



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

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

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?"

"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,

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.