



ONE

“I told you this wouldn’t take long.”

Angela sat in her attorney’s office and signed the documents. Damn her ex for making her fly all the way back to Santa Barbara to finalize the divorce. Why did it have to be now? She didn’t need a signature to know that the marriage was finished. Angela knew it was over long before she packed her bags, crated her dogs and flew back to London. She tried to delay making this trip until after Clementine’s delivery, but her lawyer convinced her that the sooner she signed the decree, the sooner she could truly move on with her life. Her ex apparently had. He was to remarry within the next couple of weeks.

Angela pored over each document before she signed her name. One quick courtship and one courthouse marriage to an American plastic surgeon equaled one long divorce. When finished, she smiled.

“Okay, Jack, do you want me to say, ‘thank you’ for dragging me back here?”

“I would never beg for a compliment, Angela, but...”

In another life, she would have been more flirtatious. Jack was a 40-something attorney with skin the colour of a Hershey bar, a swimmer’s body, patent leather-smooth bald head, perfectly

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veneered teeth and as smart as he was handsome. He would have been a perfect advertisement for her ex's cosmetic surgery practice or nominee for the Nobel Peace Prize. Thank God he was on her side. She felt the tension in her lower back ease.

“Thank you for handling all of these details. I just don't know what I would have done without you.”

“You're welcome, Angela,” Jack leaned back in his chair and flashed a 10,000-watt smile. “Now that that's over, would you like to join me for a celebratory drink?”

Angela glanced at her watch. She had a little time, but why wait? More importantly, why bother? California and everyone in it were over for her. “I'm so sorry, my plane back home leaves from LAX in a few hours. I really have to be going. Thanks again.”

Angela left the office and wheeled her suitcase next door to the Santa Barbara courthouse grounds. It had only been four years since she got married at this very spot. And now that life was over. She found a bench shaded by a palm tree and sat.

The late afternoon breeze came off the Pacific Ocean, spreading the calming scent of lavender and honeysuckle that flourished in the meticulously-manicured grounds of the Spanish-Moorish building. Angela took her curly hair out of its ponytail and shook it back into a more relaxed state. Her tan safari jacket, black stretch pants, white pashmina scarf and T-shirt flattered her curves, caramel-colored skin and hazel eyes. Her African father and Scottish-American mum raised her to feel like she belonged in any community, but she definitely didn't belong in this otherworldly, beautiful place. She filled her lungs with the aroma, allowing several minutes for it to calm her. She rubbed her hands together to warm them and paused. The diamond-encrusted, platinum wedding band that she removed over a year ago had left an impression

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on her left ring finger. She didn't know whether to cry or celebrate, but what she did know was that she would never return.

Angela fished her phone from her purse to check her calls. She saw the familiar number from Clementine and mustered a wan smile. *She must've called to wish me luck.*

“Angela, I'm so sorry to bother you, but it seems that the babies can't wait for your return. My water, apparently, has broken. We've spoken to Dr. Godwin who is meeting us at hospital. Call me as soon as you get this message. I hope everything went well for you today.”

An unseasonably frigid gust of wind whipped around her, slapping her hard on the face.

“What the fuck! Is this some kind of sick joke?” Her hand trembled as she tapped her phone to replay the message.

No, No, No, NO, NO! This can't be happening! Clementine cannot be in labour! Angela hit redial to return Clementine's call. *Pick up, pick up, pick up, pick up!*

“I'm sorry that I can't accept your call at this time...”

Damnit! “Clems, it's me. I just got your message. Please call me back the second you get this.”

Angela listened to the next message.

“Dr. Francis, this is Nurse Hattie from Labour and Delivery. Our patient is headed to hospital. Her water has broken. Dr. Godwin is on his way and we're busy preparing the Operating Suite for the delivery.”

That message was left an hour ago. Angela dialed the number to Labour and Delivery, and took a deep breath when the nurse answered.

“The Birth Center; this is Evelyn. May I help you?”

“Evelyn, this is Dr. Francis. I understand the Prince and Princess are on their way there. Have they arrived yet?”

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“Yes, doctor. They arrived here some time ago and are already in the Operating Suite.”

“What about Hattie? I must speak to her immediately!”

“I’m so sorry, doctor. They’re all in the back. The delivery is taking place right now. Would you like for me to pass along a message to them?”

“No; please ask either Hattie or Dr. Godwin to call me just as soon as they’re able.”

Angela’s heart sank. *All the planning, all the visits, the promises I made to her... that I’d be there for her. That I would protect her. How could I have let her down? Just like Sassy. I knew I shouldn’t have made this stupid trip! Fuck! Fuck! Fuuuuuck!*

It’s over.

Two painfully silent hours later, Angela finally arrived at LAX. No one returned her desperate calls. *Are they not calling me back on purpose?* She trudged through security and slumped in the departure lounge chair, all the while trying to disarm the time bomb that was ticking inside of her. There was nothing to do but wait. No other flights were going to get her back to Heathrow sooner than her British Airways non-stop. No one was answering their phone. She felt as if she were going to vomit. Finally, she boarded the plane, took her window seat and waved off the flight attendant who asked her for her drink order.

Hakuna matata, hakuna matata, hakuna matata, hakuna matata... Could repeating this mantra steady her this time, as it had done on so many other stressful occasions? She thought of the pregnancy. Thirty-five weeks was a very respectable gestational age for delivery. The growth was appropriate and the extensive monitoring was always reassuring. Clementine was an excellent patient, doing everything in her power to assure the health of her pregnancy. It was a shame — all the vile things the press said about her,

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invading her privacy and forcing her into months of confinement. Life as a royal wasn't at all what she had hoped but Clementine knew that joining "The Corporation" would have its challenges. She was determined to make the best of the situation and Angela admired her for it.

I wonder if she ever opened the envelope? She must know by now that her daughter will be the future Queen of England. The Succession to the Crown Act of 2013 ended the system favoring the firstborn male to inherit the throne. She'll be so thrilled... and so will the rest of the world. Delivering a baby girl who is born to lead the monarchy has never happened before. Ever. Nigel will take care of her, but after everything we've been through, I could cry that I'm not there for her.

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. The control tower has delayed our take-off due to bad weather over the Rockies." A collective groan spread through the entire plane. It was going to be a very long night.

As the aircraft finally taxied to the runway, Angela placed her right thumb over her nostril and inhaled deeply. She pumped her abdomen 16 times, covered her left nostril with her pinky finger and exhaled as her yoga instructor taught her. She ignored the stares she got from her seatmate and continued her pranayama breathing as the plane ascended into the twilight.



TWO

2:59 a.m.

May 15, 2013

Stork Wing, King's Hospital, London

Nigel stood poised after he was gowned and gloved by the surgical nurse.

“This is Lucille Jones. She is here for a primary caesarean section for ruptured membranes and placenta previa. Is everyone ready?”

“She has no allergies, her spinal anesthetic is active and the antibiotics are running,” replied the anaesthetist while he meticulously arranged syringes on his table.

“The warmers are ready and we are prepared,” chimed in the neonatologist, standing with a baby blanket draped over his outstretched arms, while his team of nurses checked the resuscitation equipment for the third time.

“Let’s begin. Clamp.” Nigel stretched his hand out for the instrument.

No one moved.

“Dr. Godwin,” whispered Hattie. “You have forgotten one very important item.”

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Nigel searched Hattie's prompting eyes and, for an instant, wondered what he had forgotten to say. If anyone knew what he was forgetting, it was her. He knew that he had Clementine's alias correct. Then it came to him; the most important detail.

"We are delivering twins this morning. Yes, twins everyone."

The operating room staff all smiled behind their surgical masks, not wanting to disturb Clementine, who was lying, face-up, on the operating room table. The arctic blue drapes covered everything except her smooth, gently freckled, exceptionally gravid abdomen.

"Please, ma'am, be so kind as to let me know if you feel anything sharp," said Nigel as he pinched Clementine's abdomen with the clamp, testing the spinal anaesthetic.

"I feel some pressure maybe, but it isn't sharp. I'm not sure exactly..." She looked into August's eyes. A tear inched down her face and was absorbed into the Egyptian cotton pillowcase. August wished he had a kerchief to wipe it away for her. He mustered a reassuring smile and hoped that he could provide some comfort for a moment that neither of them could have ever completely anticipated.

Clementine tried in vain to relax. She couldn't remember when she last felt the babies move. She cleared her throat and tried to swallow away the dryness. Her voice was too shaky to hum to Chopin, whose *Nocturne* was playing softly through the operating room speakers. August grabbed her sweaty palm and she held on tightly. They stared at each other, knowing they were about to be catapulted into their new lives.

"Scalpel."

No one moved. No one spoke. No one breathed.

In his 30 years practicing obstetrics and gynaecology, Nigel Godwin had innumerable stories to tell of the services he ren-

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dered to the entitled classes, only he would never break his code of silence. No starlet in his care had ever found news of her pregnancy leaked to the tabloids. No aging royal had to force a brave smile while the world gossiped about the six in-vitro treatments it had taken for her to conceive. Nigel delivered thousands of babies and had forgotten far more deliveries than he would ever remember. But today, this delivery, an opportunity that he thought he'd never have, trumped all the others. Combined.

“Scalpel.”

Nigel made a vertical incision as high up on Clementine's uterus as he could see. There was a rush of amniotic fluid and the soft pungent scent of birth filled the air of the Operating Suite. After months of preparation and secrecy, the moment of delivery was finally upon them.

This is for you, Tilly.

Hattie's eyes grew wide; she stifled a gasp as she watched Nigel's arm disappear into Clementine's uterus.



THREE

Clementine felt dizzy. *What is all this pressure, pulling and tugging that I am feeling in my stomach? Is that spinal working? I was told that I wouldn't feel anything and I feel as if my insides are being ripped out. And why are they calling me Lucille? That's not my name. That's not my name at all. My name is Clementine. Clementine Sloane. And here is my husband. His name is August. He is the Prince of Wales. We're having twins today. A boy and a girl, and do you want to know which baby is first? I'm getting too dizzy to remember. I feel really hot. I'm sweating. I don't think I can breathe. I don't know if I can do this. Where is Angela? Is she back yet?*

"It's a boy."

"A boy; darling, we have a boy," August's voice echoed off the walls, as if he were in a tunnel. "Boy... Boy... Boy... Boy." Clementine could no longer respond. She tried to force her eyes open, but she could only see the blue drape that hung over her like laundry on a clothesline. *Something was wrong. Something was...*

"It's a girl... Girl... Girl... Girl."

Clementine thought that someone had placed an exploding pomegranate in her abdomen and the seeds were spreading like shrapnel throughout her body. She thought she heard some sort of commotion. People she didn't recognize surrounded her. She

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couldn't breathe. She reached for August to ground her, to keep her from panicking, to bring her back. *Where was he?*

“Your Highness, we have encountered some bleeding and we must put you to sleep... sleep... sleep... sleep... sleep... sleep.”

She felt herself being thrust backward. Her grip on August slipped and she floated, untethered, into space before her blurred vision went black.