protection assured the judge. Anna congratulated Taylen and told him that he was better than she had expected and than she had been told.

Sarah made her way towards Taylen and said "You may have won today defending demons like him. But one day, you will pay for this. I didn`t ask any of this but still it happened and you did not think about the danger that he is".

Diego saw them talking and rushed towards her like a bull. Sensing it, Taylen instantly turned and gave him a cold look and he stopped. Taylen ignored her and went away with his client.

Brielle and Onna returned home after a long and wonderful day. They were both happy and wanted to celebrate it as they had made some friends and didn`t expect that their first day would turn out to be great. While getting out of the car, Brielle got a text from Taylen saying; he had won the case and that he would be staying at the firm for the night as they all were going to celebrate and party for his victory. Brielle replied by saying; Congratulations honey, enjoy your victory but don`t drink too much. Take care and Kisses.

Chapter 2

Ding dong,

Brielle opened the door and it was the Kamps from the house in front. Their yellow house with fresh Roses and its` well-mowed lawn was the perfect front yard for Brielle. Alex Kamps who was standing in front of Brielle was a redhead housewife, well dressed in a white loose dress and a pink cardigan over, and had a basket full of freshly baked banana muffins in her right hand.

“Hi, I am Alex Kamps. I live in the house just in front of yours. I wanted to meet you since yesterday but I was really busy.” Said Alex, with a small smile on her lips, handing her the basket of muffins.

Brielle extended her hands and accepted them.

John Kamps who was standing next to her, a good white-looking guy and tall, shook her hand and muttered those words, "welcome to the neighbourhood".

“Oh, it`s so nice of you. My name is Brielle Hills, and thank you so much for the muffins. I am sure my daughter Onna will love those” responded Brielle, stepping aside from her right to allow them to enter.

As they stepped inside, Brielle showed them to the living room and as they sat, she ran to the kitchen, placed the basket of muffins on the counter and put some water to boil and dropped three tea bags in the boiling water.

Brielle offered them some tea in a silver tray where she put the fancy flowery tea cup circularly and next to it there was a plate of cookies, and they elegantly agree. "My husband Taylen is at work. It`s his third day away from home since he won his case. I am so sorry that you won`t be able to meet him" said Brielle while offering them some cookies too.

"No worries. We just wanted to meet you and maybe we can become good friends than just being neighbours" said Alex, as she sipped some of her hot tea.

"I saw your daughter the other day, she is adorable" complimented John.

"Thank you. And yes, I would love to have you as a friend of mine.”

“Onna, come here” called Brielle, Onna who was busy playing upstairs in her room, rushed downstairs and greeted the guest, took one cookie from the plate and ran back to her room.

“Can you tell me a bit more about the neighbourhood, please? I am super interested to learn about here" asked Brielle.

"Sure, I will tell you and the hot gossip too" laughed Alex.

She explained to her that on the left of her house, lived Mrs Chou Venture who used to be a librarian, someone who is very sweet and is about to turn seventy in the next two months. From your right side lived Mrs Flores who Alex and John did not know much about as she was a very private and personal person. They barely see her outside her house but she was present in the neighbourhood meeting last week according to the Kamps. She is not even at her home sometimes and it`s only three weeks since she moved in. Brielle sat quietly, sipping her tea and listening carefully to them.

"You know, I was thinking of hosting a housewarming party so that myself and my husband can get to know all the neighbours around here. I will send the invitations by this Saturday. But I still need the approval of my husband because he does not know yet that I am planning a party" said Brielle.

"It seems that it will be a great party and you can count us in. And if you need any help to plan it, call me and here`s my number" said Mrs Kamp while handing her a card where her phone number is written. “We have to go as we had a lot of work to do. I will come and see you around. Thank you for the tea” said Alex, standing on her feet, and walking towards the main entrance followed by John and Brielle.

“Thank you too again, for the muffins” thanked Brielle.

"Before going, can you tell me where I can find a supermarket?" asked Brielle.

"It`s just two blocks away down the street, on the street Flend" replied John. Brielle accompanied them to the front yard and Alex kissed her goodbye.

In the evening, Taylen was back from work and he was completely exhausted as he had a long day with meetings and paperwork. Brielle had prepared meatloaf for dinner which she served once everyone was settled on the dining table. Taylen grabbed a glass and poured a shot of whisky and two cubes of ice before joining them in the dining room. Everyone started digging into their food.

"Your meatloaf is different today, more delicious and juicier, honey," said Taylen while chewing his food with amazement.

"Yes, I added more cinnamon and other spices that made the meat more exquisite" replied Brielle.

"Honey, I wanted to ask you that I wanted to have a housewarming party, invite the neighbours to get to know them properly and Onna too can make some new friends. Would that be okay for you and I want to have it next Saturday" asked Brielle, face down and having trouble cutting the small potatoes in her plate.

Taylen continued to eat and took some minutes before answering. He then replied, "Yes, let`s host them a party that they have never been to". Brielle jumped out of excitement and Onna too. Brielle put on some pop songs and started dancing, shouting joyfully "we are going to have a party" several times. They were joyful and seeing them dancing and jumping, Taylen was blessed to see them that much content. Taylen gazed at them thinking that they are enjoying here so much and his phone vibrated in his pocket. He took his phone out and switched it on and saw that he had received a text message from a private number saying; It won`t last, honey.

Taylen almost dropped his phone while he kept on staring at the text message. He placed the phone screen down when it vibrated again. He had received another text message but this time, it was a file attached to it. In the attachment file, there was a picture of Brielle and Onna having dinner and another one of them dancing just a few minutes ago. The person who was sending him those texts must still be around here, Taylen guessed. By the photo angle, it seemed that it was taken from outside through the left window of the living room as it had a great view of the dining room. Immediately, Taylen got up, walked to the entrance door, opened it, went out and found no one outside. Taylen walked around the house from the front yard to the back yard and came back to the front yard. Still, there was no one to be found. Taylen was confused and thought that it must have been someone trying to pull a prank on them as they were new in the neighbourhood. Back inside, he closed all windows, curtains and doors.

"What happened, honey? Why are you closing all windows and doors, it`s still seven o`clock" Said Brielle.

"Just to be safe, we still don`t know what happened last Sunday" replied Taylen. He joined them in their celebration, hugged them tight and slow-danced with them. Brielle enjoyed dancing in the tight arms of her husband and with Taylen holding Onna in his other hand. It was a perfect moment for them. They later decided to watch a movie.

“What are we going to watch tonight?” asked Brielle.

“You know we don`t have much choice when it comes to movies on movie night” replied Taylen, as Onna looked in the animated film section. They had to watch an animated movie with a talking dog who is a secret spy and running a whole secret agency under his master house. But they did enjoy the whole picture till they went to sleep. In the morning, Brielle was already up and on her computer. Brielle was working on something really important. "What are you doing, honey," asked Taylen. "I am designing our invitation cards for the guest," said Brielle while choosing the colour of the card. "After school, I am taking Onna for a shopping afternoon and I know that you have a case to prep so I know you won`t be able to," said Brielle. Taylen kissed her and muttered, "Yes, honey. Enjoy your afternoon". Brielle was still thinking about what to write on the invitation cards and still could not get any idea. When after some minutes, something struck her. She started typing on her keyboard nonstop. “That`s it. It`s perfect” she whispered to herself. Then, she started to design a beautiful beige card with small decorations that she found on the web.

Dear Neighbours,

We, the Hills are inviting you to our housewarming party that will be held on the

4th May at 15:00. I hope that me and my husband, Taylen, will be honoured with

Your presence.

Sincerely,

The Hills family.

At eight o`clock, everyone was off to work.

After 8 hours of school, Brielle drove Onna to the mall where the supermarket that Alex had mentioned is in the same building. Brielle stepped out of the car followed by Onna and both rushed to their first clothing store. It was modern, well light, and not full of many people and was filled with woman clothes. They kept on looking through every sample of clothes. In the first store, they didn`t find much to their liking and rushed to the next one. The second one, was an old store as it smelled a little dusty but it had more variety of clothes than the previous one. There Brielle made Onna try almost every pretty dress that she found till they got a purple dress with they had in the size of an adult too. Brielle liked the idea of a matching dress with her daughter, it was a beautiful one and decided to buy it. As Brielle got her dress, she walked to the liquor store as she needed to get some champagne and red wine. It was not convenient for her to bring Onna to a liquor store but she didn`t have many options. She walked to the store attendant and ordered seven bottles of champagne and seven bottles of red wine. “Could you please help me to carry those bottles to the car for me, please?” asked Brielle, handing him some cash. He agreed to help Brielle and as she finished paying, he grabbed the bottles which were in a bottle case and took them to the parking lot. Brielle opened her trunk and placed it inside and he went back for the bottles of red wine. “Thank you sir for your help. Thank you very much” thanked Brielle to the storekeeper, as he nodded pleasantly and walked away.

Once she got all her bottles, she rushed to the supermarket to buy the snacks, cold drinks and some local music that may be pleasant and more comfortable for the guest. The supermarket was enormous and had many items in each section organised by their usage which made Brielle think that she was in heaven. After their shopping in the supermarket, their hands holding paper bags which was filled with snacks, cold drinks and other items for the party, they both stopped at the KFC restaurant where Onna could not resist a rounder burger as she could smell the essence of the fried chicken which was triggering them.

“Mommy, it`s gooood nuh,” said Onna, mouth filled with food.

“Onna, don`t speak with your mouth full and yes it`s good” responded Brielle eating another bite of her burger.

Once they finished eating Brielle got up and Onna looked at her mother with her baby's eyes and asked “Can we have one more? Please, mommy.” Brielle could not refuse those adorable eyes and they both went on a second round of the burger. Both Brielle and Onna had enjoyed their meal as they were too full to stand up straight.

"Wait mommy, I can`t move am too full" chuckled Onna while trying to stand. Brielle could not stop herself from laughing, handing her a hand to help her to stand up properly. They went to a studio next, where Brielle would print out the cards that she had worked on in the morning. "How did you find the neighbourhood till now," asked a tall man with a huge beard to Brielle, as he read the card on his screen.

Brielle gave him an intense look but replied "It`s quite nice, quiet and peaceful, especially the Sundays. But just there was a small incident once", while he handed her the pen drive back which contained the card design.

"If you don`t mind, can I ask what kind of incident," said the studio keeper in a shocked tone.

"The second day, we think that someone had broken into our house but didn`t neither steal anything nor try to harm anyone but I am pretty sure that there was indeed someone inside" narrated Brielle. "Oh god! But how can you be sure that there was someone inside your house then?" asked the keeper. "I saw someone running, it was like a shadow and it seemed like a woman. But it was too dark and I am not sure. It was outside the house and I got a glimpse of it through the window from the living room" responded Brielle.

Brielle could not give more details as she did not see the person properly as it was completely dark outside and needed to check on Onna at that moment. Brielle did not mention it to Taylen as she knew that he would say that it must be an illusion as he did check everywhere and there was no one to be found. "Take this camera, it can record at night time, it`s small meaning won`t be easy to notice it and I will offer you a twenty-five per cent discount," said the Keeper.

"What! You are trying to make a sale from me? - But you won, I will take it" chuckled Brielle while trying to find her wallet. Brielle thought to herself that she did not mention this to Taylen and neither will she mention the camera to him as he was already tensed and stressed about work, and he would also say that she is just exaggerating things like always. “Here are your cards and here is your camera,” said the Keeper. Brielle handed out some cash and paid him. She took her printout cards and the camera and called Onna who was sitting in a corner of the shop playing with her DS. “Thank you” Brielle thanked him as she pushed the door and left.

As soon as Brielle reached home, she installed the cameras first. She left all the things that they bought in the car. She needed to install those cameras before Taylen reach home. She sat down in the guest room which she also called the loner. Inside the box, as she opened it in bed, there were four cameras and a small plastic black container box where all data recorded are stored. She took out a piece of paper folded in four ways, opened it and started reading the instruction on how to install them. But Brielle did not have any idea where to install them. She kept on thinking for more than half an hour and then it came. She knew exactly to install them. She installed one in the kitchen facing the back door, one outside of the main entrance door, one in Onna`s room and the last one, in their bedroom facing the entrance of the room door. She thought that it would be extremely difficult to install those cameras. Once the installation was done, Brielle connected all four cameras as it was wireless to her laptop through a software application where she could watch everything live and rewind at any moment in the past. She hid the data storage box in a place where no one could see it and only she will know its whereabouts. Once she finished with the installation, she took out all of her shopping items and stored them in their respective places.

As it was a Saturday, Brielle thought that everyone would be in their home. She took her cards from her handbag and decided to go door to door to invite the neighbours personally rather than leaving the card in their letterbox as Taylen said. She thought that it will be a way to meet the neighbours in a more personal way. "Honey, can you watch Onna? I am going to invite the neighbours personally" asked Brielle while she descended the stairs. "Sure, honey," said Taylen, mind absorb in the Scrabble game with Onna in the dining room.

Brielle walked out of the house and looked at the beautiful blue sky and the sunlight kissed her cheeks, Brielle marched and crossed Raindrew Street and knocked at the door of the Kamps first. It was John who opened the door. "Oh Mrs Hills, how are you?" asked John, joyfully. "I am doing great and you?" responded Brielle with a little smile on her face, "I came to invite you and Alex to the housewarming party that we will be hosting on the 4th of May at 15:00". She handed him her card which she was proud of as for her it was perfect, well designed and beige was her favourite colour. Alex who came out of nowhere took the card instead and replied: "of course, we will be there and thank you for your invitation. And don`t worry about dessert because I will bake two of my famous lemon meringue pie". Brielle, who was delighted by the offer, responded "oh thank you, that would mean a lot to me".

After the Kamps, Brielle went to the next neighbour, Mrs Chou Venture who lived on the left side of the Hills house. Brielle knocked on Mrs Venture`s well-polished wooden door, which she opened instantly even before Brielle knock a second time. Brielle stood in shock while Mrs Venture said "well, how can I help you dear?"

Brielle thought to herself, ‘was she waiting for me?’

"I am your new neighbour from next door and I am inviting you to our housewarming party," said Brielle, anxiously. She handed her, her card but she took more than one minute to take it from her.

"I am sorry, I forgot to introduce myself. I am Mrs Chou Venture” said Mrs Venture, with a trembling voice. Then she added “and I am so sorry that I will not be able to attend but thank you very much for your invitation. I appreciate it."

‘She refused the invitation in a very polite way’ thought to Brielle, "Oh, no worries and I forgot too, my name is Brielle Hills and if you can come even at the last minute, you will be most welcome".

"I am sorry to ask but is your husband Taylen Hills, the lawyer," asked Mrs Venture, curiously.

"No it`s okay and yes it`s him. Why are you asking?" replied Brielle, confused about how she knows him.

“It`s just that I have been hearing a lot about him lately. That`s why I am asking” responded Mrs Venture. “Did he win that case that I heard on the television?” asked Mrs Venture.

“Yeah, he won the case” responded Brielle, who was still standing at the entrance.

“Ohh congratulations,” said Mrs Venture.

Mrs Venture asked a lot of questions about Taylen and his work. Question on his salary, which law firmed he worked before and is now working, where did he come from, and which school and college did he attend. Brielle was quite exasperated with her question that she had to force herself to lie, "I need to go Mrs Venture as I forgot to turn off the stove."

Brielle could not stop her tour as she would be too busy later as she spent more than thirty minutes replying to Mrs Venture`s question, she went to Miss Flores`s house next. At her door, Brielle took a breath and then knocked. She knocked one time, waited for some minutes and no one answered. A second time, then for a third time, a fourth time and at last for a fifth time, still no one opened the door and it seems that nobody was home. Brielle put her invitation card in her blue flower-painted letter box and left. She continued to some neighbours next door and then headed home after.

“You home already, honey,” said Taylen, still playing with Onna.

“I have the word b-e-a-u-t-i-f-u-l, beautiful,” said Onna, as she placed the letters on the scrabble board.

“Yeah, it was fun meeting all those people and they seem lovely. It`s just the neighbour on the right was not here and I left the invite in the letter box. Do you think we should visit in the evening just to be polite because I handed every invitation personally?” responded Brielle, worried.

“No honey, it`s okay. When the neighbour will come, we will tell them that you came and they weren`t here. It`s simple. Stop torturing yourself with that” replied Taylen, as he placed the word revenge on the board. Brielle knew that she was just torturing herself with all kinds of thoughts that Mrs Flores might be upset that she did not get the invite personally. ‘She did go and see her but she wasn`t here’ thought Brielle.

“Oh honey” called Taylen, Brielle turned and he added, “I have already invited Joey and Rose. So, don`t worry”. Brielle thanked Taylen, “Thank you, honey.”

Monday at Gold law limited, was hard as it always started with a meeting with either they would be congratulated for extraordinary work or would be roared at for dreadful work. “I would like to congratulate Taylen Hills for winning his fifteen victories” Anna congratulated Taylen as she stood up from her chair and clapped for him. Taylen was seated in front of Anna, at the other end of the table, nodded with a big smile and said again and again “thank you.”

As the meeting was over, Anna walked out of the conference room and Taylen followed her to her office. Once they were in her office, he invited Anna to the housewarming party, "my wife and I are hosting a housewarming ceremony on the 4th of May and would be honoured to have you and your husband". Anna chuckled upon hearing the word husband and passionately said "I am delighted by your invitation and I will attend. And for your information I am a divorced woman, so no husband will be present". Taylen smirked upon hearing that there is no husband and look down, and she added "Why are you smiling, I don`t expect my immoral and deceitful husband of mine to be there for me when I need him, I just need a man like you. A good and a perfect life partner like you."

Taylen responded in a non-flirty way forcedly "then, it will be a pleasure to have you all alone then". Anna laughed and Taylen left her office with a big smile on his face. Anna did not want him to know that she was rapturous about the invitation. She hoped that she did manage to hide her excitement well. Taylen was glad too that she would come.

On the eve of the party, Brielle was preparing a dessert that she has learned from her mother when she was younger, a traditional English trifle for the event. She was going to serve that dessert for the party the next day and she wanted to try it on the eve as she was trying the recipe after a very long time. But Alex`s lemon pie would be a masterpiece in the perfection party that Brielle wanted and did not want to reject it. She used jam, custard which she made from scratch, raspberries and bananas and on top she added her final touch, whipping cream. As the party was the next day, Brielle was on another level of cleaning. She would do the floors twice and even thrice, gloss all her silverware and took out some exquisite champagne that she bought on her shopping day with Onna and put them in the mini-fridge bar under the kitchen counter.

"Onna, don`t walk, I just rub the floor with polish" snarled Brielle as Onna rushed downstairs and walked two steps on the well-polished floor. "I am sorry, mommy" apologised Onna, her head down. "Oh no no, I am sorry honey. I shouldn`t have shouted at you" said Brielle in a sad tone, while taking Onna`s hand, pulling her and hugging her tightly. "It`s okay mommy, I know that I shouldn`t walk as you have been cleaning since we were back from school," said Onna in a sweet voice.

Taylen was back home and brought a surprise, "well honey, I have something for you". Taylen was smiling as he knew that Brielle would love his gift a lot. Taylen took out a box, Brielle grabbed the box upon seeing it and opened it like an eight-year-old girl. She started to jump and cried as she saw a new white, flowery, elegant and beautiful dress wrapped inside it. Brielle was beaming and gazing at the dress for more than three minutes. "What are you thinking and why are you scanning the dress like that?" said Taylen while Brielle was examining all sides of the dress closely, "I checked honey, there is no defect on it if you are looking for one" giggled Taylen. Brielle responded while she went to her room to dispose of it carefully in a drawer, "no, I am just trying to see which set of jewellery will go perfectly with the dress. Thank you, honey, I love it".

“But me and Onna, we already bought a matching dress and we planned to wear that tomorrow,” said Brielle in a sad voice. “But can`t you wear it for tomorrow? I will talk to Onna if you want to wear it” responded Taylen, sweetly. Onna heard the entire conversation of her parents, she gently approached them and as their attention turned towards her, she responded in her angelic voice “you can wear it mommy if that will make you happy. I will wear the purple one and we will wear the same dress together another time.”

Brielle felt happier to see her daughter do something sweet like that for her. ”It`s decided then that I will wear the dress that Taylen bought me. Thank you sweety” said Brielle as she hugged Onna.

Taylen laid in bed for a nap as he was tired from all the workload he had at the office. Brielle, who was in the kitchen, switched on her laptop to check whether she had received any emails from work which concerned upcoming exams and also wanted to check the camera footage that she had installed the last time. There was nothing suspicious in the videos that she kept on streaming for more than thirty minutes and in her mail inbox, no emails were received, but in her spam box there was a number one there and as she clicked on the spam box, there was something that she couldn`t understand at first. It was a mail that was pending since 27th April and Brielle opened it, and found that her antivirus software had written to notify her that someone was trying to de-encrypt her data and that she needed a bigger and more powerful firewall to protect her personal information. Brielle was confused about that mail, at first thought that it was a fake warning so that she would have to install another version of a firewall. But Brielle started to doubt herself as since they have been here, things sometimes were not that normal. There was a break in which still they don`t know who was inside their home. Brielle instantly downloaded a new firewall and try to uncover who was behind it. She started to do research on how to code and with the success, she found a tutorial that helped her to uncover who was behind it. After one hour of coding and she was not that perfect at it. But she was successful and it pointed her to the location next door and her greatest surprise, it was Mrs Chou Venture. It was its IP address that was used. Brielle was perplexed, and could not stop thinking why was she trying to hack her computer, more importantly how a sixty- nine old and librarian knows how to hack. At the moment, Brielle wanted to ring her door and confronted her but she thought a lie would come from her mouth and that would make an unnecessary scene in front of the other neighbours.

In the morning, it was the 4th of May and Onna rushed to her parent’s room, "We will have a party, we will have a party, and we will have a party" shouted Onna excitedly, jumping in her parent`s king-size bed. "Come here, yes we are going to have a party," said Taylen while grabbing her waist and hugging her. Watching Onna and Taylen hug, Brielle joined them and thought that she had the most amazing, loving and caring husband and daughter in the world. They were so comfy and it felt good being around their arms. But Brielle needed to wake up as she had a lot of work and did not want to be behind her schedule planning. Brielle got up and kiss Taylen on his neck though she was trying to kiss him on the lips. They both giggled. After refreshing herself, Brielle started to organise all her ingredients in the kitchen downstairs, items and decorations and verified the list more than ten times in case she missed something. She did not book any catering services as she wanted to prepare the food and the aroma of hot, delicious juicy food to be diffused around the house as her mother always said that food always makes a home homier. As she was marinating all her ingredients, a knock on the door sounded vibrating all around the kitchen; "Oh somebody knocks, can you go and check who is it, honey" requested Brielle. It was almost noon as she started deep frying her chicken wings in hot oil, Taylen replied "yes honey, I will get to it", he was busy installing the silverware, plates, glasses and some fresh white roses decorations as per Brielle`s order. Taylen opened the door and to his great surprise, it was Rose and Joey. They both hugged Taylen and Rose said in a very joyful tone "we know that you are overwhelmed, so that`s why we are early to give you a hand. I do know that Brielle has her plan schedule, but I will lay a hand in the work too". Brielle came to the door and hugged Rose excitedly and told them "glad that you are here and thank you that you want to help but we are almost done with the work because guess who is on time and it`s all because of my plan". Everyone burst into laughter.

"Good then, what`s smelling so good" replied Joey sniffing in the air like a dog. Watching Joey acting like that, everyone laughed.

At around 14:30, the first guest was Mrs Anna Margin, Taylen`s boss from the gold law firm. Brielle opened the door and greeted her. She was wearing a beautiful and formal red dress which was covered with printed gold elephants which made Brielle a little jealous as she was looking dashing in it. "It`s a very nice dress and you look amazing in it, It`s so unique and elegant." complimented Brielle. Anna thanked her while Brielle guided her into the living room and replied "It`s an Indian attire that I received as a gift from a client". Their conversation got cut as Taylen entered the room and said in between "Oh hi, you came. I am so glad that you could make it".

“I wouldn`t dare to miss my favourite lawyer housewarming party” responded Anna, in a charming way. Brielle offered Anna some champagne and some gourmandise to go with it and both Brielle and Rose started talking with Anna.

"How do you find her," asked Taylen to Joey while sipping some red wine.

"I think that she looks extremely beautiful in that dress, she is a perfect wife and a perfect mother to Onna. But nothing compared to mine" muttered Joey while looking at Brielle.

Taylen was looking at Anna, turned towards Brielle and muttered fast “yes, she is”.

Taylen approached them and grabbed Brielle by her waist and said "what are you ladies talking about", to which Anna instantly responded with a smile "about our marriage".

"I hope that good things are being said about me," said Taylen with a smirk on his face, as his face turned towards Brielle. All of the three women burst into laughter. Then the Kamps arrived exactly at 15:00 and Taylen opened the door. "Oh Mr Hills, glad to finally meet you. Brielle has told us so much about you and we wanted to meet you since then" said Alex while handing, not two but four of her lemon meringue pie.

"Oh Alex, you are finally here and welcome. Oh dear, why did you go into all this trouble?" said Brielle on seeing the four pies in Taylen`s hand. Taylen walked to the buffet table and placed the three pies, took the last one to the kitchen and came back with two glasses of champagne. "No, the pleasure was all mine and one of the pies is for you because once you are going to taste my pie, you won`t get over it" replied Alex while taking a glass of champagne that Taylen offered to them.

After all the guest that the Hills were expecting all arrived, everyone was busy talking to the Hills, Rose and Joey was talking to Alex and John, Anna was talking to the neighbours who lived down on the street, the Elfino family who also had just moved here two months ago. Onna was busy playing with the other kids. Knock, knock, someone knocked at the main entrance door and they did not await someone at that moment as almost everyone was there. Brielle opened the door and found Mrs Chou Venture, who stammered "I know that I said that I won`t come but at the last minute, all of my plans got cancelled".

"No worries, you are most welcome" replied Brielle while taking Mrs Venture's coat from her hands. Mrs Venture marched towards the buffet table, took a plate and grabbed some food before Brielle lead her to the living room she had left a mess on the table after serving herself. As she was a guest, Brielle contemplated her silence. Taylen graciously offered her some champagne which she was relenting with the offering.

Clink, clink, clink, Taylen tapped his glass with a fork and raised his glass for a toast and said in a cheerful tone, "dear friends and neighbours, I welcome you all into our home and we are very honoured to have you all here. It`s been two weeks that we lived here and we fell more in love with the house and neighbourhood each day. I hope that friendship will make us close to each other and become more than just neighbours. Thank you for your presence as it touched our hearts, enjoyed the party at the maximum and, a big round of applause to my wife who got the idea and organised it to perfection".

Brielle was so shy that she hid her face behind her glass of champagne and could not stop smiling. Taylen raised his glass and kissed Brielle who was still hiding. Everyone raised their glass too and took a sip.

“Thank you for the invitation and we look forward neighbour,” said John as he raised his glass in the air.

Everyone was enjoying themselves, the music that Brielle picked, was energetic and vibrating and it was excellent taste according to Alex, the food was delicious and juicy, champagne and red wine were still flowing in glasses and the dance floor were open which was in the living room, which Rose and Joey were warming it for more than thirty minutes. But all of a sudden the festive vibe went low when Mrs Venture dropped her glass and her plate which had shattered into pieces. Everyone stared at Mrs Venture and was shocked.

"You pushed me, Taylen" squealed Mrs Venture twice. Taylen, his face went pale when he heard his name, who was twelve feet apart from her and did not move anywhere near her responded, "no, I did not push you, Mrs Venture and I did not even move from where I am standing".

Alex backed Taylen up by saying "Yes Mrs Venture, Taylen did not move at all. - Oh maybe she is having some episodes again".

Mrs Venture started crying, "You pushed me, and I almost fell. I don`t know what you want from me. I saw you on the 25th of April in my backyard, what were you doing there?" hooted Mrs Venture.

"It`s okay Mrs Venture, I will take you home," said Alex, she approached her gently and gave her a caress over the shoulder to calm her down. John approached Taylen who was unclear about what had just happened and said "I am so sorry about this. You see Mrs Venture suffers from dementia and have some hallucinations sometimes. She rarely gets those episodes".

Brielle approached and said to John "No worries, we understand. But how does she manage all this and she is alone?"

"She has a home nurse assistant at night and sometimes, we the neighbours help her with diner, and lunch and have some small talks with her" responded John.

Alex took her to her home and Mrs Venture was trembling as if she was terrified of something. Taylen grabbed a broom and started cleaning the broken glasses before Brielle started freaking out with the mess on the floor as all the sauce, drinks and food were on the floor. Rose came downstairs with Onna who had gone to the bathroom; saw everything was quiet and calm, no one was dancing and Taylen was with a broom.

"What happened? Did someone die? Oh, Brielle died when she saw her plate break. Oh my god was that so shocking to her that she died just on seeing that broken plate" said Rose in total panic and her voice went high.

Everyone started laughing except Brielle who came out of the Kitchen and said "I am fine and thanks for worrying". She later smiled at her and Rose couldn`t believe either at what she had said.

"We are going to continue to enjoy ourselves," said Brielle. Brielle did not mention to anyone the hacking that Mrs Venture tried to do. But later that night after almost everyone was gone, Joey and Rose who stayed back to help them clean, Brielle had confessed to them about the email that she had received.

"I found that Mrs Venture had tried to hack our computer. I don`t know why and how she did that, even though she was not successful but she tried to," said Brielle.

"What! I mean what. And it`s now that you are telling us about that" blurted out Taylen, giving intense look at her.

"I am so sorry honey. I thought it was stupid till I saw her dropping the plate and glass, just like that intentionally. I don`t know if it was intentional or not but she dropped it and no one pushed or knocked her" said Brielle in a tense voice. "What do you think, is she hiding something I don`t think that she has dementia if that`s the name of the disease or virus or something that Ales said she has" said Rose.

Brielle looked at Rose thinking and she muttered “what did she mean when she said that she saw you on the night of the 25th?”

Taylen looked at Joey perplexed, "Okay ladies, we will look into it some other days and let`s continue to enjoy our evening" said Joey while pouring more champagne into their glasses.

Chapter 3

The following weekend, Brielle went to her maternity home as her younger sister, Gareta Mayfair a fair woman, with green eyes just like Brielle, was getting married. As soon as they arrived, Brielle was already managing the whole event to make sure that everything was organised. The wedding ceremony and reception would be held in the backyard.

“Well, look who didn`t come and see the bride nor dad,” said a sweet voice, Brielle turned and responded “well, I am inspecting your venue and what things need to go, like that hideous dress on you. What are you wearing?”

Gareta examined her designer pink robe with big purple flowers at the bottom and muttered irritably “It`s a designer dress for heaven`s sake. There`s nothing hideous about it.” Brielle examined the dress a second time and said nothing. Brielle looked at the organised and she showed him where he needs to put the ice sculpture tomorrow, Gareta talking under her breath “or I look dreadful in it?” Brielle who noticed Gareta talking to herself felt bad for what she said and approached her, “Taylen and Onna are inside, let`s join them.” Brielle took her hand and they marched towards the house. Brielle opened the door and Onna was playing chess with her grandfather, Faresh Mayfair. Brielle`s father was on his feet and kissed her on the cheeks and asked “how are you my sweet pie? I am so happy that you have found your way home because I thought you would have stayed the whole night with the organiser.” Brielle who was smiling, responded, “I am doing great dad and for the record, I wouldn`t have spent the whole night.” Both Faresh and Gareta burst into laughter. “Oh sweet pie, still funny. You will be more thrilled to know that for dinner I have made your favourite chicken salsa with a salad of lettuce, corn and peas.” Brielle who loved her father's chicken salsa responded “mmm, that`s delicious.”

Brielle looked at her father, “you know dad, the last time that I called, Mrs Fino told me that you weren`t taking any of your medications.” Brielle who was worried, added, “don`t do this dad, you should take care of yourself.” Brielle approached her father and hugged him. “Group hug, group hug” shouted Onna as she jumped between them. Gareta who was standing next to them joined too. As they let go of each other, Brielle turned to Onna and asked her “sweety where`s daddy?” Onna who was still hanging on his grandfather`s leg, answered “daddy is upstairs mommy.” Faresh sat on his knees and whispered to Onna “want to continue our little game of chess?” Onna screamed, “Yes, grandpa.” They went back to their chess game as Brielle went upstairs to see Taylen and Gareta went to the backyard to see the arrangements being done. Brielle climbed the stairs and on the right side, there was Brielle`s room where Taylen was unpacking their stuff.

“Honey, you should let me do this,” said Brielle, as she grabbed some of her clothes from the bag and started to fold them. Brielle added, “go and relax, you deserve that break from work.” Taylen`s lip curved into a smile as he responded “it`s okay, honey. I don`t want to just sit around and not help. There is a wedding downstairs and I want to help in any way I can.” Taylen still folded the clothes and placed them in the dresser. Brielle gazed at his well-folded clothes which were better than hers, which made her impressed but jealous at the same time. As soon as they finished, they both descended and had their afternoon tea with Danish biscuits which Taylen was fond of since he discovered them. Mrs Fino, who was back from the market where she bought fresh flowers and other wedding decorations for the tables, entered the kitchen where Brielle and Taylen were. “Oh Mrs Fino, you are back,” said Brielle. “Yes, my child. It was so crowded at the market that I had to flee from there.”

“How long have you been working here Mrs Fino?” asked Taylen, curiously. Mrs Fino who was cleaning the kitchen counter responded: “it`s more than thirty years and I had the pleasure to see both Brielle and Gareta become incredible women.” Taylen sipped his tea and continued to listen to Mrs Fino. “I babysat them since they were babies and let me tell you how messy Brielle was”. Taylen was shocked and said eagerly “tell me more. I want to know.” Mrs Fino laughed and narrated “one time, Brielle had redecorated a whole wall in her room with a marker. I had to clean that wall five times that day. Now just try and do that and you will see her reaction.” Both Taylen and Brielle laughed and she depended on herself by saying “I was only seven years old.” The door of the kitchen banged against the wall, which Mrs Fino jumped and Taylen and Brielle turned to see what was going on, ”oh my god, my sculpture just arrived and it`s the most amazing piece of art I have ever seen,” said Gareta, jumping from right to left. ”Oh you all should come and see it, come on” requested Gareta, as they got on their feet and followed her. They all gazed at the ice sculpture which was a bride and a groom dancing. It was indeed beautiful. ”It`s the most beautiful thing that I have ever seen,” said Gareta, and she corrected herself, “of course not, my soon-to-be husband is the most beautiful one.”

“Gareta, you need to calm down. You scared us” expressed Brielle, calmly. But Gareta didn`t pay any attention to his sister`s words and muttered “I am going to place it in front of the house so that everyone will know that there is a wedding going on.” Brielle chuckled and said, “Everyone who lives from a mile knows that Gareta Mayfair is getting married.” Gareta was perplexed at Brielle`s words and asked “What do you mean, sister?”

“Dad told me since last week, you had been screaming - I am getting married, I am getting married” chortled Brielle and imitated her sister. Gareta burst into laughter as Brielle`s imitation of hers was horrible.

The following day, the wedding preparation was still stagnant. Nothing was being done, the tables and chairs were not settled yet, the red carpet was still tied, the catering service had not arrived yet, the musicians were late and the decorator was unjoinable. The wedding planner who was present, witnessing that everyone who needed to be there wasn`t, made him start to panic. As it was already past nine o`clock and the ceremony starts at noon, the tension that he could feel can provoke a heart attack. Brielle came outside and witnessed the look on his face and glanced at the backyard and understood the situation. Brielle approached him, he was reading his to-do list, “Hi Mr Gen, what happened? You looked so tense.” Gen looked at Brielle and told her the truth that everyone was late and they were not answering their phone. “No need to worry, I am here and I will help. There`s still time till the wedding and I am sure that they will be here just on time” assured Brielle, to calm Gen. Brielle grabbed the chairs and started to arrange them in a line next to each other, Taylen came outside and saw Brielle working and decided to lend her a hand. “What can I do, honey?”

“Can you set up those tables for me, honey?” Answered Brielle, Taylen nodded and went instantly to work.

Five minutes later, arrived the catering service followed by the musicians and the decorator. “So sorry Mr Gen for the lateness. We encountered a small problem on the road. We had a tyre puncture and the others helped us to change it” said one of the workers from the catering service. Mr Gen who was about to burst out a fit of rage, calm himself down and said calmly “okay no worries, I understand. But next time, let me know what`s going on, okay.” They nodded and started to work. Brielle approached Gen and said “I have the seating arrangement with me”, and handed him a piece of paper where all guest names were written so that the guest knows which seats and tables they are assigned to. Brielle turned and saw Onna running through the chairs that she had just installed and called “Onna, come here.”

Onna approached her mother who got on her knees and said “don`t run honey. You may hurt yourself”, Onna nodded, “so what do you think of the venue?”

“It`s beautiful mommy” replied Onna, with her sweet voice. She ran back inside the house. Brielle gazed at everyone working and noticed that everyone was working at a quick pace and felt that everything will be ready just in time. Brielle went back inside and walked to her room upstairs. She took out her dress plus Onna`s and Taylen`s suits from the closet. “Onna” called Brielle twice. Onna rushed into her mother`s room and muttered “yes, mommy.”

“Did u take a bath or do you want me to give you one?” asked Brielle. Onna replied, “I want you to give me one.”

Brielle took her in her arms and went straight to the bathroom. As Onna finished her bath, Brielle was her first and she wanted to wear a pink dress rather than her beige one Brielle did not want to force her as she loved it due to the butterflies’ embroidery. Onna, which took at least thirty minutes to get dressed, was finally ready and went to sit with her game console in the living room. Taylen came and took his clothes and went straight to the bathroom. Brielle who already showered in the morning put on her beige dress which was plain and simple applied a little makeup and was ready. She looked at herself in the mirror and Taylen was back in his blue ocean suit. Brielle gasped on seeing Taylen. “Ohh honey, what a handsome man you are” complimented, Brielle. Brielle examined Taylen from back to front as she circled him. “What!” exclaimed Taylen with a big smile on his face. “I don`t know what turning me so on, you or that blue suit of yours” smirked Brielle. Taylen started blushing and said “well, I think it`s both”, grabbed Brielle`s arms and pulled her close to him. Taylen leaned and slowly kissed her gently on her neck, Brielle could feel his breath, his hand in her hair and she let a moan out, and let her hand go to the south as she tried to unzip his trousers, “we have to stop” as he back off a little. “Honey, we will celebrate the honeymoon later. We need to get to the wedding and you need to go and check on your sister.” Brielle who was not expecting no as an answer as Taylen never refused, walked out of the room frustrated.

As Gareta turned upon hearing the door open, Brielle entered and closed the door behind her, and gazed at her sister in her white wedding dress with big embroidery white pigeons. Gareta gave a relief sound, witnessing Brielle in her room and said “we thought it was Kevin again. He wants to see me, the bride, before the ceremony.” As the make-up artist applied some powder as Gareta continued to talk, “before the wedding, I mean he can`t do that. He can`t see me before and I won`t allow it.” Brielle who was still gazing and listening to her, responded “oh don`t worry, he won`t be able to see you before.”

“Just let me tell you, Gareta, that you are the most beauteous bride that I have ever seen.” Gareta had a big smile on her face, and joked “even more beautiful than you were.” Brielle chuckled “Indeed you are.” Brielle then added “And mother would be so proud of you.”

Gareta felt her eyes fill with tears and she tried to retain them so that she doesn`t ruin her make-up, said “It means a lot to me. And thank you for always being there for me, sister.” Gareta got on her feet, approached her sister and hugged her tightly.

As she baked away, they heard a knock on the door and Brielle rushed to the door. She opened the door one quarter and found her dad standing in the corridor. Faresh entered the room to see her daughter and turned to Brielle, asking “where is Gareta?”

Brielle did not know what to answer as she too, didn`t know the answer. Gareta came out of the closet upon hearing her father`s voice. “What you doing in the closet?” asked Faresh, curiously.

“I thought it was Kevin as he wants to see me and it would be considered inauspicious” explained Gareta a second time. Faresh laughed, “Ohh I see, and you kids are always impatient about anything.” Faresh offered his hands and everyone was confused. “What you doing, dad?” asked Gareta as she extends her hand to grab her father`s. “Am walking you down the aisle” replied Faresh, excitedly.

“Whattt” squealed Gareta.

Faresh perplexed, “what, don`t you want to get married honey?”

Gareta who also was confused by her father responded “yes I do, but I get married at noon and it`s still…”, Gareta`s face went long and screamed in a high piece voice “Oh my god, it`s past noon. I am late at MY OWN WEDDING.” She grabbed her father`s hand and rushed to the aisle. Brielle followed them and they found everyone was already there. The pianist upon seeing Gareta coming started playing a slow and melodious song called ‘forever and ever’ and everyone who was on their feet admired the bride. Onna walked in front of them, throwing white rose petals, the lantern all lighted, which was on a stand, and was decorated with lilies and white roses. As they arrived at the altar, Faresh let go of her hand which instantly, Kevin grabbed and whispered in Gareta`s ears, “the most beautiful bride I have ever seen.” Gareta blushed and instantly Onna repeated word by word what Kevin said and everyone cried “awwwww”. “That`s what uncle Kevin said mommy” replied Onna, as she looked at her mother. Everyone burst into laughter and the priest started the ceremony with the opening phrase, “Dear friends and family, we are here today to celebrate the love between two people…”

During the ceremony, they both exchanged their vows which were simple, sweet and cute and then they were proclaimed husband and wife. They ended the wedding ceremony which an intense kiss. They wouldn`t stop their lips from touching each other, if Onna didn`t come between them. Everyone laughed and approached the newly wedded couple for pictures.

After thirty minutes of shooting, they approached the dance floor and opened the reception with a slow dance to a song called ‘all I want are you’. It was a romantic scene as they hugged tightly as continued to dance. Once the music stopped, a wooden cart approached them from where they were standing and on it was the wedding cake with white frosting, two bottles of champagne and was decorated with a garland of lilies and white roses. They cut the cake, fed each other some and opened their bottle of champagne and Gareta managed to open hers first. She could not herself laughing as she poured champagne into her glass and witnessed Kevin still struggling to open his.

Every guest settled at their assigned table, and the waiters started to bring food out and poured champagne or red wine. Brielle whose table was on the right side and next to Gareta`s got up from her chair, grabbed her glass and gave a little tap with her knife. “I want to address a few words to the newly coupled,” said Brielle, smiling at everyone as they turned to look. “Watching Gareta and Kevin exchanging those vows that I even can`t find words to describe such sublime vows, made me realise that love, doesn`t matter if it does not make sense to others. But as long as it made sense to both people, it`s the most amazing and beautiful thing that a person can have.” Brielle looked at Gareta and added “Always be there for each other, be there for each other and always stay strong on that love that you showed us today at your wedding. So dear little sister, congratulations and I wish you the best for the future.” Taylen clapped first and everyone followed, Faresh was on his feet clapping. Gareta was emotional at the speech, ended up crying and walked towards her sister, and hugged her tightly. “Thank you Brielle and I love you, sister.” Brielle caressed her back and let her as Gareta straighten her body and joined her table.

After a heavy, delicious and juicy lunch, everyone was on the dance floor, jumping from right to left, Taylen felt his phone vibrating in his left pocket. It was a text message from Joey. As he opened the message, Onna rushed towards him and grabbed his hand and asked “daddy, coma and dance with me. I have no partner. Please, daddy.” Taylen responded “no sweety, I have to check something but maybe after. Ask your mom in the meantime.” Onna agreed and rushed to her mother, and murmured “Mommy, will you dance with me? Daddy is busy with his phone and won`t dance with me.” Brielle glanced at Taylen and noticed his face went pale. “Of course honey, daddy must be busy with something important” responded Brielle and could not forget the expression on her husband`s face.

They walked to the dance floor, the music was so loud and good that gave them the vibe to dance. Onna was into the music and her body flows naturally along it but Brielle could not enjoy herself and was just moving like a zombie as she could not stop from glancing at Taylen every second that she got the opportunity to. She noticed Taylen getting tenser at every look. Brielle took Onna to Gareta who was dancing on the other side of the dance floor and asked “can you please dance with Onna?” Gareta replied enthusiastically, “I will be happy too. --But you don`t want to dance?” Brielle responded “I have something to do”

Brielle marched towards Taylen who was busy talking on the phone, near the bar and grabbing a drink. “Is everything alright, honey?” asked Brielle, as she approached the bar. Taylen responded after his drink, “Yes, just some issues at work came up at the last minute.” He ordered another one and added, “there`s nothing that you should be worried about, honey.”

Taylen kissed her on her forehead, grabbed his second drink and walked away. Brielle walked back to the dance floor and joined Onna and Gareta, who were dancing like crazy. Kevin couldn`t stop himself from laughing upon seeing how cute they were. Brielle joined them and it was a total blast.

Upon dancing and having drinks, Brielle found an urge to go to the bathroom and she walked away from the reception to her father`s house. Inside, as she walked towards the bathroom on the ground floor, she overheard someone screaming and instantly she recognised the voice. She walked towards the room and asked “what`s going on honey? Is everything alright?” Taylen turned and found Brielle standing in front of him. Taylen was sweating buckets and responded, “No honey, I have a big problem.”

“Wait honey, I have to go to the bathroom and I will come to listen to you. Give me five” responded Brielle as she rushed to the bathroom. She came back with a towel and started to dry Taylen who was still sweating. “Okay tell me now. What`s going on?”

Taylen responded, “I just got the news that Sarah Hayden was found dead in the woods Kans.” Brielle shocked, responded “oh god, that`s bad. But who is Sarah Hayden?”

Taylen narrated the whole Diego vs Sarah case to Brielle. “And the worst part is that whoever did that had burned several parts of her body.” Taylen gasped for some air and continued “now my client Diego will be the prime suspect in this case. But I know that he is innocent.” Brielle looked at Taylen and asked, “How do you know that he is innocent?” Taylen answered the question quickly “because he was with me that day. We had the case that day and he had stayed with us the whole night. It doesn`t make any sense to accuse him.”

Brielle hugged Taylen and answered, “Well, the autopsy will reveal the exact time that she was killed and if at that time Diego was with you, he has a pretty solid alibi.”

“But we will know the truth as it always prevails over lies” quoted Brielle from a book that she had read. Taylen checked his call log and Brielle added, “I hope that you will find the true culprit and Taylen honey, do help that girl also. Found out who had done this to her and punished them. Poor girl, she deserved better than that.” Taylen who was still looking at his phone, responded “I will honey. I will find out who did that. But I need some time alone to think about what I am going to do next.” Brielle understood, nodded in agreement at Taylen and walked out of the room.

After the wedding reception, which was a pleasant and elegant evening, the newlywed couple took off to the airport as they were heading to Bali for their honeymoon. Brielle went back inside as she waved goodbye to her sister, and she was thrilled that her little one was now officially married. As she stepped into her room upstairs, she found Taylen completely absorbed in his phone, “you still working, honey?” He looked at Brielle and put down the phone on the nightstand and responded “yes, we just found out that she passed away around eleven on the night of the 25th of April and Diego was with us till late in the morning. So he was nowhere near that forest.” He gave relief, approached Brielle and hugged her. He whispered in her ear, “you are right honey, the truth always prevails but we need to know who did that to Sarah. I mean, it`s horrible.” Brielle who was tight in his arms, replied “I am sure that you will figure everything out as usual, honey.” She kissed Taylen on his forehead and muttered “goodnight honey.” Brielle got into her sleeping gown and went to bed. Taylen`s phone rang and answered “yes Joey, let me what did you found out”, as he walked out of the room.

“The police are not pressing any charge on Diego as his alibi checks. So there`s nothing to worry about and you go and have a good night's rest. I will talk to you tomorrow.” Said Joey, Taylen replied, “Good then, see you later.”

Taylen felt incredulous as he got into bed as things never happen that easily. But he thought that good things happen to good people sometimes as he closed his eyes and fell asleep.

As the sun rose, Brielle was already on her feet and was preparing breakfast for everyone. She cooked pancakes and eggs and pressed fresh oranges for healthy juice. They were returning home after breakfast and, Both Onna and Brielle skipped school. Taylen woke up later, freshen and went down for breakfast. He was on leave today but due to Sarah`s case, he is going to work late.

“Your coffee honey, you sure that you don`t want juice? – And here`s your pancakes” said Brielle as she added two spoons of sugar and stirred it. “No, I don`t want juice. I need coffee” chuckled Taylen. Taylen switched on his laptop and started to read every article that he found on Sarah, “eat your pancakes Taylen” squealed Brielle as she noticed the pancakes untouched. Taylen instantly replied, still reading, “I am sorry honey, I will eat them”

Brielle returned to the kitchen where her father was baking chocolate cookies for Onna, approached Brielle as he put a silver bowl in the sink and murmured “are you afraid that Taylen is protecting a criminal?” Brielle turned and was perplexed. “No. Why are you saying that?” said Brielle. “Taylen won`t let someone get that kind of injustice. Instead, he will put those kinds of criminals in prison.”

Faresh nodded as Brielle added in a low voice, “Taylen told me that the boy, - hum what`s his name? – Yeah, Diego, was with him all night as they celebrated his victory.” Faresh walked towards the kitchen counter, grabbed the plate of uncooked cookie dough and put them in the oven and asked “why do you look so tense then?” Brielle turned towards her father, gazing at him and responded “I don`t know why, but since I heard about that girl dying, I can`t stop feeling sad, depressed and having horrid feelings for that poor girl.”

Faresh as he closed the oven, walked towards Brielle and said calmly “it`s your mother's instinct. You are a mother now. That`s why you feel like that.” Brielle hugged her dad and felt calm. She took some strawberries from the fruit basket, cut them into half, placed them on a plate and walked to the dining room as Faresh went to watch his daily morning news in the living room. “Here honey, some fresh strawberries,” said Brielle as she laid the plate in front of him.

“Taylen, come here quick” called Faresh from the living room. “Is it your client Diego on the television?”

Both Taylen and Brielle rushed into the living room and there was a huge picture of Diego on the screen. They sat and watched.

The news reporter quoted “Here in Lousana Forest, a seventeen-year-old girl named, Sarah Hayden, was found dead. The police described that she was molested, tortured and killed brutally by setting her on fire. The cause of death is still unknown to which circumstances the latter died. The autopsy revealed that they had found DNA of a male figure which is still unknown now. Mr Lavesh Kumar, Sarah`s lawyer, joined us to tell us more about her.” The camera turned towards Lavesh and the reporter asked “you were the one who informed us that Sarah was missing.” He responded, “Yes, it was me who informed as I did not get any news from her since the case on the 25th. I thought that she was depressed, sad or something and didn`t want to talk to anyone so I decided to visit her and brought ramen noodles for her to cheer her up. But once there, I knocked and no one answered and saw a pile of letters I checked around the house and there was no sign that there was someone inside the house. I walked to her neighbour and asked them about her. They told me that they hadn`t seen her since the 25th in the morning. Instantly, I went to the police station and filed a missing report.” The reporter asked, “It seems that Sarah was more than just a client.” Lavesh responded “Yes Sarah and I were good friends. I considered her like a little sister to me. She had no one else in this cruel world. And look what those monsters did to my friend. They will pay for this.”

Taylen switched the television off; “He must have done it all and pretended to be innocent. How can a twenty-eight old person be friends with a seventeen? It doesn`t make sense.” Brielle seemed more clear about the interview and said “I think that he did consider her as a little sister as if he did try to commit that kind of crime, he wouldn`t have alerted the police and no one would have suspected him.” Taylen`s face went long and muttered aggressively “enough of this now, let`s get on our work and our hobby.” Everyone stood still and gazed at him as he stormed out of the living room. Brielle called Onna who was playing outside, “Onna, come here. We are going home today. Let`s go and prepare your bags.” Faresh approached Brielle and asked, “what`s going on with Taylen?” Brielle responded, “He must be tense but even I don`t know why he reacted like that.”

After lunch, Brielle went upstairs, grabbed her bags and Taylen gave her a helping hand. Taylen remained silent. They both descended and walked towards the car and loaded all bags in the trunk. Faresh followed them to the car and Brielle turned towards him, “Dad, I am going and will miss you a lot. But do take care of yourself.” Brielle hugged her father as he responded, “I will miss you too and take care of yourself too and do visit and call me more often.” Taylen approached and muttered, “I apologise for the little outburst of mine and thank you for having me.” Faresh replied “it`s okay son, I know how a lawyer`s work is. So there`s no need to apologise.” They shook hands and Taylen went in his car. “Onna, let`s go” called Brielle, Onna rushed from the backyard and hugged her grandpa and ran towards the car. “Children” muttered Faresh.

Brielle waved her father goodbye as she walked to the car, as the car leave the driveway and till they leave the block. “We will come and visit again, don`t worry” assured Taylen, “plus Gareta is moving next door, so we will have two places to visit next time.” Brielle jaw`s dropped and screamed “whatttt.” Taylen realised that it was a secret and none knew. “Yes, don`t tell Gareta now. Kevin bought the house next door and will surprise Gareta at the end of their honeymoon.” Brielle was overjoyed at the idea and was thrilled for her sister. “How did you know?” asked Brielle. Taylen answered, “Well Kevin told me just before I heard the news of Sarah as he needed me to check the house history like the old owner.”

Brielle raised her left hand and said “I promise that I won`t ruin Gareta`s surprise.” But Brielle turned and gazed at Onna who was busy playing on her game console and wasn`t paying any attention to them, Brielle looked back at Taylen and asked him “honey, what has got into you during the news in the morning?” Brielle glanced at Onna and added, “Dad was shocked upon seeing your reaction.” Taylen who was facing the road, responded “I don`t know honey. – It`s just that I couldn`t hear any more of that outrageous thing. What she must have gone through and how can someone do such kind of things.” Brielle glanced again at Onna, who was still busy in her game and said “yeah, I understand, honey. It`s tragic. I hope that at least justice will be served to that girl because no one deserved that kind of tragic death.” Brielle asked, “Did you get the autopsy report yet?” She was still constantly checking on Onna in the backseats. “No, I didn`t get any news yet. The last time I got was how she was killed and it was Joey who told me everything. My boss, Anna, is neither answering my calls nor recalling me back. She is not keeping me informed about the case either. And I need to know if charges are being pressed on my client, Diego” said Taylen.

Brielle was confused and asked “but Diego has an alibi and it`s you. You won`t lie.” Taylen looked at Brielle and growled “well you trust me and believe me. But my opponent won`t. As Diego was charged with attempted molestation, they will think about him as the prime suspect. And I don`t have proof that he was with me the whole time. It`s just my testimony and it`s not enough to prove to the court.”

“Maybe, she also was busy during the weekend and didn`t get the news or she didn`t want to disturb you,” said Brielle, to calm Taylen down. “Maybe you are right, honey. I am just overthinking things. I will check it with her tomorrow at work.”

After two hours of driving and conversing about Sarah, they finally entered Raindrew Street and saw their home from a distance, Brielle knew that she was back. Taylen parked his car in the driveway next to Brielle`s Honda and as Brielle got out, she heard some talking behind her, “Oh Mrs Hills, you are back. How did the wedding of your sister go?” Brielle turned and responded “Oh hi, Mrs Kamps, It went great. We brought a cake for you. I will drop by later and give it to you.” Alex thanked her for the thought and walked away. Taylen walked around the house and inspect every corner of the house to check whether there was someone on their property during their absence and repeated the same process once he was inside the house. Brielle as she stepped inside the house, smelled dust and it started to bother her. She grabbed her broom and started to sweep the floor of her living and dining room. Taylen descended and found his wife in total cleaning mode. Taylen concluded that there was no intruder in the house as nothing was missing or moved. He went to the kitchen, took a glass out of the furniture and poured some water in it. As he sipped a little water, his phone rang and it was Joey. Taylen took the call and went straight to his home office. Brielle was busy doing the laundry as she had two days’ worth of clothes to wash.

The following day, Taylen was up to work early just so that he could meet Anna alone, as her schedule is always hectic. Taylen prepared coffee and breakfast before he left. And as usual, Anna was already here in her office, going through files. Taylen knocked on her door and asked “may I come in?” Anna who had a file in her right hand and was reading page per page turned and replied “yes, you may.”

Taylen walked in and muttered, “I have something important to talk about with you.” Anna who was still reading responded, “Concerning what?” Taylen took a moment before he replied and answered “I don`t know if you have heard about Sarah Hayden, the one who had filed a case of attempting molestation against our client, Diego Martinez, - well, she was found dead in the woods.” Anna who did not gaze at Taylen once, responded “hum, I see and why are you telling me that?” Taylen gasped for some air, and said “I am going to request to the court that all details about the ongoing investigation, evidence, the suspects, the autopsy report, any given statement.” Anna looked at Taylen and said, “Why are you requesting that?” Taylen explained, “Because they are trying to pin all charges on Diego again and I think they are going to provide fake evidence.” Anna responded “and how do you know all that?”

“My friend Joey knows someone in the police department. And Diego is innocent.” Anna unconvinced, replied, “How can you be so sure that he is innocent?”

“Because he was with me and Joey the whole time. He did not do it. – I know what happened to that girl is dreadful but that boy is innocent and I can`t let someone innocent suffer for the crime of others.”

“Well, I see now what you are trying to do. But it won`t be easy to get that approval as they are no cases built yet. I will send the court your request and I know a friend judge who can help. But I don`t promise you that it will be approved.” Said Anna as she grabbed the phone and dialled a number.

“We have to find the real culprit too so that Diego won`t be a suspect. Try to investigate on your part to find the truth” added Anna. Taylen nodded, thanked her and walked away he could hear Anna talking on the phone. As he entered his office, he noticed a pile of files waiting for him to dig into.

In the afternoon, Brielle and Onna were tired after a long day at school. Brielle opened her fridge and took out 5 frozen uncooked pastries and place them directly in the oven. She switched on the television, and Onna joined her, and couldn`t decide on what to watch; a documentary, a film, a series, an organising program or a mathematics documentary. As she came across the news channel, she noticed in red and huge headlines ‘Sarah Hayden; 17-year-old girl dead.’ The reporter muttered “It has been found through her autopsy report that she was beaten till death as there were internal scars on her belly, waist and back. She was also choked with a rope and they found semen inside her privates which we presume that she was physically molested. Her upper body was completely burned with the help of alcohol but was stopped due to the heavy rain in the early morning. Till now, there`s no suspect. But all the public eyes are on Diego Martinez. Did he commit such atrocity? Later the time will tell us.” Brielle instantly switched off the television, walked into the kitchen, grabbed a glass of water, took a sip and muttered, “That bastard who did that, must be burned alive.”

Chapter 4

Brielle woke up with a heavy headache and couldn`t get on her feet. The sun was already out and dimmed inside her room, Taylen turned on the side of Brielle who was facing the other and whispered “You okay, honey?” Brielle shook her head and muttered, “Call for a sick for me and take Onna to school.” Taylen got on his feet and responded “Sure honey, don`t worry, I will take care of everything.” Taylen woke Onna up and helped her to brush her teeth, bathed her and dressed her for school. Taylen went straight to the bathroom while Onna ate her breakfast. He came out followed by a cloud of steam and he rushed downstairs, checked on Onna and took a tray full of toast, butter, hot tea and strawberry jam to Brielle. Taylen put the tray down on the nightstand next to Brielle, and asked “How are you feeling, honey?” Brielle did not respond. “Is everything all right?” added Taylen, he sat next to her. “Do you want me to take you to the doctor? – Or do you need some medicine?” But Brielle shook her head and muttered nothing. “I have already prepared breakfast and lunch and I brought yours. - Do have something.” Taylen kissed her on her forehead, got on his feet and went back downstairs. Brielle heard the door of the main entrance open and close, and the engine of Taylen`s car till it fade away. Brielle turned and saw the tray on the nightstand. It had a vase with a single flower in it. She knew that it was Onna who picked out the flower. She took the toast and spread jam on it and started to eat. She drank her ginger tea which cool down as it sat for several minutes.

As Taylen dropped Onna at school, and walked with her to her classroom, once he was back in his car driving to his office, dialled Joey`s number.

“Hey Joey, how are you?” asked Taylen, as soon as Joey muttered hello.

“Yes, am doing great man and what about you?” replied Joey.

“I am doing great. It`s just Brielle who is down a little. That`s why I called Joey. Can you ask Rose to go home and checked on her for me, please?” said Taylen.

“what`s going on with Brielle? Is everything alright?” asked Joey and instantly Taylen responded “She is quite that well and she is not telling me what`s going on. I thought that maybe it`s some female's problem and would be more comfortable to talk with another woman.” Joey remained silent and after two seconds, he responded “Okay sure, I will ask Rose to go and check on her. Taylen I will talk to you later as I have a very important meeting that will start in two minutes.”

“Sure, no worries, have a nice day ahead Joey” Taylen wished as he hung up the phone.

Taylen too had a tight day as he had an important meeting concerning his request to access all information on Sarah`s case. He was going to learn whether his request have been approved or not.

Around ten o`clock, someone knocked at the main door. Brielle who was still lying in bed slowly took her blanket off and got on her feet. She descended the stairs like a zombie and heard the door crack. “Who is it?” yelled Brielle, standing right where she was on the stairs and turning in case she needed to run. “It`s me, Brielle, Rose.”

Brielle gave a sign of relief and descended the stairs and said in a low-pitched depressed voice “Oh, I was just coming to open the door.” Brielle hugged her and added “How are you? And, what are you doing here at this time?”

“I came to see you. But, is everything all right? Taylen told Joey that you were not doing that great. So I came to check on you. What`s going on, honey?” responded Rose, as they walked to the living room and sat down. Brielle lied and said “No, everything is good. I just wanted to relax for a day.” But Rose figured that she wasn`t telling her the truth and replied “Why are you lying to me? I can tell by your voice that there is indeed something that`s bothering you.” Rose got on her feet, walked to the kitchen and came back with a bottle of wine and two glasses, said “It`s a conversation that we should have with some alcohol in our system.” Brielle looked at Rose and the clock and responded “It`s still morning. How can we-”, Rose interrupted her by saying, “Hey, having wine in the morning doesn`t hurt anyone.” Rose popped the bottle, poured the wine into the glasses and sat down, handing Brielle her glass and asking “What`s going on?” She gave Brielle an intense look and said “Don`t try lying to me. You know that I will figure out if you not saying the truth.” Brielle nodded and gave a large sip of her wine and muttered “Okay, I will tell you everything but tell neither to Joey and Taylen.”

“Promise me that you won`t tell them” Said Brielle, as Rose raised her right hand and muttered, “Promise, won`t say a word.”

Brielle took another sip and said “Yesterday, I was watching television and I came across that news channel and they were talking about Sarah.” Rose listened to her carefully and muttered “Sarah! The girl who was found dead in the woods.” Brielle gave an intense look and continued “Yes, it`s her. But, please don`t tell Taylen.” Rose nodded as she drank her wine and poured some more. “I don`t know why I can`t stop thinking about that girl. I am feeling so sulk about it. – The way she died, Rose, It was horrible. Just imagine what she must have gone through at that moment.” Rose with her glass in her left hand, responded “It must have been awful for her. May, she rests in peace.”

Brielle poured the remaining wine into her glass and muttered “I think that Diego is the one behind it. I don`t know how he did it but my guts tell me. He is a rascal. I can tell.” Rose`s jaw drop as Brielle started accusing Diego and responded “Are you sure? But Taylen and Joey said that he was with them the whole night.”

Brielle remained silent and after some seconds, she said “I don`t know how it happened but I am sure he is behind everything.” Rose looked at Brielle and said, “Is that why you weren`t feeling good?”

Brielle nodded but said something. “Why aren`t you telling all this to Taylen?” asked Rose. Brielle answered “Because he will tell me that I shouldn`t listen to my guts and that I am wrong. But something isn`t adding up and I know that I am right.” Brielle finished her glass of wine and added “And I don`t know why Taylen is so keen on representing him. If you know to what extent he is going to defend him.”

“You seem to hate that boy, Diego,” said Rose. Brielle admitted that she wasn`t his biggest fan. “But don`t interfere in his work. You know how Taylen is about his work. He won`t like it. And don`t play the detective as they are just feelings that you are having. They are not facts.” Brielle knew that Rose was hundred per cent right and replied “I won`t interfere in his work, don`t worry. I just hope that they will catch the culprit and gave that girl justice.”

Rose added “Let the people who are in charge of that do their work. They will find the real culprit. Like you always said, the truth will always prevail, even how well it`s hidden.” Brielle agreed with Rose and said “Yeah, you are right and I think that it was just me talking as a mother as she didn`t have any mother to take proper care of her. I hope that she is in a better place now than she ever was here.”

“Of course, I am always right. You are a mother now, that`s why you think like that and you should be proud of yourself for that. You are a good mother. I think that you felt the pain of that girl and that there was no one to mourn her death.”

Rose drank her last sip of wine, got on her feet as she looked at the time which was past eleven and muttered “I am so sorry, Brielle, but I have to go as I have some errands for the house to do.” Brielle got on her feet too and responded “It was nice talking to someone. Thank you, Rose, it means a lot to me.” Rose approached and kissed her goodbye on her cheeks and rushed to the door.

As Rose was gone, Brielle grabbed the glasses and the empty bottle to the kitchen and walked back upstairs. Brielle grabbed her phone on the nightstand and dialled Taylen`s number. “Howdy honey, thank you for preparing lunch and breakfast for me.” Said Brielle over the phone. “Hey sweety, how are you feeling? You know you don`t have to say thank you because I don`t when you do it every day.” Brielle`s lips curved into a smile and responded “No, but I want to say thank you and I am doing much better compared to in the morning.” Taylen answered “Glad to hear. Honey, I have to go as I have some important work to do. Bye honey, see you tonight.”

“Before you hang up, I will pick up Onna from school and no need to worry. See you tonight honey.”

“Okay sure honey, bye”, as he hung up the phone.

Brielle walked to her bathroom, opened the tap of her bathtub, and added some rose petals and some bubble soap to the hot steamy water. She slowly undressed, immerse herself in the hot water and allowed herself to feel relaxed. She stayed in that bathroom for more than one hour, listening to some music and singing off-key along to it. She felt more at peace with her feelings about Sarah and got on her feet, let the water drain and walked out of the water. She dressed and picked out a white blouse which she tucked inside her jeans and took her car keys and was off to fetch Onna at school.

Brielle parked in front of the school, waiting for the bell to announce the end of classes, and witness the principal walking towards his car. Brielle opened her door and rushed towards, shouting “Sir, wait.” The principal turned to look for the person who was shouting and saw Brielle running towards him. “Oh Hi Mrs Hills, how are you feeling now? Heard from your husband that you were not quite that well this morning.” Brielle gasped for breath and responded “Yes, I wasn`t in my perfect form in the morning and I am more okay now. And, I wanted to apologise for that sir.” Brielle who was still catching her breath, the principal replied “No need to apologise dear, we can`t apologise if we don`t feel well. We are all humans and do not feel perfect every day as each day is a new one.” Brielle nodded before answering, “Thank you, sir, I will see you tomorrow.”

“See you tomorrow, Mrs Hills,” said the principal, as he entered his car and drove away.

After five minutes of waiting since the principal left, the bell finally rang and a bunch of kids rushed out of the main door, and finally, Brielle could notice Onna waiting and searching around near the door. Brielle walked towards her and a right smile was on Onna`s face when she saw her mother walking towards her. Brielle got on her knees and asked “How was your day, honey? What did you learn today? ”

Onna in her sweet little voice, replied “I have learned how to count till twenty, Mommy. You want me to count for you, Mommy?” Brielle nodded, “sure, honey.”

As they walked towards the car, Onna started counting to twenty and Brielle continued to count and figure out that she had done forty-five steps to the car. Brielle installed Onna on her seat and said “Well, we are going to the supermarket today. I will buy you a croissant for you.” Onna started smiling as the croissant was her favourite pastry.

Brielle drove to their local supermarket, took a trolley once she parked the car and went straight to the cleaning products aisle. She found the product for cleaning floors, grabbed one orange bottle and examined it from left to right and finally put it in her trolley. She picked some more cleaning products from the same manufacturer as she would use them for different purposes. She then, after fifteen minutes in the cleaning aisle, walked to the food aisle and grabbed some pasta, a bag of white rice and so on. As she continued to walk, she noticed a new sauce with was in a mason jar which Brielle was more interested in the jar than in the sauce. “What do you think, Onna? I take the normal one or the one with paprika flavour” Brielle asked as she compared the list of ingredients from the two sauces. “Take this one, Mommy” replied Onna as she pointed to the normal one. Brielle placed it in her cart and pushed it as she walked. Onna who was seated in the baby seat of the cart shouted “Look, Mommy, look at that pretty doll which was on the other aisle, and as Brielle tried to look for it, not paying attention to where she was going, her cart bumped into a woman`s behind. As Brielle felt the hit, she stopped and turned and found a light-brown woman in a beautiful black robe and said “Oh my god, I am so sorry. Are you okay?” The woman turned towards Brielle and backed off two feet away from her and replied “It`s okay, don't worry. I didn`t get hurt.”

Brielle felt horrified and apologised once more. “No need to apologise again. I am absolutely fine” assured the woman, bent over to pick up her phone which she dropped. “I am sorry once more. I was looking at that doll that my daughter showed me and wasn`t paying any attention to where I was walking.” For the third, the woman replied “It`s okay. I understand.” Both women laughed and she bent over to Onna and asked “What`s your name, sweety?” Onna raised her hand, opened all five fingers and muttered “four.”

Brielle closed her little finger and said “That`s four. One – two –three - four” Brielle pointed and showed her how to count on her fingers. “So cute” complimented the woman.

“I am so sorry that I forgot to introduce myself. I am Brielle Hills” said Brielle. “You like the word sorry” chuckled the woman, “my name is Manya Flores.”

“Nice to meet you, Manya” replied Brielle and Manya smiled.

“You seem new here. Did you just move around?” asked Manya.

“Yes, it`s been more than a month now” replied Brielle. Manya then gazed at her and asked “Call me, if you want to grab some tea or coffee. And, here`s my phone number. Call me anytime you want.” Manya wrote down her number on a piece of paper which she tore from her bag. “Thank you, I will call you.” Said Brielle as she took the paper and put it in her bag.

“We can go now if you want as I have nothing planned afterwards,” said Brielle. Manya took some seconds before answering. “Oh no, I am so sorry but I didn`t bring my car with me and I have to call for a taxi and I need to go home as it has been more than one month since I was home”

Brielle looked at Manya as she added in a sad tone “And I am so sorry again. But do call me when you are free.”

“Oh don`t worry, I fully understand.” Brielle then asked, “But do you want me to drop you off?”

“It would be my pleasure to drop you and it will be a way to apologise for the small collision,” said Brielle. Manya without any reluctance, accepted Brielle`s offer.

Manya went to a different aisle than Brielle and will wait for her at the entrance door. As Manya lined up at counter number five, where they were only one person in front of her, Brielle came next in the line. As they passed, Brielle pushed her cart towards the car followed by Manya. Brielle opened her trunk, installed her grocery bag first and then grabbed Manya`s. As everything was settled in the trunk, Brielle put Onna in her seat and said “You can sit in the front seat, Manya.”

Manya nodded, opened and sat in the front seat next to the driver seat. Brielle sat down a few seconds later and as she adjust her seat belt, asked Manya “So where do you live?”

“Oh yeah, I live at 4138 Raindrew Street” replied Manya. Brielle turned towards Manya, and Manya could see that she was shocked as her jaw dropped. “Oh my god, do you live there?” said Brielle astonish. “Yes, I live there. Why are you so surprised, do you know anyone there?” said Manya perplexed. “That`s such a coincidence. Well, I am your next-door neighbour.” Manya`s jaw dropped and muttered, “What!”

“Yes, I live on the 4137 one. Next to yours” replied Brielle with an enthusiastic voice. “Oh really, you are not joking, right?” said Manya. But upon seeing the look on Brielle`s face, she knew that she was serious. Brielle shook her head and muttered, “No, I am not joking at all.” Manya replied “Well, that`s such a coincidence. Well when you finished unpacking your groceries, come over to my place for tea.” Brielle accepted her invitation rapturously.

After half an hour of driving, they finally reached home. Brielle parked in her driveway, Manya took her grocery bags and marched towards her house. Brielle unloaded her trunk of her bags with Onna`s help who was only interested in the paper bag that contained the chocolate-chip cookies. Brielle opened the main entrance door, dropped her bags on the kitchen counter and opened the packet of cookies for Onna as she was craving them. She gave her two and Onna ran towards her room. “Don`t run on the stairs, honey” shouted Brielle, as she heard Onna rush on the stairs. Brielle started classifying her grocery into different categories before packing them on her shelf. She removed all containers which were half empty and refilled them with the new stock. In that kind of work, Brielle was fast as the lighting. “Onna, come with mommy to Manya`s place” called Brielle. Onna came downstairs with her doll in her right hand and facing the floor, “I don`t want to go, Mommy. I want to play with my toys. I am so sorry Mommy” expressed Onna.

Brielle took some moment before responding and Onna kept looking down. “Okay sweetie, if you don`t want to go, then we will not,” said Brielle. “Let me call her to cancel” added Brielle, as she went through her handbag for her phone.

She grabbed her phone which was at the bottom of her bag, and dialled Manya`s number from her card, “Hi Manya, it`s Brielle here.” Manya responded “Hi, but you won`t come over for tea?” Manya was a bit confused as Brielle was coming over in a few minutes for tea. “Humm, I can`t come as Onna doesn`t want to and I have no one at home to look after her,” said Brielle. “It`s no worries. I completely understand” said Manya. Then something stroke Brielle in the mind. “Well, if you can come over for tea, it would be an absolute pleasure.” Manya accepted her offer with great pleasure.

Five minutes later, Manya was on her doorstep and rang the bell. Brielle opened the door and welcomed her into her home. Manya gazed around the living room and dining room. “You have an adorable house, Brielle” complimented Manya. But as she walked to the living room, she noticed some photographs on the table, which she moved towards it. She grabbed one where Onna was still a baby in the arms of Taylen and Brielle was next to them. “You look adorable in that picture,” said Manya, turned and found that Brielle was gone. Brielle came back with a tray which contained a plate of cupcakes, a teapot in which steams were coming out of its back, her creamer pitcher, her sugar bowl and two cups. “It was taken in our previous house. We were so happy there too” said Brielle as the picture was still in Manya`s hand. She laced the picture back into its place. “How fancy Brielle,” said Manya as she gasped at her tea set. “I think that we both share the same taste in that kind of thing, Brielle.” Both girls sat down on the sofa and muttered “I mean, look how you present things, how everything`s neat and organised and it`s so satisfying to look at. The way you decorated your house is so simple but at the same time it`s energetic and livid.” Manya was still glancing at every corner of the house. Brielle responded “Thank you for your lovely compliment. Let me tell you that I am sort of a materialistic person. I don`t know but items give me a sense of comfort. And I don`t know why. And if someone gave me a gift, no matter what it is, I will keep it with me till the day I die.”

Brielle poured hot tea into her fancy cups and handed it to Manya who added two spoons of sugar to hers. “Like I had inherited this set from my grandmother. My sister, Gareta and I, had inherited all of her properties and luxury. But my sister took her properties and I took the luxury one and the set came with it.” Manya sipped her tea and asked curiously “Is your sister living in those properties now?” Brielle chuckled, “no, she is not. She is moving next door to my father. Her husband surprised her. Why are you asking?” Manya placed her cup on the table cup holder and answered “Because you had just bought this house. You could have just stayed in one of her properties.” Brielle grabbed her cup and drank a little and answered “They are very far from here. They are in the south. And I love things that I have got such as plate set, silverware collection, some jewellery and some painting that may cost over hundreds of thousands.” Brielle grabbed the teapot and poured more tea into her cup. “Well, I can say that you are a different kind of person. How good you are – You know, most people have run to the properties, wealth and all, but you didn`t. You have my respect for that.” Said Manya, who also went for a second tea. “I don`t think that money, properties or any sort of things will make me that happy. Because I think it just feeds people's egos and arrogance. Those belongings that I got, do make me happy and you know why - Because they remind me of my childhood, my grandmother and especially my mother.” Said, Brielle.

“Do only things make you happy?” asked Manya as a joke. “No, not really as my husband does makes me feel joyful” confessed Brielle. Manya added two sugar to her tea and grabbed one cupcake. “Oh those are delicious,” said Manya as she took a bite of the cupcake. “Oh thank you, I baked them myself when I was at my dad” replied Brielle. “Oh well, you are a good baker then.

As you were talking about happiness. I don`t see that in any things that I have even if they are personal or from a person anymore. I was betrayed by people who I once trust blindly and then my whole world. Things are only temporary for me” said Manya, as she took another sip of her tea. Manya added, “I was once just like you. Years ago, I had a precious gold with diamonds in its design, a brooch which my mother gave me before she passed away. As you said, it reminded me of my mother. But they stole it and I never saw it again.”

“Your mother too passed away?” asked Brielle. Manya nodded and answered, “Yes, she died as she was suffering from cancer.”

“And yours, if I may ask?” demanded Manya.

“My mother was sick too. She died from a car accident” responded Brielle. “But Taylen supported me during that period. We were not married at that time but he was there for me. – And I love him for that. – I hope that one day you will meet someone who will support you, just like my husband.” Brielle sipped more of her tea. She made another once she finished her second one but she craved some honey in it. She walked to the kitchen and grabbed some. Brielle offered Manya too, a third cup of tea but she was reluctant at first but accepted as Brielle offered the third cup with two drops of honey in it. Brielle poured tea into Manya`s cup as Manya said “We have a lot in common but I don`t think that I need someone to support me during my hard times. I had no one when things were hard and there was a time that I was completely lost in a dark place that I can`t describe. Things were atrocious for me. But I learned from those times that I am and will always be on my own till my last breath. – And I think that everyone should be like that because we don`t know when the tables can turn.”

Brielle put Manya`s cup in front of her. “Oh, I see your point of view. But you know something. – You have me now as a friend and as a neighbour. I won`t leave anyone in trouble o in their dark moments. I will bring them out of it. You can count on me, I will always be there no matter what.” Said, Brielle. “Thank you, Brielle that means a lot to me. –And the same applies to you, you can count on me too” said Manya, she grabbed the cup on the table and took a sip. “Hmm, it’s different but good.” Brielle noticed Onna walking into the living room on her feet, quietly thinking that no one is going to notice her, grabbing one cupcake and sprinting before her mother could say anything. Both Manya and Brielle started laughing and Brielle chuckled “We do control her intake of sugar, but I was going to give her one later as she just had cookies. I don`t know why she did that.” Both of them were still laughing.

“She is just a kid. We don`t need to find understanding for each of their moves. Else, we will be so confused by many theories and make us believe in all kinds of things.” Brielle nodded and narrated “Yeah, one day I caught Onna talking to herself. And when I ask her, she told me that she was talking with her friends. – And I said what friend? – And he told the one with the two red corn on his forehead and huge teeth that don`t have lips to cover them – I almost shit myself just with that description and I run to Taylen. What I thought was that something evil was here, just like in movies. I couldn't find me anywhere.” Manya started laughing at Brielle`s story. “I even tried to call a priest to ask him what to do but just I dialled the number, Taylen took the phone and told me to calm down.” Manya could not stop laughing and was holding her stomach as she was laughing hard. “Then, they told me that it was just a joke from them and they both were laughing at me. I was so scared” chuckled Brielle. Both of them couldn`t stop laughing hard. After some moments, they calmed themselves down and finished their cup of tea. “Can I go to your washroom, please? I am having a little bathroom emergency” demanded Manya who giggled at her situation. “Oh yes, you can it`s in your right. In the meantime, I will clean all of this” said Brielle. Manya got on her feet and walked towards the bathroom. Brielle took her sets, walked to the kitchen and placed them into the dishwasher after she emptied all the containers of sugar and all. After several minutes, Manya came back and thanked Brielle for her warm welcome and said “Oh, I forgot to welcome you in Raindrew Street. And one day, I will invite you over for either lunch or dinner.” Brielle nodded and muttered, “Sure, you let me know when.” Brielle accompanied Manya to the main entrance and she headed towards her house.

In the evening, Taylen got home and was extremely tense due to the investigation about Sarah. “Hey honey, I am home,” said Taylen as he closed the main door. Upon hearing her father`s voice, Onna rushed downstairs and jumped in his arms. “Daddy, Daddy, how was your day? Mine was wonderful, I had cookies and cupcakes” said Onna while she kissed her father all over his face. Brielle approached Taylen and kissed him on the lips. “Hi honey, how are you?” asked Brielle. “I called you, honey and you didn`t answer. I was extremely worried. But never mind, you had told me on the phone that you were okay but still, I wanted to check on you. But I see that you are doing better than this morning” said Taylen. “I am tensed, honey. With all the investigation that`s going on” added Taylen.

“Yes, I am a lot better now. Try to relax at home and don`t worry about that. You know what happened today?” said Brielle. “No, tell me what happened” replied Taylen, instantly. “I met our neighbour next door,” said Brielle. “Who? Mrs Venture! – I thought we already knew her.” Responded Taylen. “No, not her, but the one who lives in house 4138, Miss Manya Flores” corrected Brielle. “Oh, how was she? Was she pleasant or sophisticated like Alex” said Taylen, and both of them started laughing. Brielle walked back to the kitchen where Taylen followed her. Brielle stirred her vegetable soup and try as hard as she could control her laughter. “No, don`t say that. She was very nice, sweet and interesting too” chortled Brielle. “Okay, I won`t laugh but I can tell that you two will be great friends. - Interesting. Well I can tell by only that” said Taylen. “Honey, I am going to my office for some work and will be back once dinner is ready. - Just let me know. Okay sweety” said Taylen. Taylen put Onna down, headed towards his office and locked his door behind him. Taylen settled in his chair and open some files which he removed from his office bag. And while he opened it, he noticed a piece of paper, folded in two and knew that it was not there before. Taylen grabbed it and opened it. It was a letter. It was addressed to him. But there was no envelope nor it was handwritten and usually, his mail goes through Brielle first and never comes to his office desk. He started to read;

Dear Taylen,

How are you? But I guessed that you must be tense right now. Trying to cover the truth from others. But how long are you going to keep up with that? You will crack like every rock that cracks under pressure. I will make sure that day is not far too away. Know that, it`s not my intention to threaten you, but I am sure that you know what happened that night and of course Diego is innocent. Nah, I am just kidding. But you trying to gain access to all evidence so that you can temper it means that you are trying to hide something. But don`t think that no one is watching you, I have all eyes on you and god dam you look hot. I am here, always was and always will be. One wrong move from you, and you will be meat for the lions at the zoo. I will destroy you and your little perfect world that you have going on. If you think that I am kidding, oh the girl died on the 25th of April, right? If I clearly remember, there was no party at work, right? Then there was Diego at that time and I know that he wasn`t with you. And I also know why you are protecting Diego, if he goes down, all of you will go down too. But he will be punished but let's see how far you can go to protect your client. You must be sweating right now, reading that. Make a wrong move, you will be dead meat.

Regards,

Taylen gaped and was all sweaty on reading that. “But you are so far from the truth which you will never know about, whoever you are” muttered Taylen.

Chapter 5

June 13th, exactly one month since the body of Sarah was found, was the day that Diego Martinez was proven not guilty by the court. Two weeks earlier, Diego was charged with rape and murder as semen was collected from the victim`s body. His alibi was not enough to prove his innocence. The semen collected on the victim`s body did not match his. And there was no further evidence and the alibi that Taylen provided did check. Taylen, Diego and his team from his law firm came out of the courtroom, cheerful. Taylen noticed outside the court, a crowd of reporters waiting for the verdict. Taylen walked outside and witnessed as the crowd rushed to Taylen and started to bombard Taylen with questions.

“What did the verdict say?” Taylen heard one reporter say. Taylen raised his hand, trying to calm them down, “Wait, wait, I will tell you everything. So just listen.”

Taylen expressed as Diego and the others stand behind him, “Today, the court has proved to us that he won`t let an innocent one pay the crime of a felony. We want justice for Sarah, but not by letting an innocent one pay the consequence of another person`s crime. All the threats, hate messages, and letters that we have received in those past two weeks from people should know that it is a waste of time. Use that time to find the culprit instead of projecting hate without any true knowledge of the situation. Thank you.” Taylen made his way through the crowd and the rest followed him.

Taylen walked to his car, and the others went on their way. Taylen drove back home directly. Once he parked his car in the driveway, he rushed to the door and look for Brielle all around. He found her busy preparing dinner in the kitchen. He ran to Brielle and said excitedly, “I won honey. I won.” He kissed Brielle all over her neck and Brielle could feel Taylen`s hand on her waist. He turned Brielle to face him, who was peeling potatoes, and move an extra inch where he could sense her breathing which was intense and kissed her delicately on the lips. “Where`s Onna, honey” whispered Taylen in Brielle`s left ear. “She is upstairs, taking a nap” replied Brielle whose breathing was still intense. Taylen went straight down and Brielle could feel his two fingers inside her. She couldn`t stop herself from moaning loud. “Oh god, keep doing that,” said Brielle. Brielle felt good. Taylen grabbed her waist, put her on the kitchen table and pulled her more towards him. Brielle gazed at him, removing his belt and unbuttoning his pants and he approached her, slowly letting him inside of her inch by inch. Brielle giggled and chuckled “Stop teasing it, I can`t wait, to be in me.” Taylen turned red upon hearing Brielle`s words and smirked. Brielle found it exciting, having the fear of getting caught and making love in the kitchen. Taylen unbuttoned his shirt and revealed his muscular chess. “It`s so hot” moaned Brielle in his ears. “Am what?” muttered Taylen, pretending that he didn`t understand what she just said. “I said that you are hot and it`s gooood” repeated Brielle. Then Taylen struck it in the middle of his act. “Is it okay that we are doing it here?” asked Taylen. “Seriously, it`s in the middle that you are going to ask me now” chuckled Brielle. “Carry on, now” ordered Brielle. Taylen chuckled at Brielle`s behaviour. As Taylen was close, Brielle hugged Taylen tightly. When Taylen ejaculated inside Brielle, she had a weird smile of satisfaction. Taylen moved back from a few feet and pulled his pants up and buttoned his shirt. Brielle got on her feet and put back on her underwear. She went back to her potatoes. “What was that all about?” asked Brielle, “never saw you that excited.” Taylen smiled and replied “Well, I wanted to celebrate. I won today. Diego is off of all his charges.” Brielle did not turn and muttered something. “It`s such a relief that everything is over now” added Taylen. “Oh I see, but I also that girl will get justice because she deserves it,” said Brielle, as she put the potato in hot boiling water. Onna came downstairs and joined them in the kitchen, scratching her eyes as she was still feeling sleepy and a big yawn came out. Once they had dinner, Brielle let Onna choose the movie for movie night. Onna pick out a family animated movie about a bird who was in danger of extinction and every hunter was after it. Onna didn`t sleep through the movie but was awake during the whole movie.

The following day, Taylen was off all ready to work as he had a lot of unfinished work that he had left yesterday so that he could come home more early. He had already prepared breakfast except for lunch. Brielle was already up, preparing to go to work and Onna was downstairs eating her breakfast. Brielle who was still dressing for work, heard the bell door rang. She walked downstairs to answer the door and heard the bell ring a second time. She opened the door and found Manya standing in a beautiful white dress with two plates of cookies in her hands. “Morning Brielle,” said Manya. She continued, “I was just passing by and I wanted to drop some cookies that I had baked fresh in the morning for you and Onna.” “Morning Manya, and thank you for the thought” replied Brielle, grabbing the plate that Manya extended. “Hmm, that smells good” complimented Brielle. “I am going to hand this to Mrs Venture,” said Manya. “Oh yes, I will see you later then,” said Brielle, as Manya walked away from the main entrance and Brielle close the door behind her.

Two weeks went by, and Taylen was working till late at night and often missed dinner with them. Sometimes he reached home between eleven o`clock at night or one in the morning. There was a pile of cases that came every day on his office desk. Taylen had no time for himself and for his family as he had to prepare those cases. Taylen was still on the investigation of Sarah and till now there was no prime suspect. The police each time they got a lead, ended up at a dead end. Taylen was less worried about his amount of work or how he was going to cope with all that because he could not figure out something. The letter that he had found in his office. He could not figure out the writer yet and it seemed that the writer knew him well. He was sure that the writer was the one who delivered the letter which means that there is someone who could break into their home without their knowledge. Taylen kept on sleeping with those thoughts. He knew that he and the investigators are doing their best to catch the real culprit. Taylen didn`t give much thought as the day goes by as the writer of the letter didn`t have anything facts. He was scared that the writer might try to frame Diego again. But not only Taylen`s mind was preoccupied, Brielle`s too. She felt lonely during his absence and when he was home, he was either too tired to hang out or she was already in bed waiting for him. But Brielle found herself a new friend, Manya, who often swung by the house and they did a different kinds of activities each night. Sometimes Manya hosted them at her house, where they have game night and would laugh like crazy. Brielle`s favourite game was Monopoly as she could see how Manya doesn`t understand how to invest in properties that will later prove beneficial for her and Brielle would always win. But when they didn`t want to play games or watch movies, they would sit down with a glass of wine and talk about their ex-lovers which Manya didn`t have many as well as Brielle`s too, or about some problems that they had faced when they were younger, or how women should stand for each other and about their mother. They grew close over the past few days and Brielle appreciated Manya as a close friend.

Friday evening, Taylen was home early. After two weeks of working late, Taylen was on time for dinner, and Brielle and Onna were both excited to have him back as usual. According to Brielle`s meal plan, she was going to prepare vegetable soup, but instead took out some frozen chicken and wanted to make deep-fried chicken with mashed potatoes. Taylen knew deep in his heart that his family missed him and he too had missed them a lot. “I tried to get out early today. I know that I have been working late a lot. And I am sorry for that” said Taylen. Brielle who was busy marinating the chicken responded “It`s okay honey, I understand how work is hectic sometimes.”

Brielle expressed from her heart, “It`s just that I missed you a lot.” Taylen approached her and as Brielle turned towards him, he leaned a little bit forwards and kissed Brielle on her forehead. Brielle liked that kiss. And she closed her eyes and could still sense his hips on her forehead. After eating dinner, Brielle grabbed her book from the bookshelf and walked to the living room where she sat on the sofa. She started reading her book and made notes about words or phrases that she liked. Onna was doing her homework in the dining room and Taylen was taking a shower upstairs. Brielle`s concentration broke when he heard a phone vibrating for a second and it`s stop. She dived into her book but was interrupted a second time by the same vibrating sound. Brielle wasn`t bothered by the sound. But his phone vibrated more than five times. Irritated, Brielle got on her feet and rushed to the phone to switch it off. Onna too was disturbed by the sound of the phone as she too was staring at the phone. Brielle grabbed the phone and pressed the switch button on the edge. Instead of switching off the phone, it was switched on which then appeared an option box to either switch off or restart the phone. But behind the box, Brielle noticed that Taylen was receiving a text message from an unknown number and at the end of the text there was a red heart emoji. Everyone knew Taylen wasn`t an emoji guy. His text was always simple and dry. Brielle unlock his phone, went into the messaging app and view the message. As she goes through the text, Brielle felt her heart miss some beats. The message quoted “See you at eight, babe” followed by a heart emoji. There wasn`t any text above that. Brielle whispered to herself “You have faith in your man. You must trust your man. It must be a wrong number.” Brielle put the phone in the same spot before she grabbed it and walked away to the living room. Brielle was not the kind of woman who didn`t trust her man. She trusted him and had a lot of faith in him. But it could not be bothering Brielle. Brielle`s eyes filled with tears but she held them as she was not far from Onna`s sight. As she kept on thinking about who could have sent that message, she heard footsteps coming downstairs and instantly started reading a random page. She glanced at Taylen who had talked towards the dining room, grabbed his phone and walked towards his office. She heard him lock the door. Brielle put the book beside her on the sofa and wanted some water. She got on her feet and as she walks towards the kitchen, she noticed the clock and it was past eight. Brielle whispered to herself “That means whoever he had to meet, he is not.” As she grabbed a glass of water, she thought ‘How can he cheat on me, he is not like that. He is in love with me. He loves me, only me.’ Onna rushed into the kitchen and said “Mommy, I am done with my homework. Can I go to bed early as tomorrow is Saturday and I have a play date? So I want to be fresh for tomorrow.” Said Onna in her sweet little voice. “Sure honey, let me tuck you in then” Brielle replied as she drank her water. Brielle took Onna to bed, she too was tired and went straight to bed. As she stepped under her bed sheets. All kinds of scenarios Brielle could think of. She imagined Taylen running to a woman, telling her how much he hated Brielle and that she married only because she was pregnant. Brielle allowed herself to think that Taylen is having sex with other women and told them how Brielle is a cleaning maniac. Brielle cried herself to sleep.

In the morning, neither Taylen nor Brielle didn`t woke up early as there was no work on Saturday. But around seven o`clock, Taylen got up and went to the bathroom to freshen himself up. Brielle gazed at Taylen who was getting ready for his golf match. “You remember honey, that Joey had invited me to go golf with him today” reminded Taylen, who witnessed Brielle lost in her thoughts. “Sure, honey I remember you mentioning that” replied Brielle. Brielle took off her sheets and went straight to the bathroom. As she brushed her teeth, she heard the bell rand and heard Taylen walking downstairs. She heard Joey saying “Hey mate, you ready to golf”, but she couldn`t hear Taylen`s answer. Brielle walked downstairs and greeted Joey with a good morning. “How are you doing, Brielle?” asked Joey. “I am doing great” replied Brielle. “You want some coffee or some juice” Brielle demanded. “No thanks, I am good” refused Joey gently. Taylen came back from his office with his backpack and muttered “Let`s go, Joey.” Taylen kissed Brielle goodbye and walked away. Brielle knew that having the house for her, she could try and find more about that unknown number. But she waited more than ten minutes to make sure that he was gone. But before she started to investigate, she dropped Onna to her playdate was a few houses away. And when she was back home, she pushed Taylen`s office door and stepped in, she gazed around as she muttered “Where do I start?” She looked at the bookshelf where Taylen`s law books are and muttered to herself “Let`s start there.” She grabbed one book by one and flipped through the pages. But it was just booked and didn`t have anything hidden in it. As Brielle placed one book on the shelf, she heard someone knocking on the door. She stood still. Then she heard a second knock. “Where do I hide?” said Brielle in a panicked tone, as she looked for a place to hide. As she tried to hide under the desk, something strike her that she was in fact in her own home and there was no point in hiding. She rushed out of the office and answered the door. “Oh Manya, - It`s – you – how are you?” said Brielle who was trying to catch her breath after rushing upon the third knock. “Are you okay? You seemed that you had just run a marathon” said Manya as she witnessed Brielle gasping for air. Brielle stepped aside and allowed Manya to enter. “oh nothing, I was just cleaning that`s why” lied Brielle. Manya remained silent. “What brings you here this morning?” asked Brielle, hesitantly. “I wanted to see you this morning” replied Manya who stood in the space between the living room and dining room. Brielle at each second that she got, glanced at Taylen`s office. Brielle muttered as quickly as she could, “Yeah I am fine. I will see you later. Bye.” Manya look at Brielle and noticed that she was acting strange. “Okay, tell me what`s going on and why are you glancing at that room each second?” asked Manya who started to worry. “You can tell me everything, if there`s a dead body I will understand. But tell me what`s going on? – I am your friend and you can tell me everything” said Manya as she grabbed Brielle`s hand. “I think Taylen is cheating on me” pleaded Brielle. “What! What do you mean he is cheating on you?” asked Manya whose jaw dropped. “Yeah, I saw a text yesterday. It says see you at eight, babe.’ I was looking for proof in his office” said Brielle in a low voice. “Oh my god, are you sure about all this?” asked Manya. Brielle nodded in agreement. “Well let me help you then,” said Manya. Then Manya looked at Brielle and added “But did you ask him about the text?” Brielle responded, “No, I couldn`t ask him and let`s stop wasting time.” She grabbed Manya`s hand and rushed to his office. Manya gazed at the office. “Hurry Manya, look at his desk and I will continue to look on his bookshelf,” said Brielle. “What are we looking for exactly?” asked Manya. “Something that can prove that he is cheating or not” responded Brielle. Manya sat on Taylen`s chair and open the first desk, removed all the files and went through each one paper by paper. Brielle grabbed one book by one and flipped the pages. Manya went through the second drawer. They found nothing that proved that Taylen was cheating. But as Manya opened the third drawer, she noticed on the desk a pink note under a pile of papers that she hasn`t checked yet. She extended her hand and noticed that there was a phone number written on it. “Joey`s new number” muttered Manya. “Brielle” called Manya, “I have found that, is it that number?” Brielle took the note from Manya`s hand and responded “Wait, let me check.” As she checked the number with the one which she had noted down, both numbers correspond. “So it`s Joey's new number,” said Brielle as a smile curve on her face. “That means your husband is gay,” said Manya, frightened for Brielle. “Oh no no, Joey is Taylen`s best friend. And that explained everything, they went golfing at eight today” replied Brielle. “Oh I see now, yeah that does explain everything and you were worried for nothing,” said Manya. Brielle's heart skipped a beat when she heard, “Brielle, honey where are you?” Manya stood still, paralysed with fear. “It`s Taylen” whispered Brielle. “Honey, where are you? Let me check upstairs” they heard Taylen saying. “What are we going to do?” said Manya, “he can`t find me in his office. That will be too suspicious.” Brielle remained still from where she was standing and after one second she responded, “Stay here and hide. I will go out and see why he is back and not at the golf court.” Brielle walked out of the office and closed the door behind her. She rushed towards the kitchen and she heard Taylen`s footsteps descending the stairs. Taylen walked into the kitchen and found Brielle cleaning the kitchen counter. “Honey,” said Taylen and Brielle was startled upon feeling Taylen`s hand on his shoulder. “Oh honey, what are you doing home?” asked Brielle as she removed her ear pods. “I forgot some files in my office as I need Joey to take a look. But why do you look so pale like you were caught of something” said Taylen. “Oh really, do I look that pale? I think that happens when I used too much bleach” said Brielle. Then she realised that Taylen meant that he was going into his office to grab those files that he need. Taylen grabbed a glass and poured some water into it. As he drank, Brielle needed to think about how she is going to prevent Taylen from going into his office. “Let me go and grabbed your files for you and you can enjoy your water,” said Brielle as marched towards his office. “No need honey, you don`t know which files I need. Thanks” said Taylen. Brielle did not know what to do. “OKAY HONEY, YOU CAN GO AND GRAB YOUR FILES IN YOUR OFFICE, YOUR OFFICE” yelled Brielle. “Why are shouting like that” chuckled Taylen thinking that it was a joke. “I am not shouting,” said Brielle, defensively. Taylen giggled and walked towards his office. As he marched towards his office, Brielle could feel her heart through her whole body and Taylen opened the door. Brielle did not move and closed his eyes. “Honey, why are all my files on the desk?” asked Taylen. Brielle instantly rushed there and found Taylen looking for his file from the pile on his desk. “I am going to organise them by colour, there are too many different coloured files,” said Brielle. Taylen grabbed the files that he needed and walked out of his office and said “Well, thanks, honey. But don`t lose anything and let me know where you have kept each file.” Brielle nodded and muttered “Sure honey.” “I will go now as Joey is waiting for me in the car,” said Taylen as he walked away and closed the main entrance behind him. Brielle rushed to a window and double-checked if Taylen was gone. “He is gone” shouted Brielle as she rushed to the office and gazed at Manya who was struggling to come out of the desk. “That was a narrow escape,” said Manya, giggling as she straighten her body. “Is he gone for sure now?” asked Manya, “because I don`t want to go down there for a second time.” Both burst into laughter. “Yes, he is gone. Thank god that he didn`t catch you else how was I going to explain your presence in his office” said Brielle, as they walked out of the office. “And he doesn`t like having people there” continued Brielle as they stood in the living room. Manya was all sweaty, responded “I kept on praying that he doesn`t find me there and let me tell you something. The way that you yelled, trying to tell me that he is coming in there, I was like why is she yelling like that? I could hear your whole conversation.” They ended up laughing at the whole situation. “I am just glad that he didn`t find you there,” said Brielle. “Me too, else we would have been dead meat” responded Manya.

In the afternoon, Taylen was back around five o`clock. He went straight to the shower without looking for Brielle and Onna. But Brielle was in the kitchen organising her tea drawer, putting each one in different kinds of sections, and didn`t notice that Taylen was already home. As she finished, she walked to the living room, grabbed her book on the shelf and as she passed by the stairs, she found Taylen coming downstairs. “Oh, you're already home, honey. Didn't hear you coming” said Brielle. Taylen was down the stairs, kissed Brielle on her cheeks and replied “I am sorry honey that I didn`t come to see you and went straight to the shower. But you know that I hate travelling in those golf carts, so I had to walk a lot so I was too sweaty and my clothes stunk of sweat. So I needed that shower.” Brielle continued her way to the living room and Taylen followed her. ”It`s okay honey, am just glad that you had a nice day,” said Brielle as she settle down on the sofa. “Indeed, I had a great day. I scored very high but Joey beat me by one or two holes” responded Taylen, as he sat down next to Brielle. “Glad to hear that,” said Brielle, and Taylen stared at her, “you are glad to hear that I lost over Joey” responded Taylen. “Oh no, - That`s not what I meant. What I mean is that I am glad that you had a great day” explained Brielle. “I know what you were saying, just wanted to tease you a little. What`s for dinner tonight?” said Taylen. “I cooked macaroni and cheese, you can have some if you are hungry. You want me to bring a bowl for you?” responded Brielle. “No, I will eat later” replied Taylen. Brielle started to read her book and Taylen was on his phone playing games. “I tried to call you but you were unreachable” lied Brielle. Taylen responded, “Yeah, I was out of battery.” Brielle looked at Taylen and lied “I tried Joey but he was not answering. Did he change his number?” Taylen still playing his games, responded “No, he didn`t change his number. He must have been too busy winning I guess.” Brielle was shocked upon hearing that, but she thought to herself about the number that Manya showed her. ‘The number was the same’, thought Brielle. “What are you thinking honey?” Taylen as he noticed Brielle was not reading a single word in the book. “I have so many copies to correct on Monday and I have to grade them and submit them to the student on Monday itself. Just thinking on how I am going to do that” lied Brielle. Taylen started to feel hungry, got up and walked towards the kitchen. “I am going to get some food,” said Taylen as he walked. Brielle was still worried about the phone number. She decided to give it a call. She grabbed her phone from the table and went to the guest room. She closed the door behind her and dialled the number. It started ringing, she could feel her heart beating in her chest, and someone answered the call. “Hello,” said a woman who Brielle could not recognise at all. “Hello,” said the woman a second time. Brielle froze and remain silent. “Hello, is someone there?” said the woman a third time, and then she hung up the call. Brielle could not figure out who was it. But she was sure that it was not someone she knew. She found herself more confused than ever. How could that paper say Joey`s new number, but Taylen denied it. Brielle grabbed her phone and dialled Joey`s number. It rang. “Hey Brielle, how are you doing?” answered Joey. “Oh hi Joey, my bad I was trying to call Rose and I called you instead. Don`t worry, I will text her” lied Brielle. “You sure, she is just in the next room. I can call her to talk” replied Joey. “Yes, am sure. Thanks” said Brielle, she hung up the call. She concluded that Joey did not change his number. So whose number was it and it noted Joey`s new number. Brielle whispered to herself “Taylen is not an idiot. If he was cheating, he would lie and say that Joey did change his number. But he didn`t. So there is someone else trying to sabotage him. But who?” But Brielle was broken out of her concentration when Onna knock on the door and muttered, “Mommy I am hungry.” Brielle responded, “Yes, Mommy is coming honey.” Brielle opened the door and took Onna to the dining room. She served Onna her mac and cheese, brought a plate for herself and sat next to her. Brielle was completely lost and paid no attention to her food. Brielle needed answers and she was not the type of person who would sit around and waste time. She knew that she needed to tell Manya about this and she would know what to do. But as she was eating her food, all kinds of scenarios kept on playing in her imagination and she tried to hold her tears. She heard a crack and Taylen`s office was open. She turned her face the other way so that he wouldn't notice her holding tears as they filled her eyes. “Mommy, mommy, mommy, are you okay?” called Onna several times and on the fourth call, Brielle jumped from her seat. “Am sorry honey, yes what were you telling mommy?” said Brielle who didn`t hear one word that Onna had muttered. “Can I have more mac and cheese?” asked Onna. “Sure honey” replied Brielle, grabbed her plate and marched to the kitchen. She came back with her plate, but she felt full and couldn`t finish her food. She took her plate to the sink. She threw her remaining food in the dustbin and started to do the dishes. But she decided once she finished with the dished, she would go to Manya place. Onna too was finished with her dinner. Taylen was already asleep upstairs. Brielle took Onna to her bedroom, gave her the game console and Brielle said “If you need help with anything, just wake your father and tell him that I am just next door. But be silent, mommy will be back soon.” Onna switched on her games and was instantly submerged in them. Brielle left her room and opened her main entrance door. But she heard whispers of two women coming from the left. She slowly close her main entrance door and allowed a small gap to peak who was whispering. Brielle`s jaw dropped as she noticed a pink roat on one of the women. The other woman was Manya. Rose was wearing the pink roat that Brielle had given her as a present, sunglasses and a huge hat.

Chapter 6

Brielle instantly closed the door and couldn`t believe her eyes. She was so confused as she had no idea that Rose and Manya knew each other. Brielle couldn`t stop herself from thinking of all kinds of questions. She opened the door and decided to ask them directly. She walked out of her house and headed straight to Manya`s home. As she reached there, she noticed through the window that they were in the living room. Brielle slowly approached the window, lowered her back to ninety degrees so that she won`t get noticed and went straight under the window. She could hear them talking. She listened closely to every word that they said.

“So how are we going to do that?” Brielle heard Rose asking. Manya responded “The plan is already in its process dear, don`t worry. I had found something interesting that will destroy his whole career.” Upon hearing that, Brielle could not believe that they were plotting against someone. ‘But who could that person be’ thought Brielle. But while she tried to listen to their conversation more, Brielle as she tried to re-balance her body as her back was in a total discomfort position, she slipped and her hand hit the window as she tried to grab something to avoid falling. Inside the house, both Manya and Rose heard a huge bang on the window.

Brielle in the meantime, knew that they must have heard the noise and would come to check, ran to the backyard bending her body to avoid getting noticed. She reached a wooden wall that separate her backyard from Manya`s. She climbed it and jumped in her backyard and ended up next to her vegetable garden. Climbing Wall was like a game for her as she used to play when she was young. Brielle entered her house through the backyard door and kept on praying that no one noticed her.

Manya and Rose upon hearing the noise, put their cup of tea down on the table and they slowly approached the window. Manya grabbed the handle and opened the window in a flash. She slowly approached it and found no one. “What is it?” asked Rose who was scared. “I don`t know, there is nothing here” replied Manya. “I just hope that it wasn`t someone who knew me, else I would be in enormous trouble,” said Rose.

At home, Brielle kept on thinking ‘What was going on? Manya and Rose knew each other and they are plotting against someone, but who? Is it Taylen that they were against? But did we do something wrong that they would take revenge upon us or are they just jealous? Let me go and ask him.’ Brielle climbed the stairs and marched towards her bedroom. When she entered the room, she found Taylen sleeping deeply with his book laid on his chest. Brielle gazed at him as he looked sexy when he was asleep. Brielle approached him, grabbed the book and placed it on the nightstand, and kissed him on his forehead. She whispered, “Sleep well, sweety.” She went to check on Onna who was sleeping too in her bed. Brielle smiled and something struck her as she walked back to her room. ‘It can`t be us because it doesn`t make sense’ thought Brielle as she change her clothes for bed. Brielle decided that she would hold her tongue and won`t say a word to Taylen as she could be wrong. And there was still the text message that was still unsolved. As Brielle slipped into bed, looked at Taylen, ‘do Taylen knows Manya he is having an affair with the both of them and they are also plotting against me to get rid of me’ thought Brielle. “No, no, no, Taylen wouldn`t do that to me. He loves me. He won`t betray me like that. There must be some explanation and I need to find it” whispered Brielle. That night Brielle had forgotten to do her night skin-care routine as her mind was full of thoughts and questions.

The following morning, Brielle was already up after a sleepless night. She did not waste time and was already cleaning the house at five past thirty in the morning. She removed all her glass containers from the pantry and started to reorganise them. Brielle`s mind was bursting with questions and thought that she was trying to keep herself busy. Taylen woke up at seven and noticed that Brielle was already up. He came downstairs directly in search of Brielle, who he found busy refilling her containers with ingredients. “Why are you up so early honey?” asked Taylen, grabbed the coffee pot and poured some in a mug. Brielle who didn`t look at Taylen and kept on doing her work, responded “Just wanted to do some stuff around the house as the week is so busy with work.”

Taylen knew when his wife was not doing well and was neither convinced by her answer. “Are you alright, honey?” asked Taylen, trying to get an answer that would tell him what was bothering her. “It seems like something is bothering you” added Taylen. “Everything is alright honey. – it`s just that..” Brielle hesitated before continuing her sentence, “It`s just that I had trouble trying to sleep yesterday.” “Hmm, well you should not force yourself by trying to fatigue you” said Taylen. “Sure, I won`t do any more household chores. I will stop and try to relax” said Brielle. Brielle continued her work and Taylen went upstairs and headed to Onna`s room. He gave Onna a little shake to wake her up, as she opened her eyes, Taylen said “Sweety, wake up as I will take you out on a trip”. Onna who was still not fully wakened, scratching her eyes, nodded to her father. But he didn`t know where he was going to take them. Then an idea struck him and whispered to himself, “That`s what she needs now.” He walked back to Onna`s room and found her on her way to the bathroom. Taylen went back to the kitchen, approached Brielle from her back and slowly removed her long silk hair from her right ear and whispered, “Honey, go get dressed because I will take her out for the day.” Brielle turned to face Taylen and asked “where are you taking me?” Taylen chuckled and answered “it`s a surprise. I am pretty sure that you will like it.” Brielle was astonished. She responded “What kind of surprise do you have for me” expressed Brielle, a big smile curved on her lips. “Just go and get ready, honey,” said Taylen, Brielle rushed to her room excited as a seven-year-old in Disneyland.

Taylen went to check on Onna who wasn`t dressed yet. Taylen helped her pick a dress of her choice, put her shoes on her tiny feet and came down to the kitchen for breakfast. Twenty minutes later, Brielle was ready to go and walked downstairs to the kitchen where Onna was still having breakfast. Both Taylen and Onna witnessed Brielle bouncing off the walls wherever Taylen was heading and he was glad to see her happy about something. Taylen cleaned the Kitchen table after Onna finished her food. The Hills hit the road after locking every single door and window of the house. “So where are you taking us honey?” asked Brielle as she watched the countryside. Taylen smiled and remained silent. Brielle was happy and started to examine every road that they took. But she still could not figure out where they were going. Then she realised as they cross a florist shop that they were driving towards her father`s house. “Aww honey, you are taking me to my father,” said Brielle. But Taylen observed his silence. “But Dad`s not home. He went on a camping trip with his old pals. He will be back on Tuesday evening” continued Brielle. But still, there was no response from Taylen`s side. They entered her father`s street and stopped one house before her father`s. It was a beautiful house white in colour and had huge black windows and roses in its garden. Then a lady opened the door and came outside in a beautiful broad-designed white dress. Brielle jumped on her seat, rushed out of the car and called “Gareta, you are back.” Both sisters were excited to see each other till the wedding. Brielle hugged her sister tightly and whispered “I missed you.” Gareta hugged her back and responded, “Me too, I missed you a lot.” Taylen and Onna got out of the car and witnessed Brielle and Gareta jumping and screaming like crazies. Upon hearing those screams of joy, Kevin came outside and gazed at them who were laughing and hugging each other. He passed them and walked towards Taylen and said “Hey dude, how are you?” Taylen responded, “I am doing good and thanks for having us.” Kevin turned to have a proper look at Brielle and Gareta and said “I am glad that you could come as she also was missing Brielle badly.” “But look at them, what did we marry into” joked Kevin, as burst into laughter. “It`s been a long time since they saw each other,” said Taylen. Kevin responded, “Yeah since the wedding and indeed it`s been a long time.”

“Let`s go inside now,” said Gareta as she walked inside, holding Brielle`s hand. As they all were inside, Brielle could not stop asking questions about her honeymoon which made them blush and red each time. But Gareta grabbed her hand and pulled her to the kitchen. Taylen and Kevin went into the living room so that they can have a chat about sports or their usual main topic of politics so that the ladies can have some private time to catch up with each other. Onna was busy playing with her game console in a corner of the living room. As they sat down, Gareta asked Brielle, “Taylen mentioned that you were quite off this morning. Everything alright?” But Brielle who had forgotten about her worried and tension, just those words from Gareta awoke everything again. Gareta could see how Brielle`s expression changed. But she hesitated but then she gathered some courage and responded “You promise me first that you won`t mention that to a soul. Even your husband and mine too. – Especially mine.” Gareta upon hearing that, knew that she was extremely serious. Gareta raised her right hand like they used to when they were little and muttered “I promised.” Brielle started narrating about the text that she found on Taylen`s phone, how she tried to look for something in his office, Manya`s arrival, how she found the number on the desk and till that how she found Rose and Manya together. But Gareta was so confused about the whole scenario that she could feel her head spinning. “But nothing makes sense and aren`t related at all,” said Gareta, trying to find some clearance about the situation. She still could not believe what Brielle just told her and knew now why she was not doing okay. “I can`t understand what`s going on. Do you think that Taylen is cheating? – And, are you sure about everything?” said Gareta, who started having all kinds of theories in her mind.

“Yes, I am sure of everything. But I don`t know why I feel like everything is connected with the three of them. – But I don`t know how” expressed Brielle, confidently. Gareta listened closely to every word that Brielle said and responded “Well, you know what mother always said. Whenever we want to learn something, learn the facts first else we will be dancing with lies.” Brielle nodded and muttered in a stressed tone, “But where do I start?” As Gareta was about to respond to Brielle`s question, Onna burst into the room forcing her to remain silent and asking her mom, “Can I have some juice mommy, - please?” Brielle nodded, opened the fridge and poured some into a glass. She grabbed her glass and ran back to the living room. Gareta responded as soon as Onna stepped out of the kitchen, “Start by finding out how Manya and Rose know each other. By that, every little detail will come along and you will know who send that text because I have a theory that it was Manya who had sent the text.” Brielle was now confused and asked, “But why do you believe that?” Gareta looked at Brielle with a serious look and explained “What if she wrote the number and the phrase Joey`s number as she was the one who send that text? Because you said that there was no message apart from that one. She wanted you to have doubts and here you are.” Brielle looked at Gareta as everything that just mentioned did make sense. “But why would she do that?” asked Brielle, curiously. “That`s what you need to find out. Start by investigating how Manya and Rose knew each other” said Gareta. “But do you think that Rose is in it too” muttered Brielle. “We don`t know that yet but act like you know nothing about what`s going on,” said Gareta. “Because if you told them one word, they can lie to you easily and later you won`t know who to believe or not” continued Gareta. “Yeah you are right, I need to get a perfect image about who is trustworthy or not so that I can get to the bottom of this,” said Brielle, then she added, “Thank you, sister, I don`t know what I would have done without you.” Gareta got on her feet and hugged Brielle tightly and whispered “I will always be there for you. Always.” Brielle felt warm and peaceful as her sister hugged her. Gareta added, “You are not alone anymore, so call whenever you need my help.” Brielle let go of her sister and said, “Now, let`s forget all this nonsense, let me tell you that you have an amazing house and I want to know how did your honeymoon go?” Gareta noticed the drop of tears that rolled down her cheeks and that she tried to hide it from her. But Gareta said nothing about her crying but instead thanked her by saying, “Well thank you, and you should know that I have learned from the best.” Brielle smiled at those beautiful words. “Well, let me tell you that my honeymoon was amazing. - And yes sister, we finally did it and it was intimate” said Gareta as Brielle watched her closely. “Oh my god, you did it and did you like it?” said Brielle excitedly. Gareta who was now shy upon hearing her sister talking about her being now sexually active, muttered in a low shy tone, “Yeah, I did”, then she turned her face away which was completely red and walked away. Brielle followed her to the living room. Brielle continued to tease her about how romantic it was. But the men on the other side of the living room paid no attention to Briella and Gareta's conversation as they were debating about the recent basketball match between the Lakers and the Yorks. Later Brielle and Gareta went for a walk outside the house and went to check on their father`s house. But as Taylen was immersed in his conversation, his phone vibrated in his pocket and took it out to find that he had received a mail from work on a Sunday. “That`s odd,” said Taylen, anxiously. “What happened,” asked Kevin upon seeing Taylen become tense within seconds. “I have got an email from Anna, my boss” replied Taylen. He opened the mail and started reading.

Dear Mr Taylen Hills,

I am writing to inform you that tomorrow, Monday 01/07/2019 at 06:30 Am, I have scheduled an important meeting. I hope to see you and I apologise for writing to you on a Sunday. Thank you and have a nice day ahead.

Regards,

Mrs Anna Margins

CEO of the Gold Law Limited.

Upon reading the email, Taylen still had no idea what the meeting was scheduled for, as he did not have any important or high-class case for the moment. But something that came up in his mind, was the name of Diego Martinez. ‘What if there was evidence on Diego or something else happened’ thought Taylen. Kevin who was on the opposite side, saw Taylen`s face go pale. “Is everything all right, Taylen?” asked Kevin as he witnessed the tension rising on Taylen`s face. “No, I just got a mail that Anna had scheduled a meeting early in the morning and it`s always bad news when she has those kinds of meetings” replied Taylen looking down at his phone, trying to read between the lines. But it was in vain as the email was specific and dry. But Kevin broke his attention, “But how do you know that it`s going to be bad news. It could be good news too, you don`t know that” assured Kevin. Those words that Kevin just assured him did not give him a little hope of being positive. “No, you are wrong. It has to be something bad as she does not like to sit around with bad news all day long” responded Taylen in a distressed tone. Kevin started Taylen in a pity way and said “It must be something about the cases that you are currently working on.” Taylen nodded and said “Yeah, it can be. It could be good news too and I am just worried for nothing. – Let`s not ruin our Sunday for that.” Kevin completely agreed with Taylen and went to the kitchen to come back with two bottles of non-alcohol beer from the refrigerator.

Brielle and Gareta talked about their childhood in this neighbourhood, how they sneak off from the house to go to a party, how they play in the same backyard where Gareta got married and how they used to stalk their neighbours for fun. Gareta showed her sister her white rose garden that she had just started in her father`s garden. “Wow, that`s shocking to see that,” said Brielle as she gazed at the well-kept garden. “I know that at first, I didn`t like gardening, but now it`s my favourite hobby,” said Gareta. Brielle noticed her swing in the corner of Gareta's backyard. Brielle rushed towards it and said, “What is it doing here?” Brielle was amazed to see it again. It was her favourite thing to play after school. It helped her relax a lot. Brielle gazed at it as she circled it. She sat on the seat and let herself go forward and backwards by slowly pushing herself with her feet. She could feel the wind through her hair and a big smile was on her face. She felt free and could sense that she was flying on her own. Gareta took the seat next to her and she also join Brielle. As they both stopped and they could feel their feet on the cold ground, they both ended up laughing. “That was so much fun,” said Brielle. “Indeed it was” agreed Gareta. They both walked back inside the house and joined Kevin and Taylen in the living room. But Taylen didn`t mention the email to his wife and had already warned Kevin as he knew that she was not feeling that well in the morning compared to now. They ate dinner after Gareta insisted and went straight home after.

After a sleepless night, Taylen was already up at five. He freshen up and went down to the kitchen for some hot coffee. He couldn`t take a bite of anything as his stress level was too high and hit the road straight after. Brielle was still asleep and didn`t notice that Taylen was already gone. As Taylen drove, he could feel how tense he was. He drove as slowly as he could as a way to kill time and to think about the meeting's purpose. He parked his car and noticed Anna`s car in the corner of the parking area. “It`s still six in the morning and she is already here,” said Taylen to himself. He walked inside the building and muttered to himself “Today will be a great day, you will be blessed like always and you will receive the greatest news ever” affirmed Taylen to himself, even though he did not have any belief in those affirmations. He did not wait till six-thirty to go and see Anna and he walked straight to his office. He gazed at her through the open door and knocked before entering. “Oh, you are early. Come in” said Anna coldly as she scribbled on a piece of paper. Taylen looked at her and he tried to read her expressions. He couldn`t figure out whether she was happy or not. But he could feel the tension rising through his body. “Yes, I am glad that you could make it. – please have a seat” said Anna, Taylen sat down on the chair on his right side, and Anna continued

“It's very important for me to discuss this delicate matter with you.” Taylen remained silent and was still wondering about that delicate matter. “Saturday evening, I received something from an anonymous source. Wait let me show you” said Anna as she threw down some papers on her desk and added, “Can you explain all this to me?”

Taylen`s jaw dropped as he viewed the papers on the table. It was an agreement for the provision of evidence;

Taylen Hills

4137, Raindrew Street,

Calabasas City

[taylen@mail.com](mailto:taylen@mail.com)

Re: Agreement for Provision of Evidence

This Agreement had been written between two persons Taylen Hills and Ryan Fields.

1. Purpose:

The purpose of this Agreement is to summarise the terms and conditions which the lawyer accepts to compensate the Police Officer in exchange for the provision of evidence which are assigned to certain cases which are handled by the lawyer.

1. Confidentiality:

Both parties agree to maintain strict confidentiality regarding this

       Agreement. The Police Officer is not allowed to disclose the name of the lawyer or details about this document to a third party unless the lawyer gave written consent, which the law required.

1. Compensation:

In the provision of evidence to the lawyer, the latter agrees to pay the Police Officer the sum of 100,000 for each piece of evidence provided. The payment shall be made in cash and received the money during the receiving process of the evidence.

1. Entire Agreement;

This Agreement contains the entire understanding between both parties and replaces any prior agreements, whether it`s written or verbal, relating to the subject matter herein.

1. Amendments:

Any amendments or modifications to this agreement must be made in writing and signed by both parties.

Please indicate your acceptance of the terms and conditions of this Agreement by signing below. The Agreement will become effective when both parties signed the document.

Taylen Hills Ryan Fields

Attorney

Police Officer

Taylen gasped and muttered “I don`t know what this Agreement is for. – And I never signed such a document.” Anna examined Taylen`s expression and said “Okay, you didn`t sign it and you know nothing about that agreement.” Anna removed another piece of paper from her desk and it was a bank transaction and asked “Then explain to me, all those one hundred thousand that you withdrew from the bank. It was for what.” Anna stared at Taylen and continued sarcastically, “I am sure you have an answer. -You have an answer for everything.” Taylen did not appreciate Anna's sarcasm and replied, “Indeed I do have an answer because I still don`t know what the hell is this agreement about and I don`t feel like I need to provide you an answer with what I do with my money.” Anna turned his computer towards Taylen on her desk and played a video. Taylen could see a man grabbing a bag from Officer Fields and the man handed him an envelope and walked away. “Well, you can`t tell who the man is, it`s not visible at all” argued Taylen. But Anna didn`t give him the last word as she played another video of the parking and he witnessed the man still unclear to view his face, entered a car, an Audi Q7. “Now, don`t tell me that it`s not your car, sweety,” said Anna. Taylen breath became heavy and replied “It is the same model car, but I couldn`t see the plate`s number. So nope, that`s not my car.” Taylen took a deep breath so that his breathing becomes normal and said “I am telling you for the last time, I don`t know anything about all this. - I think someone is plotting against me.” Anna burst into laughter and chuckled “Someone is plotting against me. That`s the lame excuse I heard in my entire career.” Taylen said, “Anna, you have to believe me.” Anna stopped her, gave Taylen a cold look and muttered “It`s Mrs Margin, Taylen. I am not your friend”, Taylen said nothing as Anna continued “I also have been in this job a long period, but I know a liar when I see one.” Taylen responded “But you didn`t see me as a liar when I was bringing clients and profits to your company. What did you see me then, Mrs Margin?” Anna who started to get annoyed argued “Well, let me tell you something Taylen. First, I have got the list of evidence and they are all related to your cases. And in the record, they were input as a loss. And that evidence never saw the daylight of the court. So there must be a connection somewhere.” Taylen remained silent, no expression on his face and Anna yelled, “answer me, Taylen.” Taylen responded “To say what, that yes I did all these. But I know that I am not a liar and it`s not you, Mrs Margin, who is going to tell me who I am as a person.”

“But it`s your signature, your car and the evidence does point at you” argued Anna. “Believe what you want but I shall stand corrected that it`s not me. That`s why you never won cases and make profits as you made conclusions too fast” replied Taylen. “I am not playing with you. Tell me the truth now. You can come clean to me” said Anna, trying to convince Taylen. Taylen let a smile and said “I won`t lie. On that document, it is my signature and it`s even more perfect than mine. But it`s not me who signed that agreement. I can`t give you an explanation about the evidence because I don`t have any knowledge about it and as for the money, I am still paying for my new home as I still haven`t settled thee full price yet as I was short by two hundred thousand and I haven`t tell Brielle about that.” Anna stared at Taylen and responded frustrated “I don`t why, I can`t believe a word that you are saying. I just can tell you that you are playing innocent and don`t know anything. You can pretend and be a good liar, but I can read you like a magazine.” Taylen said for one more time, “I am not lying. I am telling you the truth.” Taylen was getting annoyed that Anna wasn`t believing him. “Well, I think you will continue to deny everything but let me tell you something, you are a sly person. Oh yes, you are one and you prove it today and for that, Taylen Hills, you are FIRED” declared Anna. “Take your things and go away.” Taylen got on his feet and replied “Fine, I will go but I will not let this go away like that, I will prove that I am innocent and am not a sly person as you saying.” Anna responded “no matter what you say will make me change my mind. You are fired. So take your things and go away from here.” Taylen as he stormed out of her office, said “I will rise. You will see. You just have to wait.” Anna laughed and yelled back, “You are just in denial, sweety. It`s you who needs to wait.” Taylen turned when he heard her yelling back, but he stood motionless and decided to give her the last words and went straight to his office to collect all his belongings. He took an empty box of paper and filled it with his items, left the office at eight and as he walked past the hallway, he could feel that all eyes were set on him. He kept his head forwards and walked out of the building as if nothing happened. As he reached home, Brielle and Onna were already off to school he sat down on the sofa and he could feel the tears filling his eyes. He felt perplexed at what just happened and kept on thinking about who could be behind all this. He thought that it could be anyone as being a lawyer brought out a lot of enemies, but he concluded that it must be someone who knows his case very well.

After a hard day, correcting more than thousands of homework, Brielle was finally home. Onna who was not feeling tired as her mother, rushed to her room. Brielle as she entered the house, she muttered “What`s Taylen's car doing in the driveway.” She then called, “Sweety are you home?” Onna instantly came back downstairs and said “Is daddy home?” Then they heard Taylen replying from his office, “Yes, I am in here. Come.” Onna rushed to see her father, followed by Brielle as she hung her bag on the coat hanger, and Onna jumped in her father's arms. “What you doing?” asked Brielle.

Taylen took some seconds before answering and he finally replied “I had something important to work on here.” Taylen`s desk was filled with files and papers and Brielle asked “What`s going on, honey? – An important case?” Taylen looked at Onna and said to her “Sweety, you can go and play in your room. Mommy and Daddy need to talk.”

Onna nodded and ran towards her bedroom. “What`s going on?” said Brielle, confused.

“I got fired from my job, sweety. Someone plotted fake evidence and Anna believed it. So you seeing all these papers is because I am trying to open my firm” said Taylen.

“What! You are fired” said Brielle in shock, “Oh honey, - fake evidence, who could do such a thing?”

“But you didn`t try to prove your innocence to Anna,” said Brielle. Taylen responded “I did, but she didn`t believe me at all. She said that I am a sly person.”

Then Brielle remembered Manya and Rose's conversation and thought that was it their doings. ‘But why would they do that and how did they do that? – No, it can`t be them. What has Taylen done to them that they are acting this way? – No, no I don`t think so. But I heard them talking about destroying someone`s career’ thought Brielle.

“Honey, are you okay?” asked Taylen, as he witnessed Brielle daydreaming.

“Yes, I was thinking about something” replied Brielle.

“I don`t know who could be behind this. It can be a colleague, people who lost due to me or it could be anyone who doesn`t like me” continued Taylen.

“That`s why I have decided to open my firm, So no one can fire me again. And I also found a part-time job as a professor in a college to teach criminal law” said Taylen.

As she listened to Taylen, Brielle realised that even though the situation was not ideal, he didn`t give up and was building something new from that misfortune and Brielle was extremely proud of him.

‘He has the capacity, intelligence, finance, and management skill and was devoted to his work, and that was the best quality a firm owner needs’ thought Brielle as she stared at her husband going through thousands of papers. “Honey, if you need any kind of help, know that I am right there for you. You just need to ask. And don`t worry about support for the house and grocery, know that I will take care of it till your firm is born” announced Brielle.

Taylen was content to hear his wife's words as it encouraged him to work harder and he responded, “Are you sure honey? – No, don`t worry about the house. If I got the professor job, I will contribute half to it. Okay?”

But Brielle was sure about her decision and replied, “No, I said I will take care of it. Plus you will need a lot of money to invest in your firm. You have contributed a lot in this house for me, so let me do this for you.”

Taylen eyes were filled with tears again, got on his feet, approached his wife and gave her a passionate kiss, whispering “thank you, honey, you are the best wife a man could ever ask for.” He hugged Brielle tightly. Onna at the same moment descended the stairs and gazed at the sight of her parents hugging. “Oh I can see you kissing, mommy is kissing daddy, mommy is kissing daddy” sang Onna, Brielle gave her a sign to approach them and as she did, Brielle grabbed and hugged her too. As they let go of each other, Brielle said to Onna “Let`s go now and take a bath. – maybe later, I will give you a delicious cupcake.”

As Brielle walked upstairs with Onna to the bathroom, Taylen returned to his desk and resumed his work. He thought that he needed to find out who was also against him and hated him that much but he didn`t know where to start his search. He removed all his old cases, and view each one of them, trying to figure out who could be behind all this. But there were so many people that he couldn`t distinguish who it was exactly or they were from his old firm and it was miles away from here. And no one from his old job knew where he was living right now. This search and a lot of questions were burning his head as he could not figure out and he didn`t know where to look for answers but he was one hundred per cent sure that there was indeed someone who is plotting against him. That night, he went to sleep with thousands of questions but compared to Brielle, she had an idea of where to start.

Chapter 7

Diego was chasing after Sarah, who was gasping for her breath, on a deserted road on which on two sides of the roads were thousands of pine trees. It was just fifteen minutes away from the court. The street was not well-lit, and Sarah had difficulty to figure where she was heading too. And Diego was still after her. She decided to take a turn into the woods in the hope to hide behind in the dark and behind one of the pine trees.

“Come here baby, just come to me. – Let me have a little taste of you” shouted Diego with a bottle of whisky in his right hand and noticed Sarah going into the woods. Sarah was sprinting as fast as she could, hoping to escape him.

“You wouldn`t let me the last time. Come here now and stop playing, because I will make you feel good, baby” expressed a drunken Diego.

But as she entered the woods, she noticed that the trees were not thick enough to hide her whole body and continued to run. But as it was dark, she didn`t notice the roots of a tree, which the soil was washed away by rain, hit her right foot in them, lost her balance and collapsed on the floor. ‘I am okay, I can walk’ thought Sarah as she tried to get on her feet. But she noticed two feet as her face was down and as she raised her head; Diego was already in front of her. He tried to grab her, but Sarah backed away and muttered “Don`t you dare try to touch me.” But Diego who was a gym rat, managed to grab her hand and did not allow her to move. As she tried to fight back, Diego neither felt hurt nor could feel any of the attacks. For him, Sarah was just wasting her energy and time. But at a moment, Diego started to get annoyed and in a fit of rage, she threw her over a tree. Sarah felt her body fly and heard a crack as her back hit a tree. She was on the ground full of insects, dry leaves and dry wood sticks. She felt herself being pulled, and as she tried to open her eyes, she found Diego on top of her. She started to get agitated, but she could not do anything. But she was someone who was not ready to give up. She could feel Diego unbuttoning his pants and heard him pull how his underwear. She tried to fight back, but Diego with his left hand managed to hold her two hands over her head tight. She felt him, removing her panties and knew the inevitable was going to happen. Sarah as she could feel his penis over her private parts, from the bottom of her throat, she shouted “Nooooooo.”

Taylen woke up from his sleep, sweating like a fountain and breathing hard.

“It was just a dream Taylen. Just a bad dream” muttered Taylen to himself, trying to calm himself down. He could feel his heart racing.

“What kind of dream was that,” said Taylen to himself. He turned towards Brielle and found her asleep. Taylen yawned and closed his eyes as he wanted to sleep back. Within minutes, Taylen`s phone started ringing. But as it was in vibrating mode, it didn`t make any disturbing noise, he was too tired to answer the call and allowed the call to go straight into his voicemail. But the landline started ringing, waking both Taylen and Brielle. Brielle who was fast asleep, answered the phone which was on her side table and muttered “Hello!”

Taylen gazed at Brielle whose expression went from sleepy to shocked and she was listening closely at the other end of the phone. Taylen gasped as he found Brielle putting her hands on her mouth in disbelief. “What`s going on, sweety?” asked Taylen who could not figure out what was going on. He could see tears filling in her eyes and he tried to remain calm till she cut the call.

“What happened, honey? Is everything okay?” asked Taylen with trembling lips. Brielle put the phone down on the side table with a shaky hand and replied with a shaky voice, “It was Rose, Joey committed suicide and he died.”

Taylen`s heart gave a lump and his jaw dropped, his hands started shaking and replied in disbelief “What! He committed what. Oh my god, what?”

Taylen mind was exploding as he could not understand anything and got up from bed.

“Are you sure, sweety? – you may have misheard what she told you”, said Taylen as he started to freak out a little. He started walking in circles around the room. Brielle muttered “You need to calm down, sweety. Take a deep breath and relax so that you can process everything.” He stopped walking, took a long deep breath and asked, “How did he commit suicide?”

Brielle got off the bed, approached Taylen and hugged him tightly as she answered, “he jumped from the roof of his house and landed on Rose`s car.” Taylen got on his knees and sobbed silently. He could feel his heartache.

“I am so sorry for your friend” expressed Brielle in a quiet voice as she joined him down on the floor. “I want to go there and see my friend. I want to be there for him. He is my friend” said Taylen, as he got back on his feet and changed his clothes.

“Yes, you should go and see what`s going on there. – I will stay here with Onna and will be there first thing in the morning,” said Brielle. Taylen who was ready, kissed Brielle on her forehead and walked away. “Take care honey, and look after Rose when you’re there,” said Brielle as looked at Taylen walking down the stairs. As she heard a bang downstairs as Taylen closed the main entrance door, Brielle approached her window, pulled the curtain a little to her right and peered outside and watched Taylen get into his car and drove away. It was already two-thirty in the morning, and Brielle wouldn`t get her sleep back, went to check on Onna and went downstairs for a cup of hot chamomile tea. She then walked back to her room and went straight to bed and after fifteen minutes of turning around, Brielle finally fell asleep.

After thirty minutes of driving, Taylen finally was at Rose`s place. He noticed the five police cars in front and had taped the whole scene with their horrible yellow tape. He lifted the tape and crossed under it and he noticed Rose`s car and notice Rose over there and he rushed towards her. But as he ran, he felt a hand grabbing his chest and pulling him backwards and the man in the police uniform said, “Sir, you are not allowed here. You will have to wait behind the yellow line.” Taylen who was shaking and started begging, “Sir please, you have to let me go over there. He was my best friend for God’s sake. You have to let me see him.” He tried to walk forward, but the officer came in front of him blocking his way. Rose from where she was standing, noticed Taylen and the police officer arguing through their gestures. She asked one of the officers that was near her and told them to let Taylen come. The officer nodded and walked to deliver the message. “Please sir, let me go and see him. Please I beg you,” said Taylen. The officer arrived and told to his workmate, “You can let him. He is a close friend to the Greens.” He made way for Taylen and he rushed towards Rose. He hugged Rose and asked, “Where is he?” Rose pointed to her left and there he saw Joey`s body on the ground. Rose muttered in a shaky voice, “There he is.” And she broke into tears and looked away from her left. Taylen approached Joey, and he gazed at the officer who was wrapping his body in a plastic bag. Tears rolled down his cheeks and turned away. He could not believe that he had lost his friend. With his smile, their laughter, their non-sense talks, his way of seeing the world and his voice, Taylen knew that he had lost all of this. He sobbed quietly as he walked towards Rose again.

“Hey, how are you holding up?” asked Taylen to Rose, who was crying in a corner. “I don`t know. I don`t know how I am feeling. But I know that I can`t understand why he committed such a thing. Oh god, he is gone now” said Rose with trembling lips.

Taylen who had no words to console Rose, hugged her tightly and whispered “Everything`s going to be okay.”

One of the police officers approached them, removed a small notepad from his shirt pocket and asked them, “Madam, can you tell us what happened?”

Rose looked at the officer in his eyes, breathing hard and narrated, “Joey was in the kitchen with me, talking about the future and told me that I needed to take good care of myself if he is gone one day. But I didn`t know what he meant till now. I continued preparing dinner and he went upstairs later on I heard a huge bang sound and my car alarm started going crazy. I rushed to see what was going on and I found him on top of my car roof. I instantly dialled the ambulance because I thought there was a chance that he may be alive and I didn`t try to move him to minimise the risk of breaking him more.”

The officer noted every word that Rose said and she sobbed as she narrated the whole story. Taylen too, tears filled in his eyes and he wiped them and asked the officer, “Can I also come with you for the autopsy, please? I think a family member can come and if Rose allows me, can I?” Rose nodded in agreement and the officer too.

“I am going with the officer and you stay here. Brielle will be here in the morning and you will need to be strong now as we will have to organise for the funeral” said Taylen as he turned away and walked away. “Yes, I will start the arrangement. Don`t worry and please can you keep me updated about the autopsy please” responded Rose. Taylen nodded in agreement and walked into the ambulance and sat next to Joey`s body.

As expected, Brielle reached Rose`s home as soon as she woke up. When she entered Rose`s home she asked Onna to go into the kitchen and went to see Rose who was all alone trying to pick a suit for Joey for the funeral ceremony. Brielle gave her a caress on her back and as she turned to find Brielle, she burst into tears and hugged Brielle tightly.

“It`s okay sweety, let it all out” said Brielle as she patted her back to try and calm her down. Rose was in pain, heartbroken and sad and Brielle could feel that. At this instant, Brielle had forgotten about Manya, Taylen losing his job or whether Rose and Manya were plotting against her family and till now nothing was proven that it was them as she had just heard a conversation in which she had no knowledge of the real context. So she was there as a friend that Rose needed during those hard moments. As Rose let go of Brielle, she continued choosing things for the funeral, weeping as she picked white roses for the ceremony. Brielle went to the kitchen and came back with a plate of biscuits and a glass of orange juice. “Here dear, something to eat” said Brielle as she laid the plate next to her on the table. Rose took one biscuit and ate it quietly. Brielle left her and went back to the kitchen to give Onna too some biscuits to eat and she was sitting on the round dining table watching cartoons on her phone. As she approached Onna with the biscuits, she noticed on the table Rose`s phone. Brielle started to overthink what she was going to do. ‘Do I check her phone or I don`t? – But I need to know whether am right or not?’ thought Brielle. All her answers may be answered as everyone`s phone have details about its owner`s doing. But she hesitated due to the circumstances but she eventually grabbed the phone from the table and rushed to the bathroom. As soon as she was inside the bathroom and locked the door behind her, she unlocked the phone as it did not require any pattern or password to unlock it. She sat on the toilet cover and opened each application and checked her history. But as she opened her message application, she noticed Manya`s name and opened their message box.

29th June

-Manya

Come and let`s celebrate

for our small victory. Let`s

meet at our usual place.

-Rose

Okay. I will meet you

in the afternoon. Let`s

celebrate our victory.

1st July

-Rose

Joey died, come quickly

Please. Come

-Manya

Yes, am on my way and

Don`t call anyone yet.

2nd July

-Manya

How are you holding up

girl?

Brielle whispered to herself, “What kind of victory are they talking about? Is it because Taylen lost his job? It was still unclear to her mind what they meant about celebrating. I need more evidence to prove that they are doing something against me.” She screenshots of those conversations, send them to her and deleted the photos on Rose`s chat box to her. But while she was deleting the transfer, Rose`s phone started to ring. It was a private number but as her ringtone was super loud, Brielle knew that Rose must have heard and was looking for her phone. Brielle knees wobble and did not know what to do. She sat still on the toilet cover and the phone ringing in her hand. Then something strokes her, she got up, opened the door and rushed to Rose and when she found her in the kitchen, she handed the phone to Rose and muttered, “I was looking for you to give you the phone as it was ringing.”

The phone calls stopped as Brielle handed her the phone. “Oh, thank you Brielle” said Rose as she took the phone from her hand and added, “Oh it`s Joey`s mom. Let me call her back.”

“Hi, how are you feeling, Mommy?” asked Rose as her voice fade away as she stepped into the living room. Brielle let out a breath of relief. As she tried to walk into the living room to listen to Rose`s conversation, Taylen was back from the autopsy and walked directly towards Brielle.

“I have to talk to you. It`s urgent. Let`s go home now and we will come back tomorrow for the funeral,” said Taylen. Brielle nodded in agreement, walked to the living room and said goodbye to Rose. Brielle came back to the kitchen, grabbed Onna`s hand and followed Taylen to the car. “You didn`t come in your car?” asked Taylen to Brielle, who responded “No, I came by taxi. I knew that you were going to be here.”

“Good then, we can talk in the car itself,” said Taylen as he unlocked his car and stepped in. Once they all were settled in their seats, they drove away from Rose`s house and Brielle asked “Yes, what did you want to talk about?”

Taylen turned and looked at Onna and asked Brielle to give her the headset and her phone so that she could watch some cartoons. Brielle handed her phones and headset to Onna, and within minutes she was completely lost in her show. Taylen turned to check on Onna and whispered “Onna, can you hear me?” But there was no response from her parts as she watched her show and couldn`t hear a single word that her father just said.

“I think that Joey was murdered” announced Taylen. Brielle gasped upon hearing that and yelled, “What! Murder!”

“Yes, I don`t think it was a suicide at all” said Taylen, he turned to check on Onna again, who was still absorbed in her cartoons. Brielle looked at Taylen with her mouth wide open and said “What! What do you mean by murder? How can you be so sure? The police did confirm that it was a suicide case. Right?”

Taylen drove slowly and explained to Brielle about his doubts, “They did confirm it was a suicide but I am hundred per cent sure that they are wrong. He was killed and coated it like a suicide. The injuries on his head were a deep cut, but when I saw his body at Rose`s place, there was nothing that sharp that could have hurt him like that nor that fall. Before you say it, no the windshield was just cracked into millions of pieces, so nope I don`t think that it was the windshield. He was killed with something sharp.” Taylen didn`t know that Brielle knew more than him and that she was solving a complicated puzzle. “When you arrived there, was there a woman, tall and with black hair?” asked Brielle to confirm her doubts and the text message. Taylen took some seconds to think and then answered, “No, there was no one with Rose. She was all alone with the police.”

Brielle understood that Taylen was completely right. But for now, she didn`t say anything to him as she started to gather proof. But she was scared if she allowed Taylen knows what she knew, she may act out and they will know that she is suspicious about them.

“Why are you asking me that?” asked Taylen, curiously.

“I am just asking because there was no way that Rose alone could do such a thing. Joey is a big and strong man. Imagine now Rose alone, carrying him on the roof and throwing him into her car. If you are right, she wasn`t alone in that or else you are wrong. Your friend did commit suicide. But you know what will confirm your doubts: find out why Joey committed suicide. I think that will answer your questions” affirmed Brielle as she dazed outside in the countryside.

The next day, The Hills arrived at the Winston church, where the entrance was well-lit with decorative lighting and decorated with bouquets of flowers. As Taylen stepped into the church, he found himself shaking hands with Joey`s cousins and saw their old friends from high school. They walked towards the coffin to pay their homage to Joey. They approached it which was dark brown, made with pure wood and had a copper-golden handle and found Joey lying inside peacefully. He was wearing a black suit with a white shirt and a pale blue tie. Taylen placed a white rose on his stomach, caressing his face and tears filled in his eyes as he gazed at him. Taylen was anguished by seeing all the people around in the church as he settled down in the first-row bench and knew that today was the final goodbye that he was going to say to his friend. He still couldn`t believe that his friend was now gone forever. As he gazed at the coffin, all he could think of was the good memories that he had spent with Joey. Brielle sat down next to her husband. Taylen could feel his emotions were being hard to control and would burst into tears, he looked at Brielle on his left and said, “Honey, I am going outside for some fresh air.”

Brielle nodded and Taylen got on his feet and walked away. Brielle knew that Taylen was in pain as he had lost a brother figure and a best friend.

Thirty minutes later, the ceremony started as the Priest came in front of the chapel as he recited some verses from the holy bible. “We are gathered today to mourn the loss of a son, a brother, a friend, a colleague and a husband. Life is built like this; every beginning has an ending and it`s something that we can`t work against. I will call Mrs Rose Green who will address a few words about her late husband and to you all. Thank you.”

Rose got up from her seat, approached the coffin as she sobbed and walked away towards the stand. She straightens the microphone and started;

Dear friends,

Today we are gathered to say a final goodbye to our dear Joey. He was a husband, a friend, a brother, an uncle, a son and a lawyer to each of us present. He was in our life and now he is gone. The first day that I met him, I knew instantly that he was going to be my husband, mine. I pictured our life together and it was wonderful till now. But something had changed when I think about it and I didn`t notice it. Many of you here, must still be wondering why he had committed suicide and the police did find out why. It`s very hard for me to say it, but me and mother-in-law agrees that we must tell the truth so that Joey can rest in peace and no gossip or rumours goes around his death. It`s hard for me to say it. – Joey was gay. He felt suffocated and did not want to continue living such a lie. He did not want to divorce me either as he mentioned that I did not do anything wrong to deserve something like that. But little did he know that I wouldn`t care as long as he was happy. So, it was stupid on his part. You left me here more hurt and more heartbroken than if you would have just told me the truth and I am sorry that you felt that I wasn`t open for such a conversation. I then understood that I did not know him really well because Joey was someone who you would discover something new about himself, each day. For me, gay or not, you are my Joey and I am going to miss you. My man, I am saying goodbye to you. Joey, I love you and will continue to do so. I will cherish the memories that we spent together and still couldn`t believe that I won`t see you anymore. Goodbye, Joey. Goodbye.

As she walked away from the stand, she sat on the floor and sobbed. Her mother-in-law, Joey`s mother who was seated in the front row, rushed towards Rose and helped her to get on her feet and muttered, “It`s okay, dear. It`s okay.”

Rose walked to her seat, next to Mrs Green as they both settled, Taylen entered the buildings and resumed his seats too. He gazed at Mrs Green who too started sobbing over Rose’s speech. The priest stood behind the stand and said, “Those words from Mrs Rose Green, came from her heart and pain. I would like to call Mr Taylen Hills to address a few words.”

Taylen walked towards the stand and as he turned towards the people whose eyes were on him.

I just wanted to share something with you. I am not getting formal as Joey would have hated to see me like that. – I knew Joey since high school and since then we had been best buddies. We shared everything together. We were like brothers. Every day I used to see Joey for lunch or we would go out and have some fun. I never thought that there was going to be a day that I won`t see you. And thinking about that, just break my heart.

Tears rolled down his cheeks as he continued;

It`s just that we usually do, we don`t think that each day is a possibility that we may lose something until we do. Joey, wherever you are, just know that your friend will always love you and will think about you. So, goodbye to you Joey. Goodbye, my old friend and I will miss you.

Taylen walked away from the stand and sat in his seat. Brielle grabbed his hands and hold them tight as his eyes were watery. The priest said some verses from the bible and said, “It`s time now for Joey to join the house of god.”

Four men well dressed in suits came and locked the coffin, each one of them grabbed the handles and lifted the coffin. Everyone stood and watched the coffin passed near them and they followed. As they reached outside, they walked behind the coffin to the churchyard. Brielle as she walked in the yard, noticed that a lot of graves were already dug, and they reached Joey`s.

The priest said, “Now Joey is saying goodbye to his love ones and it`s his last sight of daylight.”

And they started to pull the coffin down the grave and Rose approached and threw some soil followed by Joey`s sobbing mother. As the coffin reached completely down, the churchyard workers started to fill the grave with soil and everyone walked away.

After the funeral, Rose hosted a repast at her home where everyone had brought something to eat. Brielle had prepared mashed potatoes and meatballs and had placed them on the buffet table, where each person was serving themselves. There was apple pie, green peas, roasted chicken, fried chicken, meatloaf and some French pastries.

Everyone was busy talking, and eating food when Rose came downstairs and everyone stopped whatever they were doing to stare at her. She was wearing an elegant white-purple dress and had print flowers. Everyone was still in their black suits and dress, and couldn`t take their eyes off her as their stomach flipped. Brielle approached her and whispered in her right ear, “Rose, why did you change your clothes?”

Rose looked at Brielle and scanned the room as all eyes were on her. “It was a gift from Joey and I want to wear it to honour him,” said Rose to everyone in the room.

Brielle understood what she must be going through and decided not to say anything that may upset her. And the others thought the same way.

Brielle grabbed a plate, went to the buffet table and served herself some mashed potatoes, green peas, fried chicken and some pie. Rose followed her and called, “Brielle.”

Brielle turned and replied, “Yes, tell me?”

Rose who seemed restless, asked “Can you stay for the night? – Only for today.”

Brielle did not expect such request on a short notice. She gazed at Rose, as she muttered “Please, only for tonight. I just don`t want to spend the night alone.”

Brielle did not know what to do and replied “I need to ask Taylen. Wait a minute, let me go and ask him.”

As Brielle walked away, she thought to herself that it can be a way that she may learn the truth about everything that she doubts. As she rushed in look for Taylen, found him outside eating his food and conversing with a late classmate from his high school. Brielle approached him, gave him a little touch on his shoulders and as Taylen turned towards her, he said “Hey honey, you need anything?”

Brielle responded “Hey, sorry to cut your conversation, but Rose is asking me to spend the night with her. She doesn`t want to be alone. And I too, don`t want to leave her alone, especially today.”

Taylen paused for some seconds and responded, “Yes, you can honey. Rose does need someone close for support. It`s going to be hard and having no one with her today, will leave her feeling extremely alone and depressed.”

Brielle had a different motive behind her stay. She needed to know what really happened and what was going on with Manya.

“Thank you, honey. I am going to take good care of her” said Brielle, “you look after Onna and don`t forget to put her to sleep before nine.”

Brielle realised that they won’t have anything to eat for dinner. She walked into Rose`s kitchen, took a plastic Tupperware and marched towards the buffet table. She filled it with roasted chicken, peas and mashed potatoes. She joined Taylen once again and handed him the Tupperware, “Here is some food for dinner. No need to prepare anything at home. Don`t forget to get Onna from Alex.”

Taylen grabbed the Tupperware as he responded, “Yes honey, don`t worry about Onna. She will be fine.”

Taylen returned to her conversation while Brielle walked back in the house. As Rose witnessed Brielle coming back, she rushed towards her and asked, “What did Taylen say? - Did he agree? – Oh, if he didn`t agree, he and I are going to have a long conversation. I mean how can he not allow you to stay with me and I do need someone and I want someone who is close to me.”

Brielle stood silently listening to Rose and broke it by answering, “Stop Rose, Taylen has agreed. I will stay. I won`t leave you alone especially when you need a friend during those hard moments.” Rose smiled upon hearing the good news. She grabbed Brielle`s hands and thanked her. She hugged her tightly and gave Brielle a little kiss on her right cheek and muttered “Thank you.”

Around four o`clock, almost everyone was already gone. Taylen looked at Brielle, who was on the black sofa, talking with Joey`s mother, who also was about to leave. Taylen approached Brielle and said “Honey, I am heading home. I will call you once I reach.”

Brielle looked at Taylen and replied “Okay honey, you called me and don`t let Onna have ice cream, she may fall sick. – Hey, as you are going, can you drop Mrs Green at her home?”

Taylen took some seconds and answered, “Sure, come on Mrs Green.”

As Mrs Green got on her feet, took her handbag and followed Taylen. At the same moment, Rose entered the living room and yelled, “nooooooooo”

Everyone in the living room stopped whatever they were doing and looked at Rose with their eyes popping open.

“What happened dear? Is everything all right?” asked Mrs Green, who was still in shock.

“I have already called your taxi and it`s already here. I am sorry that I shouted. I don`t know why I shouted like that. I think that I am just getting emotional swings or something like that” responded Rose, as she approached her mother-in-law and hugged her goodbye. Taylen got into his car and Mrs Green into her taxi and both of them drove away. Brielle waved them goodbye standing next to Rose who waved at them too. Mrs Green as her taxi drove away and looked at Rose, tears rolled down. As Taylen hit the road, he put some music on to ease the loneliness that he could feel in the car and sang along it. He enjoyed the scenery as the music kept on playing, he approached a junction and applied his brake to slow the car a little, and his face went pale. He kept pressing the brake pedal, and the car was not slowing. He pressed it fully and still, there was no response. He grabbed the handbrake and pulled it, but that too was in vain, it did not stop the car either as it kept going at full speed. Both Brakes were broken. His car was going at sixty miles per hour and as he passed the junction which fortunately there was no car, was about to go through a dangerous curve and there was another junction after that. The speed of the car kept on increasing even though Taylen was not hitting the gas pedal. Taylen who was sweating cold hit the dangerous curve at eighty-five miles per hour and drew nearer to the junction. Taylen knew he needed to slow the car down or it will be a terrible tragedy. His junction was the busiest one and knew if he couldn`t stop the car, it will be terrible. He tried to turn his steering wheel and drift over the pavement and hit a tree to stop the car, but it was in vain as there were too many people on the pavement. Taylen reached the junction over ninety-five miles per hour and he closed his eyes as he crossed the junction. Taylen felt his car fly rotating anticlockwise above the street and fell on its roof to the other end of the street. The windshield was completely shattered into million pieces and they were spread on the road. It was a delivery truck that hit Taylen`s car and the witnesses, they started to describe it as violent. The truck was barely damaged compared to Taylen`s car. The truck driver came out and started yelling, “It`s that bastard’s fault, the light was green and he was driving that fast.” The truck driver approached Taylen`s car and found him under the car, gasping but he was bleeding a lot. He was hurt on the forehead and was stuck behind the wheel. He found himself upside down and started calling for help. The truck driver dialled the emergencies and said, “Sir, don`t worry. Help is on its way.” Taylen looked at him, gasped for a second time and fell unconscious.

Chapter 8

Taylen woke up three days after. As he gazed around, he took notice of the heart monitor that was beeping on his right, needles that were projecting serum into his body and get well soon balloons attached to his bed`s footer. Taylen instantly looked for the nurse bell and pressed the call button as soon as he found it. Within seconds, a white man in pale blue scrubs burst into the room and said with a small pleasant smile, “Oh, you are finally up.”

He approached the heart monitor to check his blood pressure, heart rate and the amount of oxygen in his body.

“Everything seems all right,” said the nurse, marched towards Taylen and added, “How are you feeling, sir? – Are you feeling pain or feeling dizzy or something?”

Taylen looked at the nurse as he responded, “No, I am not feeling any kind of pain and am not feeling dizzy at all. I am just feeling tired, that`s all.”

The nurse seemed to agree with him, was completely sure that he was doing well and left for the nurse’s room. But as he was about to leave, Taylen asked, “Was my wife here? – I want to see her.”

The nurse turned and answered him with a shaky voice, “Your wife was here one hour ago during visiting time. I am sorry sir, but you will be able to see her in the morning as it`s already eight in the evening. But don`t worry, we will notify her that you are awake.”

Taylen remained silent for a few seconds and then he said, “No, don`t tell her now. Let me surprise her in the morning and she must be tired right now. I am pretty sure that she must be resting.”

The nurse smiled, “Seems like you know your wife well” said the nurse as he left Taylen`s room and closed the door behind him. Taylen`s face curves into a smile too.

Early in the morning, as usual, Brielle entered the residency ward, wearing a pair of jeans, and a white shirt, with a printed design of a sunflower which under it had a quote, ‘Keeping hope in life, make the sunflower in you shine brightly’, tucked in. As she passed the reception desk, she greeted good morning to the head of the nurse and walked towards her husband’s room. As she entered the room, to her greatest surprise found Taylen`s eyes were wide open and yelled, “Honey, you are awake.”

She rushed outside to look for either a doctor or a nurse to tell them that her husband was awake. But as the head nurse saw her running and heard her yelling some seconds ago in the room, she told her that they already knew. She walked back into the room, rushed towards him and hugged him tightly. Then she realised that she might be pressing her hug too tightly, took a grip on herself and stood straight.

“Since when did you wake up? – Noone informed me and I had specifically said that they should inform me if you wake up” snarled Brielle as she was heading back to the reception desk to let them know a piece of her mind. But Taylen stopped her by grabbing her hand and confessed, “It was me who told them not to tell you. If you knew that I woke up, you would have rushed here and I knew you must be so tired. Plus, I wanted to surprise you in the morning. They are at no fault.” Brielle gave Taylen an intense look, and he added, “I am sorry honey. It`s now that I realised how stupid it was. You must have been worried sick about me. You did deserve to know. I apologised for my stupid behaviour.”

Brielle responded as she tried to calm herself down, “Oh okay, yeah it was really stupid on your part because indeed I was worried sick.” She walked to the chair next to Taylen`s bed and sat. For two minutes straight, there was complete silence between them which Taylen broke by asking, “How is Onna doing? – And how`s Rose?”

Brielle responded, “Onna has been doing great, she just misses you and she is at school. Rose has been doing great till now. She does cry sometimes when she missed Joey. But, it`s less now.” Then once again, there was a complete silence between them as Brielle gazed around and they could hear the people chattering, the television playing in the waiting room and the monitor beeping in the other rooms. Brielle got on her feet and said as she walked away, “I have to go as I have some errands to run. Oh, and before I go, I forgot to tell you that I brought your phone”, Brielle walked towards him and handed him his phone, “you can play videos, watch films and all. Just something to kill time.”

Brielle walked away without kissing Taylen goodbye. Taylen switched on his phone as he tapped his fingers on the bedsheets while waiting. As the screen lights up, he entered his password and was on his home screen, he noticed all the messages, calls and notifications that he had received since. He checked all his mail just in case there was something from his old jobs but there was nothing. But something in his mail intrigued him a little. It had no title and the sender id was not familiar to him at all. He opened it and noticed a video was attached to the mail. He scanned the video before playing it, just in case it is a scam to hack his phone. But no threats were found and he opened the video and pressed on the play button. As the video started, the nurse burst into his room and said, “time for your medicine.”

Taylen paused the video and put his [hone on the side table, as he grabbed a small cup from her left hand and swallowed every pill in it and grabbed another cup of water from her right hand. “Thank you, madam” thanked Taylen as the nurse nodded and smiled. The nurse grabbed the two cups and walked away. Taylen took his phone back in his hand, reopened the video and repressed the play button. And the video started to play and Taylen watched Joey was running into the forest shouting, “come here baby, let me have a taste of your sweet pie” and he ran inside the woods and was lost behind those huge trees. He could hear screaming from afar and he could recognise that scream, it was Sarah Hayden. Then the video went black for ten seconds, and the after, Taylen to his surprised watched Joey on top of Sarah, holding her two hands and fucking her. Taylen instantly switched off his phone and gasped for breath. “What the hell was that?” muttered Taylen to himself. “There is a video of Joey molesting Sarah. Who the hell filmed that?” He continued to watch the video and at the end as the phone turned, he found that it was Diego who was filming the video and he stopped as it was his turn now. Taylen could hear Sarah crying for help and he could sense the desperation in her voice.

Panick rose within Taylen with what he had just viewed. Question started to rise in his mind whether it was right to defend Diego even now he learned that he was not that innocent at all. Taylen started biting his nails and he took the electric bell next to him to call for the nurse. The nurse walked in and asked, “yes sir, how can I help you?”

“Can you ask my wife to bring my phone charger and my laptop, please? – It`s quite boring in here.”

The nurse nodded in agreement and walked away. Taylen was determined to know who was the sender of this video. Taylen thought to himself, ‘how could he not know the existence of that video, how did Joey hide such things from him? – was it related to bis death in a way?’

Questions pop up each second in his mind and to calm himself down, he needed to get to the bottom of this. Taylen was so confused and needed a lead.

Brielle in the afternoon, came to visit and alongside her, Onna and Gareta came. Brielle approached Taylen and asked, “honey, why do you need your laptop for?”

Taylen looked at Brielle and was still feeling perplexed about her since the morning. “What happened, honey? – You won`t even ask me how I am doing and you are the first thing you got to ask me is why I need my laptop. I need the laptop to watch to watch movies as holding the phone for too long, hurt my hands.”

Brielle who remained silent and broke it by saying, “I am so sorry honey. It`s just that you being gone…” Brielle did not finish her sentence, as tears filled in her eyes and she sobbed.

As he witnessed his wife crying, Taylen said, “it`s okay honey. Don`t worry, I am not mad but was just concerned whether you were alright or not. Don`t cry, you can see that I am doing absolutely fine.” Taylen looked at Onna who was holding Gareta`s hand and called, “Onna, come near daddy. Daddy needs a hug.”

Onna let go of Gareta`s hand and rushed to her father. She climbed on the bed and laid next to her father as she asked, “is it hurting, daddy?”

Taylen looked into her eyes as he responded, “no sweety, it doesn`t.”

Gareta approached Brielle as she put her hands on her shoulders and asked Taylen, “don`t worry about Brielle, I am taking care of her. And I see that you are doing just fine. Glad to see you like that and I hope that soon, you will be back on your feet.”

Brielle then asked, “honey, how is your stay here? – I know that you dread the hospital.”

Taylen hated hospitals and being in here was a completely nightmare for him. “It`s been okay. I won`t lie that I still don`t like the smell of medicine everywhere, ammonia solution used to clean the floors which is just eww” said Taylen as he made a funny face as the sound ‘eww’ came out of his mouth. Both Brielle and Gareta burst into laughter as they looked at Taylen`s face. Witnessing the girls laughing at him, Taylen covered his face in shame with his white blanket.

“Okay, we won`t laugh at your horrid situation” said Brielle, who could not stop herself laughing even after she said that. Taylen uncovered his face and the muttered, “I think I will be discharge tomorrow. I will be home soon.”

Brielle smiled and nodded as she said, “we have to go as today we are having diner and staying at Gareta`s place.”

Brielle kissed Taylen on his forehead as she said goodbye, followed by Onna and they walked away as Gareta waved.

Five minutes that they were gone, Taylen called the nurse by pressing his bell, who came quickly and asked “do you need anything sir?”

Taylen gave the nurse a sign to approach him and as he does, Taylen removed a bloat of money and offered the nurse. “Take this as there is someone who is coming to help me with something important. He will leave after visiting hours. So, you know what you got to do, thanks.” The nurse nodded as he grabbed the cash and walked away.

Taylen grabbed his phone, fully charged and dialled the number of Rajesh Uppiah, a software engineer who used to work at his previous firm and was an old friend of his.

Rajesh arrived five minutes later and closed the door behind him.

“How are you feeling, Taylen? – I was already on my way when you called” said Rajesh as he approached him. He pulled a chair next to the bed and as he settled down, Taylen replied “I am fine, now. Just bored being in here as they are nothing much to do. I am just glad that you didn`t come early as Brielle was here and she would have been suspicious that there was something going on.”

Rajesh responded, “that`s why you did not wait to be at home? – And, what kind of work is it that you are even hiding it to your own wife?”

Taylen peeked at the close door and said, “I can`t tell you either the content of the email either and I am so sorry for that. But I really need you to look to try and track the sender of that email.”

Rajesh gave an intense look at Taylen, wondering what the email could hold that he wasn`t willing to share it. But Rajesh respected his privacy and agreed to help him. “Don`t worry, I won`t ask any question either” said Rajesh as he switched on Taylen`s laptop.

As he entered the email add, copy the email address of the sender and so on, he asked, “how are you holding up since your friend, Joey, passed away. I heard what happened and I was completely shocked.” He was looking at lines of code as he listened to Taylen`s answer, “you know, I didn`t have any time to grieve his loss at all. I was off from his funeral when I got into this accident. – You know that the cause of my accident was that the car`s brakes was not working at all. I don`t know what the police said about that.”

Rajesh was concentrating in breaking the encryption data of the email hoping to find trace of the sender as he responded, “your brake was faulty? – What was wrong with it that made it stop working all of a sudden?”

Taylen who was gazing at the white sheets, looked at Rajesh as he realised something.

“Someone must have cut my brakes” said Taylen in shocked, “as in the morning, it was perfectly fine and I did a general check for the car with the mechanics a few weeks ago and he said everything was good.”

“What! – You are saying that you think that someone had cut your brakes to kill you. Well, in other words you are saying that someone is plotting against you” said Rajesh in disbelief.

“Yes, I think that`s what happening. I mean someone accused me of something that got me fired. So, there must be someone out there who is not a well-wisher” affirmed Taylen. Meanwhile, Rajesh was in inside the source file of the email, trying to locate the sender. Five minutes later, the location of the sender popped on the screen that made Rajesh jumped from where he was standing. “I have got your sender`s location” said Rajesh, “do you want it?” teasing Taylen a little. Taylen tried to sat as he said excitedly, “of course, I want to know where he or she lives. So, tell me where I can find that person.”

Rajesh replied, “that person`s location is pinned on a street named Raindrew and it`s is not that far away from here. You know what`s interesting is that there are several sources from that street that I can`t tell which house exactly is the sender.” Taylen was shocked and was lost in his own thoughts just upon hearing the name of his own street. “You know what`s more interesting is that I live on that street” said Taylen who was trying to figure out who could that sender be. “That person could be anyone living in your street,” said Rajesh. “I think I know what the sender could be, Mrs venture. She is the old lady next door who once tried to hack into our computer and yes, she is old” said Taylen who still didn`t believe that it was she behind all of it as Rajesh confirmed it by saying, “let`s say she was the one behind the mail, but do you thing that she was behind cutting your brakes.”

“No, I don`t think that she was involved with my accident, as if she had cut my brake, she must have attended the funeral but she was not there as she neither knew about Joey`s death,” said Taylen.

Rajesh took some breath before replying as he said, “what if she had someone helped her and that too must be someone who is close to you and have a strong motive against you. So, think hard who could that be?”

“Yeah, you must be right. There must be someone who is helping her because how come an old woman have so much knowledge on today`s computer. Meaning, there must be someone helping her in all these,” argued Taylen. A huge smiled came across Rajesh`s face as an idea pop in his mind. “You know what we can do, reply to that email and let her know that we know who she is and ask why is she doing that? – Like what`s her motive and all.”

Taylen agreed with Rajesh`s idea and click on the reply button and started writing;

Dear unknown sender,

You must be thinking that I am shaking right now with that video, but know that I am not. I don`t get intimidated that easily, because I know for sure that you must be hiding something as if you have such evidence to prove Diego and Joey culprits makes me ask then why you didn`t send it to the police. So, I concluded that something must be fishy. Now as I think about it, it must have been you who were texting me, breaking into my home and got me fired from my job, AM I RIGHT, MRS VENTURE? Oh SHOCKED, that I know who you are. Huh a dementia patient, my foot that you are one. Just tell me what do you want from me? Why are you doing all this? You want money, just tell me how much so that you can leave me alone and go as far as possible. And I know that you must have someone helping you and in no time, I can find out who that person is. So, if you don`t stop, oh oldie, I will take good care of you.

Your Sincerely,

Taylen Hills

Taylen hit the button send and the email was sent. But as Taylen was about to put his laptop on the side table, the laptop made ding sound that alerts him that he received a mail. Taylen was surprised, as he didn`t expect that they would have respond that quick and he opened the mail and read;

Dear Taylen,

I am dying with laughter here when I read your mail, Mrs Venture. I can`t believe that you are that stupid and I wondered now how did you graduate law school. Oh my god, I can`t stop. Well let me tell you something, Mrs Venture is not behind it as she doesn`t even remembered who the hell you are, I am the one who is against you, and believe me my motive is very big and full of hate towards you, and by now I know that you haven`t yet figure out my identity. The video that I shared with you, know that it`s just edited and I do have the full version. So, I know what happened everything that happened. And I know that you know what I am talking about. I am not done with you yet, that`s why I am keeping it for me. Once I am feeling that I am done, then I will share it. You must be feeling powerless in that hospital bed right now, having no control over the video and all. Well know that, I have bigger plans coming for you and that accident was just the begging of your fall down. So be prepared for what`s coming. Before ending that mail, let me just say that you are the most absolute disgusting man that I have ever seen in my entire life and you must be ashamed for that. So, goodbye for now and don`t send me anymore mails, else…

Your Sincerely,

Unknown Sender

Taylen`s face went pale and gasped as he went through the mail. “What did she reply, Taylen?” asked Rajesh, as she saw the look on Taylen`s face. “NO, DON`T READ THAT” shouted Taylen as he shut the laptop. Rajesh was now more worried upon witnessing Taylen`s reaction.

“What`s going on, Taylen? – Tell me, if I can help you, I will do my best for you. But I need to know what is going on” expressed Rajesh in a shaky voice.

But Taylen looked away from Rajesh direction and gently asked him to leave as the nurse would be here soon and the visiting hours were already over one hour ago. Rajesh got on his feet and walked towards the door and Taylen said, “thank you for your help, I appreciate it and I am sorry that I shouted at you. But I need to continue this alone as it`s my issue and I have to solve it as a man.”

Rajesh gazed at Taylen and responded, “well, you should be careful as how you reacted does not seems like it`s something safe. As someone is playing with you. But you know where you can find me whenever you need my help. And if you are lying in a hospital bed, know that they are ten steps ahead of you and now, you need to get twenty feet ahead of them. And I know that you will,” he opened the door and walked away. As Taylen was all alone in the room, he started thinking on how to beat that mastermind behind, what he or she is planning and when is he or she going to strike again. As he decided to go to sleep on those thought, he was thankful that at least he knew that both Brielle and Onna were safe at Gareta`s place.

The following morning, Taylen was discharged after the doctor had approved and confirmed that he was doing much better now. “You were lucky that you were not injured that badly because if you did, you may have the risk of being paralysed for the rest of your life” the doctor confessed to Taylen, as he signed his papers of discharge.

“Yeah, I agree that I was lucky. God only knows what would happen if I was not” responded Taylen, facing down at the white sheets on the bed.

“Who`s coming to pick you up” asked the doctor and handed him the papers.

“I called my wife several times, but she didn`t pick up. So, I am going home by a taxi and surprise her” declared Taylen, grabbed his bags and walked away. “I think that I am going to need help to carry my bags till the car. It`s quite heavy and I am still fragile over my shoulders” said Taylen as he dropped the bags on the floor. The doctor with a pleasant smile on his face, agreed to help him. The doctor walked next to him, grabbed his bad and followed Taylen till his car. The doctor had to reduce his pace as Taylen was walking slowly as a precaution. But the doctor was patient and waited for him several times. As they reached the car, the doctor deposited the bags in the backseat and helped Taylen to settle in his seat as he was still suffering from knee pain. He thanked the doctor for helping him and the closed the car door. Taylen looked at the driver and said, “Raindrew street, please.” The driver nodded and drove away. After forty minutes, Taylen was finally home. With the driver`s help, Taylen walked out of the car and took his bags till the main entrance door. To thank the driver, Taylen gave him a generous tip which he accepted with a big smile on his face. Taylen knocked on the door and Brielle opened the door, “oh my god, you are already back from the hospital. Why didn`t you call? – I would have come and fetch you.”

Her jaws were on the floor as she witnessed Taylen were standing in front of her.

“Well, I did call but you were not picking up your cell, so I took a cab and get the hell out of there” replied Taylen as he stepped inside.

The sweet aroma of the well-polished floor made him feel great to be back home. Brielle grabbed his bags and took them upstairs. Later, she would wash all the clothes even the clean one. She came downstairs, marched towards the living room and sat next to Taylen.

“So, how are you feeling and I can see that you are walking quite alright” said Brielle to Taylen who was reading his novel which he had left hanging on a plot twist.

“Actually, am feeling great and the doctor confirmed that. And he also said that I was extremely lucky that I got out of this accident without any serious injuries except from the fact that I was unconscious for three days straight” replied Taylen, still immersed in his book.

“I am so sorry, Taylen. If I saw your call, I would have come to pick you up and I was bringing your favourite food, sushi” said Brielle with a shaky voice.

Taylen put his book down as he looked at Brielle and gave her a hug, whispered in his ears “where are those sushi’s?”

Brielle smiled as she gazed at him, “they are in the kitchen. Rose brought them for you as she could not come to visit you in the hospital. She is still trying to move on from Joey`s death.”

Taylen responded, “then I need to thank her for bringing my favourite food as you still hate that and would prepare that for me.”

Brielle smiled and replied, “Yeah, that`s a fact. I don`t like it at all. But you should know I don`t prepare it for you, not because I don`t like it, it`s just that I don`t know to make it.”

Onna who did not know that her father was already back, came downstairs after a long nap and witnessed her father in the living room made her jump with excitement as she rushed to hugged him.

“Yes sweety, daddy`s home and don`t worry because I am not going anywhere” said Taylen to Onna as he slowly let go of her.

“Daddy`s hungry now, you want to have lunch with me” said Taylen to Onna, which she accepted by nodding. Both of them headed to the dining table. As both of them were settled, Brielle placed their plate in front of them, one which contained the sushi`s and the other one had a chicken-breast burger with French fries. Onna too was not a big fan of sushi`s either. Brielle had the same thing as Onna and they sat down eating a meal together after a long time. Everyone ate their lunch as Taylen talked about the hospital where everyone ended up laughing hard. He described how the hospital is the busiest at night for the nurse and cleaners, how patients passed away, their families came quickly upon hearing such news and how bad the food was. Taylen ate his food and once finished, he went back to the living room to continue reading his book. Brielle took his and her plate back to the kitchen and later Onna brought hers. She grabbed the sponge and pressed some soap on it and started to scrub the plates till they shine like they were new again. But some shriek sound coming from the living room which made her jump from where she was standing. She rushed as quick as she could and her jaws dropped upon seeing Taylen on the floor and having an attack. “Taylen” shouted Brielle and ran towards him, grabbed the phone and dialled help. Taylen who peered at Brielle while she was in total panic, slowly closed his eyes as he fell unconscious.

Chapter 9

Brielle sobbing in the ambulance, next to Taylen who was still unconscious, had left Onna at Alex`s place as they are headed back to the hospital. Brielle was scared on witnessing Taylen struggling to breath, the nurse injected some yellow liquid through his vein, the beeping of the heart monitor, the ambulance`s driver racing while the other cars on the road are parking on the side of the road, making way for the ambulance. Within ten minutes, they arrived at the hospital and Taylen was brought to the emergency ward. As soon as he was rolled in the ward, two nurses and one doctor rushed towards his bed and said, “what do we got.”

The ambulance`s nurse read a list of symptoms that she noticed during the ride to the doctor and rolled him to the operation room and as they were inside, they closed the door, leaving Brielle alone in the cold, white and deserted corridor. Brielle walked in circles, biting her nails, looking at the door each second as she completed one whole round and asked about Taylen`s condition each time a nurse came out of the operation room, and their only response was “we don`t know yet. You will have to wait for the doctor.” Brielle felt like it was taking an eternity and it was not going to end at all.

But after two hours of waiting and walking around, the doctor who was wearing a green suit, gloves and a blue face mask came out of the operation room and called, “Mrs Hills.”

Brielle who was sitting on a bench, tired after walking a lot in circles, turned around to see the doctor and stood up as she approached him.

“Yes, I am Mrs hills. How`s my husband doing? How did it go inside? Is everything alright?” said Brielle, whose eyes were red as she held on her tears.

“Your husband is fine, now. He is out of danger. He was victim of poisoning. We had removed all sign of poison from his body and due to the poison effect, we feared that he may suffer another attack and if could have been the heart, so better to be prepared we did the extraction in the operation room” explained the doctor.

Brielle sat down on the bench and looked at the doctor, “food poisoning! – how come?” said Brielle in disbelief. “So, how is he now?”

The doctor with a smile on his face responded, “he`s stable now. But he will need rest and will be conscious tomorrow.” But the doctor expression change when he added, “we had informed the police about the situation due to protocol. As it could have been an attempt to murder. I am sorry, madam. It`s just protocol.”

Brielle was shocked as said in sad tone, “attempt for murder. What do you mean?”

“Well, the poison we found was something that was added to his food. It was not from the food. And the food we collected in his stomach was neither rotten. The poison was spreading all around his body as it was getting all around his system. He as lucky that you brought him in time and in the ambulance, they gave him something that had block the spreading,” said the doctor. “Do you remember anything about this?” asked the doctor. Brielle stared at the doctor for one minute and lied, “no, I don`t know where it came from. People kept sending me food since Taylen was in the hospital. But we ate the same thing that I bought We drank water only.”

Brielle continued, “we ate the same thing. Maybe you could test the food to verify.”

The doctor responded, “the police will go to your place and collect the food. They will run the in the laboratory and will let you know what they have found.”

Brielle nodded in agreement as the doctor walked away. Brielle sat down and within minutes, an inspector wearing black sunglasses, his police badge leaming in his shirt, brown beard, and fair skin, approached her. “Are you Mrs Hills?” asked the inspector.

Brielle looked at the inspector and responded “yes.”

The inspector sat down next to her and said, “I am Inspector Collins Grey. I am going to work on your husband case. He is a very good friend of mine. So, tell me everything that you know. Like, who would try to poison your husband? Or, does he have enemies and all?”

Brielle started to narrate from how Taylen returned home from the hospital, they had lunch together and had the same thing. “We had chicken-breast burger with French fries” lied Brielle. Brielle lied about Taylen having sushi. Brielle knew that it was Rose who had brought that sushi but Brielle wanted to know the answers first before jumping into any conclusions. She wanted to know the reason why she is doing all that. Brielle added, “there are leftovers of Taylen`s food at home. You can test those and learn what kind of food poison he may have been victim of.” The inspector looked at Brielle suspiciously and responded, “we will and the police is already at your house trying to figure out the truth. Your neighbour Alex, let them in. You know Taylen`s a friend of him and I will do everything in my power for him. So, don`t worry, Mrs Hills.”

Brielle hugged the inspector and thanked him for his help. Brielle got on her feet and walked towards the head nurse in the reception and asked if she could see Taylen inside.

“No madam, you won`t be able to see him yet as they haven`t moved him from the operation room. Maybe in the evening when he will be assigned a room, you will be able to see him” said the nurse and walked away to answer the telephone behind her. Brielle decided to return home and to come back later.

As Brielle drove home, all she could think about was to confront Rose. But she chose not and continued her way home. As she parked the car in the driveway, Alex rushed from her house and called, “Brielle”, waving her hands trying to catch Brielle`s attention. Brielle noticed her running across the street and waited for her. Alex as she stopped in front of Brielle, gasping for air, and she stood straight correcting her posture and asked, “so, how`s Taylen holding up? – And, what happened to him?”

Brielle hanging head low answered, “not well, the doctor said that he had food poisoning.” Brielle sobbed and hugged Alex tightly and she hugged her back. “It`s okay, dear. Everything will be alright soon” said Alex to comfort Brielle. “That`s explain why the police were here earlier and I think that they are still here as their car is still here” added Alex as she let go of Brielle. Brielle replied, “yes, the inspector told me that they were working on it to know whether it is an attempt murder or not.”

Alex whose mouth was wide open, muttered “what!”

Brielle with a shaky voice responded, “yes, it`s being considered as an attempt to murder and I am one of the main suspects.”

Brielle started sobbing again upon saying that she was a main suspect. Alex expressed in a sad and worried tone, “oh dear, I can`t imagine what you must be going through. But don`t worry, everything will be alright. – the truth always prevails.”

At the same instance, five police officer in their usual black uniform and their gold plate badge gleaming through the sunlight, walked towards Brielle.

“Hello madam, are you Mrs Hills?” asked one of the police officers, while the remaining four stood behind. Brielle nodded.

“We have tested the remained of the burger and there was no trace of any kind of poison in it. But we noticed there was a bottle of water with Saint George`s hospital logo on it and it was the water that was contaminated with poison. We concluded the water bottle was already contaminated with the poison before he reached home and the doctor just confirmed with me that the poison started its effect since yesterday but needed to drink the whole bottle to suffer the whole reaction of the poison” explained the police officer, while he took out the bottle of water out of a black suitcase. Upon seeing the bottle, Brielle was extremely confused as she did not remember seeing Taylen with that kind of bottle of water. That didn`t make sense as she was one hundred percent sure that it was the sushi that was poisoned. And there was no such bottle when she left home. “Well, they are well planned” thought Brielle. But she remained silent for some minutes, thinking what to say and finally answered to the officer, “thank you for helping my husband and I hope that you will find the person who gave that bottle to my husband.”

The police officers walked away and Brielle turned back to Alex, asked “can you keep Onna for the evening too, I will go and see Taylen at the hospital and I will pick her up later.” Alex who was still hazy upon listening to the words that the police officer just said, looked at Brielle and muttered “of course, of course, I will watch over her.” Alex turned away and marched towards her house and Brielle towards hers. As she entered, she felt uncanny like something was going to happen. But she walked to her room and ran the water in her bathtub which five minutes later she got into. She felt more relax and grab her mobile phone, dialled Gareta`s number. “Hello Sista, how are you doing?” asked Gareta who was on speaker and her voice was echoed in the next two rooms. “I am okay” said Brielle, but cracked as she started sobbing. “What`s going on? – Why are you crying?” asked Gareta whose voice got tense upon hearing Brielle crying. “Taylen is in the hospital again” said Brielle as tears rolled down her cheeks. “What do you mean by again? – wasn`t he in the hospital?” replied Gareta who was unclear of what was going on. Brielle narrated about how Taylen got home from the hospital, she served food, how she found him on the floor what the doctor said and what the police officer discovered, and burst into tears as she said, “it`s all my fault.” Brielle pulled her legs towards her chest and hold them tight as she rested her head on her knees. Brielle continued sobbing. Gareta responded with a shaky voice, “don`t say that it`s all your fault. I mean there must be someone who gave the bottle to him.” Brielle remained silent upon listening to Gareta. “But why are you silent?” said Gareta. “Brielle tell me, who is behind all this? – Your silence tells me that you know the know responsible behind all this. – Tell, dam it” yelled Gareta, and her voice echoed in the whole house. Brielle stared at the call and disconnected the call. But Gareta didn`t appreciate being cut dry like that and she called again. Brielle declined the call. She called a third time and got declined again. She called a fourth time and got declined again. On the seventh call, Brielle answered and yelled on the phone, “because I found something that has been eating me since I found out but I need to be one hundred percent sure that it is true. I need to see where someone fits in all that. Why she doing all that.”

Gareta was completely silent and broke it by saying, “what did you discover, Brielle?”

Brielle answered, “All I can tell is that it involves a girl named Sarah Hayden, the girl that was found dead in the forest on your wedding day. I will explain everything to you but not on the phone. And I have to go and see Taylen at the hospital.” Gareta instantly replied, “okay, you will tell me everything that you have discovered as soon as you can. I will come over to see you soon.” Brielle replied with a simple, “okay sure, bye”, and disconnected the call. Brielle got out of her bathtub, dried herself and walked towards her wardrobe. As soon as she was ready, she walked to her car and drove to the hospital.

As Brielle entered the room 5B, she found Taylen awoke and she slowly walked towards him. She grabbed his hand and said, “oh Taylen, I am so sorry.” Brielle was in tears. Taylen caressed her cheeks with his right hand and muttered, “it`s not your fault, honey. So, don`t apologise.”

Taylen tried to sit as he fixed his posture, but found it difficult to move. But Brielle grabbed his shoulder and gave him a hand to adjust himself more comfortably to sit.

“I am back here, once again. I think that I am never going to leave this place” joked Taylen, as he looked around the room. Brielle sat down next to him on the bed, but she said nothing.

After five minutes, Brielle broke her silence by narrating to him about the investigation about him being poisoned, how inspector Colins is working on the case. “Yeah, I know Colins. And yes, he did pay me a visit earlier and he said that he will be back in the evening if he found new leads,” said Taylen. “Oh okay. Did you eat something because the doctor had extracted everything from your stomach” said Brielle, got on her feet, “I am going home now. Onna is at the Kamps since noon. She must be tired and scared.”

Brielle left the room, Taylen didn`t get to respond and kiss her goodbye. Taylen thought that she must be going through something as he has been hospitalised once more. And as far as he knew Brielle, when it comes to her emotion, she won`t talk about it until she feels ready.

Someone knocked on the door, driving Taylen`s attention to the entrance and found Inspector Colins standing at the entrance. “Oh, I thought that it was my wife” said Taylen, disappointed. “No, unfortunately am not” said Colins jokingly, as he walked inside the room. “So, you told me that if some new leads come up, you will let me know, so anything new?” said Taylen, pointing his hand towards the chair behind him. Grey pulled the chairs towards him and sat down while he crossed his legs. “Yeah, I do have something to tell you. That`s why I am here but let me close the door” said Colins.

He got up and closed the door before resuming his seat. “You remember when you told me that Joey`s death was covered-up murder” said Colins, with a serious look on his face. “Yes, I do. - Why?” replied Taylen, whose expression was now serious.

“Well, you were right because there was sign of struggle and aggression in the autopsy`s report. But the pathologist said that it was due to the severe injured that he had from the fall. But I don`t believe that. They were scratches on his neck. Nail scratches. It must have been a woman who keeps her nail long, Rose. But the camera of their home showed that she was indeed in the kitchen the whole time. Then I kept on watching that camera tape for several minutes and I noticed that she kept on cutting the same potato for one hour full. Each time it`s the same potato from the backet. It means the video tape was edited in a loop. But I lost the video tape that night and I was hundred percent sure I had kept well hidden in my desk drawer” explained Colins. “Humm, it`s quite complicated to prove that without the tape. So, there must be evidence that she must have left out. Keep digging and found out more. – But I know Rose, she is not that intelligent enough to come up with a cover up plan, edit video camera and so on. She is just not capable of all that. She must be having an extra help. But who?” said Taylen. Colins was shocked upon hearing the word help as he continued, “That`s why you are the best lawyer. I concluded that too.”

“But how are you sure that she must be having help. I know Rose personally but you don`t. so, how come?”

Grey leaned forward to reply, “because it was made up like a suicide. Only a person who high knowledge on the human body and highly intelligent could have come up with such a masterpiece. You the angle that Joey`s was found had cover up every scratch that was on his body. So, if he was hit on the head, the pathologist concluded while he fell, he must have hit his head first. You getting the idea what I am trying to say?”

“But how can you be so sure?” asked Taylen because in a weird way, it made sense.

“The loop of videos proves my theory, she had enough time to cover the murder, edit the video and act like she just heard a loud bang outside and rushed outside. It was well planned but let some details out. But for one hour, doing all that alone is just impossible” explain Colins as he leaned back as he started feeling pain in his shoulders. “But something does not add up. Why would Rose want Joey dead? – There must be something deep that made her do that. Because she was madly in love with Joey.”

Colins remained silent for some minutes, put his hand in his left pocket and removed a photo and said, “I think it is connected with this woman.”

Taylen was confused on whom was he talking about and muttered, “what woman? – what woman are you talking about?”

Colins passed the photo to him and as he glanced at the picture, his jaw dropped.

“That`s impossible, she is dead” whispered Taylen under his breath.

Colins asked, “do you know the woman on that picture?” Taylen kept on staring at the picture, lied “No, I don`t know that woman. Who is she?”

Colins replied, “they were seen together the day that Joey died by a security camera in a bakery shop and her car was spotted near Rose`s house the night that Joey died.”

Taylen still could not believe her eyes. “That`s mean that she is still alive” whispered Taylen in horror. Everything in Taylen`s mind started to realise that everything that had happened till now was due to her. It was her from the beginning. “But how can you be so sure that she is connected to everything and why would she help Rose in that sort?” asked Taylen hoping to find the answer that he was looking for. “It`s just a theory but I am hundred percent sure that what happened. I just can`t prove it as there is lack of evidence. Just by the look of her, I can tell that she is capable of everything” replied Colins.

Colins continued, “But the reason why exactly she helped Rose, I still can`t figure out. There are some theories that I tried, such as maybe they were lesbian lovers and need the husband out of the picture for example.” Taylen did not get the answer he was expecting. He gave him the picture back. “Then you need to find evidence so that we can put those criminals behind bars. And please can you give me the address of that woman please? – I want to do some background search on her,” said Taylen, “and thanks a lot as it must be a lot of work to come up with all these theories.” Colins nodded and walked away as the nurse opened the door with tray of food. Then Taylen realised that he had sushi for lunch and it was Rose who had brought that for him as she knew that both Onna and Brielle hated Sushi. Taylen then concluded that Rose wanted him out of the picture too.

“That makes so much sense and they must be behind all my misadventure that I had till now since we moved here” mumbled Taylen as he took his plate of white rice, boiled broccoli and roast breast-chicken. The nurse gave him a look and asked “excuse me, do you need anything else? – I couldn`t understand anything you said.”

Taylen looked at the nurse and replied, “no, I am good. Thank you.”

The nurse nodded and walked away. Taylen`s mind continued on thinking about everything that had happened since they moved in. But something that he couldn`t figure out was; ‘how Rose knew that woman, how were they related? And how did they become close with each other?’

Taylen wanted his answers as he ate his rice. After one hour, Colins was back but the nurses wouldn`t let him in as the visiting hours were over. But after arguing for five minutes straight and showed them his police badge, they gave him permission for only five minutes.

“Taylen, I don`t have much time but here`s the address of the woman on the picture. I didn`t had a look at it but I hope it`s not that far” said Colins while handing him a piece of paper folded into two. “Okay thanks. I will check it later as I am going for some test” replied Taylen. The nurse came inside, gave Colins an intense look and said, “it`s time for your test, sir.”

Taylen nodded and Colins walked away. The nurse helped Taylen to get on his wheelchair and rolled him to the room on the fifth floor. After the test Taylen was extremely tired and went to sleep instantly when he got back into his room.

As Taylen woke her up at six o`clock and found Brielle sitting next to him. “Honey, what are you doing here early in the morning” he said as he looked at Brielle. Brielle who was well dressed, responded “I have to go to work. I can`t take a leave today as my students needs me for some revision for their exams. And I won`t be able to come and visit you in the afternoon either.”

Taylen was quite disappointed upon hearing that Brielle won`t come. Taylen responded with a fury tone, “Why? What do you have so important that you can`t come and see me.”

Brielle looked at the monitor and with a shaky voice, she replied “I have to take Onna for her cold-injection and it`s scheduled today`s evening”

Brielle was not content at the way that Taylen had responded to her, stormed out of the room and slammed the door behind her. Taylen remailed silent till the nurse opened the door and brought his breakfast along with his morning medicine. She handed him the medication to take before eating and Taylen thanked her. Taylen watched her walked away and ate his French toast. He switched on the television and watched the news and the reporter muttered the word address. He realised that he had completely forgotten about that. He started to look around and he could not find the piece of paper anywhere. He opened the left-side nightstand drawer and it was there. He unfolded it and his right hand over his mouth as he could believe on what he has just read. Taylen put his toast back on his plate. Taylen was incredulous. But something else distracted his attention when his phone started vibrating as he had received a text;

Unknown number

* How`s the hospital bed been treating you?

08:17am

Taylen

* Nice. Thank you for putting me there twice. 08:18am

Unknown number

* Well, you`re welcome. But how

Come you are polite to me today?

No threats message. 08:19am

Taylen

* Because, I know who you are

Darling. 08:19am

Unknown number

* Then, why don`t you come and

See me darling. I am waiting

For you. 08:19am

Taylen

* Ok, I will. I will make you pay

For all my suffering you made me

And my family go through. 08:19am

Unknown number

* Can`t wait to see you then. 08:20am

As the unknown number was the one who send the last text, Taylen got up from the bed, pulled out his regular clothes out of a bag that was kept in the corner of the room. As soon as he was completely dressed, crawled out of the room, looking in every direction in case a nurse came in. But the perimeter was clear. As he covered his face with a brown hat, he walked as fast as he could in the corridor and ran as soon as he found the taxi stand. He got into a taxi and said “take me to Raindrew street.” And they drove away.