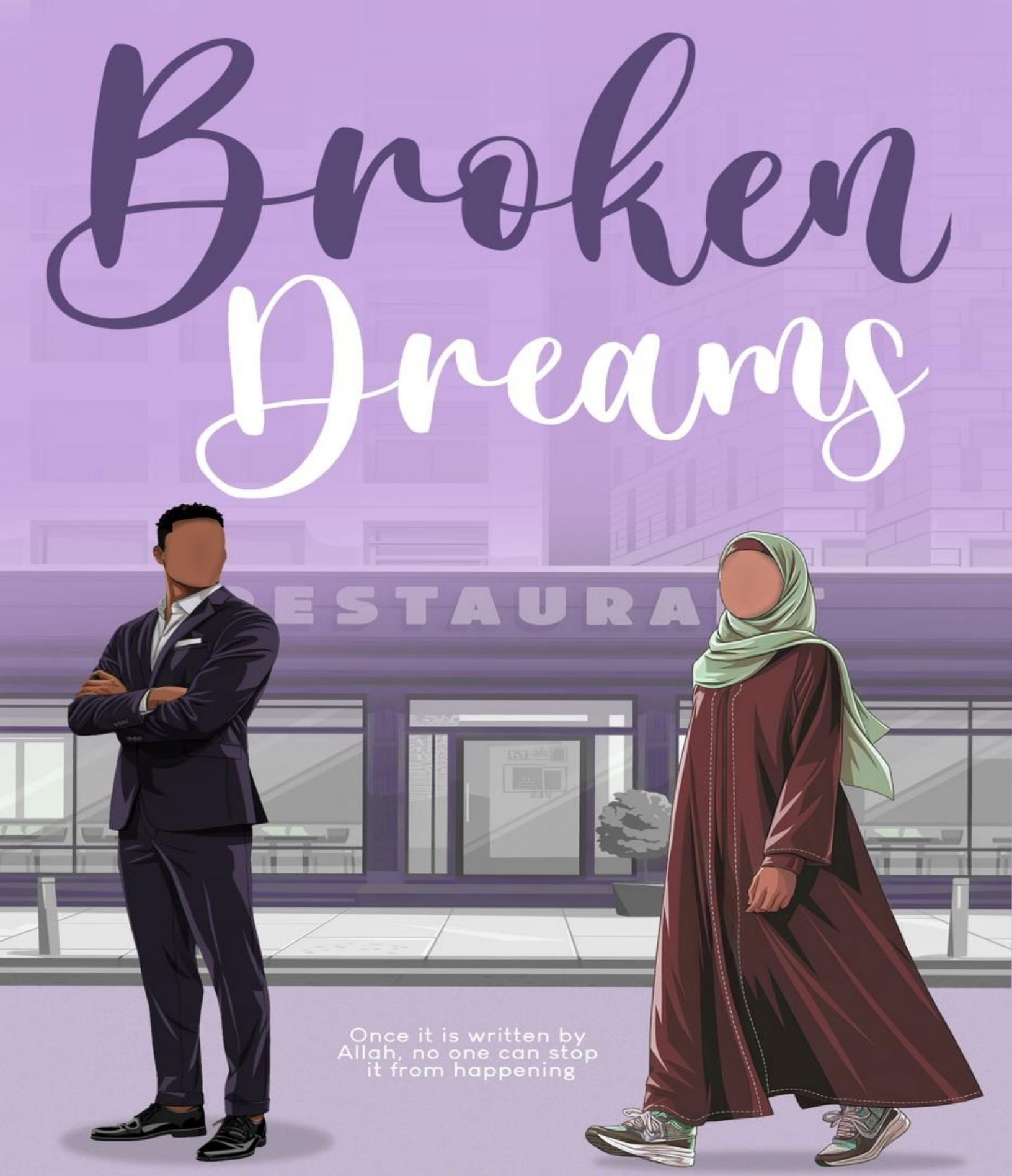
Broken Dreams



A CLASSIC ISLAMIC BILLIONAIRE ROMANCE

QUDRAH ADAM

Broken Dreams

Qudrah Adam

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Broken Dreams



A Classic Islamic Billionaire Romance
BOOK 1 OF THE BILLIONAIRE BROKEN SERIES



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Dedication



To all my book girlies, who desire to find a man who would fall crazily in love with them, this is for you. Sit tightly, Aimar Ali is waiting for you.



Authors Note



Hi, my name is Qudrah, and this is my debut novel - literally my first time writing a serious book and putting my all into it. It was hard for me to write this book, so you might find a couple of things here and there that might unsettle you. But hey, there's no such thing as a perfect first book, right? This book almost claimed my sanity; it was tough to put together, but Alhamdulilah, I pulled it off. I hope you enjoy reading my book as much as I enjoyed writing it. You can reach me on Instagram @qudrahadam.



Acknowledgement



If I were to begin mentioning all the people who have helped me put this book together with their unwavering motivation and kind words, I might as well have to publish the acknowledgments as a separate book. I first began writing "Broken Dreams" on Wattpad in July 2023, and it has been my dream to publish it, and I am so glad I took the bold step.

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to several individuals who have supported me throughout my writing journey.

Firstly, I thank my mother, Hajiya Maryam, for her unwavering encouragement and support. Her motivation helped me to persevere and never give up on my dreams.

I also appreciate my siblings, who patiently listened to my ideas, offered valuable feedback, and urged me to bring my stories to life.

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Thank you to each and every one of you. Your support means the world to me.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge and thank everyone who takes the time to read my work. Your support is truly appreciated, and I am grateful for the opportunity to share my stories with you.



بسم الله

Chapter 1



Azrah Yusuf

Kano, Nigeria.

SEVEN HOURS AND THIRTY minutes elapsed, littered like a pack of cards — that was all I could think about.

The day of my Nikkah had finally arrived, and I was overwhelmed with absolute excitement. I had stayed up all night, my heart was pounding at an unusually fast pace. My friend, Nazeerah, was seated by my side, munching chips in a bag while watching a new series on Netflix. Although I was watching too, my excitement surpassed the movie by far. *“I am getting married tomorrow!”* I muttered to myself.

To think I was to get married to the love of my life seemed unreal, appearing like a dream, which I didn’t want to wake up from.

"I can't believe they did that to her." Nazeerah frowned with anger, as she stared at the TV screen, her eyes fixed next at me.

"Did what?" I asked, my eyes rolling at the screen of my phone. I was chatting with Sameer, my soon-to-be husband, who would come deep into my life in seven hours and twenty-eight minutes. Funnily, I was counting each second, as I was very excited, and could not think of anything else but my upcoming wedding ceremony, and the moments I would share with Sameer, once we finally become a couple.

"Are you even concentrating on the movie at all?" Nazeerah turned her eyes away from me and started to gaze at the TV.

"Yes," I lied, setting my phone down on my pillow.

"Get some rest, Azrah. Your eyes look puffy.” She teased. “Your mother won't be pleased if you wake up looking like an ogre tomorrow," I gently tapped her arm, receiving a giggle from her.

"I'm sleepy, but I'm too excited. What if I sleep and don’t wake up?" I asked, feigning breathlessness.

Nazeerah smirked in return, shaking her head.

"You will wake up, drama queen. I'm also sleepy." Nazeerah walked up to the TV and turned it off, hopping right away in bed. I joined her as well, laying

flat with my eyes walking through each design on the ceiling.

I was overwhelmed by my emotions - nervousness and excitement swirling together. It was like I was being trapped in a jar, desperate to break free. I couldn't wait for tomorrow.

"I'm going to be a wife tomorrow," I whispered, hoping that Nazeerah wouldn't hear, but she did. I heard her grin.

"And I'm finally going to be at peace, knowing I will not be hearing about you and Sameer's fights," Nazeerah returned, placing a pillow over her face, squealing happily.

"That's mean," I said, chuckling lightly.

"Honestly, I'm happy that you both will be married tomorrow. I can't wait to see the look on Sameer's face when he finally gets to hug you for the first time."

As I pondered her words, a flurry of butterflies fluttered in and around my heart, resounding in my belly. Sameer and I had never even held hands before. We were committed to keeping things *halal*. That's why our *Nikkah* would precede our wedding dinner.

"I'm going to sleep now," I said. Nazeerah smiled and her eyes sparkled with amusement, knowing she had successfully made me blush.

"Good night, Azrah." I heard her say, I smiled, closed my eyes tight, and whispered a gentle *'goodnight'* back to her, hoping she would hear.

The next morning, as I woke up, having observed *salat al fajr*. I took my bath, picked up my cell phone and called Sameer. He received the call on the first dial, and displayed much excitement.

But, as soon as I heard his voice, my heart skipped an abrupt beat. Something felt odd, so I had to try to push it behind me. I couldn’t let anything ruin my special day.

"Hey, Noor." I couldn't help but blush, when I heard his tender, calm, and sweet voice. I could tell vividly, that he was very excited with the way he spoke, the enthusiasm in his voice, not missing.

"Sameer, what time are you going to the mosque?" I eagerly asked him.

"Relax, Noorie, the Nikkah is going to take place after the jummah prayer," he assured me.

I took a deep breath, glanced at the clock, and swallowed saliva deep down. I wish I could make the time move faster.

"That's going to be in four and a half hours. Thank God I overslept," I said, earning a chuckle from him.

"I can't wait to finally hold your arms, my perfect girl." he rejoined. I couldn't explain why, but his words stirred a unique sense of comfort within me.

They filled me with an unshakeable calm and intensified my excitement to spend eternity with him – in this life and in *Jannah* paradise.

Sameer's words transported me back to 2017, the day I first met him. He was just an ordinary guy then who had just returned from his studies abroad, but he remained someone who had earned my respect as my best friend's brother.

I often visited Nazeerah's home, and that was how I met my *Naseeb* (soulmate). He was everything I ever dreamt of, and I had the biggest crush on him. And here we were today, about to tie the knot and become husband and wife.

"I can't wait, Sameer." I blurted, dwelling on the way his breath reverberated in my ears, so I could tell he was smiling. "Also, don't forget to help me get those books from the post office. They'll return them to China if I don't collect them today." I pleaded.

"I promised I'd get it. I will. Make sure you eat something, okay?" Sameer spoke softly.

Another pang of fear hit me, and I struggled to toss it behind me. What was wrong with me? I was so scared, and it was as though something was going to happen, which wasn't just about my wedding. It was something more. But I couldn't place my finger on it.

"I will, Sameer, " I replied, pretending to be fine. "Take good care of yourself, and please be careful, okay?"

"I will, Noor, bye," Sameer said, before he hung up. But just as he was about to end the call, a voice boomed through the receiver, its arrogance so palpable that it made my skin crawl—the most pompous tone I'd ever had the displeasure of hearing.

"Do you have to get..." That was the voice of Aimar Ali, the eldest brother of Sameer and Nazeerah. I disliked him a lot, because he was very arrogant and annoying. Even Nazeerah confirmed this, but still loved him though. Aimar pushed everyone away from him. His only focus in life was money, nothing more, just money. What a sad man he was.

Well, I thought I had had enough thinking about Aimar. I needed to get my makeover and hair set, which might take me a period of two hours or even more.

The Nikkah preparations were underway, with my cousins and aunts' voices filling the air, mingling with the pungent scents of *Turaren Wuta* and *Humrah*. The house was bustling, with most of my cousins and their mothers gathered downstairs. My mother, mindful of my aversion to crowded spaces, allowed only Ismahan and Nazeerah upstairs to keep me company.

As I walked out, I found Nazeerah, my mom, and my sister seated on my bed. "Don't tell me you were making a call in the bathroom again," said my

mother, as she sprayed my Nikkah dress on the *cabassa*, the smell of *Turaren Wuta* filling the room.

"Guilty!" I admitted, and she shook her head. She was already tired of me, so she glared at me and then picked up her cell phone to make a call.

"Where is the makeup artist?" I asked Nazeerah.

"On her way," my mother replied to me instead. "Be careful, Azrah, you talk in the bathroom a lot. That's very bad," she then warned.

"I'm sorry, mother," I apologized.

Just then, the makeup artist walked in with a huge box hanging around her arms.

"Good morning, shall we begin?" The young lady asked, and I nodded excitedly.

I sat on a chair while my sister, Ismahan, passed me a cup of coffee.

Ismahan was my little sister, she was the only sibling I had, and I loved her a lot. I couldn't imagine what life without her and her tantrums would be like, when I am gone.

"Do you want a biscuit with that?" Ismahan asked me.

"No. This will do," I playfully reached for Ismahan's leg, arousing a chuckle from her. Our mother shot us a stern glance, and I struggled to stifle my giggle at the comically disapproving face she made.

"The makeover shouldn't waste much of our time, the guests are already coming on their way," my mother said, her face looking very tired. I knew the wedding stress must have been weighing her down. She had been working very hard, ensuring my things were put together. From my *Kayan Kitchen* to *Kayan Daki*, she seamlessly coordinated everything, ensuring Sameer's and my new home was warm and welcoming.

"Sure thing, ma'am," the makeup artist said.

My mom gave me one last, longing look and a sad smile. As she turned to walk away, I could sense the ache of separation in her eyes, and I knew she was already missing me.

"You and I both know we aren't listening to her, huh?" I said to the makeup artist, and she burst into laughter.

"*Astaghfirullah*. But not one bit."

I smiled, asking her. "What's your name?"

“Halima,” she replied softly as she gently applied a primer to my face.

"I'm Azrah," I returned.

"Your name is beautiful," Halima complimented.

Just then, Nazeerah, who had briskly stepped out, walked back into the room holding a tray of food. She placed it on the table before me.

"I don't want to eat," I objected, since I was sipping from my cup of coffee.

"Sameer just called," Nazeerah blurted, "And he asked me to make sure you eat something. Please, have this at least..."

"What else did he say to you?"

"He is stuck in traffic. He told me he went to get a parcel for you from the post office," Nazeerah responded.

"Well, come feed me," I ordered teasingly. Nazeerah shook her head with a smile, she walked over to me and placed the tray on her lap while she sat on the chair, next to me. I felt like we would be distracting Halima, so I asked her to wait until I'd finished eating.

"Halima, come eat with us," I said to her.

"No, I'm okay, thank you." She politely declined and so I continued eating. While eating, I got a message from Sameer, it was a picture of my parcel with him holding onto it with a smile on his face. After seeing it, I texted him that I loved him. I also told him that I was eating, which he was happy about. After speaking to him, I returned to eating and creating a conversation with Halima and Nazeerah.

Ismahan, who had also earlier left, walked back in and sat next to Halima, and they seemed to be familiar with each other.

We all talked, as I ate. After that, Halima stood up to start the makeover. She began beating my face up with all sorts of foundations and colors, and as expected, the entire beauty session lasted 2 hours with my cousins and aunties coming in and out to check up on me. My mother also kept on sending in the maids to check up on us, she was complaining that her guests were waiting to see the bride. Once I had my makeover all worn on me, I got dressed.

Thankfully, I had taken my bath first, in the morning, making the rest of my routine a breeze. After wriggling into my dress with the help of Nazeerah, Ismahan, and Halima, I looked at myself in the mirror, and a smile spread across my face as I gazed at my radiant skin. I immediately picked up my phone and took a selfie, which I sent the image to Sameer, whose last message was: *'I love you too, Noor. I can't wait to marry you and call you my wife.'* I felt emotional while reading it. There was an hour remaining until my Nikkah. I knew they were already at the mosque, so I didn't bother calling him.

Ismahan whispered, "We should head downstairs before Mother comes herself." We all erupted into laughter at the thought. Meanwhile, the guests were gathered in the grand dining hall. With the help of Nazeerah, who held my arm, we all made our way over there.

The moment we got there, I shyly glanced at everyone. It wasn't what I expected, they all didn't look happy. They didn't look like they came to attend a

wedding ceremony and I became very worried instantly.

"Mother?" I turned to my mother, ignoring the stares of the guests, who were mostly women, my aunties, and my cousins. My mother looked away sadly, and I called out to her again as I took calm strides toward her.

"I'm sorry," my mother muttered back, her voice drenched with resentful emotions. I looked at Ismahan and Nazeerah, they were just as confused as I was.

“Sorry about what?” I asked my mother with a smile spread across my face.

“It’s my *Nikkah*. Did Sameer call you?” I questioned. My mother held my arm and pulled me into a hug as she burst into tears. I didn’t understand what was going on. My heart began to accelerate, I gently broke free from my mother's hug and hurried to the dining room, my heart racing. With trembling fingers, I dialed Sameer's number. The phone rang twice before he answered.

“Sameer, where are you now?” I asked. I could hear crying in the background, and I recognized the voice of his mother. She was wailing, and it was loud.

“Sameer is dead,” said Aimar, his voice as cold as ever. I didn’t understand what came over me, but I felt myself slump and fall into oblivion.

The last thing I heard was the desperate screams of my mother and Ismahan calling out to me, accompanied by Nazeerah’s piercing wails.



Chapter 2



Azrah Yusuf

Two months later.

TWO MONTHS, TWO DAYS, seven hours. For the first time in a while, I'd gone two months, two days, and seven hours without speaking to Sameer. My heart was aching, my eyes hadn't seen light in a while, my heart didn't know peace, and my forehead had become one with the ground.

The only person I speak to is Allah. Allah was the only one that kept me going and kept me from running insane. My family had tried to get me out of my room, but I only kept refusing. I didn't want to talk to anybody, not when the guilt of leading Sameer to his death weighs heavy on my heart. I should have never asked him to get my parcel, but I was selfish, and that led to his demise.

My mother tried her best to support me during this time, she would have the maids bring me food and ensure all my dirty clothes were washed and ironed. As for Ismahan, she'd always try her best to cheer me up, but I was never in the mood. Nazeerah and I barely spoke, everyone needed time to heal. I wanted to be left alone.

I couldn't count the days I have gone without sleeping, simply wallowing in pain. I still couldn't believe I would never get the chance to hear his voice again. It was surreal. Everything felt unreal, and time elapsed slowly. The pain was not fading, and neither were my tears coming to a pause.

My mind often drifted back to the times we had spent together, how he would ensure I was happy and well taken care of, he would do anything in his power to ensure that my dreams were fulfilled, from supporting my dreams and encouraging me never to give up.

Sameer was an Angel, my angel, but now he was gone, gone forever. I still couldn't bring myself to believe this, it was hard, painful, and the worst feeling ever. I sometimes wake up breathless, fighting for air. His image haunted my dreams.

"*Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar*..." The calls of the *Adhan* call to prayer were the only words that could get me out of bed. I stood up gently, it was time for *salat al-isha*. The act of praying always brought back memories of Sameer, who

often called me at night to ensure I wouldn't sleep without performing a *nafl salah* voluntary prayer called *Salatul shukr* (a salah to thank Allah). He would often encourage me to thank Allah for making my day possible. Even after his demise, the pain served as a constant reminder to observe *salah* every single day.

I entered the bathroom and stared at my reflection in the mirror. I looked very pale, stressed, and slim. My former complexion of caramel had gotten even lighter. This was because of the lack of exposure to sunlight. As I stared at my reflection, tears streamed down my eyes. The thought of Sameer gnawed at my heart. His voice, his sweet, calm and soothing voice echoed in my ear. I could hear him calling out to me excitedly, telling me he had spoken to my Baba, who had accepted his proposal. That day, Sameer was very happy, in fact, the happiest of the person I had ever seen in him.

"*Azrah, you're going to become my wife!*" he said to me over the phone, that day. The thought of this broke my heart and while wiping my face, I burst into more tears.

His voice continued to haunt me, as he would always ensure that I performed ablution before going to sleep. He'd always remind me of the importance, which was that angels would guard me while in my sleep, and each time I made a turn in my sleep, they'd pray for me and seek forgiveness on my behalf till the end of the night. Sameer wasn't perfect, but he always tried his best to make me fall in love with Allah.

Oh Allah, grant Sameer *Jannah* paradise. I missed him so much.

After my *wudu* ablution, I made my way into my room and observed my obligatory *salah*. When I was done, I observed the *nafl salah* non obligatory prayer, *salat al shukr.* And then, I recited the Quran and made *duas* for Sameer, the ummah, my family, and myself.

Getting off the prayer mat, I heard a knock on the door, and my face formed into an instant scowl. I didn't want to talk to anyone, and I was certain it would be Ismahan.

"Ismahan, go away, I want to sleep." I lay flatly on my bed as I yelled.

"Noorie." My heart did a flip as I heard that voice. I calmly got up, and a genuine smile spread across my face for the first time in a while.

As I opened the door, I hugged her. It was Sameer's mom. Looking at her, one would be able to tell that she was going through a lot. She had lost so much weight, her complexion had darkened, and there were bags under her eyes from the non-stop cry. Seeing her like this broke my heart. Sameer would do anything to bring a smile onto his mother's face. Him, being the cause of her sorrow, would break him even more.

“Ummie, what brings you here so late at night? You should have called, and I would have come to see you.” I said to her, she held my arm gently as I led her to my bed, where she sat.

“I wanted to come and see how my daughter-in-law is doing.” Her words weighed heavily on my heart. *Daughter-in-law,* she said.

What a sad lie. My dreams had been broken, my hope was lost, and everything had died along with Sameer.

“I’m good.” It was evident that I was lying. She shook her head and cupped my cheeks. The strong scent of *Turaren Wuta* filled the air. I could easily tell that she had burned some *Hawi* and *Kajiji* before coming in here, which were my favorites.

“Pale, but beautiful. I can see a lot of *Noor* light on your face.” Her words managed to bring a smile to my face.

“Thank you, Ummie. How have you been?” I asked.

“I am fine my child, I am in the care of Allah, so *Alhamdulillah*, everything is fine,” She said, despite the truth in her eyes. Her words came out very heavy. They came out strong, and my body stiffened. I tried my best not to cry, I hated seeing her like this.

“Let me get you water.” I got up. She held my arm and made me sit.

“No. There is no need for that. I’m doing perfectly well. I came to tell you something very important.” Her eyes narrowed, and I could see her take a deep breath. She looked scared, as though she was battling in her head. This made me worry.

“Okay, what’s wrong, ummie? You look worried.” Her nod confirmed my words.

“You are right. I feel ashamed for what I’m about to ask of you,” She said, inhaling deeply.

“Please do not. I’m your daughter. Do not feel ashamed to ask anything of me.” I assured her. She was like a mother to me, she had watched me grow into the woman I am today. She and my mother were friends, childhood friends, and we had all grown up together. Sameer, Nazeerah, and me.

“You’re a very special child.” She cupped my cheeks. “I’ve always wanted you to be a part of my family. From the moment I set my eyes on you, when you were little, your mother and I made a promise to ourselves that we would unite our families together. And, when Sameer told me he wanted to ask your Baba for your hand in marriage, I was very excited, but *Alhamdulillah* Allah had other plans.” She paused and inhaled deeply.

"Azrah," she called, her grip tightening around my arm. "Can you please marry Aimar?" A lump formed in my throat at her request, and I jerked my arm

free. Marry Aimar? Aimar Ali? I struggled not to laugh. The idea alone was funny, and I couldn't fathom a life with him, especially after losing my beloved, I could never think of marrying my beloved's brother. That would be a stab to Sameer's memory, and that is something I will never think of doing. Impossible, I can never marry Aimar Ali.

With a deep breath, I said, "Ummie, I'm sorry, I can't."

"Azrah, I know my request is too much, but Aimar has already agreed to marry you. It has always been Sameer's dream to see Aimar get married again," she said, "I remember how he'd always set his brother up with different women when he came to visit. I'm not forcing you to marry him, but please give my request some thought. I know Aimar isn't perfect, but please give it some thought." I struggled not to show my emotions, I had to maintain my composure as I decided not to speak rudely to her. What she had asked of me is impossible. I could never marry Aimar Ali.

"Ummie, I can't marry him," I said, trying to keep my voice as pleasant as possible. I couldn't bring myself to speak to her rudely; she was like a mother to me. Despite the hurt her words had caused, she was more important to me.

"Azrah, I know what I have asked of you is unimaginable, but please my dear, I need you to think about my request. Please." She implored, I forced a smile at her and gave her a reassuring nod. She smiled and hugged me, before standing to her feet with my help. I led her outside and downstairs, where my family were seated. The moment they saw me, a smile spread across their faces. They were happy to finally see me out of my room. As I led Sameer's mother to the couch where she sat, I spotted Nazeerah, who walked towards me and gave me a very tight hug. This was the first time I was seeing her after Sameer's demise.

The grief had caused everyone to remain alone.

"I've missed you," Said Nazeerah as she stroked my back gently.

"Me too." I smiled, as we disengaged with the hug.

"Thanks for coming, Mrs. Ali. it was nice having you," My father said, I glanced at him, and I forced a smile. I knew he was aware of the reason she was here, they were all aware. I wanted to speak, but I kept my words to myself. I didn't want to create a scene today.

"Good night!" I said to everyone and headed back upstairs to my room. As soon as I got there, I lay flatly on my bed. My heartbeat was accelerating abnormally, and I burst into tears once again.

The thought of marrying Aimar Ali sounded like a betrayal to Sameer. I was aware of the immense love Sameer had for Aimar, he once confessed that he would willingly sacrifice all his happiness to see Aimar happy again. That was

the depth of Sameer's love for him. After losing his wife, Aminah, Aimar was devastated. He barely spoke to anyone except Sameer. They shared an equal and profound love. The only times Aimar laughed were when he was with Sameer or his little daughter.

Aymah was the sole witness to his happiness after Aminah's demise. Now, with Sameer gone, I could only imagine Aimar's unbearable pain, he has lost his brother, his confidant.

I wish Sameer hadn't died. I wish it were just a terrible nightmare. But reality was cruel, and Sameer's been laid to rest.



Chapter 3



Aimar Ali

I THOUGHT I'D FORGOTTEN how to cry. Watching my brother's lifeless body being taken away that day, I felt responsible for his death. It seemed preventable, yet I did nothing. I abandoned my poor brother, leaving him to his demise. Sameer was everything to me, he was my best friend and the only person who understood me. But now he is gone for good, and that was the reality of it. I had lost him forever.

As I stared at him wrapped in the white cloth, my heart shattered. My little brother was dead, and he was laid to rest in the sand. Why couldn’t it be me? Why did it have to be him? He was too young, too kind to die so soon. But who are we as humans to question Allah's decisions?

"Daddy!" I turned to find my daughter staring at me, her eyes shining with unbridled joy. Her innocent gaze met mine. She scrambled onto my bed and snuggled beside me.

"Yes Aymah." I grabbed her, making her giggle.

"Why are you crying?" she asked innocently, her little arms reaching up to wipe away my tears.

"I'm happy." I lied. She pushed her lips in a pout. She could tell I was lying.

"You're not telling the truth, Daddy. Are you crying because of Uncle?" She asked, and I reached for her, and hugged her. I found myself shedding more tears —tears I didn't even know I had in me. The pain was so unbearable, and this was because of a stupid parcel he had to get for his selfish wife-to-be. If he had not gone to get the parcel that day, he would have still been alive. But that selfish woman had to lead my brother to his demise.

"Grandma said Uncle is with Allah. She was also crying as well, but I gave her a big hug, and she stopped crying," She said, I wiped my eyes and broke our hug gently.

"Your hug must be magical, I stopped crying." My words brought a smile to her face.

"Daddy, can we go out and get ice cream?" I couldn't say no to her. I shook my head, telling her ‘yes.’

"Yes, princess, we can," I said. A wide smile spread across her face. Her smile was the only thing I worked hard for, it was the only sight that could heal

my pain.

"Can we go with Aunt Nazeerah?" She questioned.

"Aunt Nazeerah went out with Grandma." I realized they had gone to Azrah's house regarding a proposal for me to marry her. My mother had informed me about it, and I initially refused. However, she persisted until I finally agreed, believing that Azrah would never accept the proposal since she loved Sameer so much. I was certain that she would never betray Sameer by marrying his brother, and I was 100% sure of that. So I said, yes, and my mother, was overjoyed and immediately drove to Azrah's home with Nazeerah.

Aymah pulled my arm. "Daddy, can my teddy come along with us?" I agreed to her request.

"Of course she can, princess." I lifted her into my arms and walked over to the couch, where her teddy bear was laid out. I handed it to her, and upon receiving it, she pecked my cheek, causing me to chuckle.

"What was that for?"

"Because you stopped crying." Her innocent eyes flickered with so much joy as she spoke. Being with Aymah, I felt a heavy weight being lifted from my shoulder. She was my everything, a precious gift from Allah.

"I love you," I mumbled while we walked out of my room and towards the stairs.

"Love you too, Daddy!" Her words were balm to my soul, a precious reminder of my little gift from Aminah, who had left me far too soon. My lovely wife, Aminah—the ache of her absence still lingered. I had tried to move on from her, but her thoughts constantly clouded my vision. I couldn't bring myself to ever love another woman after her, she was my first love, my life, and my best friend.

The house was empty, and the maids were busy cleaning for the night. I didn't say a word to them and walked out of the house. My car was parked very close, so Aymah and I walked over to it and took a seat. I put her in the back of her babysitter. She didn't fail to complain about how much she disliked it, I was already used to her complaints. I sat in front, got the car started, and drove out of the mansion.

As we drove down the road, Aymah began to tell me stories of how she and Nazeerah baked a cookie that turned out too sweet. I laughed at the statements she made.

Suddenly, we got stuck in traffic, and we had to sit in the car without moving for over twenty minutes. I wasn't bored, I had Aymah to keep me company with her fictional tales.

“Daddy, are we there yet?” Aymah was very impatient. I pulled up into the parking lot and parked properly. After that, I came out and opened the door. I carried her in my arms, and we walked into the ice cream parlor. It was very huge and cozy, not very cold. It was also empty.

“What flavor do you want, Aymah?” I asked as we approached the counter. Aymah looked indecisive, I knew she wanted all the flavors, and I would get it for her. I indulged her a lot.

“Daddy, Vanilla. That’s Uncle’s favorite, right?” Her question ran a thought through my mind, making my heart skip a beat. I had to catch my breath and reply to her with a nod.

“What flavor do you want, sir?” The man behind the counter asked. “Hi, little girl.” He turned to Aymah, waving his hands energetically. She responded with an equally animated gesture.

“I want Vanilla,” Aymah said, excitement written across her face. “Daddy, what flavor do you want?"

Stroking her hair, I said. "Nothing. I have a cold, Aymah.”

“But I want us to take it together.” She insisted, her face forming into a scowl.

"Alright, I'll take it along with you," I informed her, and she smiled.

I knew I was really indulging her. I gave her whatever she wanted and couldn't say no to her. It scared me to say ‘no’ to her, because she was all I had.

The man scooped our ice creams into cones and handed them over to us. I collected Aymah's cone and led her to a table where she sat. I gave her the ice cream and went back to make payment, which became very difficult as my cards began to decline. I was frustrated. I had forgotten I had ice cream in my hand, and it had even begun to melt.

“Yes, haha...” I heard giggles coming directly from Aymah’s table. I turned around to find Aymah seated with Azrah, seeing her made me a little bit nervous, making my heart skip an abrupt beat, but I had to keep poise.

“Can I make the transfer to your bank account instead, if you have one?” I asked, behind the counter.

"Sure." I immediately proceeded with the transfer, and as soon as I was done, I made my way over to Aymah's table, where Azrah was seated.

As I walked over to them, I couldn't help but stare at Azrah. She was dressed in a hijab, and she looked completely different from how I remembered her. It had been two years since I last saw her, and back then, we barely exchanged more than greetings.

The moment I arrived, Azrah met my gaze calmly before murmuring a greeting gently at me.

"*Assalamualaikum*, Mr. Ali," she said, her voice as formal as ever. She had always spoken to me in a formal tone, addressing me as Mr. Ali since she was little.

"*Walaikumusalam*, Azrah," I returned.

Aymah with a soft giggle, asked. "Aunty, are you and Daddy friends?"

I furrowed my brow, puzzled by her question. Why did she ask that? Her innocence and curiosity often caught me off guard.

"No, we're not, Aymah. We need to go home," I said, holding out my hand.

As I grabbed Aymah, her ice cream dropped onto my shoulder, splattering everywhere as it got my T-shirt shrouded. Azrah let out a playful chuckle, effortlessly re-adjusting her hijab. Her eyes sparkled with amusement.

"Good night, Aymah," Azrah said, without meeting my gaze. She stood up and walked over to a girl I recognized as her little sister.

The girl ogled at me curiously, and I looked away, uncomfortable.

"I'm sorry, Daddy," apologized Aymah.

"It's okay princess, it was your fault." I smiled and dropped her on the chair to sit. I grabbed my handkerchief from my pocket and wiped my shoulder. It was a good thing the ice cream parlor was empty. I made my way back to the counter with Aymah in my arms. I got her another ice cream before we left.

Once we were settled in the car, Aymah giggled. "What's making you laugh?" I asked, a chuckle making its way out of my lips.

"Aunty," Aymah pointed towards where I saw Azrah and her little sister standing. Azrah didn't look like she wanted to be here. They seemed like they were struggling to get their car opened, and I didn't miss the scowl on Azrah's face as she held two cones in both arms.

When the car finally got opened, Azrah did an angry walk and sat in the front. My eyes were glued to the scene, my heart pounding in my chest with strange, unprecedented excitement, like it was awakening to a new kind of beat, especially from the stare at Azrah.

I was certain this was due to the idea of marrying her. My mother had put it in my head. I had to shake it off.

"Let's go home, princess," I said to Aymah. She didn't respond as she licked on her ice cream. I immediately ignited my car and drove home. The drive was silent because Aymah was enjoying her ice cream so much that she fell asleep with the cone right in her mouth!

She was absolutely precious.

As soon as I got home, I carried Aymah in my arms and made my way towards the front door, which was unexpectedly opened by my mother, Ummie -

a woman in her late fifties who, despite not being my biological mother, had always been there for me.

The memory of being taken home from the UK by my father after my mother's death remained etched in my mind. I wasn't happy being here, but being around Ummie made life easier. And then there was Sameer, the kindest person I'd ever met. He made life easy for me and helped me heal from my mother's passing.

Now, I would have to heal from his own death - alone.

"Ummie?" I called, worry written boldly on my face.

“Aimar, where have you been? You haven’t been answering your calls.” She sounded like she was worried.

“Is something wrong with you? Are you okay?” My heart fluttered.

She chuckled. "No, I am fine. I wanted to inform you about some good news.” I raised a brow, while I laid Aymah on the couch in the living room, my arms were growing weak.

“What news could be pleasant at this moment, Ummie?” My mother seemed very happy. She even laughed at my statement and grabbed my arm, causing me to smile. I was very happy to see her look this excited.

It had been a long time since I’d seen her smile since Sameer’s demise. Despite my attempts to make her happy. I couldn’t even leave for work, because I wanted to remain with her and ensure she is doing fine.

“You and Azrah are getting married. Her words caught me by surprise, and I struggled not to choke on my saliva. “She accepted the proposal.” I swallowed hard. I didn’t want to believe a word she was saying. So I asked again.

“She accepted the proposal?” I implored, "Wasn't it today you approached her with the proposal?” My ears couldn’t believe her words.

How could Azrah easily accept my mother’s proposal, this didn’t sit well with me.

"Yes, and she accepted," she said. "She called me twenty minutes ago and informed me that she's willing to marry you."

Twenty minutes ago? I thought, stunned. That meant she had called my mother while still in the car with her sister. Everything was unfolding at breakneck speed.

A nagging question crept in. Has she ever genuinely loved my brother? Her actions now cast doubt on her feelings, leaving me questioning the authenticity of her love. Though I had seen and known how in love they were. Sameer couldn’t go a day without talking about her.

With a deep breath, I asked, "Interesting. When is the wedding?”

My mother's eyes lit up at my question. This was the exact reason I agreed to marry Azrah - to see a smile on my mother's face once again.

When she had first approached me with the proposal, I instantly said no. But her reaction caught me off guard. She began to cry, pleading with me to reconsider. *"This would make me the happiest woman alive,"* she had said, her eyes brimming with tears.

Hearing those words, I couldn't bring myself to say no. I reluctantly agreed, assuming Azrah would decline. But, I was wrong. She agreed to marry me on the very same day the proposal was made.

What a betrayal!

“Your Baba has already sent the gifts and *Kayan Lefe* to her family. He was so excited when I told him that he had to send them immediately. He will also meet with Azrah’s dad tomorrow to set the date.” The excitement in my mother’s eyes never faded. She wanted me to get married quickly. As for my father, a shrewd man in his late sixties, I sensed he had an ulterior motive. His enthusiasm seemed excessive, extending far beyond mere excitement for my upcoming marriage. I knew he had other plans on his mind. But why would he agree that I married another woman when he had already assured the president that I would marry his daughter?

It was confusing, but I would certainly find out soon.

"I don't want a big wedding, Ummie. A *Nikkah* alone will suffice," I said, and her face lit up with a warm smile.

Her smile warmed my heart, a welcome sight after Sameer's demise.

“Azrah’s family made the same request,” she said, firmly.

"Oh," I mumbled, reconsidering my decision. But the thought of disgracing my mother after giving her the approval to ask for Azrah's hand in marriage gnawed at my heart. I couldn't bear to wipe this smile from her face - it was too precious.

“Are you okay, Aimar?” She asked.

I needed to come up with an answer. “I'm thinking of returning to Abuja,” I told her. “I have work commitments and should be there in two days.”

"Is it very important that you return?" she asked. "I don't want to put pressure on Azrah.” I hesitated, sharing her concern. I didn't want to rush the wedding either, but I knew that if I returned to Abuja without finalizing the *Nikkah*, it might never happen.

The thought of breaking my mother's heart was unbearable, especially now.

"It's either the *Nikkah* happens tomorrow or never," I replied."I need to get back to work," I said to her, and she nodded, promising to inform Azrah's family.

My mother was resolute, she wouldn't let anything derail the wedding. I knew she'd ensure it happened tomorrow, no matter what. She knew me too well, aware that I could change my mind at any moment.

After our conversation, I handed Aymah over to Nazeerah, who took her to her room. Subsequently, I headed to my father's room, where I knocked on the door, and he asked me to come in.

"*Assalamualaikum* Baba," I greeted, and walked into the room. He sat on the floor, engrossed in a book, his gray hair a stark contrast to his poised expression. My Baba, one of Nigeria's wealthiest men, was a force to be reckoned with - crossing him could ruin lives.

Our relationship was strained, a result of his absenteeism during my childhood. I grew up under Ummie's care, while he pursued his own interests. Business and money were the only bond between us. He needed me, recognizing my self-built empire's value, especially since our family's influence stretched across Nigeria.

"You have heard the news, I presume," My father said, and I acknowledged.

"Is there a change of plan I'm not aware of?" I asked, my arms crossed.

"There's no change of plans. The president's deal still stands, just ensure you marry Azrah. I have everything under control." He informed me.

"If you say so," I said, and I left his room.

It was crystal clear that this alliance was tied to the northern districts. However, Azrah's swift acceptance was not only suspicious but was also a stark betrayal to my brother, whom I had thought she truly cared for. I had been certain she would refuse.

Azrah's family true intentions were now obvious — they had always sought to exploit the 'Ali' name for their gain.



Chapter 4



Azrah Yusuf

AFTER SAMEER'S MOM left my room, my mother entered and sat next to me, her eyes reflecting the weight of my emotions. She knew what was requested of me, and more than anybody, she was aware that I couldn't go through with it.

"Marry him, Azrah," she said, her words catching me off guard. I swallowed hard, struggling to contain my anger. The thought of marrying Aimar Ali was unthinkable. He was the complete opposite of Sameer, and the idea of being with him felt deeply wrong. I couldn't fathom associating with him; it seemed utterly unreasonable.

"Give me one reason why I should marry him, Mother, just one," I demanded, though I dreaded the response.

My mother was speechless, taking deep breaths as her eyes welled up with tears. I had asked the question reluctantly, sensing that there was more to this request than met the eye. Something was amiss, and I feared that my mother's silence was only the beginning.

"It's only been two months since Sameer passed away, and yet you all expect me to marry his brother, Aimar, just like that?"

My mother burst into tears.

I didn't understand what was going on, and I was too aggravated to speak. I kept on taking deep breaths and muttering, "*Auzu Billahi Min ash-Shaytan ir-Rajim* I seek refuge in Allah from the accursed Satan." In order to control my anger.

"I want you to be happy. Azrah, I can't watch you suffer like this. You've lost so much weight, and you look sick. Marrying Aimar will make you happy and fix things." My mother paused in her speech and wiped her tears.

"You'll be happy again."

I couldn't even believe her words. What concerns Aimar with my happiness? A man who couldn't even bring happiness to his own life was who they claimed would make me happy. It only sounded crazy to me.

"I'll never be happy again, Mother. Never!" I exclaimed, my voice trembling with anguish. "My happiness lies six feet beneath the earth, and I don't want anyone to take its place. I want him, and only him," I declared in a single, desperate breath, my words seething with anger and longing.

"Sameer's passing doesn't mean you should spend the rest of your life unhappy, Azrah. This is Allah's plan, and He knows best." She said, her words measured and calm. I took a deep breath, fighting to compose myself and respond respectfully to my mother.

She was my mother, and I held her in the highest esteem. Witnessing her tears was like a punch to my gut, filling me with sorrow. Yet, her request weighed heavily on my mind - marrying Aimar, a man I didn't even tolerate for a moment, was utterly absurd.

With my hand running through my hair, I blurted out, “Mother, tell me one valid reason why I should marry Aimar Ali, one valid reason." I had to ask; I sensed there was more to this. Her eyes told a thousand stories.

"Because he'll make you happy, Azrah," my mother said, her voice laced with a mix of conviction and concern. "But that's not the only reason. You know Sameer's family is... complicated. His father's influence is far-reaching, and the royal family won't approve of you marrying anyone else. If you don't marry Aimar, things will only get worse for you, and for our family."

The mention of the royal family's involvement sent a shiver down my spine. Their influence never boded well. As puppeteers controlling my father's every move, their sway over his decisions made my anxiety spike. This situation was far more ominous than I initially thought.

"What do you mean?” I asked, confusion etched on my face. “I don't understand you at all.” She responded by burying her face in her palm, her frustration evidently revealed.

"Azrah, I didn't want to tell you this, but your father, the royal family, and Sameer's dad signed a deal forming a contract family. This agreement involved properties, money, and lands. Now that Sameer's passed, there's no reason for it to continue. However, Aimar's father threatens to reclaim all properties unless you marry into his family. If you don't, we'll lose everything. The royal family has given your father an ultimatum: secure your marriage to Aimar Ali within a week." My mother informed me, her expressions proving grim.

I'd always known Sameer's dad to be cunning; his absence from their lives only deepened my distrust. But this revelation was staggering. How could I agree to this? It's a deal that didn't involve me, one I was kept in the dark about.

“And how’s that my business? Why can’t Ismahan marry Aimar?” I returned, knowing too well I was sounding ridiculous, considering my sister was only 18 years old, while Aimar was 30 - a staggering 12 years older than she was.

My mother grasped my arm, her eyes blinking at me. “Ismahan is just a child, Azrah. Trust me, we've thought this through.” I pulled away, but her words lingered.

“This marriage is the only way to save your father's property and reputation,” she urged me. “Many people rely on him. If he loses everything, Cousin Sadiq will have to return to Nigeria from his studies abroad, and the children he's sponsoring will have to drop out of school. It's not just about you, Azrah. It's about the kids who have no one else to turn to.”

I took a deep breath, the weight of her words settling in. She was right. My father's downfall would devastate the orphans he'd taken under his wing, and the countless others who depended on him.

I wiped my tears.

"I'll think about it," I said, my voice measured. "Please, Mother, you and Baba must give me time."

"Azrah, time is running out," my mother warned, her voice laced with urgency. "Abubakar Ali is threatening to destroy everything. The Royal family's patience is also wearing thin. If you don't marry Aimar, they'll force you to marry someone from the Parliament of Elders. A marriage to the royal family would mean a life dictated by their rules and expectations. I can’t bear to watch you suffer the same fate as me. "

Her words sent another shiver down my spine. The Royal family was ruthless, holding sway over our lives and decisions. They controlled my father's fate, and their approval had been the deciding factor in my doomed engagement to Sameer. Without their blessing, our union would never have begun.

"Do you truly believe Sameer's feelings for you were just fate?" she asked, her words hanging in the air.

I trembled with fear, anticipating her next words. Yet, I had to know. “What do you mean, Mother?” I asked, my voice barely rising above a whisper.

“Sameer loved you very much, but his father and the royal family played a great role in bringing you both together,” she said, her words still unclear.

Anyways, I wasn’t bold enough to ask any more questions, since it would only end up adding to my pain.

"But what could he possibly gain from this? He's wealthier than we are. Why is he planning to destroy us?" I asked, my mind struggling to comprehend the motivation behind this evil act.

“He wants control over the northern district, and if his son gets married to you, it will give him that power and it will ensure his position as the next president of Nigeria.” My mother explained.

Everything became clearer. He was running for president, and my uncle's son, King Haidar Jega - my cousin - was the current King of the North. This alliance would give Sameer's dad the upper hand in securing the northern district's support. With our families united, our royal bloodline would boost his

chances of winning the election. In Nigeria, having the north's support is crucial due to its population, making it a decisive factor in winning the presidency. It was all about securing power for him.

The Royal family recognized Abubakar Ali as a formidable contender. Thanks in large part to his strategic partnership with his son, Aimar Ali, Nigeria's youngest self-made multi-billionaire, with an estimated net worth of over $40 billion. With Aimar's extensive network and resources at his disposal, Abubakar's prospects for success skyrocketed. The royal family was well aware of this situation. If the King of Kano had a daughter, she would have been the one to marry Aimar. However, since my cousin, Haidar, was the King of the North, my sister and I, as the northern princesses, became the most sought-after brides for noble families. This was largely due to our father's close relation to the King of the North. In fact, my father was initially next in line for the throne, but after Haidar's father, his brother, passed away, my father relinquished the kingship to Haidar. As a result, our family maintained its respect and influence, earning us the title of Princesses of the North.

My father, as the King's Advisor in the Kano emirate system, held a significant position, where the king's word dictated the lives of his children. Now, with my cousin leading the north, our family was their prime target.

“Mother,” I inhaled deeply. “I have to think about this, but I promise I will ensure everything is fine,” I assured her, and she smiled at me in return.

"I trust you, Azrah," she whispered, her voice barely audible. "We're sorry for dragging you into this mess." Her apology was laced with regret.

This wasn't just any mess; it had the potential to ruin lives and cause chaos. If my father lost his property, he'd lose everything - his position, status, and our family's reputation would be tarnished. The thought of our name being dragged through the mud was unbearable. With everyone waiting for us to fail, I couldn't let that happen while I only watched.

“Was Sameer ever aware of this? Did he know that this was all for power?” I dared to ask.

“Sameer loved you for the sake of Allah. He was aware of this but never had the intention of using you as a pawn in his father’s games.” My mother assured me, bringing ease to my heart. After giving my hand a final, reassuring squeeze, my mother stood up and quietly walked out of my room.

As she walked out, my sister walked in with a smile on her face. “Hi,” she greeted me.

“What do you want?” I asked, lying flat on my bed with my pillow on my stomach.

“I want us to go out for ice cream. I’m bored,” Ismahan said, and I sat up.

“Yes, we should go out for ice cream.”

I agreed, which came as a shock to her. I would normally never go out. But at the moment, I needed to clear my head. There was a lot going on in my mind, and if I remained here, I’d explode.

“Okay.” She said, my words notwithstanding. I picked up my hijab, put on some kohl in my eyes, and we made our way out of the room. I was glad my parents were in their rooms, so we briskly walked towards the car and drove to the nearest ice cream parlor.

As we approached it, my mother's words ran through my mind. I couldn’t just marry Aimar Ali. It was a crazy thing to do. I don’t think Aimar was in the right state of mind when he accepted to marry me. Maybe he felt he was compelled to do so, because of his father. That man would do anything to ensure he gained a seat as the president.

“We’re here,” Ismahan said, parking the car. “What’s on your mind? You seem lost.”

I sighed, collecting my thoughts. “They want me to marry Aimar,” I told Ismahan, my voice barely above a whisper. “It’s only been two months since Sameer passed away.”

She looked at me for a while and exhaled, loudly. "Although I don't know him well, I firmly believe that listening to your heart will be the wisest choice. However, considering the royal family's involvement, you need to make up your mind swiftly." Ismahan said, her arm wrapping around mine reassuringly.

She was right, I had to make my decision swiftly. If I didn't, chaos would erupt, and they'd force me to marry an elder from the parliament - a prospect I couldn't bear. My options were limited - marrying Aimar to save my family or marrying an elder and watch them suffer. Forcing me to marry an elder was one of their tactics to ensure I'd ultimately marry Aimar. They knew my parents would never approve of our union. However, if I refused to marry Aimar, they'd resort to their alternative plan: forcing me to marry an elder from the parliament.

As soon as we stepped into the ice cream parlor, Ismahan halted. "Azrah, I forgot the debit card in the car. I'll grab it, and be right back" she said, turning to leave.

I was about to take a seat when my gaze landed on a familiar face, Aymah, Aimar Ali’s daughter, was seated in the room, lost in the bliss of her ice cream. A warm smile spread across my face as memories flooded back - Sameer would often bring her to my home for visits.

I walked over to her, eager to reconnect. "Aymah!" I exclaimed, my voice barely rising above a whisper.

“Aunty, hi.” She said, her innocent eyes flickering with joy as she continued to lick on her ice cream.

“What are you doing here? Are you here with Aunty Nazeerah?” I inquired, and she shook her head, telling me no.

She turned around and pointed a hand at Aimar, standing at the counter, with a scowl on his face, as he aggressively scrolled through his phone, complaining to the man behind the counter. As I stared at him, my heart skipped an abrupt beat, and I swallowed hard. Aimar Ali had not changed one bit, he stood tall, and wore a noticeable expression. I had never spoken more than two words to him before, the only thing that brought us together was greeting.

"Oh," I said to her, and she smiled afterwards.

"You've got ice cream all over your dress." My words prompted her to silence me, gently placing her finger on her lips.

“Don’t let Daddy know. He will get mad at me.” She whispered, and I chuckled.

“I won't. it’s our little secret,” I whispered, and she laughed out loudly. As I continued to tease her about her dress, I felt Aimar’s presence along with his harsh scent of masculine *oud* perfume. I immediately stood up, feeling extremely nervous and shy, as I adjusted my hijab.

“*Assalamualaikum*, Mr. Ali." My words came out softly, ensuring my gaze didn’t meet his.

"*Walaikumusalam*, Azrah," he replied nonchalantly, before hurrying to leave.

Just as I was about to bid them farewell, Aymah said something very funny. “Aunty, are you and Daddy friends?” She questioned with a giggle. Aimar’s face formed an instant scorn.

"No, we are not," he returned, very harshly.

"Aymah, we need to go home now." He scooped her up in his arms. His tone betrayed his displeasure with her previous words. When he grabbed Aymah, the ice cream she was holding got smeared on his shirt.

Making an unannounced chuckle out of my lips, I felt very embarrassed for doing that, so I immediately walked away after bidding them farewell. I found Ismahan at the entrance with a leather field with ice cream, and she chuckled, realizing that I was shy. She gave me a teasing glare.

As we walked over to our car, Ismahan bumped my shoulder. “What is it?” I asked, anger laced in the tone of my voice.

“Was that Aimar? He has changed so much.” She said, sounding so excited.

I rolled my eyes at her. “And if that was him, why should that concern you?”

"He's very handsome," she blurted out. "I never noticed he was mixed. Is he truly Sameer's half-brother? And he sounds a bit British too," she added with a

squeak, snorting excitedly.

Aimar was indeed Sameer and Nazeerah's half-brother, they both had the same father, but had different mothers. Aimar's mother, a British woman, had passed away when he was 15 years of age. This was before his father divorced his mother. After losing his mother, Aimar moved back to Nigeria. Despite being a stepchild, Sameer's mother had shown him immense love and affection.

I ignored Ismahan on our way out. As we reached the car, I struggled to open the door. The remote seemed to be malfunctioning.

"Azrah, calm down," she said gently.

I handed her the remote control, and the car doors were unlocked with ease. She chuckled as I stomped over to the other side, yanked open the door, and slid inside. She mirrored my actions, settling into the driver's seat as she started the car.

As we drove out of the ice cream parlor, I heard Ismahan chuckle mischievously. “What is it?” I felt compelled to ask, knowing too well what was on her mind.

“Aimar isn’t that bad; I mean, he isn’t bad at all,” Ismahan said excitedly. “He’s extremely handsome, tall, with beautiful light brown skin, and his accent – oh my God! His daughter is absolutely adorable too.” I glared at her immediately.

After a moment of silence, I spoke up. “I have made my decision already,” I announced. She turned to look at me and then at the road.

“And which is?” She asked.

"I'll marry him," I said.

"Are you sure you want this?" She asked, and a nod was her reply.

This wasn't a decision driven by personal happiness. My family came first. The thought of my father losing everything was unbearable. With Sameer gone and my dreams in shambles, I felt I had nothing left to lose.

Pushing aside my doubts, I dialed Aimar's mother and shared my decision. She erupted in joy. Before my mother could hear the news from someone else, I quickly called her and informed her. She prayed for me, unwilling to stop, her words comforting my soul like a soothing balm.

"I hope I've made the right choice," I whispered to myself, the weight of marrying Aimar Ali settling heavy in my heart.



Chapter 5



Azrah Yusuf

I HAD WOKEN UP QUITE a while ago and had already eaten breakfast. Nazeerah had ordered my favorite snack, which was creamy chicken French rolls from Qudrah's Kitchen. They tasted so amazing that I couldn't believe I had gone so long without having them.

"Azrah, it's your *Nikkah*, and you're not even dressed," Ismahan said, exasperated as she walked into the dining room. I rolled my eyes.

Today was my *Nikkah* with Aimar, but I felt no excitement. Why stress over dressing for something I didn't want? There was no need.

My family and he opted for an intimate wedding, so we skipped invitations and merely informed my aunts, who were notorious gossip.

A northern blog on Instagram took it further, labeling me shameless. They called me a gold digger because I married my dead fiance's brother. Aside from that, my aunties created a group chat where they gossiped about my father, saying that he forced me into a marriage with the Ali's for his own benefit.

People were talking, in fact the whole of Kano was talking. But that was just a minor concern. I was relieved the *Nikkah* ceremony didn't necessitate a woman's presence. In the north, it's customary for men to perform the *Nikkah* at the mosque, with the news reaching the woman through her husband. The *Nikkah* was the only event planned, but you wouldn't know it from looking at me or my house. I hadn't applied any henna, and everything looked just as it normally did. A visitor might think nothing was out of the ordinary.

"Ismahan, let her be." I heard my mother say from the kitchen. Nazeerah held my arm firmly and assuringly. I felt so good having her by my side. I was having a mental breakdown but I had to hold tight. I couldn't let my mother see me breaking down. It would kill her, the guilt of pushing me into a marriage with Aimar.

"Has he texted you?" I asked Nazeerah, and she shook her head, meaning 'no.' It meant the *Nikkah* had not been finalized. I felt a bit relieved on hearing this. A part of me hoped it would be canceled.

After a couple of minutes of bantering over unimportant matters, Nazeerah's phone began to ring, and she picked it up. From the smile on her face, I could tell the news I dreaded had reached her ears.

“*Alhamdulillah*,” she said, gripping my arm more firmly. I tried to force a smile.

“You’re now Mrs. Aimar Ali,” Nazeerah whispered. She sounded so excited. And her excitement was justified. She was happy to have me as her sister-in-law and no longer just a friend.

“*Alhamdulillah*.” My mother came out of the kitchen and said, her eyes holding so much grief. She leaned down and hugged me. I hugged her back, feeling a sense of relief from our proximity.

Nazeerah's voice cut through the air, “Uhm... Ummah, Ummie has asked for Azrah to get ready. Aimar says they're leaving for Abuja today.”

My face fell flat. "Leaving for Abuja today?" I echoed, stunned. "Why the sudden rush?" My expression was mirrored by everyone in the room, they appeared confused.

“Why is Aimar in such a hurry?” my mother wondered aloud. “*Nikkah*, and now this?”

She shook her head, recalling the whirlwind events. As soon as Aimar received my acceptance, he arranged for our *Nikkah* to take place the very next day. I barely had time to think, let alone deliberate on my decision. He wanted everything done swiftly.

“Aimar claims he has a lot of work to do,” Nazeerah said.

“I’m not happy with this arrangement, but I have nothing to say since she’s already his wife.” *His wife?* Hearing my mother say that broke my heart. It was then that I realized I wasn't prepared for the consequences of my choices.

I turned to my mother, “Do I really have to leave today?” I asked.

With a nod, she said, "Yes, my dear, you have to." I shook my head in a nod and took a deep breath. Ready to face the life ahead of me.

Without saying a lot, I proceeded upstairs and took a shower. When I was done, Ismahan had already packed my luggage and other essential items. The *Kayan lefe* for Aimar and my wedding was presented on the day I agreed to marry him, and it wasn't the only one. The *Kayan lefe* meant for Sameer's and my marriage remained with me and would accompany me to Aimar's house, my new home.

Sameer's mother requested that I take everything, resulting in 50 boxes of clothes and other items to be transported to Aimar's. I was unsure of how they planned to move them, but his mother arranged to pick them up this morning. Now, they awaited me in my designated room and closet at Aimar's.

“I don’t want to wear that.” I said, upon seeing the outfit Ismahan had laid out for me to wear.

“Mother said you should wear it,” she said. I picked up the traditional attire, feeling a sense of resignation. The *atampa* was exquisite, adorned with intricate embroidery, and paired with a delicate, shimmering chattily veil. As someone who didn't adhere to traditional norms, I hated the idea of wearing this, but I didn't want to upset my mother before I left. So, I reluctantly obliged and got dressed in it.

When I returned back from the closet, my eyes met Sameer’s mom, seated on my bed with a huge smile on her face. “Ummie, you’re here!” I exclaimed, immediately enveloped in a warm hug. But my joy was tempered by concern - she had been ill, and I was surprised to see her seated in my room.

"Yes, my dear, and thank you so much.” She said to me, I smiled.

“For what?” I asked. “Why do you keep thanking me?”

“For becoming a part of my family. You’ve made me the happiest woman alive by doing so. My Aimar is a husband once again.” Her words touched my heart. She loved him so much.

“I did nothing, Ummie, but I’m glad to be a member of your family,” I said and she smiled.

"I'm sorry about Aimar rushing everything," she said, her voice trembling. "He's very stubborn, and that's why I need your help. Which is why I couldn't let you leave without speaking with you." Her eyes welled up with tears.

“What is it, Ummie? You look very sad.” I said.

“Azrah, I need you to help me for the sake of Allah. You’re my only hope at seeing my Aimar happy once again.” A part of me knew where this conversation was heading to, but I needed to hear more.

"Azrah, you’re going to be the closest to Aimar since you’re now his wife—closer than I ever will be to him. So I need you to help me bring him closer to Allah and stand a chance of finding happiness once again.” She said, and I got confused.

“What is wrong with Aimar?” I questioned.

“Aimar is heartbroken. He has been heartbroken for a very long time and has refused himself the chance of finding love again.” She explained, “This was one of the reasons why I wanted you to marry him, because you’re a good person, Azrah, and I know you will make him believe in Allah once again and fall in love with you.” I tried my best not to make a face at her last statement.

Aimar's falling in love with me was the last thing on my mind. In fact, I didn't want to have anything to do with him.

“Ummie, Aimar doesn’t like me, and it’s very obvious.” I informed her.

"That doesn't matter," she said. "He will fall in love with you. I truly believe so, because he's a very kind man, and so are you."

She paused, her eyes displaying sheer seriousness. "I want you to make me a promise, Azrah."

My heart skipped a beat on hearing what she said. “What promise, Ummie?”

“I need you to promise me that you’ll help Aimar find Allah again. I need you to promise me that you’ll be by his side no matter what.” Her words weighed heavy on my heart. How can I promise to be by the side of a man who clearly does not want me? I mean, we clearly do not want each other. And everybody could see it.

"Ummie..." My voice faltered as tears welled up in her eyes, and she clutched my arm tightly. The sight of her sob was unbearable.

But her request meant I'd have to associate with Aimar, something I had sworn never to do. I agonized over the decision, weighing my options. Yet, I couldn't bring myself to say no to her.

"I promise," I whispered, my words barely audible as I gazed at a mother's desperate tears. Her eyes pleaded with me to bring happiness back to her son.

"I'll try my best," I added, and she enveloped me in a firm hug.

Our moment was interrupted by a knock at the door. Nazeerah entered, her presence a subtle intrusion.

“Ummah, Aimar is becoming impatient.” Nazeerah informed us. “Azrah, we need to get to the airport.” She said, Ummie smiled at me, and advised me, and pleaded with me further to try and associate with Aimar. She also apologized for not being able to accompany me to Abuja. In fact, neither she nor my mother would be joining me. Both were unable to bring themselves to make the journey, given the sensitive circumstances surrounding my marriage. Instead, I would be traveling with Ismahan and Nazeerah.

I didn’t have to pack anything because all my bags and luggage were already in the car. Before leaving, my mom advised me, along with Ummie. They gave me a series of lectures on making my husband happy and fulfilling his right in Islam. As for my father, who had just returned from the mosque, he hugged and told me he was going to miss me.

“Be a good girl.” My father had simply said and made *dua’s* prayers for me.

We didn’t need to say too much. After bidding everyone goodbye. Ismahan and Nazeerah accompanied me to the airport, where Aimar was impatiently waiting.

The drive to the airport seemed endless, but eventually, we arrived. My luggage was swiftly unloaded from the car and whisked into the airport. Ismahan and Nazeerah walked beside me until we reached the business class waiting lounge, where Aimar sat with his daughter, Aymah, sleeping serenely on his lap.

As soon as he saw me, his expression turned cold, and his gaze shifted to Nazeerah.

“What took you so long?” he asked Nazeerah, his tone laced with impatience. She explained her reason for the delay, citing his mother's visit, but he cut her off, his interest already waning.

Once he'd vented his frustration about the wasted time, he curtly dismissed them.

“Both of you can leave now.”

“But Ummie said I should come with you to Abuja and make sure Azrah settles in comfortably before I leave,” Nazeerah protested.

“You can't be serious,” Aimar said, his voice rising. “You have school commitments. You both have to return home this instant.” he said, voice laced with annoyance.

Nazeerah remained silent, trying her best not to retaliate. She knew better than to go against him.

"Get out, both of you!" Aimar ordered, his glare fixed on Ismahan, who rolled her eyes in annoyance.

I turned to Nazeerah and said, “Nazeerah, you should go, you have school, and I promise I'll be fine.” She shook her head and hugged me tightly.

“If anything happens, please let us know,” Ismahan whispered, her voice laced with concern as she hugged me tightly. “With the way some people are acting, *wahala go dey*.” I playfully tapped her arm in reassurance.

Meanwhile, Aimar feigned indifference, pretending he hadn't heard us and focusing on keeping Aymah asleep.

After I bid both Nazeerah and Ismahan bye, they left me at the airport, and I took a seat next to Aimar. We both completely ignored each other's existence. I picked out my phone and scrolled through TikTok. Trying my best to keep myself from crying, I felt a deep pang of sadness as I prepared to leave home, having spent my entire life in Kano.

Except for summer vacations, Kano had always been my home. Those brief escapes typically took us to London, a city I cherished and held dear.

Lost in a seemingly endless stream of videos, I heard a voice call out to me using a name I wasn’t familiar with—“Mrs. Aimar.” I quickly turned to see where Aimar was seated, only to discover that he was walking away with Aymah on his shoulder.

"It’s time for boarding," A man before me said. I smiled in acknowledgment and got up.

As I followed him, I noticed that we weren’t heading towards the area where the regular planes I was used to were parked. Instead, we approached a jet with

‘ALI BUILDERS’ boldly written on its side. This was a private jet, a Gulfstream G650ER to be precise. I had never known that the Alis owned one. Nazeerah and Sameer never talked about their wealth, even though they were extremely rich, and everyone in Kano knew of their affluence.

I climbed the stairs and stepped inside. Aimar was already seated, his laptop open in front of him. I hesitated for a moment, then chose the seat opposite him. We exchanged no words until takeoff.

My father's flights typically lasted 55 minutes whenever he was visiting Abuja, so I assumed ours would be similar. As expected, the flight was brief, and we soon landed at Nnamdi Azikiwe Airport in Abuja.

As the plane touched ground, my nervousness grew. I was alone with a man who seemed indifferent to my presence. He didn't acknowledge me at all, instead continuing to type away on his laptop until we landed.

As the aeroplane parked, the doors opened, and it was time to disembark. Aimar exited without saying a word, leaving me stunned. Before I could react, the helpful man who had assisted me during boarding, emerged from the pilot's cabin.

“Mrs. Aimar, come with me,” he said. A woman dressed in a maid's uniform entered the aeroplane and opened a curtain to retrieve Aymah, who was asleep. She gently placed her on her shoulder, and we both walked down the aisle of the plane toward a sleek black Mercedes that had come to take us home. I had assumed Aimar would be in the car, but when I got in, he was nowhere to be found. The man, on the other hand, sat in the front seat with the driver, while the maid sat next to me with Aymah on her lap.

“Excuse me, where is Aimar?” I had to ask, my so-called husband didn’t feel the need to tell me where he was going. Not like I cared though.

"He's on his way to a meeting and has asked me to ensure you both get taken home," the man informed me, and I shook my head in understanding.

After an hour of driving, we arrived at a stunning mansion and drove inside. The exterior was breathtaking. In front of the mansion, ‘ALI BUILDERS’ was boldly written. It resembled a mini palace, complete with lush flowers and multiple fountains.

Immediately, our car came to a halt in the parking area. Two guards instantly walked over to the door and got it opened for me and the maid who was holding onto Aymah. I thanked the man who had opened the door and walked out.

Afterwards, I followed the man Aimar had instructed to get us home and walked into the mansion, my jaw nearly dropped when I saw the interior. The mansion was painted white with a bit of gray touches. It was absolutely beautiful! On arrival, two maids greeted me and kindly picked up my luggage.

"The maid will show you to your room, Mrs. Aimar," the man said. "If you need anything, please don't hesitate to let them know." I nodded in response.

Before heading to my room, I checked on Aymah, ensuring she was still fast asleep.

"When she's awake, please ensure she's fed," I said to her nanny, who affirmed with a nod.

Later, I followed the maid to my assigned room. As I entered the room, I was delighted to see the elegant all-white decor, accented with soft green and subtle hints of light gray. The combination was stunning.

“Madam, we've arranged your luggage in your closet. If you need anything, please use the telephone to reach me," the maid said, and I smiled gratefully.

"And lunch will be ready in twenty minutes," another maid added. I thanked them before they departed.

Trying to seek solace, I entered the spacious bathroom, matching the room's serene color scheme. The cupboard revealed an array of toiletries. I opened a new sponge and indulged in a refreshing shower. Afterwards, I made *wudu*, retrieved my prayer mat and hijab, and performed *salah*.

As I read the Quran, a knock interrupted me. "Come in!" I said, my eyes still fixed on the page.

Aimar entered, hands pocketed, his gaze piercing. My heart skipped a beat, but I swiftly regained composure.

"Hello, *wifey*," he said with sarcasm, his eyes mocking me. I looked away.

"I'm sorry, I didn't know you were..." He cut me off.

"Keep it to yourself." His tone was brute.

"I thought you were smarter than this," he continued. "You accepted being my wife, proving an initial fact I had rejected."

Perplexed, I replied, "I beg your pardon."

"You're selfish, Azrah. You agreed to marry me despite causing my brother's death." His accusation stung.

"I didn't cause Sameer's death. Stop saying that," I pleaded, struggling to contain my sobs.

Aimar's words cut deep, reigniting the embers of self-doubt within me. His eyes blazed with anger as he spat, "You did, you're selfish." His voice dripped with venom. "You made my brother run errands on your wedding day, you’re evil"

He glared at me, expecting a response, but I remained silent. Frustrated, he turned and stormed out of my room, leaving me reeling from the weight of his accusations.

Overwhelmed, I burst into tears. *"Oh Allah, please forgive me,"* I whispered, crushed by a sense of guilt.



Chapter 6



Aimar Ali

Abuja, Nigeria.

I'D BEEN MARRIED TO Azrah for two weeks now, and I was relieved that our paths rarely crossed. Thanks to my early work schedule and late returns. Even when we did, I'd completely ignore her, despite her warm greetings. She'd always smile and greet me, but I found her enthusiasm infuriating. Her very presence frustrated me, and I preferred keeping my distance.

Exhausted and ravenous after my morning run, I nonetheless decided to shower first before eating. As I made my way into my living room, Azrah caught my attention. She was seated on a prayer mat in the garden. This was her normal routine every morning. Through the spacious, floor-to-ceiling transparent glass wall, I saw her poised amidst the garden's splendor, framed by slender profiles of refined glass and lush greenery. She had a Quran in front of her, and her attention seemed very focused on it. As she read, I saw her wipe her eyes, she was crying.

Ugh, what a drama queen!

I ignored her presence and headed to my room, where I took a quick shower.

Afterwards, I got dressed for work in a sleek blue Prada suit, pairing it with my Audemars Piguet wristwatch, a gift from Khadijah. The mere mention of her name ruins my day, filling me with anticipation for our upcoming meeting. Securing the financial deal was my top priority, and Khadijah held the key, which is why I was wearing her gift. I knew she'd be excited to see it on my wrist today.

After ensuring I looked presentable, I headed downstairs while scrolling through my phone and replying to some emails. As I approached the dining room, I heard laughter coming from there. I recognized Aymah and Azrah's voices.

"And here comes the train, choo-choo!" I saw Azrah try to feed Aymah, and she ate while her nanny stood there watching in amusement. Aymah never ate without me, so this was very amusing to watch.

“What is going on here?” I interrupted them. Azrah turned around to stare at me, dressed in a white *Jilbab* hijab.

“Sir, I’m sorry madam insisted...” Aymah’s nanny tried to speak but I interrupted her.

“Do I pay you to let strangers feed my daughter? Huh? Do you want to lose your job?” I harshly said to the nanny, and she shook her head ‘no.’

“Mr. Ali, it isn't her fault. I was the one who...” I didn’t let Azrah complete her statement.

“I wasn’t speaking to you. And for the record, you’re not my child’s mother, so stop trying to act like one. Stay away from my child.” I warned her, her eyes instantly filled with tears, causing my heart to skip a beat. *I hated making women cry.* But I had to put her in her place. I couldn't accept the fact that everything in my life had changed. I now had a wife, and Aymah had a mother figure who wasn't Aminah. The thought of replacing Aminah was unbearable, it was something I never imagined doing.

“But I’m your wife.” She said in a whisper, causing me to laugh in mockery. Did she truly believe this alliance held any significance?

“Wife? Are you foolish?” I asked, “Do not ever call yourself my wife, I do not consider you one. You’re nothing to me, and do not even make the mistake of telling anyone that I’m married to you, got it?” My tone was harsh. She had nothing more to say than to nod her head in approval.

I turned to the nanny. “And as for you, go get Aymah ready for school, and ensure she isn’t late,” I said to her, and she immediately picked up Aymah and walked away. Azrah tried to get up and leave, but I interrupted her.

"Have your account details written down and sent to me by one of the maids before you go about telling the world that I don't take care of you," I instructed. She stared at me calmly for a moment, then took a deep breath.

“I do not need your money. Keep it to yourself. I’ve made arrangements to get a job,” she said, and I couldn’t help but laugh.

"You really think you can get a job in Abuja?" I asked, but she remained silent, her glare piercing with malice.

"Trust me, no one will hire you," I continued, "and even if they do, they'll fire you once they find out you're my wife. So, stop being a nuisance and send in your details.”

"I don't need your money," she said, "and besides, I'll get a job today, mark my words."

With that, she stormed off angrily, leaving me staring at her retreating figure in amusement. I found it hilarious that she truly believed she could get a job so

easily. Shaking my head, I decided to leave for work, knowing I had a long day ahead.

On arriving at work, I was welcomed by my friend and Business partner, Rayan Shetimah. He was impatient, as he kept complaining, sitting on the couch in my office.

"Aimar, you're late," he said. "And, don't even think about telling me you were performing husband duties." Rayan teased, his expression playful, but I shot him a scowl. He knew better than to push the joke further.

“Rayan, I do not like such jokes.” I sternly said, and he chuckled.

“Whatever, tell me you’re ready for today's meeting, and has Khadijah’s uncle signed the papers already?” he inquired.

“No, he hasn't,” I said. "She says he'll only sign them if I agree to meet with him to discuss our relationship. They want us to get married soon.”

“And what’s that for? Isn’t she aware that you’re married?” he questioned.

"She is," I said. "She doesn't care or mind being my second wife." Rayan burst out into laughter.

"Is that woman mad or what?" he asked, and I shrugged.

"Aimar, you need to stay away from her," he continued. "She's going to ruin your marriage if you don't."

"And who says I care about my marriage being ruined?" I asked, noticing Rayan's surprise.

He was taken aback by my question. "Rayan, to dominate Nigeria's oil, mining, and gas industry, I need Khadijah's father's approval. The president's support is crucial," I explained. “Dating and marrying his daughter could be the keys to securing that support. Just consider it.”

Rayan's brow furrowed in concern. “And, what about your wife?" he asked. “How do you think she'll feel about this, Aimar? You don't need all this wealth, it's time to prioritize yourself and your family. You're a married man now."

“Rayan, I'm disgusted that you keep calling her my wife,” I said in one breath. “You and I know the circumstances surrounding this marriage. Stop it.”

“Sorry,” Rayan apologized.

“Enough of this conversation," I said, changing the subject. “Get the Ogbeche company files ready. We have a meeting with Mr. Adams Khalid in an hour.”

Rayan nodded and left my office without another word, tasked with preparing the files.

I refocused on work, scrolling through my emails and ensuring each one received attention.

Time was always valuable, and I never decided to waste it.



Chapter 7



Azrah Yusuf

STAYING AT HOME ALL day was tiring, and when I thought back to what Aimar had said to me this morning, I decided I was going to get a job today no matter what. I needed to show him that I didn't need his money or him to survive.

Due to the circumstances that led to my marriage, I didn't want to burden my father with any financial problems. Instead of sitting around and doing nothing, I took my bath and headed to get a job. After making sure I had called my good friend Uche, who had directed me to a company.

I didn't know my way around Abuja, and the place where I had an interview was at Maitama, according to Uche. So I took a bolt, which drove me all the way to the company, which was a very large building with the name **'ATTAH ESTABLISHMENT'** written boldly on it. As soon as I arrived, I called Uche, just as he had requested. After paying the Bolt driver, I stepped out of the car.

"Hi, Uche, I am at the company." I said the moment he received the call.

"Very good, someone will come get you now." He informed me.

"Alright, thank you so much, Uche. May God bless you." I appreciated him.

"It's nothing. I'll see you when I come to Abuja, *abi*?" He asked.

"Sure, of course!" I happily said. We wrapped up our conversation and hung up. After about three minutes, a young woman walked over to me, a smile on her face. She wore a sleek black suit, her straight hair perfectly styled on her head, as she confidently sashayed toward me.

She was light-skinned and breathtakingly beautiful. Her features screamed mixed race, and her curves were perfectly accentuated in her pencil skirt.

"You must be Azrah," she said with a warm smile. "Welcome! Uche told me I'd meet you here. My name is Adesuwa, it's lovely to meet you." She beamed happily at me.

"Thank you, Adesuwa. It's nice meeting you too." I said and she smiled.

"My boss is waiting for you, come with me." I followed her instructions, and she led me into the company.

I loved everything about the office - the hustle and bustle of workers rushing back and forth, the rows of mini cubicles surrounding us.

Before I knew it, we were stepping into an elevator that whisked us away to the top floor. As the doors opened, we made our way to a sleek glass door. Adesuwa took the lead, knocking gently before pushing it open.

“Come!” She urged me to come in along with her, which I did. We soon stood before a man whose entire demeanor radiated Islamic and northern Nigerian culture. His appearance and attire clearly indicated he was Hausa.

“Good afternoon, sir, here she is.” Adesuwa introduced me.

“Good afternoon, sir!” I returned the greeting, a smile clearly written on my face.

“Afternoon, you may leave Adesuwa.” The boss said to her, and she left, but not without uttering a silent ‘good luck’ at me. She was so sweet.

I was left alone with the boss, who scrutinized my sky-blue Abaya, covering me from head to toe. His gaze made me uneasy. “Take a seat,” he said. I complied, sitting down as instructed.

“What is your name?” With a welcoming smile, he asked.

“My name is Azrah Yusuf.” I replied.

“How old are you?” he questioned.

“I am 22 years old.” I said, and he shook his head in amusement.

"Nice,” he mumbled. “Can I have your CV?” I did as told and passed him the document. He intently flipped through it and nodded his head in approval.

“Are you married?” When he asked that question, it took me time to come up with an answer. But when Aimar’s words replayed in my ear, I took a deep breath and replied to him.

“I am not married.” I informed him, and he shook his head in acknowledgement.

“Hm, your CV seems very interesting, and I like everything I am seeing here,” He said, I couldn’t help but smile.

“Thank you, sir.”

“Would you be able to do the job of a personal assistant?” he asked, and I immediately agreed. Of course, I would be more than able to.

"Yes, sir, I will be very happy to.” I informed him, and he smiled.

“Great, but before I can hire you, you’d have to pass a test first.” He informed me, and I eagerly sat upright.

“What test, sir?” I asked, and he glared at the wristwatch on his arm.

He informed me, “I have a meeting at 3 pm, and I'd like you to join me. If you can keep up with the discussion and take note of everything said, you'll be automatically hired.” That seemed easy. I had done a job like this before during my internship. Despite my father's wishes for my sister and me to be housewives, I was determined to forge my own path. Being part of the Royal

family had its downsides – it meant living a life dictated by tradition, with every major decision made for you, from who to marry to when to end the marriage. I was relieved to be away from that, at least for now.

"Yes, sir, I can do it, I promise." I said with an eager smile. He chuckled at seeing how excited I was.

"Very well, we need to leave now, the meeting starts in twenty minutes." He got up from his seat, and so did I. He reached for his drawer and pulled out a journal and a pen, which he handed over to me. I collected it, and without saying more words, we headed for the elevator. It was a silent journey down to the first floor.

When we got there, we made our way to the exit, and a sleek BMW M5 was parked waiting for him. His driver opened the door to the car, and he hopped in. I was left confused and as I tried to sit at the front, he instantly interrupted me.

"You'll be sitting here," he said, and I made my way to sit next to him at the back. I was sure to keep my distance. Throughout the ride, we didn't speak to each other.

Thank goodness the ride wasn't a long one because I was feeling awkward, sitting next to him. As soon as we parked in front of a huge building, the car came to a halt, and we alighted out.

The boss led the way while I trailed behind him. His aura was very demanding, and everybody that walked past him greeted him, and he didn't fail to acknowledge them with a smile.

As we approached a door with a *'Do not disturb'* sign boldly written on it, he pushed it open, and everyone seated in the room immediately shifted their attention to us. And I didn't fail to notice those eyes that bored into my soul, there were Aimar's, and he stared at me in shock and confusion. His lips moved, as though trying to say something but he refrained. I smiled at him mischievously as we walked in. I didn't fail to notice his angry expression, I tried not to laugh.

"Good evening, everyone. I'm sorry I'm late." The boss said, and everyone welcomed him except Aimar, who I couldn't tear my eyes from, and neither could he. He was staring at me like a hawk. I tried my best to ignore his existence and trailed behind my boss, who gave me a place to sit before taking his. After that scene was over, the meeting commenced, and I began to do my job. I noted each and everything being said. As I worked, I could feel Aimar's gaze on me, and when I looked up a couple of times, I caught him staring.

"I don't think $77,000,000 will be enough for this project," I heard Aimar say.

“That's not for you to decide about Aimar,” my boss shot back, his tone dripping with determination and a hint of animosity towards Aimar. The tension between them was palpable, like a long-standing rivalry. It was clear they didn't get along.

“I wasn’t speaking to you, Mustapha. I’d advise you to mind your business.” Aimar shot back, his focus moving to the man at the podium.

“This is my business, Aimar, as long as my money will be included, I have every right to speak on it.” The boss said.

The tension between them made me stifle a laugh, and Aimar noticed, his eyes glared at me before they focused back on my boss.

"Mustapha, please, not today.” Aimar said, his attention back on the man at the podium.

The man at the podium immediately intervened, “Everyone spoke wisely, but I think you seem to need more time to yourselves to discuss this matter, so due to this, the meeting will be adjourned till next week.” The man declared, and without any hesitation, I wrote it down.

Everyone began to leave the room, and my gaze immediately shifted to Aimar, who seemed very busy as he spoke to a man, anger evident in the way he moved his hands. I turned to speak to my boss, who had requested to see my notes.

“This is good, you’re very smart, and you did a great job at drawing a table to specify each cost for the project.” He commended, and I smiled afterwards.

“Does this mean I get the job?” I asked, excitedly, and with a chuckle, he nodded.

“Of course, with skills like that, I’m in good hands,” he said, and I unconsciously yelled a *‘thank you’* out loud, catching Aimar’s attention.

He gave me a very harsh glare before getting up and walking away. That was the least of my worries. I was glad I had got a job.

“You shall begin tomorrow, a car will be sent to your residence by 8 pm, where do you live?” he asked. I made a funny expression. Realizing I didn’t know where I resided.

“I'm new to Abuja, so I'm not sure,” I replied, “but the Bolt app says *Asokoro*.” He listened attentively, then shook his head.

“Alright, I’ll have the company’s driver call you before picking you up, is that okay?” He asked, and I thanked him. I got a job, I was very excited and couldn’t stop myself from smiling.

Well, the boss and I went our separate ways. I was thrilled to have avoided my so-called husband, so I quickly grabbed a Bolt ride home.

As soon as I arrived, I retreated to my room. I decided to freshen up with a shower before calling Ismahan. I filled her in on today's events, and she was overjoyed about my new job. However, her delight quickly turned to frustration as she unleashed a string of curses aimed at Aimar, I happily joined in.

What a jerk!



Chapter 8



Aimar Ali

I COULDN’T BELIEVE she had managed to secure a job— which wasn't a meager job, but one she got with Mustapha Attah, my rival. I really disliked him, and watching her speak to him only increased my hatred. I was so angry for a reason I couldn't even understand. At first, I wanted to believe otherwise, but when I made some investigations after the meeting, I learned that she had applied to work at his company. And as I watched them sit together and talk, my blood boiled inside me.

“Aimar, why do you look so angry?” Rayan asked, as soon as I walked into the office, just back from the meeting.

“It’s nothing. Have you gotten the files from Mr. Smith?” I asked him back, taking a deep breath.

“No, Mr. Smith says he needs Mustapha Attah to sign them first,” Rayan said, as my expression hardened.

“And why is that bastard taking so long to sign them?” I asked, my voice louder than it should have been.

“Aimar, are you okay? What did Mustapha Attah do now?” Rayan questioned.

I shrugged and picked up some files from my desk.

“Just make sure Mr. Smith sends in the papers by tomorrow. I’m going home,” I said, not explaining further as I left the office.

In the parking lot, where my car and driver were, waiting and expecting me to come, my phone rang. Seeing Khadijah's caller ID, I let out a hiss, before receiving the call.

“Hi, baby!” she greeted, her tone causing me to roll my eyes.

“Hi, Khadijah. What is it?” I asked, not even feigning excitement.

“Aimar, you said you’d visit me today,” she whined and then, I took a deep breath before replying to her.

“*Aimar, you need her*,” I reminded myself. “I’m busy, Khadijah. I’ll talk to you later.” Without waiting for her response, I hung up. I was too angry to continue this conversation.

On reaching home, I walked straight to my room, took a bath, and observed *salah*. For some reason, seeing Azrah always read the *Quran* and take her *deen*

religion seriously had started rubbing off on me. She was often in the garden reciting the *Quran*, and sometimes she prayed there too.

After salah, I went to the dining room for lunch. Aymah was still in school, so I was left alone. Azrah hadn't returned yet, and I was feeling a slight worry. She was new to Abuja —how had she even managed to find her way to The Attah Establishment? But why should I worry? She wasn't important to me.

As soon as I finished my lunch, I picked up my laptop to resume my work on it. Aymah returned, dressed in her school uniform and she ran to hug me tightly.

"Daddy!" she called out. "Where's Aunty?" she asked, scanning the room. Azrah had woven a spell around my daughter, stronger than my warnings to stay away. A knot of fear formed in my chest. I couldn't bear the thought of replacing Aminah with someone else.

"Aunty isn't here," I told her, and she pouted in disappointment.

"Where did she go?"

"To work." She mouthed an "oh," and I asked Helen to help her freshen up and have lunch. I returned to my laptop, so immersed in work that I didn't realize it was already *Maghreb*. I prayed, read some pages of the *Quran*, and performed my second *salah*.

Azrah had already returned; I had heard Aymah screaming with excitement when she walked in. My daughter was utterly obsessed with her.

Afterwards, I visited Aymah's room to read her bedtime stories, and we both retired to bed. But later that night, sleep evaded me. I sought comfort in my favorite ice cream, which was always in the freezer for nights like this.

In the kitchen, I heard a bit of chittering. I found Azrah wearing the most ridiculous pajamas I'd ever seen, covered in kittens, making her look like a child. I struggled not to laugh and cleared my throat to get her attention. She was helping herself to my ice cream.

"Who said you could take my ice cream?" I asked, and she looked up to me with an expression of boredom.

With the way she looked at me, I was more annoyed with her. She always stared at me, as though I was a mad man.

"I was hungry and found it in the freezer," she replied, unfazed. I took a deep breath.

She was just so annoying!

"What were you doing at the meeting yesterday?" I asked, crossing my arms.

With a mouthful of ice cream, she grinned. "You said I wouldn't be able to get a job, so I got one—to prove you wrong."

"I see what you're trying to do," I retorted, my voice firm. "You want to take me down with Mustapha's help. You're smarter than I thought." Her working for

him could only mean that; what were the odds?

"What do you mean?" she asked, feigning confusion.

"Stop pretending," I blurted out. "I want you to quit that job and find another. I can’t have you working for my rival while you live under my roof."

Unexpectedly, she burst into laughter, her boldness intriguing to me.

“I’m not leaving the job,” she stated.

“You will do as I say!” I demanded, but then, she ignored me, picked up her bowl of ice cream and biscuits, and approached me.

“Read my lips, Mr. Ali, I am not leaving the job. So... Goodnight.” She attempted to walk past me, but I grabbed her arm, causing her ice cream and biscuit to drop.

“Look what you’ve done!” she complained, rather childishly.

“Shut up!” I held her arm firmly. “You think you’re smart, right?”

"Aimar, you’re hurting me," she whispered, her voice trembling. "Let go of me."

I immediately released her, overwhelmed with a wave of guilt. I didn't intend to hurt her, but desperation had consumed me. In my anger, I had forgotten the stark difference between the male and female physical strength.

"You're under my roof, and you’ll do as I say," I declared. "You’ll quit that job and never go back to that company."

As we stood close, my arms wrapped around hers, and I felt a sudden wave of warmth, a kind of calm I had longed to experience. She wasn’t very tall, a stark contrast to my 6'3" frame. Yet, as she gazed into my eyes, her expression was kind, but unyielding.

"Let go!" she exclaimed, breaking the silence. She pulled away. "Bold of you to think you have the right to control me when you've clearly stated you want nothing to do with me." She seethed, her boldness amazing me, and I struggled not to smile in amusement.

"Read my lips, Aimar Ali: I will not quit my job. You can drown yourself in the ocean, for all I care." She blabbered, her eyes flashing with malice as she walked away.

Damnit! I loved the way she spoke - calm, yet rudely assertive, all at once.

Watching her retreating figure, a surge of protectiveness washed over me. She was *mine*, my *wife*, and the thought of Mustapha Attah spending time with her was unbearable. But I couldn’t let her know that—so I’d act like I didn’t care.

Even if a part of me did, I hated it so much that I wanted Mustapha’s head for being close to *her*.



Chapter 9



Azrah Yusuf

IT WAS ALREADY LATE, and I hadn’t even eaten anything since the day before, so I made up my mind to get myself snacks from the kitchen. I dropped my Quran on my reading table after calling it a night. Afterwards, I proceeded out of my room, knowing too well that everyone would be asleep by now. It was 2am in the morning. I successfully made my way to the kitchen.

As soon as I got there, I was very confused because I didn’t have an idea as to where the spices and foodstuff were. I wouldn't have known where the kitchen was, if I hadn't stumbled into it by mistake, this morning. I had mistakenly thought it was the path to the stunning garden I spotted, when I first entered the mansion.

Knowing I had no choice but to eat the leftovers, I opened the fridge, but to my surprise, I found a bowl of ice cream and some biscuits in the fridge. I couldn’t resist it, so I pulled out the ice cream and five pieces of the biscuit and sat at the mini dining table in the kitchen, where I began to eat as I scrolled through TikTok. I tried my best not to think about things that would make me sad, but memories of Sameer still kept creeping in, making me feel weak. I often heard his voice echoing in my mind.

After a few minutes of sitting by myself, I heard someone clear their throat, and it turned out to be Aimar. He had a very big scowl on his face when he stared at me, and then, at the bowl of ice cream I was devouring.

“Who said you could take my ice cream?” He asked, his voice rising in anger, almost turning to a yell.

The ice cream belonged to him, but I wasn't sure. The tone of his voice resounded hard —he whined like a little child. To me, he was a full grown man who couldn't shed his petulant streak.

“I was hungry and found it right in the freezer.” I informed him, and then, he glared at me calmly before taking a deep breath, as though he was trying to control his anger.

“What were you doing at the meeting yesterday evening?” he asked calculatingly, waiting for a wrong response from me, which could make him launch himself at me.

With my mouth filled with the ice cream, I replied. “You said I wouldn’t be able to get a job, and so I did, in order to prove you wrong.”

"I see what you're trying to do here," he said, a hint of admiration laced with his voice. "You want to take me down with Mustapha's help. You're smarter than I thought you were."

I furrowed my brow, confused. "What do you mean?" I asked, unsure of the underlying dynamics at play.

“Stop pretending, I know what you’re up to,” he implored. “I want you to quit that job. Find another one. I cannot have you working for my rival under my roof.”

For just a second, I wanted to believe I didn’t hear him clearly, but I did, which prompted me to laugh, earning me a confused glare.

“I’m not leaving the job.” I said, very determined.

“You will do as I say!” he stated curtly and then, I glared at him for a few seconds, picked up my bowl of ice cream and biscuit, and stood to my feet.

“Read my lips, Mr. Ali,” I said, my voice clearly announcing my mood. “I am not leaving the job. So... good night!” With that being said, I tried to walk past him, but he grabbed my arms and pulled me back, causing my ice cream and biscuit to drop to the ground.

“Look what you’ve done!” I complained.

“Shut up!” He gripped my arm firmly. “You think you’re smart right, huh?” His grip tightened.

"Aimar, you're hurting me. Let go of me," I said calmly. Aimar loosened his grip slightly, but his hold remained firm, keeping me from walking away.

"You're under my roof, and you'll do as I say. You'll quit that job and never return to that company." His chest was mere inches from mine, his towering height making him all I could see. His captivating scent enveloped me, and despite the tension, I couldn't help but respond to his proximity. My body's traitorous reaction sent a shiver down my spine. I knew I had to act quickly.

"Let go!" I exclaimed, breaking the silence. I pulled away harshly. "Bold of you to think you have the right to control me when you've clearly stated you want nothing to do with me." I let my anger get the best of me. He was stunned, staring at me in amusement.

"Read my lips, Aimar Ali: I will not quit my job. You can drown yourself in the ocean, for all I care." My final statement knocked the atmosphere with my thick voice. I walked out on him, left him puzzled, but he didn’t say a word, and only watched me take my leave.

He could say whatever he wanted, but I was never going to quit my job. Especially since an impulse was in me and it took pleasure in getting under his

skin and putting him in his place. I retired to bed early, excited for my first day at work.

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The next morning, I was awake before fajr in order to observe *tahajjud*. *Tahajjud* had been helping me remain sane. I barely thought of Sameer nowadays, and I was glad about that. I loved him very much, and the thought of not having him by my side broke me beyond what words could explain, so I would rather not think about him.

After I was done observing tahajjud, I had to find my way to Aimar's room, his mother's words clinging to my mind. I didn't know where his room was, but I was ready to guess and knock on each door in the house until I found his. Luckily for me, I found a maid cleaning up the house, so I decided to ask her about it.

"Hi, good morning." I said, a smile clearly showing on my face. She returned my gesture.

"Morning, madam, how may I help you?" She asked back.

"Where's your boss's room?" I inquired.

"The last room on the left," she said, and I thanked her before making my way there. As I walked, my hijab dragged on the floor, threatening to pull me down.

As soon as I was near his room, I knocked on his door. I was calm at first until I got no response, so I knocked even harder.

Knocking harder did my bidding, and Aimar immediately opened the door, a very aggressive look appearing on his face, which automatically intensified, when he realized it was me.

"Are you insane? What gives you the right to knock on my door by this time of the night?" he gruffly asked, his voice breathing threat.

Making a deep sigh with a bored expression, I said gently. "It's time for salah, and I noticed you do not go to the mosque, so I wanted to wake you up so you wouldn't miss out today." I informed him, only to earn a dramatic laugh from him.

"See, don't ever try this nonsense again. Get out of my room now before I lose my tolerance," he said through his gritted teeth.

"Look, I mean no harm. Your mother asked me to ensure you observe your *salah*, so that's what I am doing." I informed him.

"I don't have time for this!" he retorted, striding to the door of his room and slamming it shut in front of me.

"Make sure you pray!" I yelled stubbornly, backed up with a loud hiss in response. I couldn't help but giggle. Something in me enjoyed getting under his

skin. Yet, a part of me was filled with sadness that he wouldn't visit the mosque, and I knew I had to find a way to help him reconnect with Allah. But that was a plan for later.

For now, I needed to pray and get ready for my first day of work. So, I was thrilled.

As soon as I reached my room, I observed *salah* and then headed to the bathroom, where I took a bath. When I was done with this, I applied my skincare and rubbed lotion on my body, threw on a baby pink Abaya, and matched it with a baby pink purse I had got from Chanel. I also did my makeup, sprayed on some perfumes—subtle scents that wouldn't draw attention—and headed out of my room. I was going to take a bolt to work today, since we had not finalized things with the boss in regards to the driver.

The moment I stomped my foot on the first stair of the staircase, I ran into Aimar. He was dressed in a brown suit, the sweet smell of her perfume filling the air. “Good morning, Mr. Ali.” I beamed at him.

If I was going to try to bring him closer to Allah, I might as well become friends with him, at least. But, just as I thought, my gestures were ignored, and he walked past me. He headed downstairs and made his way over to the dining room, where he hugged Aymah and scolded her nanny for not making her hair into a bun for school that day. His grumpiness had become a daily ritual.

As I entered the dining room to greet Aymah, she darted away from Aimar and rushed into my arms. The moment she saw me, she wrapped me in a tight hug.

"Aunty, good morning!" Aymah exclaimed, beaming at me. I couldn't help but chuckle with eagerness.

“Good morning, Aymah, how are you, princess?” I asked, my eyes not missing Aimar’s scowl.

“Fine, Aunty, can you please feed me today?” Aymah asked, and I nodded happily and picked her up.

We walked over to the dining room, and as I tried to sit and feed her, Aimar’s voice interrupted us.

“Helen, take Aymah to her room and feed her there, and ensure she’s in school before 8 am.” Aimar said, his voice stern.

Helen, Aymah’s nanny, did as told, while giving me an apologetic smile, she picked up Aymah and left.

As soon as they were out of sight, Aimar shifted his attention to me. “Stay away from my daughter and me, do not try to act like her mother,” he let out, rather sternly.

“I wasn’t trying to act like her mother!” I said to him, He didn’t say anything more, and then, he stood up and left. I could hear the front door open and close; he was on his way to work. Feeling the need to eat something before I would leave, I picked up an apple from the fruit bowl and put it in my purse.

Soon after, I booked my bolt, and when it arrived, I walked out of the house and boarded it. I greeted the man and we began the journey. In Kano, I rarely took bolts because I always drove myself around, so taking a bolt was new to me.

Well, the drive to the office didn't take us very long, as I soon arrived there, and paid the driver. After then, I hopped out of the car and I headed for the office building and straight to the boss’s office. As soon as I got to his door, I met Adesuwa, and she smiled happily at me the moment she saw me.

“Hi, Azrah, right?” She asked, and I acknowledged with a smile, and we hugged.

“Yeah, good morning!” I returned the greeting to her.

“Congratulations on your job. You’re welcome to the company!” She said, and I thanked her.

Later on, she advised me on dos and don'ts and told me she’d show me the nook and cranny of the place, before she left. After her departure, I knocked on the boss’s office, and he asked me to come in, which I did.

“Good morning, boss!” I greeted him, my eyes looking nowhere else but at him.

“Good morning, Azeezah, come take a seat.” The boss returned, a smile drawn clearly on his face.

“My name is Azrah.” I corrected him with a smile, and he facepalmed himself.

“I am very sorry, I have a very bad memory,” he said. “Welcome to the Attah establishment, we are glad to have you here.” He was in the auto-boss mood.

“Thank you, boss, I’m glad to be here too.” I reciprocated. I was very nervous, and my hands were shaking. This was my first real work experience, aside from my IT internship at a company in Kano.

However, I found it extremely dull and spent most of my days watching movies, until it was time to head home.

"Firstly, my name is Mustapha Attah; please address me accordingly," he said. I gave him a nod, acknowledging his words.

"Regarding your salary, I've emailed you the details. You’ll find everything you need to know in your mail.” He informed me.

"Thank you very much!" I exclaimed with a smile. "I won't disappoint you," I assured him, and he smiled back.

"Alright, we have a lot of work to do today," he said, handing me an iPad. "Adesuwa will instruct you further on how to use the iPad for work-related issues." I collected the iPad and listened attentively.

"Err..., you will accompany the driver to send out documents and invitations to several companies," he continued. "Check the Notes app; the companies are listed."

I opened the Notes app and scanned the list. One name stood out: THE ALI BUILDERS, ALI OIL AND GAS, and others. Those were Aimar's companies. I couldn't help but frown.

“When you get there, ensure you speak to their CEO and present to them our letter of invitation to our annual conference, which will be held on the 17th of August, and secondly, ensure to get their signature of approval on the document.” He said, I nodded in affirmation, as I took notes in the notes app.

"Alright, sir,” I affirmed.

“The driver is outside, ensure you get the task done before 2 pm, okay?” he said, and I assured him I would. After further instructions, I was permitted to leave with the documents and invitations. When I walked out, I met with Adesuwa, whose office was right in front of the boss's, her mini cubicle stood clean.

“Adesuwa, I need your help.” I said the minute I stood before her.

“Sure, what is it?” She replied excitedly, eager to help.

“The boss said you’d show me how to use the iPad for work; I really do not know how to go about that.” I explained to her.

She reached out for the iPad instantly, and I handed it over to her. She tapped on a couple of apps and then passed it over to me.

“That’s the manual on how to go about using the iPad for work purposes, you can go through it after work,” she said. I thanked her. “If you need any more help, you know where to find me.”

“Thank you, bye!” I said. “I have to dispatch all this today.” She chuckled at my goofy tone and wished me good luck.

After our little bantering, I made my way for the exit and soon found myself seated with the driver, the moment I got outside.

On the list, *‘Armani Builders’* was our first stop, so we delivered the papers to them and to the other companies. The last stop was Aimar's company, the one I dreaded mostly.

Having no other option but to go, we drove to his company, which wasn’t as far as I thought. As soon as we reached his company, the driver came to a halt, and I summoned all the courage in me to walk in.

Unexpectedly, the company premises were scanty and eerily quiet, with everything meticulously arranged and maintained, reminiscent of Aimar's house. This was nothing like The Attah Establishment, where workers loitered around their scattered cubicles.

A man approached me, adorned in office wear and with a very bold expression on his face. He seemed to be the security man. “Good morning, madam, what are you here for?”

Clearing my throat, I replied to him. “I am here to see Mr. Ali. I’m a worker from the Attah establishment. I have a parcel for Mr. Ali.” I said to the man, his eyes scanning me from head to toe, he made a serious expression, and then he gave me a quick nod after scrolling through his phone. I was very confused with what was going on, but I maintained my poise and waited for him to lead me to Aimar.

"Come with me," he finally said.

I followed him, and we walked to the elevator. Inside, he pressed the buttons, and we ascended to the top floor. As the doors opened, a stunning glass wall revealed the magnificent office. I was captivated by its elegance, Aimar certainly had impeccable taste and flair for glass walls.

"Wait here," he instructed me. "I'll have to inform his secretary before you meet him."

With a nod, I stood by the window, gazing out at the breathtaking view from the high vantage point.

My mind was lost, that I almost didn’t notice a figure standing next to me. Startled, I turned around only to see a woman, elegantly dressed in an Abaya, with an unpleasant look on her face. “Who are you? And what are you doing in my boyfriend's office?” She asked me, as I glared at her calmly.

“Good morning, madam. I was sent here from the Attah establishment to deliver a parcel to Mr. Ali.” My statement prompted a disrespectful glare from her, she was condescending, almost like she was on a battlefield with me.

“I see, you better do your work and just leave, I know girls like you and their tactics.” She said, and I was baffled, immediately. I didn’t utter a word but just stared at her, dumbfounded.

“Madam, the boss will meet you now.” Thankfully the earlier man came to my rescue, and as for the crazy woman, her glare intensified, giving me a clear warning not to make a mistake.

I avoided her eyes and walked with the man until we got to the front of a huge glass door. The man tapped on a button and told me to go into the office. When I walked in, Aimar wasn’t seated there, but instead, there was a man right there, seated and tapping away on a laptop.

“Good morning, sir.” I greeted, and the man raised his head, a confused look on his face, before a smile instantly spread across his lips.

“Azrah!” he called out, super excitedly. I was confused, so I managed to force a smile.

“Yes, that’s me, I’m here to deliver a package to Mr. Ali.” I said, and the man laughed at me.

“Do not tell me you do not recognize me.” he said, and I absolutely didn’t recognize him. In fact, I have never seen him before. “Common, it’s me, Rayan Shetimah, Sameer and Aimar’s friend, Khaltum’s brother,” he said, and my jaws dropped, now that I remembered him. He was Khultum’s brother, a senior from the Islamiya I once attended.

“Ray, oh my goodness, you look so different!” I was so excited to see him. He chuckled.

"Yeah, and so do you. I had plans to come visit you this weekend, but I’m so glad you’re here now.” He said, “Please come and sit down, Aimar is in a meeting right now.” He informed me, I took a seat, he offered me water, and I drank, which reminded me that I still had my apple in my bag and I had not eaten breakfast.

“So tell me, are you truly working for Mustapha Attah?” he asked, and I acknowledged. He burst into laughter. I knew what was on his mind, and I couldn’t help but smile.

“I’m certain Aimar is dying right now; he hates Mustapha.” He informed me. “What was his reaction when he found out?”

“He was pissed off, he asked me to quit, but I refused.” I informed him, and he chuckled loudly.

“That explains why he kept speaking about Mustapha since morning; I was like, What did he do again? I never knew it was because you were working for him.” Rayan said, laughing uncontrollably. I couldn’t help but laugh along with him.

Just as we were about to continue our conversation, Aimar walked in, his eyes focused on me, with a very evident scorn on his face. “What are you doing here?” he demanded, taking calm strides into the office.

I immediately got to my feet, prepared to act professionally.

“Good morning, Mr. Ali, I was sent with a parcel from The Attah Establishment, and it would also require your signature for confirmation,” I informed him, earning myself a disgusted glare. He hissed very loudly.

“Tell your boss that I won't be wasting my time at his pointless conference.” he said, taking his seat and glaring at me. His aura was intimidating, very

different from when he was at home, but I refused to budge. “Now leave my office,” he demanded.

“Please, at least, accept the parcel and then inform my boss that you would not be able to attend.” I spoke. So, he raised a brow, making him more intimidating. I swallowed a lump; I caught Rayan’s expression, and he was trying so hard to hold back a sudden burst of laughter.

"Use the door! Leave my office now!" he commanded, his voice laced with frustration and defeat. I glanced over at Rayan, waved briefly, and then turned to leave. As I walked away, I caught the sound of Aimar muttering curses under his breath, aimed at Mustapha, while Rayan's laughter echoed through the air.

Aimar Ali would never change; he always wore a scowl on his face and acted as if everyone was lower than him—what a rude fellow he was! Having completed my task for the day, I returned to the driver and headed back to work to inform Mustapha of Aimar's response to his invitation.



Chapter 10



Azrah Yusuf

THE FIRST THING I DID when I returned home was to take a quick shower, observe my *salah*, and eat from the snack I had bought on my way from work. The driver had dropped me home and would pick me up the next day. I was very careful not to let him know where I lived exactly, so I made him drop me at the third house before ours, and that was also where I would meet with him every day to pick me up for work.

Feeling comfortable, I took out my iPad and went through the manual. I read through the instructions and made sure I understood everything. My tasks were easy — to make sure I planned Mustapha's day and ensure everything got done for the day, as well as run some simple errands for him with the driver.

After going through it, I decided it was time for food because my stomach was clenching and I was certain I would fall anytime soon. I took a glance at the time, and it was 5:55 pm, and I had not eaten a decent meal all day. After so much deliberation on what to eat, I decided I would prepare dinner for everyone. Aymah was asleep, so I put it in mind to make her some cookies for school tomorrow.

I walked out of my room and made my way to the kitchen, where two maids and Aymah's nanny were busy chit-chatting and laughing.

The moment they saw me, they composed themselves and greeted me. Aymah's nanny briskly walked out, excusing herself to go be with Aymah.

"Hi girls, good evening." I responded to their greetings with a smile. "What's for dinner today?" I asked.

"Spaghetti and meatballs, along with some apple juice, and for dessert, the boss requested cake." A maid informed me.

"Scratch that, I'll be making jollof rice today." I informed her, and her face morphed into a worried expression.

"Madam, I do not think err.. He will be happy with that." She let me know and I smiled.

"I'm sure he wouldn't mind a little change of plans, okay?" I said, "Where are the spices and the foodstuff?" As soon as I requested them, she brought it all out and laid them on the counter.

We soon began to cook, she helped me blend the tomato and pepper mix, while another maid chopped the veggies. Since the rice would boil first, I proceeded to make Aymah her cookies.

The cooking didn’t take us too long, and when we were done, we made the table, and I ate some food before heading to Aymah’s room, where I found her playing with her toys while Helen arranged her clothes into her closet.

“Aunty!” Aymah yelled on seeing me. I was holding a plate of her cookies, which I placed on the table in her room, and hugged her. “Are you here to play with me?” She asked, and I agreed.

We sat together and played a little before being interrupted by Aymah’s squeal the minute she saw her dad. I turned around to find him hugging and kissing her while he smiled. This was literally the first time I had ever seen him look so happy.

“Good evening, Mr. Ali,” I greeted, a smile on my face. He didn’t respond and turned to Helen.

“What did I tell you about ensuring no stranger comes around my daughter?” He asked Helen, the poor girl was startled and couldn’t say a word.

“Mr. Ali, it wasn’t her fault, I wanted to play with her a little.” I told him, and he simply shook his head and chuckled.

“Stop trying to act like my child’s mother, as a matter of fact, I don’t even consider you my wife, let alone my child’s mother, so please respect yourself and stay in your lane!” He said, I didn't know why, but a piece of my heart broke when I realized this was my reality.

He was right, I wasn't his child's mother, and our marriage was just an alliance between our parents. In fact, it was nothing. No one would believe me if I claimed to be his wife.

With a heavy heart, I said, “Understood.” Having said that, I took my leave. I walked to my room and laid on my bed. I had not cried for two days, but today I did. I felt heartbroken, my heart was wrenched. But well, Aimar was right, I needed to try and respect myself and stay in my lane.

I spent the rest of my day facetiming Nazeerah and Ismahan. They told me about school. Nazeerah was so excited to get done with her final exams and come visit. She was studying medicine, and this was her sixth year. I graduated from university two years ago, earning a BSc in financial accounting. I had once wanted to become a teacher so badly, which was because I loved children so much.

But right now, Allah had another plan for me, and I would pray to him and have *sabr* patience until everything fell into place. I believed it would, I didn't know how, but I did know that Allah wouldn't fail.

It was time for *salah*, so I prayed, recited the Quran, prayed again, called it a night, and slept. I was very tired, and tomorrow I would have a long day, and the first task on my list was to resubmit the invitation letter to Aimar's company before I go to work.

My boss had assured me that they had spoken and he would sign them this time around. I honestly dreaded that, but I had no choice but to do it. Well, I slept like a baby that night and waited patiently for the following day.

✿✿✿

The next morning, I had woken up very early to pray *tahajjud* (voluntary night prayer) as usual, after that, I deliberated on whether to go wake Aimar up or not. It was a huge decision to make, but I finally decided to keep my promise and head to his room.

When I got there, I knocked on his door real loud, knowing he was a sound sleeper. When I didn't get a response, I opened the door and walked in. This was my first time in his room, it was dark, but I could tell it was huge. I spotted his bed thanks to the soft glow of the lamp. I made my way to it, my legs syncing into his thick fur carpet.

He was soundly asleep, so I had to tap him on the arm, which was a great battle in my mind as I deliberated on whether to tap him or not.

Coming to a conclusion, I decided to call out to him.

"Mr. Ali!" I called, he didn't move, he was very sound asleep. "Mr. Ali." I called again, but he didn't respond, so I decided to tap him.

The moment my hand tapped his arm, he pulled me down roughly, his eyes looking ready to defend himself. I screamed very loudly, and he let me go just immediately. I got up to my feet.

"What are you doing inside my room?" he exclaimed. "Oh my God, you've turned into a thief, I see." His words were laced with mockery. I was still reeling from the shock of what had just happened, and I couldn't muster a response. This was the closest I had ever been to a man.

"I am speaking to you," he said, his eyes fixed on mine.

"Siri, turn on the light," he commanded, and the light flickered to life, catching me off guard.

As the room illuminated, I was struck by his disheveled appearance, shirtless, wearing only shorts. His sudden proximity felt unsettling, his presence thick and oppressive, weighing heavily in the air.

I quickly averted my gaze, my face flushing with embarrassment.

"I came to wake you up for *salah*." With my eyes looking everywhere but at him, I said.

"Did I ever ask you to wake me up for *salah*?" he requested.

“I assumed you were a deep sleeper and needed to be woken up to go to the mosque, which is why I came to wake you up.” I could barely speak, I wanted to be out of his room. His shirtlessness was making me uncomfortable.

“Get out of my room! And, this should be the very last you’d ever try to wake me up again, got it?” he warned.

“I am sorry, I meant no harm, I just wanted you to wake up early.” I said, and the room fell silent as he tapped his feet dramatically on the ground.

Understanding that he was waiting for me to leave, I left his room and headed for mine.

I observed *salah*, read the Quran for an hour, and then got ready for work. Today I decided to dress a bit corporately, so I wore a coffee brown office pant, a white chiffon shirt, and brought the outfit together with my brown jersey veil.

Afterwards, I adorned myself in some gold jewelry and touched everything up with my perfume. When I made sure I looked good after putting on my brown Nikes and holding my milk Chris Bella handbag tightly, I proceeded out of my room.

As though Aimar knew when I was going to come out, he was on the staircase making a call. In a haste to avoid any drama this morning, I mouthed greetings at him and tried to rush off, but he called out to me.

“Azrah!” he called my name, his tone soft. I turned to find him looking in a good mood.

“Yes, good morning.” I greeted, a smile on my face.

“You see that nonsense you cooked yesterday in my kitchen, don’t ever try it again.” His tone returned back to its harshness.

“I am sorry about that, I will ensure not to cook in your kitchen again.” I informed him I had no strength for further argument.

“I didn’t say you couldn’t cook in the kitchen, I’m only saying you should not cook for us ever again, you gave me a belly ache yesterday,” he stated. *What a childish man.*

Without uttering a word and just a nod, I walked out on him and made my way out of the house. My driver was waiting for me at the third house, so I hastily headed there.

As soon as I got there, I greeted the driver. “Good morning, Musa!”

“Morning madam, first stop, the Ali Builders, right?” he asked, and I acknowledged. We started the journey but were held up by traffic, so it took us quite a long time to get there. But when we finally did, I was quick to make my way to the office. I had spotted Aimar’s car parked already, thankfully, he had gotten here before me.

As soon as I entered the building, I was welcomed by the man from yesterday, and he greeted me and accompanied me to Aimar's office. Just as yesterday, he tapped on a button, and the door opened, revealing Aimar and the rude woman from yesterday.

"Good morning, sir," I greeted Aimar without acknowledging the presence of the woman in the room.

"Good morning," Aimar greeted back. "You may sit," he said in a very calm tone. I sat next to the woman, and I could tell her eyes were throwing daggers at me.

"Here is the invitation, sir, I was also requested to collect some documents from you." With the way I spoke, even people who were present at our *Nikkah* would swear that we weren't married.

"Hey, hey, you! Are you blind, or you didn't see me here?" The woman finally spoke. I shifted my gaze to her, she looked very angry.

In order to avoid drama, I greeted her. "Good morning." Having said that, I shifted my gaze back to Aimar, who acted like nothing was happening and went through the documents.

"Keep your 'good morning' to yourself," she sneered. "Girls like you just want to steal people's men."

Aimar intervened, "Khadijah, stop it."

"Baby, didn't you see how rude she was to me?" *Baby?* When I heard the word baby come from her mouth, I'm certain the shock on my face didn't hide itself. I instantly cleared my throat.

"Not now, Khadijah." Aimar said, with one final glance at me, she got up and left angrily.

"Are you done signing it?" For a reason unknown to me, my tone came off rude and angry. He was baffled but he didn't say a word.

Why did I just speak to him like that? I felt a burning sensation in my heart, and this was something I normally felt when I was jealous.

No, I couldn't possibly be jealous, or could I?

Aimar's voice interrupted my thoughts. "Yeah, you may leave," he simply said, and I got up and walked away. My ear was still replaying what I had just heard in his office, *baby*.

For a person whose mother was sure he wanted nothing to do with women, it was a shock to find out he had a girlfriend. But honestly, that wasn't my business, he was free to do whatever he wanted with his life. I don't care who he slept with or hanged out with, that was the least of my problems.

Discarding the thoughts, I walked over to my driver, and we headed back to work. When I got to the office, I spotted Adesuwa and immediately approached

her with a big smile on my face.

“Adesuwa!” I beamed, she looked at me with a smile. I sat next to her.

“Welcome, why are you so late?” She checked the time.

“I had to deliver a parcel to Ali Builders.” I informed her. Her face immediately morphed into confusion.

“Ali builders? The boss invited them for the conference?” She asked, and I acknowledged.

“Hm, that’s new, but hard to believe.” She implored.

“Are they rivals?” I knew they were, I just needed a little more detail as to why they were enemies.

“Not just rivals, enemies!” She stated. “Enough about them, did you see Aimar Ali?”

From the way her eyes sparkled when she asked about Aimar, I could tell something was up.

"Yeah, I did, what about him?” I asked, my left brow raised.

"Nothing, I heard he got married three weeks ago. I can’t believe my crush is no longer in the market.” Her statement prompted me to cough.

“Oh, he is married?” I tried not to sound too surprised or interested.

“Yeah, it wasn’t supposed to get out though, but since he’s amongst the youngest rich men in Nigeria, the news had to come out, but no one knows who his wife is, and I heard they did a very simple wedding, such a lucky girl.” Adesuwa swooned as she said, this was all a shock to me.

“I don't think any girl would call herself lucky being married to that.” I said, while scrolling through my iPad’s note app.

“Azrah!” Adesuwa spanked my arm with a chuckle. “Don’t say that.” She said, I laughed.

“*Abeg*, enough about that *yeye* guy.” I grabbed the files on her desk.

“You sound like you already have a crush on him.” Adesuwa commented, and I laughed.

“Godforbid.” I stated. “*Oya*, let’s work before *ogah* (the boss) comes out from his meeting.” I said, while tapping away on my iPad, I took notes of what to do next. Adesuwa laughed, and we began our task for the day.

But my mind couldn’t help but wander to the woman from earlier. *Baby?* I replayed the word in my mind. Anyways, I had better things to do, so I focused on them along with Adesuwa.

Afterwards, I realized the boss was done with his meeting, so I decided to greet him as soon as his client walked out.

When I walked in, he was eating. “Good morning, sir. I am sorry I didn’t knock.” I immediately apologized.

“There’s no problem, how did it go with Ali Builders?” he asked.

“It went well, he will be attending your conference in sha Allah.” I said, and he smiled.

“That’s great, please come join me, my mother made my breakfast today, and I want you to have a taste of it.” He spoke kindly, a refreshing contrast to the stereotypical bosses I'd read about in books or encountered in real life. And, surprisingly, nothing like Aimar, whom I had expected to be stern with his staff.

“That's so kind of you, sir, but I'm full,” I said, trying to sound polite. “Maybe next time.” The truth, however, was that I was extremely hungry.

“Nonsense! boss's orders - come and eat!” He tried to sound professional, but he laughed. He is so kind, I wonder what went wrong between him and Aimar.

It was definitely Aimar’s fault.

“I’m sorry, sir, but I can't, maybe next time.” I insisted.

"Alright, no problem, I won’t force you,” he said. "Anyways, there’s no work for today, cancel all my meetings, you can go home and rest till tomorrow, we have a conference to host.” He informed me, and I was thrilled to be going back home.

“Oh really? Thank you so much, sir. I’ll see you tomorrow then.” I thanked him before making my way out. I found Adesuwa munching on some snacks while working on her laptop. The logo on the snack caught my attention.

“Isn’t that from Qudrah’s Kitchen?” I asked, excitement filling my voice.

“Yeah, you know them?” She asked, and I confirmed.

“Yeah, they sell the best snacks in Kano,” I said.

“Yeah, even in Abuja, they’re really good.” She said, and I acknowledged and she asked. “This one you’re carrying your bag, where are you going to?”

“I am going home, the boss said I could leave early.” I informed her, and I could visibly see her jaw drop.

“Wow, he must really like you a lot.” She remarked.

“It’s not that, I’m done for the day, that’s why.” I said and she shook her head, but I could tell she was still standing by her words.

“*Oyana*, see you tomorrow!” She said, and we said our goodbyes, before I made my way out of the office, into the car, and drove off with Musa. We chatted about Nigeria's economy on our way home. Things were not easy, but I know, in sha Allah, it will get better.

Praise be to Allah, we arrived at our usual parking spot. I got down from the car, waved at him, and made my way home. The security guards were already used to me, so they greeted me as I walked in.

Soon as I approached the parking area, I saw the car Aimar had used to work parked in the parking lot, he was back. A scowl immediately formed on my face.

Anyways, I will not even be seeing him because I'll be in my room all day.

As soon as I entered the house, I was met with a very strong scent of *Turaren Wuta*. Aimar's maids always ensured to burn incense every morning and night, very welcoming. I greeted some maids as I walked by, headed to my room, and took a shower.

As soon as I was done, I observed my *salah* and then decided to get something to eat. So, I made my way to the kitchen in order to cook. As I got there, I was welcomed by the maids, who beamed at me happily.

"Good afternoon, ma!" They both greeted me, I smiled at them and returned their greetings.

I equally asked them about their day before grabbing a pack of indomie from the storeroom.

"Ma, you should have asked us to cook it for you." A maid said.

"Oh no, thank you, I love cooking for myself." I informed her.

"Oh, I see, and *wallahi* madam, you're very good at it. The boss enjoyed the food yesterday, he even requested for more, which is very unusual." To my surprise, she said.

"Really? He enjoyed the food?" I had to make sure I heard right.

"Yes, he did, he even took the rest to work, and he rarely eats leftovers."

The other maid chipped in, and they both agreed. I tried so hard to hide my smile. Aimar is such a jerk, from the way he spoke this morning, I assumed I truly was a bad cook.

"That's nice." I said, and they agreed. We chatted while I cooked my indomie. I learned their names were Binta and Rebecca, they informed me that they were in charge of the kitchen. But Rebecca was particularly in charge of cooking for Aimar and Aymah, she was a chef, renowned for that matter.

While we were talking, a presence approached us, and I lifted my head to find Aimar's supposed girlfriend staring at me in shock.

"What are you doing in my boyfriend's house?" She asked, and I ignored her. "I said it, you're a prostitute." She remarked. I ignored her again and continued eating while the maids watched the drama unfold.

"I'm speaking to you, are you deaf?" She snatched the plate of Indomie from my hands and dumped its contents on the ground. That was the final straw, I couldn't remain silent any longer.

"Madam, are you mad or what?" I asked, anger soaring in my chest. "If you want to know who I am so badly, why don't you go and ask your boyfriend yourself?" I told her. She glared at me. If looks could kill, I am certain I would have been dead by now.

“Baby!” She yelled, turned around, and walked away. As she walked away, she kept yelling, and I could clearly hear Aimar respond to her. Soon after, they both walked into the kitchen.

“Aimar, who is she to you, and why is she in our home?” She put a lot of emphasis on the word "our.”

Aimar looked at me, to the fork in my hand and to the indomie on the floor. “She’s my *wife*,” he declared. When I heard him say this, a part of me swelled with excitement, and I couldn’t understand why, but it was as if I had won a lottery or something, especially after seeing the look on the woman’s face.

“Your wife? You mean you married this filthy piece shit?” She glared at me from head to toe. I met her gaze, my eyes locked in a defiant glare.

"Khadijah, watch your words, don’t call her a piece of shit.” I was stunned to hear him defending me.

“So this is the woman you chose over me? Aimar, I’m disappointed in your taste.” She said, and I rolled my eyes. If she was Aimar’s taste with this behavior, then he sure does have a taste for nonsense.

He completely ignored her statement and turned to the maids. “Binta, clean this up,” he commanded. He turned to me, Rebecca, “Have dinner ready in 40 minutes.” With that said, he glared at me calmly, then at the so-called Khadijah.

"I'll drop you home," he said to Khadijah. They both walked out, but Khadijah didn't spare me an evil glare. As soon as they were out of sight, Binta and Rebecca burst into laughter.

I glared at them questionably, and they stopped laughing. “We are sorry, madam, but we are so glad you spoke to her the way you did, she’s very rude.” Rebecca informed me. I shook my head pitifully.

“I wonder where he found such a bitch.” I remarked, and they chuckled. Well, we spent the day together cooking, and I helped them out despite Aimar’s warnings. I had no appetite because of what had just happened, so after cooking I decided to say hi to Aymah before going to my room.

As I approached Aymah’s room, I heard her giggling along with her nanny. When I got there, I made my presence known, and she immediately ran to hug me.

“Madam, I’m sorry, but sir will..." The nanny tried to explain, but I cut her off.

“You do not need to apologize, Helen, I understand, I only came to say hi because he isn’t around.” I stated.

"Aunty, come do my assignment with me.” Aymah pulled my arm.

“I would have loved to, darling, but I’m sick and I need to sleep.” I told her and she made a sad pout with her lips.

“You’re sick?” She asked, and I nodded, despite the fact that I was lying.

“Yes, baby.” I said, and she kissed my hands, and I chuckled.

“What was that for, my love?” I squatted.

“I always kiss Daddy’s arm when he is sick, so I did the same for you, and you’ll feel better soon,” she tells me. I smiled and hugged her.

“Yeah, I feel better already, you’re truly magical.” My remarks made her giggle.

Unwilling to put Helen in trouble, I kissed Aymah good night and went to my room. It was already time for *Salah*, so I made *wudu* and prayed, after that, I read the Quran until it was time for *Isha*, which I prayed and retired to bed.

Some minutes into sleeping, I heard a knock on the door. I was startled, so I got up and opened it, still dressed in my Kitty pajamas, with my hair strands falling behind. I opened the door, wiping my eyes. I saw Aimar staring at me.

“Get dressed!” he commanded. His tone forced me to fully awake.

“Huh? Dressed for what?” I yawned.

“We are going to the hospital, you’re sick.” He said, I was confused, sick? What was he even talking about?

“I am not sick.” In a sleepy voice, I said.

“Don’t try to play smart with me, go get dressed now,” he demanded.

“I'm not sick, Mr. Ali. I don't know what you're talking about.” I said, wearing a bored expression. He pushed past me and walked into my room, then proceeded to my closet. He returned with a hijab and handed it to me.

“Put it on now before I do so myself.” God, he sounded so commanding. I found myself grabbing the hijab and putting it on.

After doing that, I followed him downstairs, and we got to his car. I let myself in and sat down. He did so too and ignited the car until we drove out of the house and onto the quiet roads of Abuja. The drive was quiet, Aimar was so focused on the road. I didn’t utter a word and stared at the road as we drove by until we came to a halt in front of a huge hospital.

When we got there, he got down, and I did the same. He didn’t say a word to me, but I followed behind him. When we got into the hospital, the staff greeted him as he made his way to the elevator, and I trailed behind him.

As soon as we entered, he tapped on a button, and we got to the third floor. When we came to a halt, the elevator doors opened and we walked out. We walked to a door, and he knocked on it. A voice requested him to come in, and he did.

As soon as he noticed my hesitation, he gently pulled my arm, and we walked in together. “Good evening, Mr. Ali,” the man seated behind the desk said, greeting him. He returned the greeting.

“What brought you here today?” The man asked. Aimar didn’t even wait to be given a seat, he sat down and made me sit along with him.

"Dr. Femi, this is my wife," he said. "She's ill." The doctor looked confused for a moment before nodding. He wasn't the only one perplexed - I was equally baffled.

"Oh, your wife,” he repeated, confused. “What is wrong with her?” As soon as the doctor asked, he glared at me.

“Tell him,” he demanded, his voice soft yet dripping with arrogance.

“I am not sick, I don’t know why he assumed so.” I said, and Aimar glared at me.

“She’s lying, run a general test on her, please,” he requested, and the doctor nodded.

"But I'm not sick!" I argued, but my words fell on deaf ears.

The doctor instructed me to stand up, and we both followed him into a room, where he took some blood samples. Terrified of needles, I resisted initially before allowing him to administer the shot. Meanwhile, I could swear I saw Aimar struggling to stifle a laugh.

After the doctor was done, he asked us to wait outside, which we did. I sat first, and Aimar sat next to me, his perfume threatening to claim my breath. We didn’t speak to each other at all, and he was so busy with his phone while I was left staring at the ceiling because I forgot to bring mine. Soon later, a nurse approached us, and we were asked to go back in. When we returned, the doctor cleared his throat.

"The test results are in, and they show her blood count is low, plus she hasn't been eating well. Additionally, she has malaria and typhoid," the doctor said.

Aimar turned to me, giving me an 'I told you so' glare, his expression harsh. Why is this man always so grumpy? He never cracks a smile.

Aside from that, I wasn't shocked to hear the doctor's diagnosis, he was right. I haven’t been eating well.

“Thank you, doctor. How do we go about the blood count? Does she need a transfusion or what?” he asked.

“No, it hasn’t gotten to that point. All she needs are some medications and a proper diet.” The doctor informed us, Aimar acknowledged, and he shook hands with the doctor.

“As for the medications, the prescriptions have been posted to the pharmacy, and you can get them there.” The doctor informed us, we thanked him before we stepped out.

When we got to the waiting area, Aimar paused and turned to me. “Seat here, I’ll be right back.” He informed me, I obeyed him and did as instructed. He was

being nice, which was very odd. But this truly meant nothing, he was doing all this out of pity.

He soon returned with a leather in his hand, and his eyes were enough to tell me to get up and come with him, which I did. We left the hospital and got into his car. He started the engine and pulled out of the parking lot.

As usual, we didn't say a word to each other until we arrived home. When we did, he turned to me. "Have you had dinner?" he asked. I shook my head 'no.'

"Get down!" he simply said and hopped out of the car. I couldn't help but make a face at him, he was very harsh, and his British accent was making matters worse, he always sounded too serious. Regardless, I got down from the car, and he was already at the doorstep. I met him there, and we both walked inside.

"Come with me." Again, he was cold. I trailed behind him, and we walked to the kitchen. He dropped the leather with the medicine on the counter, and he proceeded to the fridge and brought out eggs. I watched him as he grabbed a pan and grabbed some baking supplies, like the likes of flour, sugar, and baking powder.

"You don't have to do that." I said, but he didn't even respond to me. He continued what he was doing until he was done, he made pancakes, and surprisingly, they looked very fluffy and good. Another thing that caught my attention was his orderliness, not even a single mess was made.

"Eat!" I was used to his commands. I glared at the food first, then at him, he leered at me, and I was forced to pick the fork and eat. As I ate, he stared at me, making me very uncomfortable, so I gave up eating after five rounds.

"Finish it," he said.

"I'm full, and I want to sleep." I said to him, he didn't press further and passed me my medications.

"Ensure you take them." He said, and I nodded. He got up to leave, but before he could walk out, I was quick to speak.

"Thank you." I said, I knew he wouldn't respond, he walked out, and I was left to take my medications before I retired to bed.



Chapter 11



Azrah Yusuf

I WOKE UP VERY TIRED. I had a conference I was planning, so I had to wake up very early. I didn’t want to get on Aimar’s bad side today, so I didn't wake him up for *salah* today, and I thought I would keep it that way, from now on.

Instead, I observed my *salah,* read the Quran, took my bath, got dressed in a purple abaya, and made my way out, after doing some finishing touches. When I was done, I ran downstairs and stumbled upon Aimar, as usual.

Aimar stood by the staircase, dressed in a navy blue suit. His eyes were fixed on his phone as he scrolled through it, his hands resting on the railing. His serious expression was actually quite comical, and it made me smile. What I found even more amusing was how he would react whenever I greeted him. His face would change in an instant, revealing a more childish side to his personality. I often teased him just to see that look.

“Good morning, Mr. Ali!” I beamed happily at him. He stared at me, bewildered, before standing up straight. His face contorted into its usual disgruntled expression, and I struggled to stifle a chuckle.

“Where are you going?” he inquired.

“To work.” I stated it as a matter of fact.

“You’re going nowhere... you need to rest. You know you're sick,” he stated.

“I am doing well. I can go to work.” I informed him, and he shook his head.



HIS EXPRESSION TURNED stern, his eyes narrowing slightly as he said, “Do not argue with me.” His tone was firm, but a hint of concern lingered beneath the surface. Having said that, he turned and walked out on me, leaving me feeling both frustrated and curious. I didn’t want to escalate the situation, so I decided to wait for him to leave before heading to my workplace

As I planned to go back to my room, he called out to me. "Azrah!"

“*Na’am* Yes,” I turned around only to find him staring at me.

“Come and eat!” he said.

“I’m not hungry,” I said, turning around to walk back upstairs. He called out to me again, but I ignored him. I had grown tired of being controlled.

As soon as I entered my room, I called Musa and asked him to leave. I decided I would find my own way to work today.

Afterwards, I sat and waited to see Aimar’s car zoom off. It was a BMW M5 just like Mustapha's, and the sound was unmissable.

I engaged myself with scrolling through my gallery, and as I did, I stumbled upon Sameer’s picture, and I smiled. He looked very happy. It was on our wedding day, the day I lost him. I had to scroll past it immediately. I didn’t want to relieve the pain. I didn’t want to experience another panic.

As soon as I heard his car roar to life, I made my way out of my room and watched as he drove away from the huge glass window. The moment the gates closed, I walked out. I had already booked a bolt. As I got to the big gate, a guard immediately came forth.

“Madam, you cannot go out.” The guard informed me.

“Why?” I asked.

“The boss ordered us not to let you out,” he said. I facepalmed myself. Aimar was truly a pain in the buttocks.

“I need to go out, you don’t have to tell him. I’ll be back before you know it.” I told him. He shook his head.

"Please, madam, I do not want to lose my job. I seriously beg you,” he pleaded.

With a deep breath, I returned to the house. I was fuming in anger.

How dare him restrict my movement?

Nevertheless, I had to call in sick. I called Adesuwa, and she promised to inform the boss. After doing that, I proceeded to the kitchen, where I met Rebecca. We exchanged pleasantries, and she offered to make me breakfast. She made me fried yam and egg sauce, my all-time favorite dish. I relished it as I chatted with Rebecca and Binta. They were very funny.

I spent my day helping them with some chores, which they protested to, but I insisted. After that, I went to my room, where I decided to watch a movie before *salah*. When it was time for *salah*, I picked up my prayer mat and headed for the garden, where I prayed and read the Quran. As I read, I felt a presence behind me, and I turned around only to see Aimar staring at me, his arms crossed.

“It’s good to see that you’re a good girl,” he stated. “How are you feeling today?” he asked.

“I am feeling well. I was never sick.” I said, he rolled his eyes.

“Aymah told me you were sick, and Helen confirmed it. What were you trying to do? You want to kill yourself so that people would accuse me of your death?" If it weren’t for his tone, I would have thought he was being sarcastic. But he wasn't, he only proved to be serious.

“I didn’t know I was ill.” I informed him. “Anyways, thank you for yesterday.”

“Whatever. Just make sure you take your medications. I do not want any problems." He said, I agreed with a nod, and he turned around and walked away.

I shook my head, perplexed by his behavior. He was the polar opposite of Sameer, who always wore a warm smile and showed kindness and compassion. In contrast, this man exuded arrogance and harshness, his rare smiles fleeting and unpredictable. His moods shifted abruptly, leaving me bewildered. I couldn't help but think, *‘May Allah guide him and soften his heart.’*

I pushed aside the thoughts of him that lingered in my mind and returned to my Quran. Reading it was my solace, a balm that soothed my heart. After completing my daily reading goal, feeling serene and content, I closed my Quran and headed back to my room.

On my way, I ran into Khadijah on the stairs, and her eyes glared at me disdainfully. I tried to walk past her, but she obstructed me.

“What is it again?” I asked. She ogled me from head to toe and hissed.

“I still can’t believe Aimar chose to make you his first wife over me, eww!” She commented.

I rolled my eyes, ready to push past her, but she bumped my shoulder hard.

“I’m still talking, girl!” She said, and I bit my lips and smiled. I had to control my anger.

“If you think you’re mad, I swear to God, I’m crazier than you are. Don't try to test my patience, Khadijah, don’t!” I warned but she laughed.

"Look at this insignificant fool," she sneered. "When I become Aimar's wife, I'll make sure you're thrown out like a thief."

Unwilling to hear more of her useless banter, I forcefully pushed past her, nearly knocking her off balance. Her startled squeal filled me with excitement—what a foolish woman.

I wondered what Aimar saw in her—so useless and petty.



Chapter 12



Azrah Yusuf

I GOT READY FOR WORK this morning, wearing a beautiful gray abaya. I adored abayas because they're effortless to wear.

No more struggling to choose an outfit—just slip on an abaya, add a matching bag and shoe, and I'd be set!

As soon as I got ready, I approached downstairs, and to my surprise, Aimar wasn't there. He'd normally walk out of his room by this time.

But, as I got closer to the dining room, he was seated along with Aymah, who was giggling nonstop. The moment she saw me, she got up from her chair and ran to hug me.

"Aunty!" She yelled. "Good morning." She greeted me.

What a sweet girl.

"Good morning, princess. How are you?" I asked. She nodded and replied, "I'm fine, thank you."

"Good morning, Azrah." I thought my ears were deceiving me, but when I looked towards Aimar, he was staring at me. He had just greeted me for the first time.

"Good morning, Mr. Ali, How are you?" I beamed happily at him. He responded with his eyes, and continued to eat.

"Aunty, my school is holding a parent-student meeting today," Aymah pleaded. "Everyone has a mommy, but I don't. Can you please be my mommy and come to school with me?"I turned to Aimar, and he glanced at me before looking away.

"Uhm, I wish I could join you, princess, but I'm—" Aimar interrupted.

"She'll come, princess," Aimar said firmly, standing up and approaching us, his gaze locked intensely on mine. "Please, accompany my daughter and me to the parent-student day."

I smiled warmly. "I'd love to." Aimar's lips curled into a subtle, hidden smile.

"Thank you," he uttered, his voice laced with stress. He offered another reassuring smile while he picked up Aymah in his arms.

"Make sure you eat something," he said, and I nodded in agreement.

With one final glance, he walked away, carrying Aymah on his shoulder as she bid me bye.

When they were gone, I headed to the dining room, sat down, and prepared myself a cup of tea using the milk and milo which was available. I also had two slices of bread.

After that, I headed out to meet Musa. He had been waiting for me for ten minutes, so I apologized to him for keeping him waiting, and we drove off to work. Soon, we arrived at the office.

I bid Musa goodbye, waving before I walked in. I made my way to the elevator, trying to ignore the workers who were walking around. I only associate with Adesuwa and the boss. Upon stepping into the elevator, another man entered alongside me, and we exchanged pleasantries. His gaze remained fixed on me, and I sensed he was about to speak.

My thoughts proved right.

He said, “I’ve never seen you around; are you new here?” he asked, and I acknowledged by telling him yes.

“Oh, nice, what’s your name?” *Ugh*, God, I hated it when people tried to start conversations with me. The man was very tall and was adorned with a brown suit. I had never seen him around before, either.

“My name is Azrah,” I replied. He smiled, and I got impatient, wanting the elevator to reach my stop.

“You have such a beautiful name,” he said with a warm smile. “My name is Hisham.”

The elevator doors slid open, signaling me to stop. I eagerly stepped out, ready to part ways.

“Oh, nice,” I replied, attempting to bid him a hasty goodbye. “Bye, Hisham.”

To my surprise, I never realised Hisham accompanied me out of the elevator, until I discovered his pace was matching mine. As we walked out, Hisham smiled at me and made his way toward Mustapha’s office. Adesuwa was busy and didn’t acknowledge his presence, despite making eye contact with him. I walked over to her and tapped on her desk.

“Good morning, madam!” I teased happily and she looked up from her computer and smiled at me.

“Morning, Azrah... how are you?” She greeted me. I sat next to her, picked up the bowl of *chin-chin* in front of her, and stuffed my face with it.

“Who was the man who just entered the boss’s office?” I asked, only coming to earn myself a hiss. I guess I wasn’t the only one who disliked his aura.

“That’s Hisham Attah, he’s Mustapha’s brother.” She informed me, her tone disdainful.

“Hmm, is the boss around?” I asked, and she shook her head.

“The boss has traveled to London, he traveled immediately after the conference.” She told me, and I was shocked. It wasn’t part of his schedule, so I had no idea. Plus, I sent him an email telling him I was ill, but he never replied.

“Really? I wasn’t aware.” I said.

“Yeah, it was impromptu, and that man who just walked in will be running the company till the boss returns in two weeks.” She informed me, her voice expressing dislike for him.

“I don’t think I like him.” I commented and she chuckled.

"I'm not fond of him either," she admitted.

"He's really annoying, and we clash constantly. Ever since we have had a fallout, he's made it clear that he doesn't want me to greet him." I couldn't help but chuckle at such absurdity.

Her telephone began to ring, and she was annoyed. It took a short while before she received the call, placing the phone by her ear, and putting it down again. “PA, he wants you in his office.” She informed me, and I got up hesitantly.

“Wish me luck.” I said, and she gave me a thumbs up before I walked over to his office and knocked on the door. He asked me to come in, and when I did, he smiled widely at me. He was very excited to see me, and that gave me an ick.

“Good morning, sir!” I greeted him.

"Wow, fate has brought us together again, Azrah," he exclaimed, beaming with excitement. "So, you'll be my personal assistant until my brother returns?" I acknowledged.

"Alright, come and take a seat... we have a lot of work to do.”

Having said that, I walked in, took a seat, and I began putting him through the schedule. But I could tell he wasn’t listening. His eyes kept giving me a look I did not like.

“So, I have a meeting with the Benjamin's group by 7 pm?” he asked, and I nodded.

“Okay, how about the files containing the details of the meeting?” he inquired.

“I’ll have a pdf of the file sent to your email, and if you want, I could also print it and bring it to you.” I informed him.

“I’d prefer it printed,” he said. I acknowledged that and prepared an email, which I sent to the print media to get it ready and brought to him.

Afterwards, I put him through a couple of things. As soon as it was time for a break, I headed over to Adesuwa, and we ordered food from the food vendor I usually patronized. As we ate together, we discussed life and what not.

When it was time for *salah*, I excused myself and prayed at the praying spot Mustapha had prepared for me, when I had complained about not having where to pray.

After that, I headed back to Hisham's office and saw that he had a guest. A young man was seated, dressed in a *kaftan* and a *Zanan Bukar* cap sitting on his head. He had a light brown complexion, similar to Aimar's, and appeared to be from the North. I recognized him from TikTok, where numerous edits had been made about him. Suddenly, it clicked - he was the renowned footballer, Farouq Armani.

"Good afternoon, sir." I greeted Farouq and he smiled at me.

"Good afternoon," he replied and continued his conversation with Hisham. I needed to talk about something, so I interrupted them.

"Sorry to interrupt your conversation, sir." I said to Hisham.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Can I leave early today? I have a family event I have to attend." I told him, he checked his wristwatch, then looked at his computer.

"No problem, you may leave. I'll handle the rest of the work," he said. I thanked him and left. I met with Adesuwa, who was busy watching a movie.

"I'm going home." I announced, as she checked her wristwatch and gave me a suspicious glare.

"You're heading home early today," she said with a teasing smile. "Hope everything's okay?"

"Everything is fine; I just have something to take care of," I informed her. Just then, Farouq from Hisham's office emerged, making his way towards us. A smirk spread across his face as he fixed his gaze on Adesuwa.

"Good afternoon, Adesuwa." He said. I didn't miss the glare that Adesuwa gave him. No one needed to tell me she didn't like this one, too.

"Good afternoon Farouq." She said, sensing the tension between them. I waved her goodbye and walked out of the office. I had messaged Musa to get the car ready. So immediately I got there; I hopped in and had him drive me home.

It was 1:30 pm, so I hoped I'd still meet with Aimar.

As usual, the drive wasn't long, and I soon arrived home. The moment I walked through the gates, I saw Aimar standing by his car, lost on his phone. I walked over to him, a smile worn on my face. One thing about the way he was frowning made me laugh. I couldn't help but smile.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Ali." I greeted, and he shifted his attention to me.

"You're late," he remarked.

"I'm sorry, the driver was..." I tried to make an excuse, but he shunned me.

“Just get inside,” he said and walked over to the other side of the car. I opened the front seat and sat down right beside him. He started the car and drove out of the gate.

As we drove down the street of Abuja, it began to rain, and I didn’t miss the excitement on Aimar’s face. He looked very happy to see the rain.

Throughout our journey to Aymah’s school, he didn’t say a word to me. He was focused on the road like a hawk. The journey was a bit long, and with my phone about to get switched off, I was bored, so I craved conversation.

“How was work today?” I asked, and for the first time, he shifted his gaze from the road and looked at me.

“Fine,” he simply said.

He was such a boring man.

Feeling the need to keep the conversation going, I asked him again, "I heard there's a business dinner planned for November. Will you be attending?" He nodded in acknowledgment.

"Oh, that's very nice," I commented.

We didn't exchange another word until we reached a crossroad where he needed to turn.

“How do you get to work?” This time, he started the conversation.

“The company driver picks me up.” I informed him. He turned to look at me and shook his head.

“In a Honda?” he muttered, a flicker of disdain crossing his face. "Yeah," I replied briefly. He scrunched up his face in distaste before pulling into a parking spot.

We arrived at Aymah's school, an impressive structure with expansive grounds. The campus boasted a spacious playground, lush greenery, and sleek facilities. He turned to me, his expression now neutral.

“Can you drive and use a GPS?” he asked, and I replied with a simple “yes.” That was all. He didn’t elaborate further.

Afterward, he stepped out of the vehicle, and I followed suit. He pulled out an umbrella and held it above me, shielding me from the rain.

“You don’t need to do that. I can hold it myself,” I protested.

He shook his head. “You’re a woman, it’s my responsibility to take care of you,” he said, his words catching me off guard.

Without saying another word, he continued to hold the umbrella up for me, leaving himself exposed to the rain, which, fortunately, was light.

"Do you mind walking?" he asked.

His words broke the spell, and I realized I had been standing still. I blinked, cleared my throat, and began to walk.

As we walked together into the school, he led the way. I felt a flutter in my heart as I watched him walk beside me, his suit drenched from the rain. His selfless gesture touched me deeply, evoking feelings of gratitude and admiration for this man.

Upon arriving at the administration office, he leaned the umbrella against the wall and knocked on the door. We were invited in, and as soon as the man behind the desk saw him, he rose to his feet, showing evident deference.

“Aimar, welcome!” he said, his eyes briefly meeting mine. Aimar, as usual, didn't wait to be invited. He took a seat and motioned for me to join him with a calm, expectant glance.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Ebube,” he greeted. “What is this parent-student day about and why has it been brought up?” He asked, and from his tone, I could detect fire lurking.

"The Parent-Student Lunch is an opportunity for students to share a meal with their parents and for parents to connect with one another, fostering a healthy and peaceful community through the PTA." Mr. Ebube explained, and Aimar placed his hand on the desk angrily.

"Today, my daughter asked about her mother," he said, his voice trembling. "Her mother is dead, and I had to lie to her." He whispered, his eyes welling up. Watching him look so vulnerable tugged at my heartstrings, filling me with a surge of compassion.

I watched as Mr. Ebube struggled to swallow the lump in his throat.

“I’m very sorry sir, this was not our intention.” he apologized. I simply stared at what was happening, wondering in awe. Aimar was in a fully defensive mode.

Aimar's voice trembled. "Before the end of today, I want this event erased. Seeing others with their parents will only make kids who've lost someone in their lives relieve the pain." Mr. Ebube nodded solemnly.

My heart swelled with emotion. Aimar's words revealed a compassion that extended beyond his own daughter.

Maybe I had misjudged him.

“I promise sir, I will have it canceled after today,” he said.

"Good!" Aimar commended. "Where is my daughter? My wife and I would love to participate today."

I felt a flutter in my chest. He called me his wife again. This time, a part of me felt strangely at ease, hearing it.

“Oh she’s your wife?” Mr. Ebube excitedly said. “Congratulations, Aimar.”

“Thanks,” he said, his emotion unfazed.

Few minutes later, a man walked in, so Mr. Ebube asked him to direct us to where the parents' and students ' event was taking place.

When we got there, I spotted Aymah seated alone at the huge table, where two seats were reserved for us. She clutched a juice box, her face etched with sadness. Meanwhile, other students were surrounded by their parents, enjoying an array of goodies.

“Aymah!” I called out excitedly, and she turned around and as she saw me, she ran and hugged me, completely ignoring Aimar.

“Yay, you’re here!” She jumped. “Come with me, I want to show you to my friends, I told them my new mummy was coming.” I didn’t fail to see the shock on Aimar’s face when Aymah said this.

Regardless of that, he smiled at her and ruffled her hair.

“Go on,” he said to me.

Aymah enthusiastically dragged me to meet her friends and their parents. As we made the rounds, I exchanged pleasantries with them while Aymah proudly bragged about me, introducing me as her new mom.

"Hi Yusra, this is my mommy!" Aymah exclaimed, tugging on a girl sitting next to her mother. Yusra's mom and I chatted briefly.

"Your mommy?" Yusra asked, surprised. "So you weren't lying?"

"No, she wasn't lying," I replied with a smile, wrapping my arm affectionately around Aymah's shoulders. She beamed with excitement, eager to introduce me to all her friends. As I glanced over at Aimar, I caught him watching us with a calm, serene expression on his face.

After finishing our rounds, we returned to where Aimar was seated. A lot of goodies were placed before him and once Aymah saw it, she was very excited. Aimar, on the other hand, maintained a stiffened frown, trying his best not to start a conversation with the other parents who were at the table.

The fathers present couldn't help but cast admiring glances his way, but they seemed intimidated by the scowl on his face. Meanwhile, I spent some quality time with Aymah and chatted with some of the mothers, enjoying their warm and friendly conversation.

Aimar decided that it was time to leave, so we left with Aymah. On our way back home, Aymah fell asleep in her baby seat. Aimar and I remained silent, as usual, until we arrived home. When we did, Helen was already waiting to take Aymah inside.

Just as I was about to enter the house, Aimar grasped my arm, a sudden gesture that left me bewildered. However, he swiftly released his grip and cleared his throat. That's when I noticed Ridwan standing beside a brand-new car.

"I have something for you," he said, walking over to Ridwan, and I exchanged a brief wave with him. Aimar received something from Ridwan and returned it to me.

“Here, that is your car.” He handed me the keys to a Mercedes Benz, and I was taken aback, momentarily frozen in confusion. This prompted him to place the keys right in my hands instead.

“Aimar you don’t have to do this, I’m okay with taking the company car.” I said.

“You didn’t ask me to.” he stated. “And also, no wife of mine will be seen in a Honda with an unknown man.” He called me his wife again.

“I’m sorry but I cannot accept this,” I said, and he rolled his eyes.

"The car is yours... do whatever you want with it. However, I don't want to see you taking the company's car... Good night, Azrah." Having said that, he turned around and walked into the mansion.

I stood there, staring at the gray 2022 Mercedes Benz GLE 350. It matched my abaya perfectly, and I could easily tell that the color was inspired by my outfit. The car was a brand new car with tear-free leather interior. But, I wasn’t going to use it. I couldn’t just accept a gift from him that easily.



Chapter 13



Aimar Ali



THE COMPANY CAR, *My ass*. How could my wife possibly ride in a humble Honda? It was unacceptable, and just the thought of it was unbearable. Even more distressing, was the idea of her, being driven around by another man. Yet, I struggled to find the courage to voice out my concerns. I knew I had to take action, so I immediately got Ridwan to arrange a new car for her. When he asked what color he was to get, the color of the abaya she was wearing at that moment was the first thought that came to mind.

When I handed over the keys to her, I could see the shock in her eyes. She wasn't expecting it, and as anticipated, she made a fuss. But I placed the keys in her arms and walked away.

After heading to my room, I took a shower, observed my *salah*, and as I was leaving my room, I heard her reciting the Quran. That simple sound made my heart skip a beat. Azrah was *perfect*—too *perfect*, I feared. She would often wake me up for *salah*, but when she stopped, I felt a pang of guilt. I hadn't been kind to her. I consistently shut her down. Yet, I admired and loved that she respected herself enough to stop coming to my room.

Deep down, I knew I didn't deserve her. She was too good for me. Despite enjoying the delicious meal she had cooked for me that day, I found myself trying to make her feel guilty about it. But what was the point? To push her away when she was the one I desperately *yearned* for?

My deceased brother's bride.

The very thought of my feelings felt like a betrayal—a stab in his memory. But, being around her was intoxicating, and it terrified me. I feared she would consume me, ruin me, and turn me into her puppet, since I knew I would do anything to feel the peace that came with her presence.

As I sat in my car, my phone buzzed. When I checked the caller ID, it was Khadijah. A hiss escaped my lips before I received the call.

"Baby!" she said, making me swallow hard, her words igniting intense anger within me. I struggled to maintain my composure and took deep breaths.

"Hi, how are you?" I asked, unable to pretend to care about her.

"Why have you been ignoring my calls?" she asked, her exaggerated Valley Girl accent grating on my nerves, prompting me to take another deep breath to calm myself.

"I haven’t. I'm busy," I replied curtly.

"I know you’re busy, but when are you going to take me on a date?" Her question was the final straw, so I hung up on her.

God, I couldn’t stand that woman—speaking to her felt like torture. And she knew it yet refused to move on, oblivious to my disdain. As expected, my phone began to ring again, but I ignored it and drove out of the house.

Khadijah was nothing like Azrah, she was pompous, rude, and extremely annoying. She had no self-respect and often threw herself at me. On the other hand, Azrah had never once tried to touch me. Everything about Azrah was endearing and amusing, and she had captivated my mind completely.

I had to distract myself. I had a meeting with Armani Builders, so I headed to the upscale tennis estate, our designated meeting spot.

As I arrived there, I spotted Farouq Armani, one of the world's best football players and the current CEO of Armani Builders. He was laughing and playing tennis with Rayan.

As soon as Farouq saw me, he stood up, a scar on his face catching the light. He was rarely in Nigeria but had managed to sleep with half of all the women in Abuja. Farouq was a notorious playboy, known for changing women more often than babies change diapers. He had a magnetic charm which got him any woman he desired.

"Aimar!" Farouq exclaimed, his face lighted up with excitement when he spotted me. I joined them, and we shared a warm hug, eager to dive into the details of our ambitious project.

Farouq exuded confidence, the usual air of his breath expressing and reassuring of control and competence . I admired his sharp intellect and firm dedication. As soon as we solidified our plans, I bid them farewell and headed home.



Chapter 14



Azrah Yusuf

TODAY WAS A SATURDAY, and like other Saturdays were, when I didn't have a job, I would typically spend my day watching a movie. However, this particular Saturday was going to be different.

Adesuwa had made plans for us to attend a car racing event happening here in Abuja. It was a high-profile event, attracting renowned car racers from around the globe. I was thrilled!

By afternoon, I was starving, since I already skipped breakfast. Aimar was noticeably absent, his car kicked to start, as early as 6:30 am, this morning. Meanwhile, Helen had taken Aymah to her Quran school. I appreciated Aimar's initiative to enroll her, despite his complicated relationship with Allah.

Seeing that I had a lot of time to prepare for the event, I went to the kitchen and prepared lunch for the family. Rebecca and Binta helped me, as we chatted while we cooked as well.

When I was done with cooking, I called Adesuwa and asked her what time we would be leaving for the event. She had informed me it would begin right after *asr* prayer, and I was very excited. A part of me felt bad for not seeking Aimar’s permission before going out. I was breaking a rule in Islam, and I felt guilty about it. But in my defense, he didn't like me speaking to him.

I spent the rest of my day catching up with Nazeerah and Ismahan via a group video call, proudly showcasing my outfits. Ismahan's comment made me burst out laughing: "Azrah, it looks like you're gaining weight, o!"

"Evidence of good living," I joked in response.

Nazeerah chimed in, teasingly saying, "*Shege* Billionaire wife," which left us all in stitches.

It was great to catch up on their lives, and I was so glad they were all doing well. As for my parents and Ummie, they rarely received my calls, so we normally chatted on WhatsApp. I was glad I was keeping in touch with my family.

Realizing it was almost time for the event, I bid them goodbye, prayed, showered, and quickly got dressed in a black Abaya. I chose it from the beautiful clothes Aimar's family had gifted me. I hadn't even opened the rest of my *Kayan lefe* yet.

After making sure I appeared well, I booked my bolt ride using the location Adesuwa had sent to me on WhatsApp. As I headed out of the house and approached the gates to go out, a guard whose face I didn't recognize walked out and stood before me, clearly obstructing me from going out.

"Good evening, madam." The guard greeted me and I raised a brow at him, wondering what the problem was, today.

"How may I help you?" I asked, feeling anger welling up in me. I didn't like the fact that he was wasting my time.

"The boss has ordered me not to let you out unless you're using your car," he informed me, prompting me to clasp my hands together in a dramatic manner. Aimar Ali was truly something else.

"I don't want to use the car today." I pleaded. "I'll be back before he returns. Please, let me out."

The issue wasn't my driving skills or navigating with Google Maps. It was an extravagant gift—a car worth over a hundred million naira. The price tag was staggering, and I struggled to accept such generosity.

The guard stood firm. "I cannot go against his orders, madam."

Just then, my phone rang. The bolt rider had grown impatient and began to complain about wasting his time. I apologized and asked him to leave, prompting him to yell at me. I apologized again, but he hissed and hung up. *Nigerians!*

Adesuwa's message popped up: *'Where are you?'*

"Fine, I'll take my car," I decided.

Compelled, I returned inside for my keys, then went back outside to unlock my car. The new car scent wafted up, and I also noticed that the seats still had their transparent leather covers with the Mercedes logo on, which I didn't particularly like. Time was short, so I started the engine and set my GPS. Although unfamiliar with Abuja, I knew how to use Google Maps.

As soon as I ignited it, I reversed and drove out of the opened gates. My GPS was my trusted guide, and with its help, I effortlessly navigated Abuja's streets. The drive was longer than I had expected, and as soon as I got to my destination, it alerted me, and from all indications, I was in the right place. I could see hordes of people and a whole lot of cars were parked.

Thankfully and effortlessly, I found a parking spot and parked. After making sure everything was right, I got down from the car. I ensured it was locked and then, I picked out my phone from my bag and called Adesuwa. She received the call immediately.

"I'm here... where can I find you?" I asked.

“You won’t be able to locate it, I’ll come get you, where are you?” She asked. I looked around me and noticed there was a huge signboard with ‘POWER RACERS’ written boldly on it. So, I informed her, and she said she’d come get me.

I decided to wait for her in front of my car, but I was getting a couple of stares from some guys who kept talking amongst themselves and staring at me. Feeling very uncomfortable, I hopped back into my car. I didn't know what often went wrong with some men, they couldn't see a woman and look away - Bunch of fools.

At the right time, Adesuwa started calling, and she was telling me she couldn’t find me anywhere. I chuckled and asked her to wait. I glanced at my rearview mirror and saw her looking impatient, dressed in cargo pants, a crop top, and a face cap. Despite her restlessness, she looked adorable. I stepped out of my car, still on the call with her.

"Turn around," I said, and so, she turned, and her jaw dropped as she approached me. We shared a warm hug, and then she began to admire my car, touching it in awe.

"Tell me you're rich without telling me you're rich!" she exclaimed. "Azrah, you're rich!" I laughed.

"I'm not rich... it's just a car," I clarified.

She playfully jabbed my arm. "Just a car? You're riding in a car worth over 100 million naira, and it's 'just a car'? Please, Azrah, show me the way!"

Her remarks left me laughing. "Enough about this, let's go watch the game!" I exclaimed.

She agreed, and we walked away from my car, but she couldn't resist turning back to admire it. Adesuwa was undeniably hilarious.

We arrived at our viewing spot for the race. The start time had been rescheduled to 6 pm, which didn't thrill me in any way. I enjoyed chatting and laughing with Adesuwa until then.

As dusk approached, I was worried since I wasn't fond of driving at night. However, the race soon began, and an impressive lineup of race cars took to the track. My excitement soared, especially with our VIP seats, courtesy of Adesuwa, offering a clear view.

"My crush is here!" Adesuwa exclaimed.

"You seem to have many crushes," I teased her afterwards.

She chuckled. "Let's focus on the race. I bet the BMW E46 GTR will win!" Her enthusiasm was infectious.

"Is that your crush’s car?" I asked. She nodded, and I chuckled. The race soon began, their cars started to make a loud noise. Everybody seated there

looked extremely excited. Some of them were on their feet, while others swung a flag in the air. This was so cool, I was super excited. As soon as the cars drove down the tracks, everybody began to hail the name ‘STRIKER’ and Adesuwa hailed along with them. She was rooting for the BMW E46 GTR. She got to her feet and began throwing her arms in the air. I only watched the game for the excitement.

It was truly fun, and I didn’t have a particular racer in mind that I wanted to win. The game was very tough, as a Corvette C6R managed to go ahead of the BMW, I could see the tension in Adesuwa’s eyes. As the BMW thundered toward the finish line, Adesuwa's eyes widened with anticipation. The roar of the engines grew louder, and then, in a flash of blue and white, the BMW crossed the finish line first. Adesuwa erupted into screams of excitement, joining the thunderous cheers of the crowd as the BMW took the checkered flag.

"Yay!" Adesuwa screamed, her voice hoarse with cheering.

As the finish line loomed right in front of us, the roar of the engines subsided, replaced by the cheers of the crowd. She stretched her arms, hoping to get a handshake from the winning racer. The champion emerged from his car, removed his helmet, and revealed a face I least expected—Aimar Ali. Our eyes locked, and the air seemed to thicken with tension. I detected shock in his gaze when he saw me, and I was certain he saw the same in mine. Who knew Aimar Ali could participate in such a game? He always seemed like a person who hated such a game, so his participation was amusing.

“Congratulations, striker!” Adesuwa was very noisy, prompting him to wave at her, though his gaze was on me. The crowd soon surrounded him, and we could no longer see him.

Adesuwa turned to me. “Did you see that? He waved at me.” Adesuwa gushed.

"Yeah, I did.” I tried to show excitement with her. “I need to leave now.” I informed her, it was getting late and I couldn’t afford to miss my *salah*.

“Why? The real party has just begun.” Adesuwa pleaded. “C'mon, Azrah!”

“I’m sorry I have to leave, something important came up.” I lied.

“Alright, see you at work on Monday, then.” She said, I hugged her before I made my way out of the crowd, which was a struggle. But I managed to get out and reach my car. As soon as I reached the spot where I parked it, I opened the door, started it, and drove out of the arena.

It was getting too late, and I had missed the right time for *Maghrib Salah*. Nevertheless, I effortlessly drove home because I had a retentive memory and could still find my way back without the aid of a GPS.

As I arrived home, I parked in the right parking area and got down from my car. The first thing I did when I got into the house was to check up on Aymah, who was already asleep. After doing that, I went to my room, where I had a quick shower. While showering, I replayed the moment Aimar took off his helmet. God gracious, he was undeniably handsome.

After I was done with my bath, I dressed up in my favorite Kitty pajamas, wore a hijab and went to observe my *salah*. After observing both my *salatul maghrib* and *isha*, I decided to read the Quran. I read for about 3 hours and then decided to call it a day. I dropped my Quran and retired to bed to sleep. But I soon discovered that I couldn't sleep, so I kept on rolling in bed until midnight. I knew something was wrong, so I put on my cap and made my way downstairs to prepare myself a cup of hot milk and honey, which would quickly drown me.

As I approached the kitchen, I heard the clattering of dishes, and when I walked in, I saw the kitchen in a disheveled condition - it was covered in flour, and Aimar in particular, was covered in it as well. This prompted me to laugh really hard. But as I kept laughing, I noticed he didn't like it, so I stopped.

I cleared my throat. “What are you doing?” I asked.

“What does it look like I’m doing, smarty pants?” he asked, his voice dripping with mockery.

“Are you trying to bake something?” I laughed. He didn’t respond to me and continued what he was doing. In his hand, he held his phone as he watched a video, and from the words I heard, it was a YouTube video on how to bake a cake. This made the scene more amusing to watch.

I wanted to watch what he was doing so badly, so I sat in the dining area in the kitchen and watched him. He looked very uncomfortable, but my eyes weren't taken off him a bit.

I couldn’t bear to watch the trash he was baking, so I approached him, spanked his arm, and grabbed the bowl in his arm. I didn’t know what came over me, but I didn’t miss the glare and shock on his face, as I jabbed his arm.

Even I myself was shocked.

"This isn't how to bake a cake," I said. "And tell me, why are you even baking one when you can simply order it?" He glared at me briefly before his eyes softened.

“Today is Aymah’s birthday, and she wanted me to bake her a cake, so I promised I would,” he explained, his words touching my heart. He was such a loving father, baking a cake for his daughter just because she wanted him to do so.

"Aww, that’s so cute.” I couldn’t help but gush. I didn’t miss his eye roll.

“I want to help you!” I said, I rolled up my sleeves and began to clean up the mess he made, first. I hated doing anything in a dirty kitchen.

“I do not need your help. I am doing just well,” he argued.

“You do not look like you’re doing well, Mr. Ali.” I commented. “And also, nice game today. I never knew you were such a cool person.” I said excitedly. I could clearly see him try to hide a smile.

“Thank you, and what were you doing there today?” he asked, his arms crossed and his brows raised.

Staring at him made me realize how handsome he truly was. He had light brown eyes that complemented his perfect light brown-hued skin tone. His features suggested a mixed heritage, which his subtle British accent subtly confirmed.

“I went out with a friend.” I told him, while I broke a couple of eggs into a bowl.

“Is your friend nameless?” he asked, watching me intently as I whisked the egg with a hand mixer.

“Her name is Adesuwa.” I told him.

"Oh, it’s a she,” he said, prompting me to give a weird look. He shrugged his shoulders and passed me a vanilla flavor to add to the whisked egg.

We maintained silence until our cake batter was ready to be placed in the oven. After we placed it there, I cleared up the kitchen, and to my surprise, Aimar was helpful as well. He cleaned the counter and returned every single thing he had used back to its place.

“Wow, I never knew men could help in the kitchen.” I remarked, earning me a frown from him.

“And what idiot made the rules that men shouldn’t help women in the kitchen?” he asked.

“A lot of men believe that a woman’s place is in the kitchen, so I assumed...” he cut me short.

“You assumed wrong,” he said, his tone seriously laced with certainty. “Only fools and unintelligent men believe that women belong in the kitchen and should not be helped around the house.”

I couldn’t believe my ears. All these were coming from Aimar’s mouth, the same proud and arrogant Aimar Ali. Throughout the years, I had thought he was like all the other men who believed a woman’s place was at their feet.

And aside from this, for the first time, we had a decent conversation which even lasted for at least five minutes. This was strange and in a way, I enjoyed speaking with him.

“You’re right.” I responded. After that, he didn't say a word and then, he began to scroll through his phone, while I decided to make myself and him a cup of hot milk and honey.

When I was done making it, I placed his cup of milk before him and he stared at it weirdly. He gave me a quizzical look afterwards, prompting me to chuckle.

“What is this for?” he asked.

“It will help you sleep well.” I informed him. “Have a taste.” I urged him, but he resisted at first, and to my surprise, he actually took a sip of it.

“This is just milk and honey,” he said, giving me a confused look.

"Yeah, it is, but it’s good. It’ll help you sleep well at night.” I told him. He took another sip and continued scrolling on his cell phone.

After some minutes, I checked on the cake. I put a skewer through it, and it came out clean, proving it was ready. Foolishly, without a thought, I touched the pan, and I let out a loud scream - the pan had burned me. Aimar immediately walked over to me, worry etched on his face.

He held me by the shoulder and led me to a chair, where I sat. After that, he brought out an ice pack from the refrigerator and handed it over to me. I placed it on my arm and it reduced the burning sensation.

“Thank you, Mr. Ali.” I appreciated him. He shook his head, clearly telling me a no.

“It’s Aimar, not Mr. Ali, just Aimar, please.” He pleaded, his eyes and tone calmer than I had ever seen or heard. I acknowledged his words with a nod.

"Good night, Azrah. Please ensure you're awake by 8 am.” he said, a forced smile spreading across his face. “I'll be wishing Aymah a happy birthday by then, and I'm certain she'll be happy to see you,"

“Okay, I will be there, Aimar.” My tongue betrayed me, and his name rolled out in a tone I had no control over. It was soft, almost seductive. He didn’t say anything else; he simply picked the cake from the oven, and with the use of a glove, he placed it in the fridge and walked out. Leaving me to stare at his retreating figure. A part of him reminded me so much about Sameer, especially with the way he smiled; it was forced, but I could tell it was real and desired to be let out.

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The next morning was a blur. After observing *Salah*, I caught my first glimpse of Aimar heading to the mosque since my arrival at his home. Clad in a traditional white thobe, he carried a prayer mat in his hand. The sight of him took my breath away, and I felt a thrill of excitement.

After completing my prayers, reciting the Quran, and taking my bath, I checked the time — it was ten minutes to eight. It was almost time to wish Aymah a happy birthday. Regrettably, I hadn't gotten her a gift, but I planned to make it up to her later.

Donning a brown abaya, I ensured I looked presentable before heading to Aymah's room. Aimar was already inside, softly reciting *duas* for her in Arabic. Unwilling to interrupt, I slipped in and sat beside Aymah, who repeatedly waved at me upon my arrival. She immediately wrapped me in a warm hug, releasing her hold on Aimar's hand.

After he was done reciting the *Dua's*, he turned to me, a subtle smile clearly written on his face. “Good morning, Azrah and... thanks for coming,” he said, professionalism expressed in his voice.

Typical Aimar.

“Good morning, Aimar,” I returned his greeting, ensuring I properly pronounced his name in an appropriate tone, this time.

“Aunty, today I am a big girl. I am six!” Aymah said excitedly and she placed her head on my lap.

"Yeah, you're a big girl now. Happy birthday, my princess.” I wished her. "May Allah protect you every day."

Aimar brought out a gift bag and handed one to me, then turned to Aymah and presented his. "Aymah, Aunty Azrah, and I got you a gift. Here you go," he said, his eyes nudging me to present my gift.

I was touched by his thoughtfulness - he knew I hadn't had the chance to get Aymah a gift, so he'd gotten one on my behalf.

"Thank you, Daddy," Aymah said, collecting Aimar's gift. Soon, Helen entered with the cake we had baked, drizzled in rich chocolate syrup. It looked stunning. Aimar had truly outstretched himself. I presented Aymah with my gift, and her eyes sparkled with excitement.

“Daddy, can I feed you the cake?” Aymah asked, her eyes sparkling with excitement. Aimar nodded, helping her cut the cake before handing it to her to feed him. They took turns feeding each other, and then Aymah turned to me, offering me a slice. I smiled, taking a bite as she asked me to feed her in return.

As we enjoyed our sweet treat, Aymah exclaimed, “Daddy, it’s your turn! Feed Aunty!” Aimar’s eyebrows rose, and I struggled to stifle a laugh at his expression. But to my surprise, he calmly cut a slice of cake and fed it to me. I savored the bite, trying not to giggle at his serene glare. Oh God, his expressions are priceless.

Aymah chimed in, “It’s your turn, Aunty!” I smiled, taking a slice of cake and feeding it to Aimar. He ate it graciously, delighting Aymah.

We spent quality time together until Aimar excused himself, citing work commitments. After his departure, I remained with Aymah, sharing breakfast and the morning together before she left for *Islamiya* Quran school .

With the house now feeling empty and scanty, I decided to devote the rest of my day to catching up on a new Netflix series.



Chapter 15



Aimar Ali

AYMAH'S UNPREDICTABILITY struck again as she insisted I feed Azrah cake. What a funny girl! As I obliged, I caught Azrah trying to stifle a laugh. It wasn't the first time I'd noticed her amusement at my expressions – a quirk I found quite endearing. While others might find me annoying, Azrah saw the humor in me. What a funny woman.

As I watched Azrah and Aymah play together, their laughter and joy infectious, I realized that Azrah brought out a side of Aymah that I rarely saw. She had a way of making my daughter incredibly happy – happier, even, than I ever could. With a sense of gratitude, I bid them farewell and headed to my workplace.

Azrah had a way of embedding herself in my mind, and I hated it. I didn't like how she effortlessly made me feel soft and kind, emotions I wasn't accustomed to. Whenever I was around her, I felt helpless, my heart skipping a beat as if betraying my resolve. The fluttering butterflies in my stomach were a constant, infuriating reminder that I wasn't as in control as I thought. I detested the fact that Azrah wielded such power over me.

With her being close, I felt hopelessly devoted. She could request the impossible, and I'd obey her. But this wasn’t me. I was a strict man, driven by the urge to amass wealth and being successful in life.

My focus was laser sharp, and emotions had no place in my life. Yet this woman was unraveling me, driving me insane with a desperate need for her presence. But I had to resist her. She was my late brother’s bride, and loving her —or any other woman—was unthinkable.

I couldn’t free myself from the memories of Aminah, my beloved wife and life partner. Her life was tragically cut short during childbirth, leaving me with unbearable grief. Aymah's birth was bittersweet—Aminah's final moment.

The thought kept haunting me, filling me with regret and endless ‘what ifs.’ I often got tormented with the notion that I could have prevented it, and I should have done more to avoid it.

But ultimately, I surrendered to fate. It was Allah’s plan, and His will was always perfect.

My door swung open, and Rayan walked in with a file in his hands. “Hi!” he greeted me happily, making me glare at him. Whenever he greeted me with so much enthusiasm, I knew annoyance was the next thing he would put on.

“What files are those?” I asked. He took a seat in front of me and opened the file.

“The Attah Establishment seems to have a better chance at winning the RSV project,” he said, making me clear my throat.

“I don’t need that project, they can have it,” I replied. Rayan stared at me in shock, waving his hand in front of my face.

“What are you doing?” I inquired.

“Are you sure you’re okay, today?” He questioned me, and I nodded.

“Wow, this is new—you’re allowing The Attah Establishment to outdo you,” he said, clearly in awe. “Is Azrah’s involvement the reason?” he asked, eyebrows raised in curiosity.

“This has nothing to do with Azrah,” I said, though he didn’t prove that he was convinced at all. “And it’s just a fifty-million-dollar deal; it’s not important to me.” Rayan burst into laughter.

“Now I’m sure you’re going mad. This isn’t like you, Aimar. But whatever Azrah has done to you, I love it,” he said, earning him a very piercing glare from me.

“Don’t you have work to do at your company?” I asked. “Why are you always here disturbing me?”

He raised his hands in absolute surrender, laughing loudly before saying goodbye and leaving. As I settled back, his words lingered. Why was I letting Mustapha Attah win a project I could easily secure? That wasn’t like me. But I pushed the thought aside, unwilling to dwell on it.

After work, I headed home, and as usual, I was visited with the sight of Azrah in the garden. Her prayer mat was laid out, and she was seated on it, reciting the Quran and forming notes in a journal. As I watched her, a wave of peace and tranquility washed over me. She looked at peace, and I was certain that a part of her still struggled with the pain of losing Sameer, but she never let it weigh her down. I admired that about her.

As if sensing my gaze, she turned and waved at me with a warm, inviting smile. Instead of reciprocating, I frowned at her and ignored her, quickly walking upstairs.

To my surprise, I felt a pang of guilt—an emotion I rarely experienced, which bothered me greatly.

Her presence left me reeling and wondering.

What was this woman doing to me?

She ignited a raging fire within me, an intense need that I couldn’t shake. The fact that her mere presence could drive me to the brink of madness, consumed by desire for *her*, was unnerving.

I needed to stay far away from her, but that seemed impossible, because I feared that I wanted *her* close.

A knock on my bedroom door broke the silence later that day. I opened it to find Azrah standing there, her face etched with worry. Her distressed expression sparked my concern, and I felt a pang of curiosity about what was troubling her.

"Aimar, I need your help," she said, her voice trembling.

I moved closer to her, concern etched on my face. "What's wrong?"

"My mother's been ill for some time, but I only just found out," Azrah said, her brow furrowed with worry. "Ismahan called me today with the news. I have to see her, Aimar."

"Azrah, calm down, okay?" I said, reassuring her. "Is your mom out of danger? Is she doing well?" Worry filled her eyes more deeply as she nodded.

"Ridwan will take you to Kano," I continued. "You'll see your mom soon."

"Thank you, Aimar," she whispered, taking a deep breath to compose herself.

"I'm very scared," she mumbled, tears filling her eyes. I wrapped a comforting arm around her shoulders. "I'll accompany you to Kano. You're not alone, okay?”

“No, Aimar... you don’t need to come with me. My mother is doing much better, I just need to see her myself.” She assured me.

“Are you sure you don’t need me to come with you?” I questioned, hoping she’d say yes. The thought of her leaving for Kano somewhat made me unsettled, disturbed by the feeling of not seeing her for days.

"I'm sure... you don't need to.” She uttered.

With a nod, I returned to my room to grab my phone. I called my assistant, instructing him to prepare the jet for takeoff.

Without gathering her belongings, we left with Ridwan. During the ride, Azrah's anxiety was palpable. I held her arm, offering comfort as she struggled to calm down.

"Take deep breaths, Azrah. Your mom will be fine, okay?" I said softly.

She nodded, her throat constricting as she swallowed hard. Her grip on my arm tightened, and I could feel her anxiety radiating towards me. Sitting so close to her made my own nerves flutter, and I fought to steady my breathing. Determined not to appear shaken, I focused on providing her comfort and reassurance until we reached the airport.

At the airport, I instructed Ridwan, "Take care of her and call me if anything arises." He assured me he would.

As Azrah boarded the private jet, I watched her disappear into the distance, feeling a pang of concern.

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It had been three days. Azrah had traveled to Kano, and since then, the house hadn't felt the same without her around. Whenever I walked out of my room in the morning, I would expect to hear her voice, reciting the Quran, but there was nothing like that and it made me feel empty inside.

As I reached the stairs to leave for work, she wasn't there. The void she left behind caught me unaware, revealing how deeply her presence had fueled my daily motivation. With her being away, my house didn't seem like a home. And, Aymah kept disturbing me about her. She would create a scene every morning and request for Azrah to bake her cookies. My daughter loved her so much, and seeing that warmed my heart. It warmed my heart to see that my child had someone she looked up to as a mother.

As I arrived at my workplace, I approached my office to find Rayan, and Farouq Armani, who were both seated and waiting for me. As I walked in, we exchanged pleasantries and then, we began to discuss our new business plans.

My mind kept wandering to Azrah, I wanted to call her, even though I didn't know what to say, if I did. I know I'd only stutter, and I didn't want that to happen. *How can a woman manage to make me this miserable?* My thoughts were consumed by her, making it impossible for me to think clearly.

Farouq's voice cut through my thoughts, his distinctive American accent commanding my focus. "Aimar, are you alright? I asked you a question," he said, ogling at me with curiosity. Rayan looked equally confused.

"I'm not okay. Can this meeting be postponed till next week?" I asked and they both agreed, and as it was settled, I headed home. As soon as I got home, I went straight to Aymah's room.

"Aymah," I called her on my arrival.

"Yes, Daddy," She said, standing to her feet and walking towards me.

"Do you want to go see Aunty Azrah?" I questioned and her eyes lightened up in excitement.

"Yes, Daddy, yes!" Aymah exclaimed.

After that, I swiftly called Ridwan to prepare my private jet for our trip to Kano.

I packed a few of Aymah's essentials, her beloved toys especially. The 55-minute flight passed quickly, and my excitement grew with every passing minute. *The thought of seeing her filled me with excitement.*

Towards our arrival in Kano, a car awaited us. I instructed the driver to take us to Azrah's house. As we arrived, the guards notified her family, and they

granted us entry.

"Good evening, Ya Aimar," Azrah's sister, Ismahan, greeted, opening the door with a forced smile.

Aymah rushed into her arms, and they hugged tightly as we stepped inside. We took our seats, and I replied, "Good evening, Ismahan."

The familiarity I had with her name caught her unawares, her jaw dropping slightly. "You know my name?" she asked, eyes widening.

I nodded affirmatively. "Of course, you're Azrah's little sister." I said, causing a smile to appear on her face. She looked exactly like Azrah, the only difference was that she was light skinned like her mother. While Azrah had her fathers complexion.

"Where is Azrah?" I asked, my eagerness evidently shown.

"Azrah, Baba, and Mother have stepped out to visit a relative," she said, and I replied that I'd wait for her.

Ismahan then brought me drinks and snacks and joined me in the living room. Surprisingly, we hit it off. She was chatty, sharing jokes and stories about Azrah which only left me smiling.

"Azrah is—" Ismahan started, but her words were cut short as Azrah, accompanied by her parents, walked into the room. Azrah's eyes widened in surprise, her gaze locking onto mine. Aymah sprinted toward her, wrapping her in a tight hug.

I left my seat swiftly and bowed in respect, greeting Azrah's parents.

"*Assalamu alaikum*, Baba. *Ina Wuni* Good evening, Ummah," I said, addressing her father and mother. Their faces lightened up as they saw me.

“Aimar *yane* what’s up?, how are you my son?” Her mother said. “I didn’t know you were coming, I would have waited for you.” She said, causing me to force a smile.

“*Alhamdulillah* Ummah, I am doing well.” I said.

“And how’s your health Ummah, I hope you’re better now?” I asked.

"As you can see, I'm doing much better now," Azrah’s mother said, her bright smile radiantly revealed.

I continued exchanging pleasantries with her father until they excused themselves, leaving Azrah and me alone. Ismahan took Aymah to her room, which was upstairs.

“Hi...” I decided to break the silence that was creeping up between us. “How... how are you?” I stuttered a bit.

Damn! I feared this would happen around her.

"I'm fine, thank you," Azrah smiled and let out, her bright smile spreading from ear to ear. "What brings you here? I was planning to return home

tomorrow." Her warm smile stirred something deep within me, filling my heart with comfort and joy.

“*Oh Allah*!” I muttered to myself, my voice heard by only me, but kept resounding inside me. “*What have I done to deserve such a peaceful soul as my wife?*”

“I...” I trailed off, making her raise a brow, anticipating my response. “Aymah wanted to see you.” I lied, her face fell flat instantly, she looked like she wanted to hear something else.

How could I say I wanted to see her? How would I express to her how I abandoned everything else to find solace in her loving presence?

"How thoughtful it is... of you to bring her!" she exclaimed. "I assumed you were here for Prince Khalifa's turbaning ceremony."

"Is that tomorrow?" I asked, suddenly recalling that my father had invited me to attend it. I had previously lied, citing other commitments, but now I was trapped. Since he knew I was in Kano, skipping the event would undoubtedly incite his anger. And I didn’t want to deal with that now.

“Yeah,” She responded.

"I totally forgot, but now that we're in Kano, let's just attend tomorrow, shall we?"

"Alright, that would be great," she said, her eyes sparkling with excitement. "My Baba was already making a fuss because I'd refused to attend earlier."

After spending some time with Aymah, who had begged to sleep over at Azrah's house, I agreed and left her there. Then, I returned to my parents' home in Kano, where I was greeted by my Ummie and Nazeerah, who were shocked and excited at the same time, seeing me again.

I stopped by Ummie's room later that day and found her engrossed in Quranic recitation, seated comfortably on her prayer mat. On entering the room, I exchanged warm greetings with her and sat down beside her, tenderly massaging her legs.

“I have missed you so much, Ummie.” I said, making her resort to a smile.

"Me too, my son," she said, her eyes sparkling with warmth. "Tell me, how is Azrah?" She asked, her voice filled with excitement and genuine interest.

“Azrah is doing well,” I replied, my voice firmly blunt.

“You know what I am talking about Aimar, she came to visit yesterday, so I know she is fine.” My mother said, “I mean what’s it like being with her?”

“She’s kind,” I simply said.

“Is that all?” Ummie asked, and I chuckled.

“And Aymah loves her a lot.” I added, making Ummie smile.

"Aimar, I want you to give your marriage a chance," Ummie said. "You need to let go of the past and focus on being happy."

“I have let go of the past.” I returned, taking a deep breath.

“You haven’t, I know you very well Aimar, I raised you, remember?” She said, her gaze meeting mine.

"Ummie, it isn't easy," I confessed, my emotions raw and exposed. "Some days, I'm overwhelmed by confusion and fear – the fear of letting go of Aminah and the memories we shared. I'm also tormented by the worry that I might be betraying Sameer in some way." Ummie's gentle hands wrapped around my arm, her soothing strokes a reassuring comfort.

"You’re not betraying anybody, and the only way you can move on from Aminah is by giving you and Azrah's relationship a chance," She said gently. "She's also struggling. Azrah carries the weight of Sameer's loss, but trust me, that girl is resilient. She wouldn't let it define her.”

My Ummie spoke the truth, I thought. Azrah's resilience stemmed from her single-minded focus on her faith and her deep connection with Allah. She often wore a bright smile, but behind it, I frequently glimpsed a hint of pain. Yet, despite this, she never let her struggles weigh her down.

With a deep breath, my voice came out trembling. "I'll do my best, Ummie," I muttered, and she wrapped me in a comforting side hug. The soothing sound of her Quranic recitation filled the night air, imbuing me with determination.

Her words lingered, a reminder that it was high time I moved on. Though the journey would be tough, I encouraged myself to take the first step.



Chapter 16



Azrah Yusuf

Kano, Nigeria.

“AS AIMAR PROMISED, he'll bring me a gift if he travels to Dubai again,” Ismahan blurted out, unable to cope with her excitement. We were surrounded by cousins and aunts, with henna boldly designed on their hands, when she spilled the news. Nazeerah burst into laughter, and I couldn't help but join.

"I thought you disliked him," I said, my brow furrowed in confusion. Ismahan had never been a fan of Aimar, so this sudden about-face after spending just 30 minutes with him was nothing short of astonishing.

"That was in the past," Ismahan said, wearing a smile. "Aimar is actually fun to be with, and we chatted a lot yesterday." She spoke as her henna artist carefully unwrapped the cellophane tapes from her arm, revealing the vibrant red design now that the henna had been erased. Meanwhile, Nazeerah and I still had our tapes on.

“Uhm, I see,” I replied, and she chuckled knowingly. As the day unfolded, we devoted our attention to preparing for the turbaning ceremony.

As a member of the royal family, I was dressed in a stunning baby pink lace gown, complete with an *alkaybah* – a majestic garment reserved for special occasions. This traditional attire, worn by both men and women of royal lineage, was a symbol of our heritage and a mark of respect for the momentous event.

Wearing the *alkaybah* wasn't just a choice, it was an obligation for my family. As descendants of the King of the North, our noble heritage demanded respect.

The people of Kano regarded my family with great reverence, fondly referring to my sister and me as "*princesses*." This honorific title wasn't merely a courtesy; it stemmed from our familial connection to the throne. As the grandchildren of the ex-king of the north – my father's father – the title was ours by birthright.

With Cousin Haidar, the present King of the North, currently abroad, my family had been entrusted to represent him at the event today. Meanwhile, back at home, my aunties had gathered in the living room, resplendent in their

exquisite atampas. They chatted and laughed with my mother, their conversations centered around their upcoming trip to Umrah and their plans to open new stores in Kano.

Ismahan, Nazeerah, and I attempted to steer clear of the commotion by slipping out through the back door of the mansion. We were in no mood for unnecessary remarks or confrontations.

The men, including my Baba, had already departed for the royal palace, which was conveniently located just a short distance from our home. As we prepared to follow, our house was abuzz with activity, with everyone scurrying about, making final preparations for our departure.

“Oh my God, Azrah, you look amazing.” Firdausi, my cousin said, the moment she entered my room and saw me, a warm smile beautifying her face.

"Thank you, Firdausi, you look so stunning!” I said, earning a warm smile from her. Firdausi shone in her bright blue lace lafaya, its intricate patterns accentuating her radiant beauty.

Just then, Ismahan and Nazeerah walked in.

Ismahan wore an exquisite *atampa*, complemented by her sky-blue *alkaybah*, which shimmered elegantly. Nazeerah, on the other hand, was dazzled in a luxurious red Chantilly sequined lace gown. Her beautifully hennaed hands gleamed, and her face lit up with a radiant smile as she caught sight of me.

“I can’t believe you picked the baby pink *alkaybah*,” Ismahan said, shaking her head.

“And it looks amazing on her.” Firdausi and Nazeerah said in unison, making us resort to laughter. They all admired my henna, jewelry, and makeup as we stepped out of the house.

The turbaning ceremony would commence with a *Hawan Daba* event, which traditionally involves riding a horse. Initially, both Ismahan and I were expected to participate, but my father had requested that I exempt myself from this part of the ceremony, citing cultural norms for married women. I was secretly relieved, as I've never been fond of large crowds. Instead, Ismahan would ride solo, honoring our family's heritage.

As we approached the car that would take us to the turbaning ceremony, I sighted Aymah seated at the back of a sleek black Mercedes with my mother, she was holding onto a huge pack of cheeseballs and speaking to my mother. They both were immersed in their conversation, with my mother laughing and Aymah often gasping with a giggle. I decided not to ruin their moment, so I opted to ride with Nazeerah instead, as she was driving alone, while Ismahan and Firdausi accompanied my mother.

As we navigated the streets of Kano, Nazeerah's expression suddenly changed. A look of panic crossed her face, and she gasped.

“Omg!" she exclaimed. "I was supposed to pick up my flash drive. It has my assignment questions and answers, and I need to give it to my course mate who's attending the turbaning ceremony." She said, causing me to shake my head with a chuckle.

“So what do we do now?” I asked her.

"I need to stop right at my house," she said, turning to me. I nodded in agreement, and we diverted from the route.

A short drive later, we arrived at her house and parked in the lot. We stepped out of the car and made our way into the living room, where Ummie was waiting. She was dressed in an expensive lace, ready to attend the turbaning ceremony. Her face lit up with a warm smile as she spotted me, and she immediately enveloped me in a tight hug.

"My baby, you look stunning!”Ummie exclaimed, beaming with delight as she adjusted my *alkaybah*. "Your makeup is flawless.”

Meanwhile, Nazeerah had stepped upstairs to retrieve her flash drive. Ummie and I spoke for a while, laughing and catching up with life matters.

As we spoke, Nazeerah approached us, and as I looked up, a stunning appearance caught me. He was dressed in a white shiny *kaftan* with a *zanna bukar* cap featuring gray, black, and white designs seated on his head. *Aimar Ali looked handsome*, so effortlessly. As soon as our eyes met, he smiled, and this time it reached his eyes, and I could sense the warmth that came with his presence. Time appeared to stand still as I basked in the gentle warmth of his presence, my heart skipping a beat at the sheer alluring sight of my *husband*.

Today he seemed very happy.

"Hi..." Aimar's voice trailed off, and I shyly averted my gaze. Ummie and Nazeerah couldn't help but laugh. *Gosh* I hated embarrassing situations.

“Aimar, why don’t you and Azrah drive to the ceremony together?” Ummie suggested excitedly. Nazeerah nodded in agreement. For some reason, I suddenly felt shy, which was unusual especially whenever he was around. I wasn’t keen on driving with him and as I even wanted to object, I decided to remain silent and go along with the suggestion. To my surprise, he didn’t protest either, probably because his mother was the one making the request.

After bidding Ummie bye and Nazeerah as well, we walked to his car. The drive through Kano's streets was quiet, but his scent enveloped me, filling the air.

"Do you truly wish to attend the turbaning ceremony?" he asked, breaking the silence.

"I don't," I replied.

"Great, because neither do I," he said with a smile. "How about we go somewhere more interesting?"

"Wouldn't your dad be mad if you missed the ceremony? Mine would," I blurted out.

"No one will even notice we're missing, with everything going on." He explained. " Besides, my dad, and yours will be preoccupied with the king."

"Alright then, so where is this interesting place we are heading to?" I asked, and a smile spread across his face.

"You'll see," he said, and the drive continued until we reached the gates of a tall building, with a name written on it: *GIDAN YARA* children's home. It was boldly designed with paint on the top of the magnificent building.

"Do you like kids?" Aimar's question caught through the air, making me swallow a lump.

"Of course, I do," I replied, smiling wryly. "I love Aymah." A minute of silence had passed before I responded, and his face lit up with a warm smile afterwards. I glanced around, taking in our surroundings. "This is an orphanage home, right?" I asked, seeking confirmation. He nodded, his eyes sparkling with enthusiasm. He seemed almost euphoric to be here.

We stepped out of the car after parking properly in the lot, and the guards promptly rushed towards us, greeting Aimar with enthusiasm the moment they spotted him.

"*Ranka dai ya dade*... May you live long, sir." The guards hailed, excitement brimming in their voices at the sight of him.

"How are you doing?" Aimar asked, and they replied that they were fine.

After speaking to them and gifting them with cash, we proceeded to the admin block, where we met a woman dressed in northern attire. The moment she saw me, she glared at me weirdly, making me realize I was still dressed in an *alkaybah*.

Oh! I should have taken it off before getting out of the car. I had completely forgotten.

"Aimar, *sannu*," the woman said. "I'm happy to have you here today. The kids have been asking about you."

The kids had been asking about him? This meant he often visited.

After we both exchanged pleasantries with the woman, Aimar led me to a vast room filled with children who were playing with themselves.

As soon as they saw him, they rushed to their feet and swarmed around him, hugging him tightly. To my surprise, even the little ones recognized him, calling out his name. Aimar's eyes sparkled with joy as he interacted with them, just as they did whenever he was with Aymah.

"Wow, is she a princess?" a kid yelled, and the others joined him, their faces filled with astonishment as they stared at me. I smiled nervously and waved at them, prompting Aimar to chuckle.

“Yes, she is a princess,” Aimar replied, and the kids instantly gathered around me. They eagerly pulled at my *alkaybah*, and I eventually had to remove it so each girl in the room could take turns, wearing it. The children were overjoyed, but Aimar seemed to be the happiest, snapping photos of the girls dressed in the *alkaybah*, while the boys wore his cap.

One of the kids chimed in, “It's your turn to take a picture, princess!” and handed Aimar his cap. He smiled, placing it back on his head, and the kids eagerly pushed us together. With a cheerful click, they snapped a photo of us, capturing the joyful moment.

As we stood side by side, I couldn't help but smile. I was having a wonderful time, and the kids seemed thrilled to have us around.

A little girl walked up to me and tugged at my dress.

"Aunty, you're so beautiful," she said, her eyes sparkling with admiration. I smiled and pinched her cheeks, overwhelmed by her cuteness.

"And you are so cute," I replied, making her giggle.

Another child chimed, "Can we have a fake wedding? You and Aimar can be the bride and groom!" Aimar's face lit up with a smile.

"That's a great idea!" To my suprise, he exclaimed, pulling out his phone as he turned on a lively Arabic song. The kids danced and played along, and I joined them as well, twirling with them.

As we danced and laughed, a little boy began to sprinkle me with N10 notes. Aimar laughed and pulled out his own pocket change, showering me with dollar bills instead. The kids squealed with delight, jumping and dancing with even more enthusiasm. Aimar joined, appearing carefree and joyful – a side of him I'd rarely seen.

"It's time to unveil the *amarya* bride," a child exclaimed, tugging at my hand to lead me to a plastic chair. I sat down, and Aimar settled in front of me, his face alight with excitement. As he gently lifted the hood of my *alkaybah*, the children squealed in delight while I laughed.

Aimar's eyes sparkled with joy as he lifted the hood of my *alkaybah*, and the kids erupted into cheers and applause. One of them captured a photo of Aimar and me, capturing the magic of the moment. I was thrilled to be spending time with these children, and I was impressed to hear them speaking English so fluently.

After we'd spent some time with the kids, three men entered the room carrying bags which were full of gifts. Each bag contained a personalized shirt,

with every child's name elegantly printed on it. It was such a thoughtful gesture from Aimar, and I was deeply touched by this side of him.

Soon later, it began to get late so we bid the kids goodbye and headed back home. Aimar drove me to my house, and once we arrived, I got down from the car and he did the same.

As we stood in front of the entrance, he smiled.

“It was nice hanging out with you, *Princess* Azrah.” he said, causing me to chuckle.

“It was my pleasure Mr. Ali.” I said, and he smiled. Just then, Firdausi, Ismahan, and Nazeerah walked out.

“Ya Aimar!” Ismahan beamed, excited to see him. “Good evening, thank you, I got the money you sent to me.” Her words earned her a glare from me and she shrugged.

“You’re welcome,” Aimar said. “I hope he sent you the exact amount.”

“He did!” Ismahan exclaimed. “Three million naira!”

My jaw dropped in amazement. “Three million naira for what?” I asked, but Aimar and Ismahan just shrugged, evading my question as they shared a knowing glare with a chuckle. I shot Ismahan a glare, telling her we have to talk later.

Firdausi, known for her big mouth and flair for gossip, spoke up. “So you're Aimar Ali who’s stolen our sister’s heart?” she asked and I glared at her, willing to shut her up,

“If you ever hurt my sister, I’ll be sure to beat you up, don’t break her heart o.” She continued, her words leaving us all gasping slightly. I struggled to stifle my laughter, knowing what was to come.

“Are you mad?” Aimar snapped, his harsh demeanor instantly restored. Ismahan and Nazeerah struggled to stifle their laughter, while Firdausi only stood, perplexed.

“Don’t ever dare speak to me again!” Aimar warned, his voice firm and authoritative.

Firdausi's eyes widened in shock, her face appearing pale as she realized she had crossed a line. She took a step back, her mouth opened agape, but no words came out. The air fell silent, with all eyes on the unfolding drama.

Aimar turned to me, his expression softening as he asked, “Where's Aymah?” I nodded toward the door and he walked into the house where he spotted her. They exchanged warm smiles and hugs. He then greeted my parents, his courtesy remaining a stark contrast to his earlier sternness.

With a soft nod, Aimar bid us bye and left for his home, Nazeerah staying by his side. Firdausi stood stiff, still reeling from Aimar's rebuke, her usual

boldness momentarily subdued.

As we parted ways, Aimar chipped in for what had been said, mentioning that we'd be returning to Abuja tomorrow. I felt a wave of relief wash over me, knowing I'd soon be back to my routine at work. Adesuwa was already missing me, and I was eager to catch up with work. Meanwhile, Ismahan only continued to tease Firdausi for the rest of the night.



Chapter 17



Azrah Yusuf

TODAY MARKED FIVE MONTHS since Sameer's passing. Memories of his sudden demise flooded my mind, and the pain felt just as raw as it had on that fateful day. Despite my efforts to avoid thinking about him, the grief proved too overwhelming to bear. In an attempt to cope, I tried distracting myself with work, spending time with Aymah, reciting the Quran, and forcing a smile onto my face.

But I know I couldn't be aggrieved forever. I needed to find strength and rediscover happiness. I longed to smile genuinely, feeling it reach my eyes. Spending time with Aimar had awakened this desire. His kindness surprised me, he wasn't the person I thought I knew. Especially the time we spent together in Kano, seeing him with those kids warmed my heart immensely.

Yet, considering giving our marriage a chance only sounded like a betrayal to Sameer's memory. The thought of moving forward with his brother seemed unbearable.

I decided to discard all thoughts with regards to Sameer and head for work. My car was outside, and I realized I had it for a month already. Aimar barely stays at home nowadays, but I never fail to see him standing on the staircase every morning before I leave for work. We'd exchange pleasantries with him, barely acknowledging me. Sometimes he'd feign a caring attitude and other times it was like he was battling with something. And completely, he became a different person entirely.

Today, I set out for work early, and as I got to the staircase, he was standing as usual, cladded in a black suit. "Good morning, Aimar." I greeted, but he ignored me. That was normal and usual, so I didn't bother to repeat myself. But as I walked further down the stairs, he called out to me.

"Azrah." I turned around to find him standing behind me.

"*Na'am* Yes," I responded.

"Please, arrive early from work today. I need your assistance with shopping for Aymah," he announced. That came off as a shock to me, but I acknowledged and agreed to be back early. Seeing that he had nothing more to say, I left for work after picking up an apple from the fruit bowl. I was thrilled to help him with shopping for Aymah. I adored picking out clothes for kids. Moreover, I

cherished the memories of helping Sameer choose gifts for Aymah whenever she visited, he loved her dearly.

I soon got into my car and as I started it, I drove to work. In my workplace, I was glad Hisham Attah was no longer my boss - he had left and Mustapha had returned. Throughout his stay with us, I always found various means of staying away from him, and I guess he had noticed that, so he kept his distance as well.

As I got to my workplace, I made my way straight into the office and towards Adesuwa. “Hi love!” I greeted her, placing a pack of chocolate on her table.

"Ah, this one, you’re so happy today,” she exclaimed. “And you even got me a gift... what’s the big news, Azrah?” She picked up her chocolate.

“It’s nothing, so I can’t give my friend a gift again until there's something coming up." I said, making her channel a questionable glare at me. Then, she tore open her chocolate and ate it.

“Is the boss around?” I asked, and she nodded. After having spent a little time with her, I made my way to Mustapha’s office. I knocked on the door, and he asked me to come in. I did, and the moment he saw me, a smile beautified his face.

“Good morning, Mustapha.” I greeted.

“Morning, Azrah... come, come and sit down! I have great news.” He exclaimed, exhibiting great excitement. So, I took a seat before him.

“What’s the good news?” I asked.

"We won the RSV contract!" he exclaimed. "Again, we beat Ali Builders to it.” I forced a smile, congratulating him.

"That's great news, congratulations!" I said, but my mind was elsewhere, wondering how Aimar would take this loss. The RSV contract was enormous, and losing it could destroy him.

He beamed with pride. "Yeah, I'm thrilled. Aimar thought he could outdo me... can you believe it?"

"I can hardly imagine," I replied, feigning enthusiasm while secretly empathizing with Aimar's potential distress.

“Is the meeting by 9 still holding?” He asked, and with a glance at my iPad, I informed him that it was holding. He glanced at his wristwatch and stood to his feet.

“We'd better get going then, we’re already late.” He said, with a nod, I got to my feet, and we made our way out of the office. I bid Adesuwa bye before leaving with Mustapha. We were taking the company’s car, so I didn’t bother to take mine.

We soon sat in the car and drove to the location of the meeting. Mustapha was in such a good mood, so he yapped all through the ride, and a larger part of his speech were targeted at Aimar and how he couldn't wait to see the look on his face. Those two undoubtedly hated each other, and now I could tell why, they hated each other because of business—it was such a childish way of jealousy.

When we got to the location for the meeting, we got out of the car and went in. We were welcomed by their secretary and led to the meeting room. As usual, we were always late. As we walked in, all eyes turned to us, but two pairs stood out—Aimar's, his gaze fixed intently on Mustapha and me. His piercing stare followed us until we took our seats. Throughout the meeting, I deliberately avoided eye contact with Aimar, sensing an unspoken tension.

"Do you think what he's saying is right? I thought the budget for this plan was one million dollars." Mustapha whispered to me, his mouth directly close to my ears. I could feel the hotness of his breath through my chiffon veil, and he was a bit too close to me. I dared to stare at Aimar, and our eyes locked, but he looked away nonchalantly and focused back on the speaker.

"The budget is just right." I said to Mustapha, moving a little bit away from him, and he noticed I wasn't comfortable, so he maintained his distance all through the meeting. When the meeting was over, Aimar walked over to us, which was actually strange. He stood before Mustapha and extended his arm, his eyes glaring directly at me before they returned to Mustapha.

He cleared his throat. "Congratulations on your new project," he said. Mustapha was as shocked just as I was. He cleared his throat.

"Thank you, Aimar." They shook, and with that done, Aimar walked away. Mustapha turned to me.

"Did you see that?" he asked, and I acknowledged with a nod.

"That has never happened before, I mean 'never!'" he exclaimed.

"Maybe he wants to turn a new leaf, I guess." I shrugged, my shoulders spreading out so widely. He wiped his eyes and gazed at Aimar's direction one more time, and I chuckled. He still couldn't believe what had just happened.

After the meeting, we returned to the office. Having told Mustapha about my plans on leaving early, he permitted me. I bid Adesuwa bye before I left work and drove home. When I got home, I saw Aimar's car parked outside, so I knew he had returned.

I walked into the house and went to my room, where I took a shower before I prayed and had lunch. While seated at the dining table, I noticed Aimar's presence. He sat down as well and served himself some food.

"Uhm... Good afternoon, Aimar." I greeted and he acknowledged my greeting with a nod.

I decided to start a conversation with him. “It was nice of you to congratulate Mustapha today.” He paused while eating and shifted his gaze to me.

No space for emotion.

“His win is your win,” he said and continued to eat. His words touched my heart. He had congratulated Mustapha because of me. But that didn’t mean anything, did it?

“Aww, thank you.” I gushed with a voice that sounded like that of a baby's, making him glare at me. I chuckled. We both ate in silence, and when he was done, he turned to me.

“Go get ready, we are leaving now,” he said. I gave a subtle nod. He got up and left - he was a slow eater. Nevertheless, I made sure I finished my food, so I returned to my room, and got dressed. And no, I wasn’t wearing an Abaya today, but a denim blue jeans trouser and a baby pink chiffon top. I matched that with my multi-colored, bright pink vintage scarf. To top it all, I took my white sling bag and paired it with my white Air Jordan 34. When I was satisfied with the way I appeared, I sprayed a bit of perfume and made my way out. I had wanted to greet Aymah, but I realized she wasn’t back from school yet.

As I trudged into the living room, I saw Aimar, and for the first time in a while, he wasn't dressed in a corporate attire. He wore a cream-colored linen shirt, slim-fit and tailored to perfection, with a subtle texture and soft sheen. The classic collar and French cuffs added elegance, his matching beige trousers, crafted from luxurious wool or cashmere, fit streamlined, tapering at the ankles to reveal his shoes. He looked very good.

As his eyes scanned my outfit from head to toe, he asked. “May we leave?” I agreed, and we walked out together. A Prado SUV was parked outside waiting for us, and a driver was seated in the front. To my surprise, Aimar got the door open for me - this shocked me to the core, prompting me not to move.

“Are you getting in or not?” His words distracted me, and I got in, and he followed suit. Did he just have the door open for me? That was crazy.

Afterwards, the car took off, and we hit the busy streets of Abuja. Aimar occupied himself with his phone, and I did the same. I was reading a book on Wattpad written by my favorite author, Donald Uzoka. I was engrossed in the pages of the book that I didn’t notice when we came to a halt. Aimar had to call out my name, and as I looked outside, I noticed we were at the airport, and so I raised my brow at him.

“Why are we at the airport? Didn’t you say we were going shopping?” I inquired.

"Yes, we're going shopping in Dubai," he casually said, and my jaw dropped. It's not every day you hear someone travel to another country just to shop - no

vacation plans in sight, just a shopping spree. It was utterly insane.

“No, no, no,” I said, “I have work to do tomorrow, and I didn’t tell my boss I will not be coming tomorrow, I cannot come with you.” I told him. “And what about Aymah? We left her home alone.” I added.

He gazed at me intensely and said, “You're coming with me, *princess*.”

I was taken aback, my ears straining to process what I'd just heard. Why had he called me "*princess*"? The term sparked a flutter in my chest, instantly transporting me back to our trip to Kano. I remembered how the kids at the orphanage had affectionately used the same title, but hearing it from him was altogether different. His voice, his tone, and the way he'd said it made the word feel intimate, special, and uniquely mine.

“Aymah will be fine; she's in good hands,” he reassured me.

"Aimar, we didn't plan for this. If you wanted company so badly, you should have taken your girlfriend with you instead," I protested.

He remained silent, completely ignoring me. Then, he stepped out of the car and held the door open for me. I followed, sticking to the fact that he wouldn't change his mind.

We got to the airport check-in area, where agents promptly checked us in. Afterwards, we made our way to his private jet, a subtle reminder of his immense wealth.

The stairs were lowered, and we boarded the jet. I settled into the same seat I had occupied on my first trip to Abuja. It had been over two years since I last visited Dubai. My previous trip was when my mother, sister and I had traveled there. We performed *Umrah* and stopped in Dubai for some family shopping. The memories were fond, and I wondered if the city had changed.

From my past experience, I knew the flight from Abuja to Dubai would take approximately 10 hours and 30 minutes—a considerable duration. To pass the time, I started watching a movie on my phone. Meanwhile, Aimar was engrossed in his laptop, probably working on it. As the hours elapsed, fatigue set in, and I adjusted my seat for maximum comfort. I reclined, closed my eyes, and drifted off to sleep.

It felt like I had been sleeping for eternity, and when I opened my eyes, I was covered in a soft fur blanket. It was obvious Aimar did this, so I turned to him and found him on his phone, with his headphones on. I soon discovered we had arrived in Dubai, but we were still seated in the plane. As I looked outside the window, I saw the airport's intricate network of taxiways and ramp areas, bustling with aircraft from around the world. The Dubai International Airport's airfields, with their gleaming glass and steel architecture, seemed to stretch on forever.

“You’re finally awake.” Aimar’s voice distracted me.

“Yeah, how long have I been asleep? I asked, and he glared at his phone screen and then at me.

“We landed in Dubai an hour ago, so yeah... for about six hours,” he said. I was stunned, wondering why he would let me sleep without waking me up. But that was so kind of him.

“Why didn’t you wake me up?” I scratched my eyes.

“I didn’t want to disturb you,” he said.

Oh my God, this man couldn't be Aimar Ali, I thought. Or have I been wrong about him all these years? Can you imagine someone not waking you up because they didn't want to disturb you, despite having other commitments that probably needed his attention? I found that so sweet.

“Thank you.” I extended my appreciation to him. “Also, for the blanket.” I said and I could tell immediately that he wanted to smile, but he forced it back and stood up. Slowly turning on Aimar mode, he gathered his belongings and signaled to me with his eyes to come with him. I did, and as we walked out of the jet, the humid breeze of Dubai hit me like a whirlwind.

As we descended the plane's stairs, I couldn't help but admire the airport. Its transformation was stunning - it seemed like a completely different place from the one I'd seen two years ago. As we walked out of the airport, the Dubai air enveloped me, warm and familiar.

The International Airport's Terminal 3, with its sprawling duty-free shopping and dining options, enveloped me. I marveled at the airport's sheer scale—150 million passengers annually, 3,400 flights daily. The airport's opulent décor, complete with gold accents and Arabic calligraphy, reflected Dubai's status as a global hub. It was overwhelming.

As we made our way through the immigration and customs, some Arab men approached us, and Aimar hugged them. They spoke for a while, leaving me to stand and only stare at them. Aimar abruptly turned around and grabbed my arm. He pulled me calmly, his hands were soft and cold. The men stared at us as we walked through in a haste. As we emerged out of the airport, a sleek white Lamborghini Urus awaited us. There was a driver at the front, and again, Aimar got the door open for me, and we walked right into the car and sat down.

“I’m sorry about the rush, some news reporters had gotten intel on my arrival, so we had to act fast.” he apologized. I smiled, assuring him there wasn’t a problem. As I glanced through the window, Dubai's nocturnal landscape unfolded like a canva of twinkling light. We glided effortlessly along Sheikh Zayed Road, enveloped by Dubai's mesmerizing nighttime magic.

To my left, the Burj Khalifa's towering silhouette shone so brightly, its exterior illuminated by thousands of LED lights. The Dubai Mall's sprawling complex sparkles like a gemstone, its glass and steel façade reflecting the city's vibrant energy. Dubai was truly a dream come true. I love love love Dubai.

We soon came to a stop before a giant silver gate. As our car approached, the gates swung open automatically, and my eyes were met with the most breathtaking building I had ever seen. It was a colossal estate, and at the end of the intricately designed facade, the bold name ‘Ali Builders’ was emblazoned. This was Aimar's house. There was no shock there - he was a billionaire after all.

As soon as our car came to a halt, a man ran and got the doors opened for us. Aimar stepped out, and I did the same. The air was thick and nice, and the smell of cardamom hit my nostrils. I was so lost in my admiration of the fountains and gardens that I almost missed Aimar walking towards the entrance with his gaze glued to his phone. Immediately, I scurried towards him, and we walked in together. The majestic mahogany doors swung open, revealing a stunning interior. A warmly smiling maid greeted Aimar and me, welcoming us into the opulent estate. The expansive space exuded refined elegance, with impeccable minimalism and exquisite furnishings.

My gaze was drawn to the breathtaking glass wall in the lavish living room, offering an unobstructed view of the meticulously manicured gardens. The sophisticated décor and flawless design echoed the grandeur of Aimar's Abuja residence.

“Take her to her room.” I heard Aimar say to a maid. She walked over to me, a welcoming smile drawn on her face. She had very long, silky hair—the perks of being Arab.

Nevertheless, Aimar didn’t say a word to me, he only walked away, while the maid escorted me to my room. As the doors were opened, my jaw literally dropped. It was beautiful and had similar decorations to the living room.

“There’s the telephone, madam, call me whenever you need anything.” The maid said and I thanked her before she left. When I was left alone, I sauntered toward the walk-in closet and found some Abaya’s line up, and each of them still had its price tag. Ranging from $2,500 upward. On a table in the closet, I spotted a note, and I read it out loud.

“The Abayas are yours, I hope you like them.” I read. Towards the end part of the note, Aimar’s name was boldly mentioned. All this made me wonder what was going on in his mind, he was being too nice to me and a part of me was falling for his kindness.

Nevertheless, I took a shower in the luxurious bathroom and wore one of the nightwears which was lined up in the closet. It wasn't typically my style, but they

would do for the night. Soon later, a maid knocked on the door and came in with a tray of food and snacks. I thanked her and ate. I was really hungry.

After eating, I observed my *salah* and retired to bed right after dropping a message for Mustapha on WhatsApp. I had told him I wouldn't come for work the following day and afterwards. He complained at first, but told me he would handle everything. After that, I laid in bed, wondering what tomorrow would hold.



Chapter 18



Azrah Yusuf

I WAS AWAKENED BY A knock on the door, and when I went to see who was there, I saw a maid. She had informed me to get dressed for breakfast before leaving. I had actually woken up earlier, but soon I returned to sleep after performing *salah* and reciting the Quran with the help of the Muslim Pro app on my phone. I was tired all through the time we arrived from the journey.

Nevertheless, I got into the bathroom and took a hot shower. After that, I checked on the vanity table and found a body cream, which I applied, and then threw on a purple abaya from the ones Aimar had gotten me. I also had my makeup worn, I only applied kohl and lip gloss. After doing so, I stepped out of the room, and a maid was standing by my door, she seemed to have been waiting for me.

“Good morning, madam.” The maid welcomed me. I smiled warmly at her.

“Good morning, where is the boss?” I asked, referring to Aimar.

“He sent me to get you, breakfast is ready.” She told me. “Come with me, please.” Having said that, I trailed behind her. As I walked down the hallway and down the stairs, I admired all the paintings that adorned the wall. They were carefully drawn—a true masterpiece.

The maid escorted me outside to a beautiful garden, where I spotted Aimar seated on a mat laid on the lush grass. Trays of food were arranged before him, and he was engrossed in painting. The maid halted midway, leaving me to approach him alone.

"Wow, I never knew you could paint!" I exclaimed, standing behind him to admire his artwork. Without waiting for an invitation, I sat down beside him on the mat, my curiosity getting the better of me. He turned to me, a hint of surprise flickering across his face.

“Good morning, Azrah, I hope you slept well,” he said, his gaze now focused on his painting. He was painting a seaside scene, but with a haunting twist.

Instead of the calming blues typically associated with the ocean, the waves were depicted in deep, fiery reds. Lightning illuminated the darkening sky, casting an ominous ambiance. In the foreground, a drowning woman struggled, her hand reaching out of the water in a desperate plea for rescue. The sight of the painting sent shivers down my spine.

I cleared my throat. "Yeah, I did," I said. "Can I join you?"

With a gentle gaze, he handed me a canvas and a brush, placing his paint container between us to share the paint. I started the painting and I got completely absorbed. As I worked, I relished the grapes which were also between us.

Aimar suddenly set down his canvas, his gaze shifting to me. I remained intensely focused on my art, oblivious to his attention.

“Wala!” I exclaimed excitedly, done with my painting. “This is perfect.” I gushed.

Aimar raised an eyebrow at me. "What did you paint?" he asked. I turned the canvas over for him to see, and his expression was transformed into one of utter confusion.

“And who is the angry fellow?” he asked, dazed.

"It's you, I drew you," I said.

He remained quiet for a moment, but later, he erupted into the loudest, most infectious laughter I'd ever heard. His eyes sparkled with genuine sincerity as he laughed, his face brightened with joy.

I was taken aback, I'd never seen him laugh like that before. And then it hit me—had I, of all people, just made Aimar laugh?

Aimar Ali, the serious one.

“That is me?” he continued to laugh. “You must be kidding. What you painted out looks nothing like me,” he cleared his throat.

“It does, see,” I pointed at the man’s expression. My drawing indeed looked nothing like him. “The frown—that is literally your signature expression.” I explained to him, and he chuckled, cleared his throat again. He morphed his face into a serious expression, as though he realized he had let me see a part of him that he didn’t want to share.

“Let’s eat, we have a lot to do before leaving today,” he said. He opened the closed food warmer, and the hot scent of *waina* hit my nostrils.

Waina in Dubai? I was stunned.

“Wow, who made these?” I asked with excitement.

“I did.” He said and I laughed at him, refusing to believe.

“And, am I supposed to believe you?” I chuckled. He made another style with his signature expressions and rolled his eyes.

“You do not know anything about me, Azrah,” he said, in all seriousness. His eyes were glaring at his painting. The image on it haunted me, as scary as it was. I wondered what was on his mind as he was painting it.

“Hm, I would love to know.” I whispered, putting a chunk of *masa* in my mouth after rubbing it on the *yaji* beside it. I then washed it down with orange

juice. I could tell Aimar must have overheard what I was saying, from the expression on his face, but I decided to pretend not to know.

Unwilling to ruin his mood, I ate with him in silence, but I so much desired to ask what his painting was all about. But I decided to keep my mouth shut and eat.

As soon as I was full, I wiped my hands and watched Aimar eat instead. He was very calm in the way he chewed the food, making sure he chewed everything properly before swallowing it. Not only that, his entire aura also radiated calmness, a stark departure from his usual demeanor.

When I was still little and I visited their home, I always found him scary, he would never talk to anyone, only Sameer. His conversations with Nazeerah were often mild, he always tried his best to be on his own. But now, I found him gentle, and I could tell there was a lot going deep down his soul that he needed to let out.

“If you’re done staring at me like you want a piece of me, we can leave now.” The embarrassment I experienced when he said that, made me struggle to conceal the flush that rose to my cheeks. I instantly diverted my attention to something else, and I heard him chuckle.

"I wasn't staring at you," I clarified. "I was admiring your painting. What's the inspiration behind it?" I asked, seizing the opportunity. He turned his gaze back to the artwork, and we both stood there in silence for a moment.

Wearing a serious face, he replied, “That’s the sea, and the woman there is you. The painting explains my thought of drowning you.” I swallowed a lump when he said so. Since he had a very serious expression on, I found it hard to believe he was joking.

When he noticed the amazement on my face, he laughed out loudly. This time, he began to cough really hard, and I gave him a glass of water. He drank from it and thanked me.

"I'm kidding," he muttered, taking another sip of water. His expression turned somber, and he continued, "This painting is my attempt to capture the last image of my mother that's etched in my memory – the moment she drowned right before my eyes when I was just fifteen years old."

My heart ran cold, I felt so bad for him. It was hard to imagine having to watch his mother drown, it sounded traumatizing.

“I’m sorry to hear that.” I said, making him shrug. He drank a little more water and stood on his feet. I did the same as well.

“Let’s go, we have shopping to go for,” he informed me. I didn’t even understand what was so important about his shopping, but I didn’t fail to notice the joy in his eyes whenever he talked about it.

As we walked out of the garden, a sleek black Audi parked before us. Now this made me wonder how many cars he had to his name? Because back at home, I couldn’t count, but I knew his favorite to be his BMW.

As usual, he got the door open for me, and with a smile of gratitude, I rushed in, and he did the same. The journey began from the streets of Dubai, the morning ambiance making me feel nostalgic. I loved everything about Dubai, from its clean roads to the manner in which every building was made. It was so beautiful.

We soon arrived there and parked in front of a luxurious shopping mall named *‘Souk Al Jawaher’*. The doors, this time, were opened by men dressed in suits. They exchanged pleasantries with Aimar.

After that was done, he signaled for me to get down, which I did. We stepped into the vast shopping mall, surrounded by iconic brands like Cartier, Chanel, Christian Louboutin, Gucci, Versace, Louis Vuitton, and Tiffany & Co. Behind sleek show glasses, their names and logos prominently displayed.

As we walked in next, a woman dressed elegantly in a ladies suit walked up to Aimar. “Good morning, Mr. Aimar, it’s good to have you here, once again.” The lady said, Aimar greeted back with a forceful smile. She turned to me and equally did the same, I returned the gestures.

"Is the entire store empty, as per my request?" he asked. The lady nodded in affirmation. He had booked the entire store for our private shopping spree. Oh my God, rich people truly do not know what to do with their money.

“This way, sir!” The lady said, and we trudged after her, our first stop being the Cartier store.

“What would you like to see first, sir?” The lady asked.

“Ask the lady,” he said. I was overwhelmed by the amount of expensive jewelry, watches, bags, and a lot more that was lined up. I turned to Aimar, giving him an expression that read, ‘I don’t know what to choose.' He quickly understood and approached the bag section. He scanned it slowly with his eyes and turned to me.

“Which of the bags do you want?” he asked and I moved closer to him.

“I do not know, they are all pretty.” I said. It was tough to make a decision.

“I’ll take all the bags,” he said, prompting my jaw to drop.

“No, you don’t have to do that, I think I’ll go with the red bag. It’s pretty.” I said.

"No, we will take all, you like it all, you get it,” he said. At this point, I couldn’t understand why he was being so kind to me.

I tried to protest him carrying all the bags, but he was stubborn. For the rest of the day, as we shopped, I made sure I didn't exclaim over every item, knowing

he'd insist on buying it.

We visited Cartier, Chanel, Christian Louboutin, Gucci, Versace, Louis Vuitton, Tiffany & Co., Bvlgari, Chopard, Harry Winston, and Van Cleef & Arpels—literally covering every luxury brand.

He bought me an abundance of Abayas, jewelry, bags, and shoes. We also shopped in the kids' section for Aymah.

Before leaving, he surprisingly offered to pick out gifts for Adesuwa. I was taken aback but chose a stunning Chanel bag and some other stuff for her. I felt happy that he remembered my friend.

He thoughtfully selected gifts for his mother, my mother, Nazeerah, and Ismahan, as well.

During our shopping spree, Aimar made sure no one was left out. With a paper and pen in hand, he meticulously checked off names on his list as he carefully selected gifts for each person. I found this thoughtful side of him quite endearing. Rebecca and Binta were also included on his list. I was impressed by his consideration and couldn't help but notice the joy in his eyes as he shopped for his loved ones.

He was truly a kind man.

After we were done shopping, he paid at the cashier counter with his card and then ordered that our bags be carried. The butlers from earlier carried the bags along with the staff. All the bags were carefully loaded in the back of the car, while others were kept on the empty seat next to the driver. While they arranged the bags, I sat in the car along with Aimar, who, as usual, would bury his eyes in his phone.

After our bags were stowed, we hit the streets of Dubai. To my surprise, we headed toward the airport. I could tell because I had passed these roads before, much to my astonishment, I still remembered the roads.

“Are we heading back home today?” I asked, and a nod was the response. He was engrossed on his phone.

Well, it was great visiting Dubai. I had an amazing time here, mostly because I saw Aimar Ali laugh for the first time. Not just once, but twice. His actions left me questioning my initial impressions.

Maybe, just maybe, I had misjudged him all along.



Chapter 19



Azrah Yusuf

TWO WEEKS HAD PASSED since our return from Dubai, and I'd noticed a growing distance between Aimar and me. I thought we were finally getting along, but now I was not so sure. He always left for work before me and arrived when I was already asleep. It was as if he wasn't living in this house, yet Aymah's daily stories about the thoughtful things he did for her revealed a different reality.

Presently, I was at work. I was exhausted and wanted to go home, but Mustapha had informed me of a lunch meeting we were having today with some contractors. It required my presence because I had to take notes of important information. I was currently seated with Adesuwa, whom I had just given the gifts Aimar had bought for her.

Staring at her Chanel handbag, she said “Azrah I said it, you’re so so rich!”

"Please, I am not, it’s a gift from my family to my friend.” I informed her.

“This one *na lie*!” She exclaimed. “If your family is rich, then so are you.”

“Adesuwa, I don’t have time for this *abeg*.” I said, and she laughed. My stomach was hurting a bit. It was close to my time of the month. I disliked periods a lot, and I am certain every girl would agree with me.

Adesuwa admired her gift, while I enjoyed the AC and went through some files on the desk. I arranged everything in accordance and prepared for the lunch meeting. When I was done doing that, I excused myself to observe my *salah*. Nothing in the world could make me delay my *salah*, and I loved that about myself. After I was done, I met with Mustapha in his office, he looked ready to leave.

He turned to me, “Have you arranged all the files?” He asked, and I said yes.

“Alright, we can leave now.” Having said that, we left the office. I was very exhausted, but I managed to walk. I could have easily taken a leave, but I didn't want to go home to boredom. I was actually glad I had this job, or I would have run mad staying at home alone.

Our drive to the restaurant was brisk, when we arrived, we entered and found our seat among the contractors. Mustapha spoke about the plans on building a new restaurant in the central area, they also spoke about the marketing and what

not. I made sure to take notes on everything said. After they had finalized the deal, they exchanged pleasantries, and the contractors left.

Mustapha turned to me, excitement in his eyes. “I am so happy about this.” He said.

“Congratulations,” I said. “I’m so proud of you.”

"Thank you, this calls for a celebration!" he exclaimed. "Come, let's sit at another table and have lunch. I know you haven't eaten today."

He was right, I was hungry. We got up and walked over to another table, and he ordered our food. He asked what I wanted, and I opted for Mandhi rice, roasted chicken, and orange juice. Meanwhile, Mustapha chose spaghetti bolognese, meatballs, and chicken.

As we ate, he brought up various topics, and we shared hearty laughs.

“And that was when my brother decided that he was going to become a doctor,” he said, speaking about Hisham. I never knew he was a medical doctor, but he was very annoying. He always tried his best to have conversations with me, which I oftenly avoided.

“Uhm... Azrah, I’ve been meaning to tell you this.” I heard Mustapha say. I looked up and glared at him, confused, he sounded a bit nervous.

“Yeah, what is it?” I sat upright and asked.

"I really like you a lot, Azrah," he said, his voice sincere. My heart skipped a beat, anticipating where this was headed.

"And I would understand if you don't feel the same," he continued. "I just wanted to be honest about how I feel for you."

Clearing my throat, I spoke, “Thanks for being honest, but I do not feel the same.” I told him, and he smiled.

“It’s okay, but we can at least be friends, right?” he asked, and I gave him a nod. A part of me was not taken aback by this. I had a feeling he liked me, but I always tried to push it away. I was relieved he understood, and we ate in comfortable silence. Afterward, we parted ways. His driver dropped me off at the office, where I retrieved my car and headed home.

When I arrived home, I went straight to my room and took some painkillers. I prayed *Asr*, recited my Quran till *Maghrib*, prayed *Maghrib* and *Isha*, and then fell asleep. It was a much-needed rest, and I was glad I was having one.

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I was in a hurry, walking fast to get to my destination, but when I saw him, I paused. His eyes were red, he had been crying, he was dressed in a white thobe. His favorite color.

"Sameer!" I called out.

He walked up to me, his eyes blazing with anger, as he grabbed my arm, tightening his grip. This wasn't like him. His face was etched with betrayal, his eyes flashing with a fierce intensity.

“You married my brother, you betrayed me,” he said.

“No, I never wanted to marry him, I was compelled to, if I didn’t, my Baba would lose everything.” I explained.

“But now you have fallen in love with him, was this the reason why you led me to my demise? So that you could marry my brother?” he said.

“No, don’t say that, I love you.” I said. He let go of my arm, moving inches away from me.

“You killed me, Azrah. You caused my death.” His voice was loud. It echoed.

“No! I am sorry, I didn’t know you would die.” I said, my palms covering my ear. He continued to repeat the same statement on and on, and an exasperated scream left my lips.

"Sameer!" I screamed, bolting right in bed.

It was just a dream, but it looked agonizingly real. His words still echoed in my mind, the emotions still raw.

Everything came flooding back—the guilt, the regret, the unbearable weight of responsibility.

He had been right, I had caused his death. I had led him to his demise.

Feeling the weight of my emotions, I got up, looked outside my window, and noticed it was raining. I checked the time on my table clock and saw that it was 1:19 am. It was midnight, but I didn't care. I walked out of my room and out of the house. I stepped out into the night, craving the cool freshness of the air and the calming rhythm of the rain.

As the raindrops cascaded down my body, I broke down into tears, all the emotions ran back to me.

“Hmm...” was the feeling of losing Sameer and the thought of actually betraying him. He was right, I had married his brother, what more could this be referred to as than a bitter betrayal?

“Sameer!” I cried out, falling to the ground. I buried my face in my palms, sobbing loudly. The sound of the lighting was the least of my worries, but it was loud and scary, and the rain became heavier.

“Azrah, what are you doing out here in the rain?” Aimar’s calm voice startled me, and I looked up to look at him. He was standing before me, drenched in rain.

“Aimar,” I called, standing to my feet. "You were right—I caused Sameer's death. I shouldn't have asked him to get me that parcel. I was selfish, and now he's gone,” I sobbed. He moved closer, closing the distance between us.

"You didn't cause Sameer's death, Azrah, I was wrong about that," he said. "Come, let's go inside first. You'll catch a cold out here," he urged, his hands resting on my shoulders. But, I pulled away.

"Leave me here, Aimar. I don’t want to go inside, and please, stop saying I didn’t kill Sameer. I did. And you once said it yourself—you weren’t wrong," I told him. He gently cupped my face, gazing into my eyes. I looked away.

"Look at me," he demanded and I obeyed.

“You didn’t kill Sameer, Allah took His servant. That’s the way of life—things happen,” he said, pulling me into a tight, reassuring hug. I hugged him real tight, my hands clutching onto him as though my life depended on it as I cried. He patted my back soothingly, and as we broke the hug, he pushed my wet hair away from my face and grabbed my arm.

“Come, let’s go inside. You need to change, or else you’ll catch a cold.” He gently pulled my arm and guided me inside, eventually leading me to my room. He excused himself to get something, leaving me to change out of my wet clothes. A few minutes later, he returned with two cups of steaming tea.

“You shouldn’t have stressed yourself,” I said. He smiled and set the cups down on my bedside table, then guided me to the couch, where we sat together in comfortable silence, sipping our tea.

However, the tranquility was short-lived, as he soon broke the silence.

“You shouldn’t blame yourself for Sameer’s death,” he said, his voice laced with empathy. “I’ve walked similar paths. I watched my mother drown right before my eyes, powerless to save her. And my wife... she passed away during childbirth, leaving me helpless to prevent her loss.” He took a deep breath, his eyes misting over. “But being around you has shown me something... I’m capable of love, and I deserve happiness with someone. We should never let our past hinder us from seeking a brighter future.” His words were soft and gentle, filled with vulnerability. His words touched my heart.

“Thank you,” I mumbled, and for the first time, he smiled in a way that reached his eyes.

“You’re welcome. You should go to bed,” he said, his voice as gentle as a whisper.

“And here is a counter, make sure you prioritize your *adhkar* remembrance of Allah. It’ll make you feel better,” he added, handing me a tally counter. I took it, and after giving me a final glance along with a reassuring smile, he walked out of my room.

I was left to wonder what had just happened. Did I just share a moment with Aimar Ali? This seemed incredible. Seeing him like that, utterly devoted to my

well-being, was breathtaking. He hadn't even bothered to change out of his wet clothes, yet he took the time to ensure I felt better.

Oh my God, was I falling in love with him? Or was it admiration for his character? My feelings were unclear, but one thing was certain. My heart was fond of him. His presence had a profound effect on me, making me feel lighthearted and carefree, all my problems seemed to fade away when he was around.

Aimar continued to surprise me, and our conversation only deepened my impression of him. As I retired to bed, a realization settled in my heart: Aimar wasn't what I thought him to be. He was kind, gentle, loving, and caring – everything a woman could want in a man. Indeed, he was perfect with his flaws, a lovable Mr. Grumpy.

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The next morning, when I woke up, to my surprise, I hadn’t begun my period. I observed my *salah* and, as usual, read the *Quran*. When I was done, the weight of the moment I had shared with Aimar settled upon me, his thoughtful concern wrapping around my shoulders like a warm embrace. His gentle assurance that I was fine and okay brought a soft smile spreading across my face.

As I lay in bed, another thought occurred to me. I hadn't properly expressed my gratitude for his kindness the previous night.

Was it genuinely a desire to thank him, or was I seeking an excuse to see him again?

Whatever the reason, I decided to thank him in person. With newfound determination, I got out of bed and headed to his room. It was still 6 am and I was sure he would still be around because he normally left the house by 6:30 am When I knocked on the door, I heard shuffling inside and the sound of footsteps approaching.

Then the door opened, revealing him dressed in a brown thobe, holding a *tasbih* in his right hand. He had just finished praying *salah*, and seeing that brought me immense joy, making me smile widely at him.

He stared at me calmly. “Is there a problem?” he asked curtly, his voice proving seriousness, but I could tell he was forcing it. I struggled to stifle my laughter at the deep frown etched on his face. He looked adorable whenever he was frustrated.

“No, not at all. Can I at least come in?” I asked. He glared at me for a moment before stepping aside to let me pass. His room was huge, with a fine, lush white fur carpet on the floor and a large transparent glass wall that provided a full view of the mansion. That explained how he had seen me last night.

“So, what do you need?” he asked, pulling me out of my thoughts.

“I...” I trailed off. “I came to properly extend my gratitude for yesterday. I appreciate that a lot, it meant so much to me,” I said. He stared at me, unfazed. I struggled not to laugh, his attempt to appear unconcerned was comically unconvincing.

His eyes remained on me for a while before he spoke. “Is that all you came to say?” he asked, and I nodded in response.

“You’re welcome,” he said, a smile suddenly appearing on his face. “Please, don’t go out in the rain again,” he added with a chuckle. “It’s not exactly flattering to find a girl in Kitty pajamas crying. I couldn’t bear to see that cute kitty cry.”

He laughed softly, his joke falling flat, but surprisingly, it made me laugh. Aimar rarely cracked jokes, so this was a new, refreshing side of him. I adored it —seeing his playful, lighthearted nature shine through.

“I love this side of you, the funny side,” I commented, covering my two lips.

“*It’s a side only you bring out in me,*” he replied, a warm smile spreading across his face.

“Does this mean we’re becoming friends?” I asked, beaming happily.

“No, we aren’t friends,” he said, his tone suddenly breathing out nothing more than seriousness, as he crossed his arms across his broad chest.

“We shall see about that, I guess,” I said.

His eyes conveyed a clear message — it was time for me to leave. I took the hint and returned to my room after telling him goodbye, but the thought of him lingered in my mind.

He was soft, kind, and the complete opposite of how the world saw him. This side of him drew me in, making it increasingly hard to get him off my mind. *This man was driving me crazy!* And I enjoyed it.



Chapter 20



Aimar Ali

THERE WAS SOMETHING about her that eluded me. Being around her transformed me into someone I barely recognized. She brought out a gentle part of me, and the slightest glance into her eyes made me want to surrender at her feet. It made me want to treat her like a queen.

Her ethereal beauty was captivating, angelic. Everything about her was perfect, her skin glowed like honey, and her big doe brown eyes glimmered whenever she smiled. Azrah Yusuf consumed my mind, she often made me want to do things I never thought I'd ever bring myself to do.

I had to keep my distance, I couldn't just accept that I was falling for her too easily. So I kept myself away, making sure I'd leave for work before she came out for work and return, when she was asleep. It was hard because I missed waiting to see her at the stairs, where I'd always wait till she came out of her room. Seeing her was the best part of my day, and when I decided to keep away, my days became sour.

But now I knew the truth. I loved her. That woman had me on a whirlwind. I could do anything for her, but the thoughts of letting go of the memories of Aminah and Sameer haunted me. My emotions, feeling like a betrayal to their memories.

When she left my room, her scent enveloped me, an intoxicating symphony that wrapped around me, threatening to unravel my sanity. I craved her presence, and it was rapidly becoming an all-consuming need. However, reality beckoned, and I had an important meeting to attend. So, I shook off the haze, got ready for work, and planned to catch her again on the stairs before I left.

After getting ready, I stepped outside and stood there, typing away on my phone and responding to some emails. I was trying to buy time until she arrived.

But, as I glanced through the clock, twenty minutes had elapsed, and it was odd for her not to have been ready. Regardless, I decided to wait, but as ten minutes passed, I knew something was wrong.

Because she was one to take her time and duty seriously, from all I had learned from being around her. I had to check up on her, so I headed towards her room and knocked on the door.

“Azrah,” I called. There was no response, nor the noise of movement. So I became worried and twisted her doorknob open. She was on the ground, clenching her stomach tightly, silent sobs racked her body and filled the room.

“Azrah, are you okay?” I asked as I walked in further. I squatted before her and checked on her temperature, it was normal.

"Aimar...” she trailed off, lifting her head to stare at me, her long, silky brown hair scattered all around her back. “My stomach hurts.” She managed to speak. I looked around her room, trying to find her hijab in order to take her to the hospital, but instead, I found a sanitary pad laying around. That was when it hit him, she was having period cramps.

“Oh, you’re having period cramps.” I said in realization. “Come, sit over here.” I helped her get on her feet and led her to the sofa in her room, where she sat.

“I’ll be right back,” I said. I took off my blazer and dropped it on her bed. Then, I walked out of her room and ventured downstairs and into the kitchen, where I brought out some herbs I had long purchased. I mixed up a herbal tea in a pot, which I brought to a boil. When I was satisfied with the way it boiled, I poured the tea into a glass and returned back upstairs and proceeded to Azrah's room. She was no longer on the sofa but laid on the floor with her stomach pressing to the ground.

“Hey, stand up and let's get you feeling a little better, okay?” I said, but she didn’t budge, so I placed the cup of herbal tea on the center table and helped her up. I then made her sit on the sofa and passed her the cup of tea.

She stared at it for a while, and then at me, she scrunched her nose. “What is this? I don’t want it.” She passed it back to me. I chuckled.

“Drink it, please.” I coaxed, my voice gentle. She glared at me calmly, deliberating on what to do, and then drank it slowly. I smiled.

“Eww!” She made a funny face and screeched. I laughed softly.

“You should rest, I’ll have breakfast brought to you.” I said to her, and she thanked me. I picked up my blazer and returned to my room, there was no way I was going to leave her in that situation. I called Rayan and had him cancel our meeting.

I had to take care of my *wife*.

I changed my clothes into a black sweatpants and a baggy shirt before I went out and called a maid and instructed her to take Azrah some food. Afterwards, I returned to work. I had to reply to some emails, so I did that before I decided to check up on her. When I got to her room, I knocked on the door, and she invited me in. I entered.

She was seated on her bed and looked nothing from a few minutes ago. She was even eating.

“You look better.” I said, and she smiled warmly at me.

“All thanks to you. Tell me, what did you make me drink?” She inquired.

“An ancient Chinese remedy for period cramps.” I informed her.

“Woah, it works like magic.” She exclaimed. “How did you learn about it?”

Taking a seat on her sofa, I said, “I have a daughter, and I understand how debilitating period cramps can be. During my last visit to China, I took a course to understand menstrual cramps better and learn about effective remedies. I also purchased traditional herbs, which was why I had them.” I said, she stared at me in awe. A smile then spread across her face. Everything about her was perfect, she was an art, but I couldn’t agree with that because artists make mistakes, but she was perfect, a perfect creation of Allah.

“You’re such a sweet father!” She exclaimed. “Omg, Aymah is so lucky to have you.” She gushed.

Azrah rendered me speechless, uncertain of how to conduct myself around her. Desperate to avoid appearing foolish, I'd often mask my emotions with a frown. Ironically, being near Azrah was the very thing that made me feel weak. My interactions with her were unlike any I'd experienced, even with Aminah. This unprecedented connection unsettled me deeply. Azrah was distinctively different, and that difference made maintaining distance impossible.

“I want you to quit your job.” My sudden outburst startled her, causing her to drop her spoon back on her plate.

"Aimar, I love my job," she deadpanned.

"I don't want you working anymore," I said. "I have everything you need, and I'm sorry I ever said you were incapable of getting a job, I don’t want you stressing yourself out.”

She sighed deeply. “As you can see, I like my job, and I’m happy with it. So, I do not wish to quit my job.” She said, her tone rigid. I didn’t want to force her into doing anything she didn’t want to, so I didn't say more.

"Alright, whatever makes you happy, *princess*." The same tender expression that had appeared the first time I called her princess now formed on her cheeks. It made me smile, knowing a part of her liked being called that. As we sat in silence, she began to smile, as she ate.

“Why are you smiling?” I asked, causing her to smile even more.

“I am not smiling,” She said, I glared at her questionably, my brow raised and she chuckled.

“What?” She asked, her innocent eyes flickering with amusement.

“You were smiling, Azrah, and it didn’t look normal. You seemed so,” I said, and she chuckled.

“I am smiling because of you, Aimar, you have changed a lot.” She said, her smile growing wider.

I smiled. "I've learned that when a man finds a *woman* who inspires him to be better, he transforms," I said, my voice low and sincere. "He'll do anything not to lose her." I caught the fleeting expression in her eyes as my words slipped out.

Her eyes darted toward me, then settled on the novel on her bed, its pages dog-eared from countless late-night reads. Her love for reading was evident, she'd often escape into her phone, lost in worlds beyond our own.

But it was the subtle moments that captivated me — the way her eyes sparkled when reciting the Quran, her soft voice calling my name from the staircase each morning, accompanied by a warm smile that lit up the space between us. She was my daily solace, my favorite sight – the one blessing I needed, besides Allah's.

My earlier statement caused her to swallow hard. She reached for the cup of water on her bedside table, taking a sip to compose herself. Her eyes revealed nothing but turmoil, a struggle between mind and heart. I detected the faint movement of her lips, a sign she wanted to speak but couldn't. An inner battle raged within her, and I knew exactly what fueled it. Sameer's presence lingered, unseen but palpable.

“I’ll leave you to rest now.” I stood to my feet. “Have some rest.” I added with a smile and she waved at me.

“Thank you, Aimar.” She said, and with a smile, I walked out of her room. This woman had changed something about me.

I couldn’t even force myself to remain serious around her. She makes me want to be different. She makes me want to be perfect—perfect to be with. Because she was kind, and she definitely deserved a better treatment than me, despite all my ways to push her away, I failed. She still hung around me and never failed to wear a smile, despite knowing she was broken and her dreams to be married to my brother had been shattered.

Dreams I wished so badly to put in place.

I decided to return to my emails since I wasn’t going to work today, it is better if I worked from home. But my work was suddenly cut short the moment Khadijah walked in. *Great, here goes my great day.*

“Aimar!” She squealed upon arrival. She had been away to Paris for a fashion event. Those days with her away saved me moments of unnecessary anger.

I shut down my MacBook. “Khadijah, you’re back, when did you return?” I asked, my voice low and scarce of excitement. She noticed.

“You don’t look excited to see me, why is that so?” she asked. Taking a seat next to me.

“I am, I was busy, so I didn’t expect you to walk in on me.” I lied. Her expression changed, excitement filling her face. She began to tell me all about her days in Paris, and I had to pretend to listen to her.

Being with Khadijah had been the most tormenting days of my life. I didn’t like her, but I had to keep her around for a business deal I and my father had planned.

Khadijah was the daughter of the present president of Nigeria, she was a spoiled and rude brat who got anything she wanted. And when I had gone to the presidential villa to speak to her father along with my dad in concern with my father’s interest in contesting for the office of the next president of Nigeria, she came across me, and she had claimed from then on that she was in love with me.

On hearing this, which had been announced to her father, he called my dad and offered him a deal – he asked that I marry Khadijah and we would have him support my dad. I wasn’t buying the idea, but when a great offer was made to me in regards to having control over the mining industry, I accepted to date her, but without the intention of ever marrying her. But if I ever did, I knew the marriage wouldn’t last. Because both of us, together, equal disaster. She brought out the worst in me.

After she shared every chapter of her story, she handed me a gift and urged me to accept it. It was a perfume, and not my type. She still hasn’t learned anything about me. So pathetic.

"Aimar, my uncle is willing to sign the papers, but only if you agree to attend his upcoming dinner on the 26th," she said.

That was three days from now.

“What is the event about?” I asked, eager to hear what she had to say. I wanted to get those papers signed and begin my project.

"It's a dinner party with prominent politicians, including ministers and senators, as well as influential business leaders like yourself," she explained.

"That sounds great."

“Yeah, and we can go together as a couple.” She beamed happily. That was the last thing I wanted on earth. To be around her felt suffocating.

“Yeah,” I said. There was no way I was going with her. But I wouldn’t tell her that, I knew exactly what to do.

After she wrapped up her small talk, she announced it was time to leave and insisted I walk her to her car. I was eager to bid her bye. As soon as the papers

got signed, I'd have to end things with her.

Knowing how she’d react if I had refused, I stood up and accompanied her, feeling the need to avoid drama. As we briskly walked down the hallway which led to my stairs, Azrah walked toward us, and she and Khadijah shared a bitter look. It was obvious that they hated each other. Azrah glanced at me before she walked into her room.

Khadijah turned to me as we approached the door. “That thing has to go before I move into this house.” She said, The only person that was going to go was her. In fact, she’d never get the chance to ever stay in my house.

“Do not refer to her as such, Khadijah, she has a name.” I said, my tone serious.

She looked shocked. “Are you fighting for her? I thought you said you wanted nothing to do with her.”

"I have everything to do with her because she's my wife," I declared. "If you want this to work out, you'll have to respect her." With that, I turned and walked away, leaving her standing at the door, visibly shaken.

As I approached the stairs, I spotted Azrah standing there, clearly having heard me.

The smile on her face said it all—she approved of it. I smiled back at her and continued to my room.



Chapter 21



Azrah Yusuf

AIMAR HAD CHANGED INTO a totally different person. I couldn’t believe what my eyes were seeing at first, but when I heard him defend our marriage before Khadijah, I was stunned but happy. My heart felt a ray of hope, a ray of hope I never knew I would consider feeling.

I was getting ready for work. Today I decided to wear something different. I selected one of my finest lace materials in a rich coffee brown hue with subtle creamy undertones and paired it with a subtle creamy chantilly veil. When I got dressed in it, I put on some perfume and tied my headtie in an arewa style. I applied eyeliners to my eyes and then put on lip gloss. I wasn’t a fan of makeup, and my skin was close to perfect, despite my negligence to my skincare.

After getting ready, I made my way out of my room and downstairs, where I found Aimar, standing on the staircase and making a call. As I approached him, he smiled at me, and this time it reached his eyes, and he genuinely looked excited to see me. This was new.

Putting his phone into his pocket, he moved closer to me. “Hi, *princess*.” There was something about the way he pronounced the word *princess*. It was a very normal word, but when he referred to me with it, I felt important, as though I had a reason to smile again.

“Good morning, your highness.” I greeted him with a curtsy. He chuckled.

“Did you sleep well?” he asked as we walked downstairs together.

"Yeah, I did. What about you?” I asked.

“Very well, what are your plans after work?” I pretended to think for a while, my finger tapping gently on my temple as I hummed.

“Nothing, why do you ask?” I questioned.

He shut the distance between us, his smile hinting at mischief. “Happy Birthday, Princess Azrah.” He whispered. Oh *shit*, it was my freaking birthday and I had forgotten, like, who on earth forgets their birthday? *Azrah for sure*. Birthdays weren’t really my thing, and back at my parents house, I was often reminded about my birthday by Ismahan and my mom, who sometimes forgot and wished me late. But as for Sameer, he was always the first to wish me, and now that he was no more, I didn't remember.

“Shit! I forgot my own birthday.” I cursed, making Aimar stare at me dumbfoundedly. And, this brought to my notice that I had never heard him curse. I immediately placed my palm over my mouth.

"Cursing is for people with a limited vocabulary, it doesn't suit you, Azrah." I felt embarrassed, as I rarely curse.

However, I must confess that whenever I watched a movie with excessive profanity, I found myself cursing for about a month afterwards.

"Sorry," I said, and he smiled.

He reached into his pocket, pulled out an envelope, and grasped my palm, placing it in my hand. With a final glance, he turned and walked toward the door, leaving the house.

I stood there, curious, the envelope still in my palm. What could it be? I tore it open to find a note and a debit card. Why had he given me his card? The card looked brand new.

To find out more about the card's purpose, I read the note.

"*Happy Birthday, Princess, spend as much as you wish. 4080*!" the card read. My jaw subtly dropped as I processed the generous gesture.

Aimar had given me a birthday card in the form of a debit card, loaded with a staggering amount that granted me the freedom to purchase anything my heart desired. While the thought was undeniably sweet and romantic, I knew I wouldn't be able to bring myself to use the card. After all, I already had everything I needed and wanted right here in this house.

After I said my goodbye to Aymah, I left for work in a haste. And when I arrived at work, I approached Adesuwa’s cubicle.

“Hi, Adesuwa.” I beamed happily.

“Hi Azrah.” She said, her voice low and sad. That made me worry, because the Adesuwa I know was always in a jolly mood. So this seemed weird. Something must be up.

Taking a seat next to her, I asked. “Are you okay? You know you can talk to me, right?" She closed her eyes and wiped her tears. This was serious, as she was crying.

“Adesuwa.” I called before pulling her into an embrace. “Tell me, what’s wrong?” I asked again.

“Azrah, why are men so wicked?” I raised an eyebrow, intrigued. What sparked this question? She had never mentioned anyone special before—except, perhaps tellingly, her persistent crush on my husband.

“What happened?” I inquired, wiping her tears with a piece of tissue paper.

"I met this guy weeks ago, and... well, something happened," she said, her voice faltering. She trailed off, noticing my expression, and paused, hesitating to

continue.

“Go on, please.” I implored.

“And he ghosted me. He saw me yesterday, and when I tried to speak to him, he acted like he had never seen me before.” She said, I pulled her into another embrace. That must have been truly hard on her.

“I am sorry to hear about this. The guy is a jerk, and he doesn’t deserve a woman like you, okay?” I said, and I wiped her tears. “C’mon, cheer up, it’s my birthday.” I said. She instantly smiled.

"Aww, happy birthday!” she exclaimed.

“Thank you. Later we should go out for lunch, okay?” I said to her, and she immediately cheered up, a grin on her face.

“Did I just hear someone say birthday?” There was no way on earth that I didn’t recognize that voice. It was Hisham, Mustapha’s brother. What was he doing in the office today? Because I hope he wasn't here to stay like the last time.

With a forced smile, I turned to him. “Good morning, Hisham.” I greeted.

“Is it your birthday today, Azrah?” he asked. A nod of affirmation was his response, leading to a huge curve on his lips.

“Happy Birthday! I wish you a long life and prosperity,” he said and I thanked him.

Just then, Mustapha walked in, and my mind suddenly drifted to our conversation from last time. “Whose birthday are we celebrating?” he asked. Oh God, this explains why I always forget my birthdays. I hated the attention and how people reacted to it. Like grow up people, *it’s just a birthday.*

“It’s Azrah’s birthday!” Hisham opened his big mouth and said, Mustapha immediately smiled, walked over to me, and began to sing.

“Happy Birthday to you...” they all sang along, and I laughed. As much as this was cringeworthy, it was very sweet of them to do.

"This calls for a celebration, where should we go?" Mustapha said.

Alright, this is getting too much, I thought. I didn't want all this fuss over my birthday. In fact, I had never celebrated my birthday with a cake. I usually spent the day with Sameer in his car, our car dates were my favorites.

I bumped into their exciting conversation. “No, there will be no need for that, please guys.” I said.

“Nonsense! We will celebrate, birthdays are meant to be celebrated.” Mustapha said. His reaction had me thinking it was also his birthday as well. He seemed overly excited about it.

“We should visit Qudrah’s Kitchen. It’s her favorite place to dine.” Adesuwa suggested. I glared at her and she grinned.

“Qudrah’s Kitchen it is,” Hisham said. He was more excited about my birthday than I was.

“After work, we shall go, it’s settled.” Mustapha said. Great, a birthday lunch.

After the birthday scene, Adesuwa and I began working on the list of gifts we would take to a party. It was a party being held by the current Senate president of Nigeria, and Mustapha was invited. He had given us the job to get gifts for the party, which would be held tomorrow.

We sorted everything, which was a hard decision to make, but we finally settled on gifting him a car, that was the most reasonable gift to think of for a man of prestige such as himself. Now that everything was in order, the *salah* time approached. I stepped into my cozy prayer nook and offered my prayers, grateful to have completed my menstrual cycle.

When I was done, I chatted with Adesuwa, and she seemed to be feeling better. She was laughing and cracking jokes, that was more like her, and I was glad about that.

The time for our date soon arrived in the evening, and we all left the office together. Mustapha and Hisham drove in their car, while I drove in mine. We soon arrived at Qudrah's Kitchen, and we sat at our respective tables and ordered some meals.

I ordered for my all-time favorite, the creamy chicken French rolls and her special oriental jollof rice. Seeing what I had ordered, they all ordered the same, but Mustapha made sure to order a cake. We all ate together, laughing as we cracked jokes. Adesuwa and Hisham remained silent throughout lunch, their tension palpable. Mustapha noticed, but chose to keep his thoughts to himself.

After we finished eating, we made our way out of the restaurant. I beamed with a smile, standing beside my car. “Thank you guys, that was an absolute blast!” I exclaimed, grateful for the unforgettable experience.

“Wow, so this car truly belongs to you?” Hisham asked, and when I stared at Mustapha, I could tell he had been dying to ask.

"Yeah, it was a gift from my family," I said.

They murmured a collective "oh" in surprise. Mustapha then opened his car door, revealing a thoughtful gesture – a bouquet of roses, accompanied by a note.

"This is for you," he said.

As much as his intentions were pure, I felt uneasy accepting flowers from a man as a married woman, especially a man who confessed his feelings to me. But I accepted them anyway, thanking him before we exchanged goodbyes and left for home. Adesuwa had driven back to the office with Mustapha and Hisham because her car was still parked in the office. I drove home with the bouquet of

flowers sitting next to me. They were pretty, but I didn’t like roses, my favorite flowers were tulips.

As I arrived home, I hopped out of the car and picked up the roses. I couldn't leave them there to wither in my car. So I took them inside with me, and to my surprise, Aimar was around and seated in the living room. He was watching a cartoon movie with Aymah on his lap. The moment our eyes met, she sprang up, rushed over, and wrapped her arms tightly around my legs, holding me in a fierce hug.

"Hi, New Mummy, Happy Birthday!” Her words took me by surprise. She had just called me mummy. I glanced at Aimar, and he stared at us in amusement, but mostly at the bouquet of flowers in my arms.

“Hi Princess, thank you. How are you?” I squatted before her and hugged her, she beamed happily at me.

“I’m good. Are those flowers for me?” She asked. With a nod, I told her yes and handed them over to her. The flowers were huge, but not heavy, she carried them effortlessly over to Aimar.

"Look, Daddy, my new mummy got me flowers!" Aimar took the bouquet from her, his hands closing around the stems as he picked up the attached note. *Damnit*! I had forgotten to remove it.

As soon as he picked it up, he read it aloud.

Beautiful roses for a beautiful girl.

Happy Birthday, Azrah,

Love, Mustapha.

He read, and his smile immediately faded and morphed into a frown. He turned to Aymah, “Princess, go and play with Aunty Helen.” He instructed, and she obeyed.

Once Aymah had walked away, I went further into the room. “Why is your boss giving you roses and a love note?” Aimar asked.

“It’s not a love note, and it’s just a gift for my birthday.” I defended myself.

"Bosses don't give their workers roses, that's completely unprofessional," he snapped. "If I started handing out roses to all my female employees, would you approve of that?" His tone dripped with irritation, and I instinctively shifted back.

"Wait... where are all these coming from? Are you... jealous?” I asked, forming a wide grin on my face. He rolled his eyes.

“Jealous? C'mon *sweetheart*, I cannot be jealous over such a petty gift as a bunch of degradable materials. You’re worth more than roses.” he said. A gentle flush spread across my face.

“If you’re not jealous, then why are you worried that he is gifting me flowers?” I asked, my arms crossed.

“Because you’re my wife,” he trailed, moving closer to me. “And my wife is worth more than a bouquet of flowers,” he added.

“Hm... the last time I checked, you were so confident to say that this marriage meant nothing to you.” I reminded him. A smile danced onto his face. He closed the proximity between us.

“This marriage means everything to me now,” he said. His words took me aback, and my heels slumped. I nearly fell, but he held my shoulder still. I swallowed a lump and cleared my throat. Causing him to chuckle, he was enjoying getting in my head.

“Come with me, I have something to show you.” He said, grabbed my arm and pulled me calmly, but my heels were making my leg hurt. When he noticed, he made a move I never imagined he would. He got on his knees and helped me unbuckle them and set them aside. This gesture left me dumbfounded.

I couldn’t keep my words to myself. “Are you alright?” I asked, as soon as he stood up.

With a serious face and tone, he said, "Yeah, I'm alright. Now come, let's go." He pulled my arm in a direction within the house that I had never explored before. On our way, he noticed a maid and politely asked her to retrieve my heels from the living room and bring them to my room.

When we reached the door, he paused, pulled out a key from his pocket, and unlocked it. As the door swung open, I gasped. Before me lay a breathtaking library, its grandeur awe-inspiring.

Towering shelves stretched up to the vaulted ceiling, lined with what seemed like millions of books, their leather-bound spines glistening in the soft light. A majestic staircase curved upward, disappearing into the upper levels, inviting exploration of the vast literary treasure trove. Emblazoned across the top of the room in bold, golden letters was the inscription: '**AZRAH'S LIBRARY.**' As the room lit up, a warm, golden glow enveloped me, making me feel like I had entered a sacred sanctuary.

I stepped inside, excitement coursing through my veins. I began scanning the shelves, my eyes widening as I spotted all my favorite books. I spun around to face Aimar. "How?" I exclaimed. "How did you gather all my favorite books? This is incredible!"

Overwhelmed with bubbling emotion, I hugged him tightly. But as our bodies touched, his stiffened, and mine followed suit. Suddenly aware of the intimacy, I swiftly pulled away, my face flushing.

He cleared his throat. “I called your sister, and she told me you enjoyed reading. She laid emphasis on romance novels. I didn’t know which books to get you, so I got everything I could find and transformed my old library into yours,” he explained. His gesture was truly heartwarming, showcasing his kind and caring nature.

"Thank you, I love it!" I exclaimed, admiring the adorable furry Kitty beanbag nestled on the lush baby pink carpet. The string lights emitted a soft, ethereal pink and blue glow. It was clear that he had carefully curated every detail, incorporating all my favorite things into this sacred space, proving that he truly noticed and appreciated the things I loved.

As I looked further, I noticed that the library was an exact replica of my dream library from my Pinterest board. It seemed whoever had designed it had taken inspiration from my own vision. And yet, despite the obvious imitation, the result was undeniably lovely.

"You're welcome," he said with a warm smile, and with that, he nodded and quietly slipped away, leaving me alone to wander through the library's hushed aisles.

As I wandered through the shelves, I spotted *Tahereh Mafi*’s books, carefully placed alongside other favorites. However, I noticed that some of the books were slightly disorganized. I made a mental note to tidy them up tomorrow.

After spending what felt like an hour admiring my new library, I made my way to my room. As I pushed open the door, my jaw dropped in astonishment. The space had been transformed into a dream sanctuary. Soft, baby pink hues adorned the walls, complemented by a lush, plush carpet in the same delicate shade. I felt as though I had stepped into a page from my Pinterest board.

I hastily scrolled through my phone, comparing the room to my pinned inspirations. Every detail from the furniture to the decor was identical. I gasped, overwhelmed by sheer thoughtfulness.

Aimar Ali had truly outdone himself.

As I drifted towards my new vanity table, my eyes landed on a stunning cake, perfectly replicated from my Pinterest board. It was as though Aimar had brought my dream birthday gift to life. I gasped for breeze, my excitement palpable, as I hurried towards Aimar's room.

The moment he opened the door, I engulfed him in a tight hug with a squeal, I heard him chuckle lightly. “What was that for?” he asked as we broke the hug.

“Aimar, I love it!” I exclaimed. “How did you find out about all my dream birthday wishes, did Ismahan tell you?” I asked and he shook his head, causing me to glare at him confused.

“Then how did you come up with all these?”

"I took a rather unconventional approach," he admitted with a smile. "I downloaded Pinterest and, I must confess, stalked your board. That's where I discovered the images of your favorite things, tagged as *'birthday wishes'*." His revelation left me stunned, my jaw dropping in amazement.

“You did what?” I asked, making him nod. “How did you even come up with such an idea, did Nazeerah help you?”

"Actually, it was easy," he said with a smile. "Nazeerah often sends me images from her Pinterest board, asking me to buy things for her. So, I figured you might have a similar board. I downloaded the Pinterest app, searched for your name, and found your profile.” he said, smiling from ear to ear. He looked so excited as he spoke.

“Thank you, I love it,” I said, my eyes brimming with tears. He moved further out of his room and grabbed my arm softly.

“I have one last surprise for you,” he informed me.

“Another one?” I asked and he nodded, pulling me slowly, and hand in hand we walked downstairs and towards the doors that led to the garden. And as we walked in, I took a step back in shock and he chuckled.

"Aimar?" I questioned, my gaze fixed on the breathtaking scene before me in utter shock. The garden was ablaze with vibrant tulips, and as I looked towards my usual prayer spot, I saw that it had been beautifully transformed. A prayer mat sat atop a layered surface, shaded by a canopy above. On the canopy's edge, the words *"Azrah's Safe Space"* were elegantly inscribed. The sight overwhelmed me, and tears pricked at the corners of my eyes. I hastily wiped them away.

“This is beautiful,” I whispered.

“H... happy birthday, Princess Azrah,” he stuttered, his eyes brimming with emotion as he gazed at me.

I swallowed calmly, confused by everything. “Why are you being so nice to me?” I asked, causing him to take a few steps closer.

“Isn’t it obvious?” he questioned and I gave him a confused glare, making him chuckle. “I like *you*...” his words faded, as his arms grabbed mine, my expression making him smile in amusement. “Is that so hard to believe?” He questioned, his eyes searching for a response. I, however, remained silent, my gaze locked on his, unsure of how to react.

“But, what if I...” I trailed off, he shushed me gently, his arms placed on my lips.

“You don’t have to like me, I’ve been a total jerk to you.” he said, laughing lightly. “I know you still struggle with the loss of my brother, but I want to

assure you that I understand and I am here for you whenever you need me," he said. His words touched my heart deeply.

"As a *friend*?" I asked, with a hearty chuckle, remembering our conversation from last time.

"Hmm... I'll have to think about that, I can't just accept to be your friend just like that," he said, his soft laughter lingering in the air. With a gentle touch, he grasped my arm, pressed a tender kiss to it, and then walked away, leaving me in a state of wonder.

I sat on the grass in the garden, my mind replaying his words: "*I like you*..." A deep smile spread across my face, and I felt an unshakeable sense of joy. The *adhan* call to prayer echoed through the air, but I was so lost in thought that I almost missed it. Eventually, I rose to my feet and headed to my room, my smile still radiant on my face.

✿✿✿

It was late at night, and as I read my Quran, I heard the sound of my door opening. I was startled, so I turned around to find Aimar staring at me, a smile nestled on his face.

"You recite so beautifully," he complimented, making me blush.

"We can recite together if you want to." I told him, without a second thought, he was seated before me on the carpet.

"What surah should we recite? My favorite surah is *Surah al-Ar Rahman,*" he said and began to recite. Without the Quran, he recited beautifully, and I stared at him in awe. When he reached a stop, he gazed at me and chortled.

"Why do you look so shocked? Oh, let me guess, my mother told you I plan on leaving Islam and that I do not believe in Allah, right?" he asked with a chuckle. I shook my head 'no.'

"Not really. She only told me you rarely pray and you quite disbelieve in Allah." I relayed to him, making him laugh.

He discreetly cleared his voice. "I so much believe in Allah," he said. "And as for my *salah*, I struggled with it after Aminah's demise, but *Alhamdulilah*, I am trying my very best to find him, all because of you."

"All because of me? I didn't even do anything." I said.

"Seeing your devotion to Allah sparked a light in me. I always enjoy watching you while you recite the Quran in the garden."

He often watched me in the garden? I never could have thought.

"Really?" I asked, and he nodded.

"Yeah, thank you for doing that," he whispered.

"You're welcome." I smiled.

He got up, stretched his arm, and yawned. “Do you want to go out for a ride?” His question came as a shock. A ride at this time of the night, it was 12 am in the morning.

“Right now?” I asked. He nodded.

“Okay, give me a minute to get dressed.” I said, I was still dressed in my pajamas. He shook his head, telling me a no.

"There's no need for that, let's go," he urged. I nodded in agreement, grabbed my veil, and followed him out of my room and the house. As soon as we settled in his car, he pulled out of the gates and merged into the vibrant streets of Abuja. With the windows rolled down, the evening breeze danced through my hair as I gazed out at the streetlights, watching them whizz by one by one. I couldn't contain my excitement.

Aimar didn’t say anything, he loved to keep his focus on the road while he drove. Even when his phone rang, he didn’t pick it up. He focused his attention on the road until we came to a stop at a familiar location. It was the racing tracks, and he had parked at the side.

“Why are we here?” I asked.

“You'll see,”he said mysteriously.

We walked in silence until we reached his car, a sleek BMW 8 GTE. I couldn't help but feel a pang of pride - I knew my cars well. As a die-hard Mercedes fan, I wondered how Aimar knew my preference. Had he asked Nazeerah?

Ridwan, the man from the airport from the day I had arrived in Abuja, got down from the BMW and handed Aimar the car keys.

“Are you going for a ride?” I asked. He smiled, pulled my arms calmly to the other side of the car, and held the door open.

“We are going for a ride,” he announced. I made a horrified face. There was no way on earth I would get into that. The car moved at a really fast pace. And I wasn’t ready to risk my life just yet.

"You must be joking!" I blurted out, my eyes widening in dismay as I gazed warily at his car. "There's no way on earth I'm agreeing to ride in that." He chuckled at my obvious skepticism.

“You will, trust me, it will be fun, I promise.” He insisted. Ridwan handed him two helmets, and he handed one over to me.

"No,” I objected.

“Please, just this once, if you do not like it, then we will never do it again,” he pleaded. I glared at the car for a while and then at the tracks. They were long.

“Just once around the track, no second laps." I told him, and he nodded in acknowledgment. He put his large helmet on, and when he saw me struggling

with mine, he walked over and put it on my head. After that, he helped me get into the car.

The car was magnificent on the inside, the interior exudes refinement, sophistication, and a hint of sportiness. With the combination of premium materials, it was a fine car, and from what I could see, it’s worth a lot of money.

"Seatbelts on, please," Aimar said, as he fastened his own. I followed suit. With a powerful roar, the engine sprang to life, its sound akin to a burst of rapid gunfire.

As he got satisfied with warming up the car, Aimar accelerated swiftly, leaving me breathless. I gripped the seat tightly, my heart racing in tandem with the speeding vehicle. The velocity was exhilarating yet terrifying.

As we took a sharp turn on the track, Aimar's face lit up with a radiant smile, followed by a joyful whoop. The thrill of the ride seemed to revitalize him. In stark contrast, I was white-knuckling the seat, desperate for the ordeal to end. The speed was exhilarating but terrifying.

When we finally came to an abrupt halt, I exhaled deeply, catching my breath. I assessed my shaken body, and in relief, I loudly thanked Allah for sparing my life.

I heard Aimar laugh. “What’s wrong? You didn’t like it?”

“Are you crazy? Is this what you call fun?” I asked, and he laughed louder.

“But it was fun! I'm sure you enjoyed it a little.” He implored, I glared at him, and he laughed again.

“Please get me out of here!” I said, and with a smile, he got down from the car and got my door opened. As I stepped to the ground, my legs wobbled, but he held me, stopping me from reaching the ground.

“Are you okay?” he asked, worry etched on his face.

“How can I be all right after riding in that monster?” I dramatically exclaimed. He laughed again.

“Come, sit here.” He helped me sit on the track. Then went back to his car and brought me back a bottle of water, which I sipped from.

“Remind me never to accompany you to any place you call fun.” I said, still catching my breath. Aimar burst into a hysterical laughter and lay on the tracks. He looked so good when he laughed. I was glad to see this part of him and share this moment with him.

"Azrah, you’re very funny,” he said, still laughing. After some minutes, he stopped laughing, cleared his throat, and stared at the sky. Leaving us to enjoy the silence. I dropped my bottle of water aside and laid next to him on the tracks. It was a bold and daring move, but I felt the need to be close to him.

“What are you staring at?” I questioned.

“The stars,” he said, looking very interested in whatever he was looking at.

“What about the stars?” I asked.

“I always love to believe that the stars are the people I lost. It’s untrue and not Islamic, but I just love to imagine they are up there, that Sameer, Aminah, and my mom can see us,” he said. I looked at the stars as well, and they twinkled very bright.

"You have a fantastic imagination," I said, prompting a low, rumbling chortle from Aimar.

He turned to face me, his eyes twinkling like the stars. "What's your biggest dream?" he asked, his voice cutting through the silence.

"I have so many dreams," I replied, "but one is to be happy."

He turned to stare at me, his expression curious. "To be happy?" he repeated, and I nodded.

We fell into silence for a while before he spoke again. "My biggest dream is to ensure that you're happy, to be the man that brings a smile to your face. " His words settled softly around my heart, leaving a gentle pang.

“Bringing happiness into someone’s life is a huge burden, Aimar,” I said.

He looked at me with conviction. “You’re right, but I want to be the reason one of your dreams comes true. I want to be the reason you smile. Knowing that my wife is happy because of me would be my biggest achievement.”

His words hung in the air, and I remained silent, unsure of how to respond. After a moment, I finally spoke up. "It's a pleasure to be your *wife*."

He didn't say a word, but the way his breath caught and reverberated told me he was smiling.

“Why did you accept to be my *wife*?” he asked.

“Don’t you know?” I questioned. He nodded his head, telling me a no. So I sat upright, shocked, but I relayed everything from his mother's visit to our parents' deal. He was shocked, he immediately sat upright.

“My father is such a cunning man,” he stated. His arm clenched and eyes filled with furry.

“I thought you were aware.” I said. All this while I thought he was aware of everything.

“No, why would I agree to marry a woman who is forced to marry me against her will?” He sounded like he had been hurt. “I married you because my parents wanted me to, but mostly because of my Ummie.”

“Did you marry me against your will?” I questioned, and his eyes softened.

“I didn't. when my mother asked me to marry you, I agreed because I was certain you’d disagree, and when the news reached me that you had agreed to marry me, I was shocked and I felt betrayed on behalf of Sameer, which is why I

blamed you for his death,” he trailed off, grabbing my right arm. “And I’m sorry about that, I’m sorry about the way I have treated you these past few months, it was very immature of me to speak to a woman the way I had done,” he explained, causing my heart to flutter.

“It’s okay. We were both going through a lot.” I told him. He smiled.

“But now I want things to work out between us, we could start off as..." I cut him off.

“Friends? Does this mean we are now friends?” I asked, beaming happily.

As our eyes met, Aimar's face softened. With a nod, he said, "Yeah, we are friends..." His voice faded, and he leaned in, his lips grazing mine. The gentle touch sent shocks down my spine. My heart racing, I kissed him back, my lips moving instinctively. When he pulled away, a radiant smile illuminated his face.

“Yeah, we are friends,” he said softly.



Chapter 22



Azrah Yusuf

“ARE YOU SURE YOU DON’T need me to drop you off at the event? We could go together, you know.” Aimar said, holding onto my arm softly.

Yesterday was the best day ever for me, after we had shared a kiss. We spent the night talking and laughing until we returned home late to sleep. But as I lay in bed, I couldn't shake off the excitement of the day's events. My mind began to wander, and I found myself daydreaming about Aimar - hearing his voice, feeling the gentle touch of his skin on mine. It was a surreal sensation, and I couldn't help but feel a spark of desire. I wanted him close, badly.

But amidst these feelings, a pang of guilt crept in. Was I betraying Sameer? The thought clouded my mind, filling me with the weight of potentially betraying his love

Aimar pulled my left arm, “Azrah, are you all right?” He asked, and I didn’t even realize I was absentminded. We were standing in the middle of the parking lot. He was also going to be attending the official event of the senate president.

“I am okay, what were you saying?” I asked, I knew I had heard what he had previously said. But I had forgotten.

“I suggested that we should leave together, but if you are not okay, I think we should remain home,” he said. He looked worried.

“I'm all right," I said, gently stroking his arm. "I need to head to work first, so we can't leave together just yet.”

“Azrah, you don't need that job," he reminded me. "I gave you my debit card for a reason. You can use it to get anything you want—a car, clothes, a house... anything.”

“Oh my god, I completely forgot to ask you about the card," I said, looking at him incredulously. "Why did you give it to me, Aimar? I don't need it, and I'm happy working.”

He inhaled deeply. “As much as I want you to quit your job, your happiness matters most to me, but please, the card will remain with you,” he said. He pulled me into a warm hug and bid me bye before driving away. As soon as he was gone, I hopped into my car and headed to work.

When I arrived at work, everyone was dressed elegantly. Adesuwa was adorned in a red dress that popped out her light skin tone while Mustapha, as

usual, was dressed in a suit just like Aimar.

“Finally, you’re here, we’ve been waiting for you.” Adesuwa said, excited to see me. I hugged her and admired her dress.

“Your necklace....” I touched it. “It’s so pretty.”

She smiled. “For a second there, I thought you hated it.”

“No, I love it, you look amazing.” I said.

“And so do you. How many Abaya’s do you even have in your closet? I have never seen you repeat them." Adesuwa said.

“A lot.” I replied, with a chuckle.

Just then Mustapha approached us once again, along with Hisham, who was cladded in native attire, he was dressed in a *kaftan*.

“Ladies, are you ready? And is the gift ready to hit the road?” Mustapha asked, and Adesuwa acknowledged it. We had made sure everything was set and ready.

After we cross-checked our files, we left the office and headed to the event. When we arrived, the grandeur of a luxurious mansion welcomed us, and from the amount of expensive cars that were parked outside, anyone who was present here could tell that the people attending this event were billionaires.

“Azrah, come with me.” Mustapha said, and I clutched onto my iPad. Of course, I was here for work, and that was all I would do. I followed Mustapha into the mansion while Adesuwa walked beside Hisham, they didn’t spare each other a glance.

As we arrived at the mansion, Mustapha showed the security at the door our invitation, and they let us in. An ambiance of luxury welcomed us, the decorations were on point, and everyone screamed old money. Mustapha walked over to a man, and I followed suit. They both exchanged pleasantries, and that was all that occurred throughout the night. We greeted a lot of people, and I took note of their names once it was said. I had scanned the room for Aimar, but he was nowhere to be found.

Feeling the need to be away from the crowd, I walked over to the drink section and poured myself a cup of orange juice after ensuring it was *halal* from the caterer in charge of the food and drinks. I was exhausted, and when I looked around, I couldn’t find Adesuwa nor Aimar anywhere. But, my eyes spotted Khadijah, and our eyes locked, so I looked away.

I was trying to avoid any form of drama today.

But, to my dismay, she walked over to me, her eyes filled with an evil gleam. “Our wife.” She called out, and I tried to pretend like she was not speaking to me.

“Hey, I’m talking to you.” She grabbed my arm. I pulled it away.

“What is your problem? Why are you harassing me?” I asked, but I was soft in my speech.

With her index fingers pointing at me, she said. “You are my problem!”

“Then you do not know what your true problem is, because I have never disturbed you before.” I said, she laughed.

“You have ruined everything for me, you took away the man I love.” She said, causing me to chuckle. “Because of you, he no longer has my time.”

“I didn’t take anything away from you, and if you’d excuse me, I have things to do.” I picked up my iPad from where I had dropped it and intended to leave, but she pulled me back harshly.

"Read my lips, and read it clearly," she spat. I struggled to pull away from her iron grip, but it was unyielding. She towered over me, her substantial frame intimidating.

"Aimar will marry me, and I'll throw you out!" She snarled, her voice dripping with malice. With a surge of adrenaline, I yanked my arm free, pulling harshly to break her grasp.

“And you will forever remain his second choice.” I said, and before I could tell what was happening, she landed a resounding slap on my cheeks and poured the drink from the glass in her hand on my head.

“How dare you...” she began, but I didn't let her finish. I lunged at her, slapping and beating her fiercely. The commotion drew the attention of others in the room who rushed to intervene. They eventually managed to pry us apart, but not before I had torn a piece of her gown.

“What is going on here?” I heard Mustapha yell. He walked over to the scene and glared at me, disappointment in his eyes.

"Is this what I pay you for? To come to a party and disgrace me?" He thundered, his face reddened with rage. I stood stunned, taken aback by his outburst. "I am disappointed," he began, but was abruptly interrupted.

"Do not speak to my *wife* in that tone!' Aimar thundered, his interruption sharp as a knife.

He seemed to have just arrived, yet his expression was icy, his eyes blazing with fury. Khadijah rushed to his side, but he harshly pushed her away. She stumbled, her balance precarious. The air vibrated with his anger. He strode up to me, his long strides devouring the distance. His grip tightened around my arm like a vice.

“Are you okay?” he asked, and I gave him a nod, telling him I was fine.

“Your wife?” Mustapha asked, shock evident in his eyes.

“Yes, my wife,” he said. Everyone in the room gasped. Khadijah stormed over to where we stood.

“Aimar, you are choosing her over me?” She cried.

Aimar, with a scorn on his face, walked toward her. “The deal is off, I want nothing to do with an ill-mannered woman like you, Khadijah.” He said, and she raised her arms to slap him, but he caught her wrist mid-air.

“You’re mine, Aimar, you’re mine!” Khadijah screamed. Aimar tossed her arm and walked over to me and pulled me away. We headed toward the entrance, and as we walked by, I saw Adesuwa and Hisham, staring at the scene in shock.

As soon as we stepped out of the mansion, Aimar ushered me to his car. He opened the door, and I slid in. He then walked around to the driver's side, got in, and started the engine.

With a swift acceleration, we sped away from the scene. The scenery blurred by until Aimar suddenly pulled over to the side of the road, bringing the car to an abrupt halt.

After he had parked his car properly, he burst into laughter. A very loud one that left me confused. I glared at him, unsure of what to say or do.

“What is making you laugh?” I finally asked when the laughter began to fade.

“The way...” he laughed. “The way you beat up Khadijah, it was so good!” he continued to laugh, leaving me confused.

“You’re not angry that I beat her up?” I asked. He chuckled.

“Angry? Khadijah deserves far worse than that, God! I’m so glad everything is over,” he said, wiping the tears that had dropped from his eyes due to the laughter.

“I thought she was your girlfriend." I stated.

"She was, but just like our marriage, my father had set this up," he said, turning to me. "But now, I'm done with it. I cannot marry a woman who doesn't respect my wife—scratch that—I cannot marry any other woman because I have who I want." He stroked my cheeks, his eyes locked on mine.

"Aimar..."I trailed off. He silenced me with his finger.

"Azrah, you are never going back to that company ever again," he said firmly, starting the car. "I'll have my PA send your resignation letter over to them."

"Aimar, there's no need for—" He cut me off abruptly.

"My words are final, Azrah. You will not return there." He said, and we drove home in silence.

As we arrived home, we all went our separate ways, we went to our rooms. And as I got to mine, I immediately texted Adesuwa, apologizing to her for not telling her that I was married.

She texted back immediately: *So you're married to my crush?* She had texted with a crying and laughing emoji, and I laughed.

It's a long story! I replied, and immediately she got my text, she called, and I relayed my reasons for hiding everything to her. She understood where I was coming from and promised to make plans for us to hang out.

Afterwards, I called it *a night* and rested.



Chapter 23



Aimar Ali

IT HAD BEEN A WEEK since the incident with Khadijah happened, and I got to know the news had reached my father, who was very unhappy with my decision to break things off with her.

But, that was his problem, I couldn’t risk losing someone as perfect as Azrah over a woman like Khadijah. It wasn't worth it. Azrah was calm, collected, and everything a man wanted and needed in a woman. As for Khadijah, she was rude, filled with pride, and arrogant. She treated everyone like a slave. My maids disliked her intensely, but since Azrah moved into the house, they've done nothing but sing her praises. I had instructed them to keep an eye on her and report back on how she treated them, and they all had positive feedback.

Presently, she wasn’t at home, she had gone for an Islamic event where prestigious *sheikh’s* would be attending and giving *khutbah*. She had asked me to accompany her, but I was busy. I had to set things straight with Khadijah’s uncle and return the papers he had handed to me at the party back to him. After doing that, I returned home.

Rayan was right, I didn’t need all this money, I had enough — enough to last my generation a lifetime. I couldn’t let my thirst for money and power ruin my marriage. It wasn’t planned, but it turned into Allah’s biggest blessing to me. Because of Azrah, I found myself getting more serious with the *deen*. She had inspired me, despite trying my best to push her away.

Just then, Rayan walked into my house and sat on the couch across from me, looking quite exhausted. “Aimar, you never told me getting into the presidential villa was a hassle,” Rayan said, shaking his head. “I suffered, *Wallahi*." His words made me laugh.

I shut down my laptop and focused my attention on him. “I’m sorry, my friend, but did you return the documents back to him?.” I asked, and a nod of approval was my response. My phone began to ring, disrupting my conversations. I checked the caller ID, and it was my father, I ignored his calls. He kept on calling, but I was in no mood to speak to him, I didn't have the time to get my mood ruined. I put my phone on *silent*.

“Rayan, can you please get my PA to have my private jet ready?” I asked nicely.

“Alright, where do you plan on going?” He inquired, his brows furrowed at me.

“Azrah has been reading this book set in Verona, Romeo and Juliet, and she has been telling me about her dreams of visiting it someday, so I thought to surprise her today with a trip to Italy.” I relayed to him.

He smiled, and then put his hand on my head. Feeling my temperature, I pushed it away and glared at him with raised brows. “Aimar, are you okay?” he asked.

“I am.” I chuckled.” Any problem?"

“No, it’s just so nice to see you falling in love,” he commented and I smiled. “Are you truly in love with her?” he asked me.

“No, I need her, love is an understatement. When you love someone, you can breathe without them, but when you need someone, you can’t breathe without them, and strangely, that is what I feel for her.” I replied, Rayan smiled widely while patting my shoulders playfully.

“You're a finished man, my brother.” Rayan said, making me laugh.

“You’ll never understand.” I told him. “Please ensure that my jet is ready.” I reminded him.

With a playful salute, he said, “Don’t worry, sir, I’ll handle everything. How about your hotel reservations? Have you handled that?” he inquired.

“I bought a house over there yesterday, so there would be no need for a hotel.” I said and Rayan took notes and immediately made the call to my assistant while I continued working. After he was done ensuring everything was in place, we sat together and shared ideas on our new project.

After finalizing everything, Rayan departed for his home. I then devoted some time to observing *Salah*. Later, I visited Aymah's school and brought her back home. We spent the day together, and soon Azrah joined us, looking visibly exhausted. But she still managed to smile at me, and I smiled back, the sight of her bringing instant comfort to my heart.

“Mummy!” Aymah yelled upon Azrah’s arrival. She got up and hugged her real tight. I was so glad to hear that she had gotten used to calling Azrah mummy. I had told her not to call her aunty anymore. Thinking back to the time where I had treated Azrah badly, I felt embarrassed. It was truly awful of me to speak to her the way I did.

“I got you this.” Azrah handed a gift bag over to Aymah, who accepted it happily. She began unboxing the gift and revealed lots and lots of goodies, from chocolate to cookies.

“Thank you, mummy.” Aymah said.

"Aymah, darling, go be with Helen, she must be missing you." I said, I wanted some alone time with Azrah. Aymah happily jogged out of the living room. Excited to show Helen her bag of chocolate and cookies.

Azrah fell dramatically onto the sofa beside me and stretched her legs. "I'm so tired," she said, causing me to chuckle. She looked like a child. She started to tell me all about the Islamic lectures, she was so excited as she relayed everything that happened and was said there, to me, and I listened attentively. She also showed me a lot of notes she had taken from the *khutubah*. After she was done yapping, she fell into silence for a while, leading me to break the news of my surprise to her.

"I have a surprise for you later today." I had said to her, and she immediately sat upright. A smile on her face. She looked very excited.

"Can I guess?" She asked, and I shook my head no. "Please!" She pleaded, her effort at making puppy dog eyes made the situation more funnier.

"Alright, take a guess." I said. She tapped her finger on her temple simultaneously. This was something she frequently enjoyed doing. I had noticed a lot about her these past few weeks we had spent together. Her favorite color was *baby pink*, and her favorite thing to do was to watch movies and read books. She was also a clean freak, making sure everything was kept in place.

"You got me a new book?" She asked, her eyes gleaming with joy.

"You failed, and that was your final guess." I told her, she pouted sadly.

"Alright, I'll wait until you tell me then." She said.

"You have to go get dressed first, I will take you there and show you." I said. She got up real quick.

"Alright, let me go freshen up and pray, I'll be right back." She said, She got to her feet and began to walk away, but then came to a halt. She turned around. "Have you prayed, Aimar?" She asked. This was something I loved about her, she always tried her best to bring me closer to Allah, and that was the most important thing to me right now.

To find myself as well as my purpose in life aside from getting wealthier.

"Yeah, I have." I told her, and she gave me a quick hug before going upstairs. Her scent still lingered in the living room, a strong scent of strawberry and vanilla. I couldn't get enough of her, I wanted more, I wanted her close, to touch and to feel. This woman would be the death of me, and I was willing to die by her hands, in her presence and at her feet.

Since I was done with work, I shut my laptop and headed to my room, where I had a quick shower. When I got out of the shower, I applied my lotion and got dressed in blue jeans and a black Prada shirt. I loved Prada a lot, they were one of my favorite brands. After I was done, I sprayed some perfume and lunged

over to Azrah’s room. When I knocked on the door, she opened it. She was neatly dressed in a red Abaya, the color suited her perfectly. It added more depth to her caramel skin tone. *She was absolutely perfect.* Everything about her was beautiful, her facial bones were delicately carved, and her face was a perfect oval. And when she smiled, her pretty brown eyes gleamed even more.

“Are we leaving now?” She asked, a nod was her response. She ran back into her room and picked up her handbag and cellphone before walking outside.

“Let’s go!” She beamed at me happily. I didn’t move, so she stared at me confused. "Aimar, let’s go, I am ready.” She repeated. I moved closer to her and grabbed her arm.

“You’re so *beautiful*.” I said, and she immediately blushed. A smile danced its way onto her face.

“Thank you, Mr. Ali.” Her attempt to mimic my accent failed woefully, and I laughed, making her reciprocate the same.

“Let’s go say goodbye to Aymah.” She said. I grabbed her arm, and we walked to Aymah’s room, where she lay fast asleep. I instructed Helen to take care of her before we left.

After that was done, we made our way outside and to the car. I got the back door opened for her, and she got in while I followed behind her. As I sat next to her, I gently grabbed her arm and stroked it calmly. However, she looked uncomfortable, so I immediately let go. She smiled, seeming to relax. The drive to the airport was quite long, so we spent the time together talking about our parents and what not.

As soon as we approached the airport, she turned to look at me and said, “Why are we here? Don't tell me this is one of your shopping sprees." She asked, and I chuckled and told her ‘no.’

“It's not a shopping spree, it's a surprise." I told her, she raised her brow at me, demanding I talk, but I chuckled and brushed that off. I wasn’t going to ruin the surprise just yet.

We soon parked our car and hopped out, with the help of the airport officials, we got to my private jet. As we stepped into the private jet, she made her way toward her favorite seat, but I pulled her back.

“Sit with me.” I told her, and with a nod, she agreed. We sat together, and I made sure to have instructed my cabin crew to ensure that there were books, movies, and snacks for her to enjoy before we arrived in Italy.

Throughout the flight, we talked, laughed, and enjoyed each other's company while we snacked until she fell asleep, her head was laying on my shoulder. I couldn’t help but stare at her as she slept, she was at peace, and a part of me

knew I’d do anything in the world to keep it like that. I soon also fell asleep, I was tired and needed to get some rest before we landed.

Our plane soon touched down on Italian soil, just as the pilot's announcement woke me up. She was still fast asleep on my aching shoulders, clinging to them tightly. I couldn’t bring myself to wake her up, so I waited patiently until she stirred.

Meanwhile, I engaged myself with responding to emails, I always had a backlog to tackle.

As the plane's engines died down, the cabin grew quieter. I sat still, cradling her weight on my shoulders, her slow, steady breathing a soothing melody.

Suddenly, she stirred in her sleep, her grip on my shoulders relaxed. Her head stirred, and I felt her warm breath on my skin. I sat still, awaiting her awakening.

Her eyelids fluttered open, revealing her shining brown eyes. She looked around her surroundings for a while, and a yawn escaped her lips, followed by a soft smile spread across her face.

“Hi,” she mumbled, her voice husky from sleep.

I smiled back at her, my heart skipping a beat. “Hi *princess*, we are here.”

She stretched, her body unfolding from its curled position. Her hair tousled, her scarf had fallen. She looked very adorable.

“I fell asleep on you,” she said, embarrassment etched in her voice.

“You were tired.” I said, brushing away the strands of her long, silky black hair that covered her face, her ribbon had gotten loose. “You needed it.”

Her gaze drifted to the window, where the Italian landscape unfolded. “It’s beautiful.” She breathed. A wide smile spread across her face. “Where is this?” She asked.

“Welcome to Italy.” I informed her and she gasped. “Yeah, we are going to visit Verona.” I said, and she immediately engulfed me in a hug—not quick, it lasted for a whole minute, then she squeaked.

“You’re the sweetest person ever, Aimar.” She grinned and hugged me again, she was extremely excited. Her hugs opened a window of desire in me. I wanted her so badly, but I would have to wait for her to want me too. I'd do anything for her, her comfort mattered more to me than my own desires.

"Shall we?" I asked once she'd finished tying her hair into a bun and adjusting her veil. She nodded, smiling.

As we approached the stairs, I held her arm firmly. My guards had already prepared a car to pick us up and a sleek BMW M3 parked in front of us. I wasn’t going to take the normal route out of the airport because I had been informed that some news reporters had gotten intel on my arrival due to the mansion I had

newly purchased. I didn’t know how they found out, but I was certain they wanted to know if I’d be starting a new project here in Italy.

The car doors opened, and I helped Azrah get in, she looked very tired and soon fell asleep throughout our drive to our new residence. I was left to watch her as she slept, the soothing sound of her breath being the only melody that accompanied me throughout the ride.



Chapter 24

Azrah Yusuf

Verona, Italy.

I HAD WOKEN UP IN A bed in an unfamiliar room. The room was cold, and the walls were adorned in paintings, it was huge.

Aimar was nowhere to be found. I sat upright and put my legs on the lush, furry black carpet. I looked around me and realized there was a window.

As I approached the window and gazed outside, I was struck by the bright atmosphere and the breathtaking view of a majestic vintage estate. A serene body of water glittered alongside it, evoking the essence of Verona. The entire scenery exuded a timeless, vintage charm, reminiscent of the iconic setting described in Romeo and Juliet.

“You’re awake.” I turned around to find Aimar standing behind me, he was smiling and holding onto a tray of food, which he placed on the center table in the room.

“Good morning, is it morning?” I asked, unsure of what time it was. I couldn’t find my phone or bag.

“It’s afternoon, darling,” he said. He moved closer to me, closing up our proximity. With a smile on his face, he pulled me closer, his hands wrapped around my waist. There was something about the way he touched me, it was *halal*, but I was not used to this, so I was very uncomfortable, especially because it was him. He was sweet, calm, and caring. A clear contrast to the man I had married.

“Step back, sir... Remember, you’re just my friend, no touching.” I teasingly said, making him chuckle. Putting both hands in the air, he moved back slightly.

“Hmm... we’d have to fix that then, what do you suggest we do about that?” he asked.

With a sly smile, I said, “You’re the man, it’s up to you to think about what to do.”

“You’re right, I know what to do. But before that, let’s have breakfast.” He pulled my arm and led me to the couch, where we both sat. He opened the food warmers and revealed a delicious Italian meal.

“What’s this?” I asked. “Did you make it?”

“It’s called a *frittata*, the cook made it,” he said. I glared at the frittata for a while before taking a fork full of it and filling my mouth with it. It was tasty.

“Uhm...” I chewed. “It tastes amazing.” I said. I washed it down with a glass of juice, and we ate silently with Aimar scrolling through his phone. He was always replying to emails.

Aimar spoke. “You should freshen up, we will be visiting *Arena de Verona* first, then we will go to Juliet’s house,” he informed me. *Arena de Verona* was like a dream, I had seen it on TikTok several times. It was beautiful, and I couldn’t wait to visit. Due to the excitement and exhaustion, I had forgotten I hadn't observed my salah leading a gasp out of my lips.

Confused, Aimar asked. “What’s wrong?"

“I haven’t prayed,” I informed him.

“Oh yeah, I’m sorry I didn’t wake you up, I didn’t want to disturb you because you looked tired.” he apologized.

“You should have. Anyways, no problem, I’ll bathe and pray.” I said. And then realization hit me once again. I didn’t have any clothes here with me, and I was only thinking about that now.

"Aimar, I didn't bring any clothes," I said to him.

He stood up and walked over to the closet. As he swung open the twin doors, a lavish closet filled with an array of clothes unfolded before my eyes.

“I didn’t know which one you’d want, so I had my assistant buy you a lot,” he told me.

"Aww!" I gushed, my heart warming at his thoughtful gesture. "That's so sweet of you." He smiled, his eyes crinkling at the corners, and nodded before excusing himself to bathe. I watched him go, a mixture of amusement and affection swirling inside me. His behavior often made me laugh – whenever he had nothing to say or felt shy, he'd abruptly leave, as if escaping his own awkwardness. It was a quirk I'd grown to adore.

With time ticking away, I hurried into the spacious and elegantly appointed bathroom. After a refreshing bath, I walked into the closet and was touched to find a hijab and prayer mat, thoughtfully provided by Aimar.

The cosmetic table was stocked with my favorite skincare brand and body lotion—it was as if he knew me inside out.

In the closet, I discovered an array of *abayas*, trousers, and chiffon tops in my style. Considering our sightseeing plans, I opted for blue jeans and a brown chiffon top.

Scanning the shoe rack, I spotted a stunning brown leather Hermes slipper, perfectly matching my outfit. I paired it with a brown scarf from the closet.

Aimar's PA had done an impeccable job coordinating every detail.

After dressing, I put on my hijab and caught up on my missed *salah*. As I prayed, I sensed Aimar's presence in the room. When I removed my hijab and glanced toward the couch, he was seated there, looking dashing in black Jean pants and a Prada top, its logo elegantly engraved. The sunlight accentuated his brown complexion, making him look more handsome.

"You look good!" I complimented and he smiled, before I briskly walked into the closet.

I grabbed a black Chanel bag to match my outfit, realizing I had forgotten to choose one earlier. After that, I applied lip gloss and tidied up my thick brows.

That was all it took for me to be ready. I'm not a fan of heavy makeup.

As I returned back into the room, I met Aimar busy with his phone. And he had a serious face on, he was scrolling vigorously. “Shall we leave?” I said, and instantly a smile spread across his face.

“You’re *perfect*,” he said, his words making me blush. Standing to his feet, he took calm strides over to me. He let his arm out, and I slipped mine through it, and we walked together. As we went out of the room, a vintage hallway stared back at me, the walls were adorned with paintings, and beautiful statues decorated the hallway.

“Aimar, did your company build this?” I asked, and he shook his head in disagreement.

"They didn't," he said with a smile. "I bought the house this week, specifically for our visit. It's a brand-new building, though."

My jaw dropped in stunning silence, and I came to an abrupt halt. Aimar, caught off guard, stopped beside me, his eyes sparkling with amusement.

“You bought an estate because of this trip?” I asked, a nod was my response.

“And what happened to booking a hotel? It’s less expensive than this.” I said, feeling bad that he had spent a lot of money just because of my obsession with Verona.

"I wanted you to be comfortable," he said, "and plus, the house wasn't expensive—it only costs around $800,000." His casual tone reminded me of the Ali family's wealth. What impressed me more was that it wasn't just his father's money, Aimar had built his entire company from scratch.

Sameer often boasted about how proud he was of Aimar.

Having nothing more to say, we made our way outside, and the great ambiance welcomed me. It was breathtakingly beautiful, and a part of me longed to stay here forever. Aimar’s car parked in front of us, and a butler had the door opened for us. We got into the back, and the driver drove us out of the estate and onto the streets of Italy.

As I gazed outside the window, Italy unfolded before me. Rolling hills of lush green stretch as far as the eye can see, dotted with ancient olive trees and vineyards. As we drove by sparkling lakes, their surfaces reflected the clear blue sky. Every turn revealed breathtaking scenes.

“This is so beautiful.” I gushed as my eyes peered at the colorful balconies.

“If you want, we can visit here often.” Aimar said. I turned to him with a smile.

"How do you get to travel around the world so easily?" I asked him. "I don't remember giving you my international passport, so how do you pull this off?" It baffled me, he could go anywhere hassle-free.

With a chuckle, he replied, "Firstly, my name is Aimar Ali, the youngest fourth-generation billionaire and one of the biggest players in the building and oil industries worldwide. And secondly, I have affiliations with most countries, so I can travel wherever I wish. As for your passport, and visa, my personal assistant handles that." His words left my mouth hanging, and he laughed lightly.

Money held unimaginable power, with it, possibilities knew no bounds. My family was firmly entrenched in Nigeria's upper class, affluent enough to travel in style. Yet, our wealth paled in comparison to Aimar's opulent lifestyle. One of his luxury cars alone likely rivaled my father's entire net worth.

We soon came to a stop and parked our car in a parking area. We got down, and hand in hand, we walked down the streets of Verona. The air brushed against my skin, making a wide grin across my face. At a corner, I noticed some old signori seated playing cards, and they were cheering as they held glasses of wine in their hands.

“They look so happy.” I said to Aimar, our hands still entwined.

"Yeah,” he said, his voice a bit off. I had noticed his mood had changed at home. I had brushed it off, thinking it was just him being him.

“Are you okay? You seem worried.” I said to him, and he smiled.

“I am not worried, how can I be worried when I’m by your side?” He said, squeezing onto my hand lovingly, and I gave him a reassuring smile. As we walked further, a man approached us, a huge smile on his face.

“Mr. Ali, it is great to have you back.” The man said to Aimar, his Italian accent strong and audible.

“Alessandro!” Aimar called out, hugging the man tightly. The man looked so excited to see Aimar. He then turned to me, and we exchanged pleasantries.

“Who is she, Aimar?” Alessandro asked.

“She’s my wife.” Aimar said.

“Wow, I never knew you got married, congratulations, Aimar,” he said. The man turned to me and congratulated me as well.

“Alright, I’ll be your guide for the day, let’s go.” With that said, we ventured deeper into the streets of Italy. As we walked into the streets, every corner reveals a masterpiece: a Baroque fountain, a Renaissance palace, or a humble trattoria. In a corner, I saw children chasing pigeons, street performers, and more elderly signori playing cards. Their laughter and voices filled the air.

As we moved closer, my gaze fell upon a colossal structure that took my breath away. The massive building rises before me, its reddish-brown stone glowing warmly in the fading light. The sheer scale is overwhelming, it is as if the building has been plucked from ancient mythology. I felt tiny and insignificant, beside this monolith.

“And this, my people, is the *Arena de Verona*.” Alessandro said, and my jaw dropped. On TikTok, it looked really small.

“It's enormous!” I exclaimed, bubbling with excitement. “Aimar, let's take a picture in front of it!” I tugged Aimar's arm, and we posed before the stunning backdrop. Alessandro kindly offered to capture the moment. Despite Aimar's forced smile, his eyes betrayed his true emotions – his mood still seemed off. I made a mental note to broach the subject later, when we were alone.

Alessandro guided us through Verona's hidden gems, and we snapped countless photos. I eagerly shared them with Ismahan and Nazeerah, who were both online. Their shock was palpable – not just because I was in Verona, but also due to Aimar's rare, radiant smile and his willingness to pose for pictures. I teased them with a *'story to tell later'* before signing off.

Our next stop was Juliet’s house, and as soon as we got there, I could tell it was it from the famous balcony, and the picturesque courtyard beckons. It looked just like the pictures. We climbed the stairs that led to the iconic balcony where Juliet supposedly stood, pledging her love to Romeo. It was a beautiful view from up here. Every nook and cranny of the place seemed to hold a story, every stone a secret.

“I can’t believe this building is real.” Aimar said, feeling the textures of the walls. He turned to Alessandro and made a signal with his eyes, which led him to walk away, leaving us both alone.

“Isn’t this a beautiful view?” I asked, and he nodded while grabbing my arm slowly.

"Azrah,” he trailed off. I stared at him confused, he looked nervous, and that was a first, he was never nervous. He swallowed hard and began to speak.

"I enjoy spending time with you, and all the days we've spent together have led me to a new discovery," he paused, catching his breath. "A discovery of my heart—a heart I never knew had the capacity to love again. But with you, it's

different. The sound of my heartbeat is different, and I find myself wanting to change and become better just for *you*."

I was stunned. Was he about to do what I thought he was? We were already married, and this couldn't possibly be a proposal.

He took a very deep breath. "Azrah, will you be my *girlfriend*?" he asked, and an unplanned laugh escaped me, leaving him confused.

"I am already your wife, silly," I said, still chuckling. He joined in, his laughter warm and endearing.

"I never thought I'd say this, but I want us to begin from scratch, to grow in love with each other," he said, and smiled. He was so sweet, caring, and thoughtful. Nazeerah will find it hard to believe that this was her brother. He reached for his pocket and brought out a box, when he opened it, it revealed a ring, and I could bet my life on it that it was made of real diamond.

"So what's next? You'll ask to be your wife again?" I asked.

"Be my girlfriend, first," he said. I chuckled. And stuck my fingers out.

"Does this mean you accept?" he asked, excitement laced in his voice.

"Boy, give me the ring!" I said in the most dramatic tone ever, and he chuckled and put the ring on my finger. He drew me into a tight hug, his hard chest pressing onto my softness. He pulled away.

"Does this mean I can kiss you now?" he asked, and I pretended to be thinking about it deeply. I let out a chortle before our lips met, and as his lips brushed against mine, a shiver ran down my spine.

The world faded, leaving only us.

His gentle touch ignited a flame within me. As our lips danced together, every nerve came alive. And as we pulled away, the world stood still, and I realized we had gathered a crowd, and people were clapping and cheering as they took pictures of us. Aimar and I shared a glance, leading us to laugh.

"I love you," he said, and for the second time, my heart skipped a beat. I struggled to speak, making him laugh.

"You do not have to reply," he said. I blushed. This was an amazing moment for me, and though my heart had refused to agree, I was certain I felt something deeper than a liking for Aimar Ali, a feeling that makes all my problems disappear in his presence.

We spent the rest of the day at an Italian restaurant, we were already tired.

Alessandro kept us company, telling us the ancient history and secrets of Verona. Being here was truly an amazing experience, and I certainly could not wait for what was to come tomorrow.



Chapter 25



Azrah Yusuf

WE HAD BEEN BACK HOME for a long time. Aimar had already retired to his room, while I sat in mine, with a Quran open before me as I recited its verses. It was a thoughtful gesture of his to provide me with a Quran. Everything about him brought me joy, and today had awakened a new feeling within my heart.

Maybe it was time to give up on Sameer's memory, despite it feeling too early, I really needed to put myself first because I knew Sameer would want the same for me. Aimar was kind, thoughtful, and overall intentional. He had done everything to make me happy, getting me my favorite things and ensuring everything I want and need is available.

As I read my Quran, I felt a presence in the room. Looking toward the bed, Aimar was seated there, his back resting on the headboard, watching me with a smile on his face. I smiled back and read until I finished. When I finished, I got up and removed my hijab, revealing my blue sleeveless nightgown. Although I felt uneasy dressed like this around him, I tried not to think about it. I sat beside him and laid my head on his shoulder.

"Hi, *girlfriend*." He said with a playful hint in his voice as he drew me closer. *Girlfriend? He just called me his girlfriend*. Of course I was his wife, but it felt different when he called me his girlfriend, I had never been a girlfriend before. Sameer and I never gave a name to our relationship, we knew we were in love, so we simply got our parents involved and planned to get married. We wanted everything done in a *halal* way.

"You recite so beautifully," he complimented, causing me to blush. Reading the Quran in front of people was my greatest fear. Whenever I did, I'd falter and make lots of mistakes.

"Thank you," I said.

"*Suratul Mulk* was Aminah's favorite Surah," he had said. His words held a lot of emotions. He sounded very much in love with her, even the way her name rolled out of his lips was soft. A wave of jealousy hit my heart.

"Oh, that's nice. What was she like?" I asked. I felt the need to know how the woman he once loved behaved, a part of me wanted to compare us. What a foolish idea, comparing myself to a dead woman.

“She was perfect, you sometimes remind me of her,” he said. I lifted my head from his shoulder and shifted slightly back.

“What is the problem?” he asked.

“Is it because I remind you of her that you’re being nice to me?” I asked, causing him to chuckle.

"Absolutely not," he said, moving closer to me. He pulled my arm into his and wrapped his arms around it. "Aminah was nice and kind. There were some traits I loved about her. But you're different, you both are different in a beautiful way. Even my heart can tell, its rhythm has changed with you around.” He gently tucked the stray strand that had fallen on my face behind my ear.

With his index finger, he lifted my chin, and our eyes locked. As I stared into his eyes, I saw signs of longing and desire. He looked like he wanted everything of me, and I felt the same—I wanted him, utterly and completely.

“Can I kiss you?” He sought permission, this was something I loved about him. Whenever he noticed an act of his was making me uncomfortable, he’d stop and pull away. This made me feel valued and respected.

“Yes.” That was all he needed to hear. He claimed my lips fiercely, like a hungry animal. His tongue traced the curve of my lips, and I trembled, wrapping my arms around his neck and pulling him closer. Our bodies collided, and I found myself straddling him, making his grip on my waist tighten. He stops and pulls away.

“Why did you stop?” With my hand around his neck, I asked.

“I cannot control myself around you, and I do not want to do anything that you do not want.” He said, his eyes glaring at my lips. I pulled him closer. Oh God, what was happening to me? Where is all this courage coming from?

“What if I want you to do it?” I whispered.

“You do know what I’m talking about, don’t you?” he asked, and I chuckled.

“I’m not a child, Aimar.” I said.

“Have you been...?” He trailed off, his voice low and gentle. I felt a jolt of surprise, and my throat constricted, triggering a fit of choking and coughing.

“You’re my first and only kiss.” I told him and his eyes widened in shock.

“You and Sameer have never...” His voice faded.

“We have never,” I said. “You’ll be my first.” I informed him. Causing him to clear his throat. He moved closer to me and brushed his fingers across my lips.

“You’re *mine*.” His warm breath caressed my face, his hands moving slowly down my waist. He jerked me closer to him, and his lips found mine, the world imploded. Our kiss was a wildfire, raging out of control. As his tongue danced with mine in a sensual rhythm, I melted into him, our bodies entwined.

Before I could tell what was happening, he broke the kiss, and his lips brushed against my skin. My skin tingled with pleasure, and my senses came alive. A soft moan escaped my lips.

As his lips trailed kisses along my neck, a fire ignited within me. I tilt my neck, granting him access. His lips danced across my skin, gentle yet urgent.

“Your scent drives me crazy,” he whispers, his voice husky. My eyes flutter closed as his lips find the sweet spot behind my ear. A gasp escapes my lips, my pulse racing.

As we wrapped ourselves around each other, our hearts harmonized in perfect melody. His tongue traced my skin, leaving trails of kisses that set my heart aflame.

“Are you sure you want this?” he asked, and I was quick to nod. I wanted him desperately.

“I need *you*.”

That was the permission he needed, his hand slid around my waist, pulling me closer. As his hand explored my body, I felt him tremble in anticipation, his fingers traced the curves of my hips.

"You're so *beautiful*," he murmured, his voice husky with emotion. I couldn't reply, a soft moan escaping my lips. Our passion filled the night air, our moans the only sound breaking the silence. As we explored the depth of our desires, our whispers turned to sighs, our sighs to gentle gasps.

✿✿✿

As I slowly opened my eyes, the morning light streaming through the window cast a warm glow on my face. I blinked, trying to shake off the haze of sleep. As my mind replayed the memories of last night.

A smile danced on my lips.

His voice whispered in my ear, “I’ve wanted *you* for so long.” I felt a shiver run down my spine as I recalled the way his fingers traced down my skin.

I turned onto my side, my hand instinctively reaching for him on the bed, but he wasn’t there. Causing my eyes to flutter open, the room was empty, and as I looked around, I found a note glued on the top of the headboard. My head hurt terribly, and I couldn't imagine how it happened. It felt as though I'd hit it on something, but I had no recollection of doing so yesterday. As I picked up the note, I read it.

Sorry, I had to leave without saying goodbye. The man waiting outside your room will ensure you get home safely. I love you.

Aimar

The note said, and confusion washed over me. This was his handwriting, but I wondered what he meant by *'I had to leave without saying goodbye.'* Or did he

mean he'd gone to get something? No, a part of the letter said a man outside would take me home, which could only mean one thing. He'd left the country without me.

Was this possible? And how was it that I didn't know?

Tossing the thought aside, I decided to take my bath and observe *ghusl* purification bath. I had not prayed, so I had to do that first before going outside to see what was happening, which I did. I took my bath, observed *ghusl*, and when I was done, I got dressed in a lilac abaya and observed my *salah*. After I was done with my *salah*, I applied my lotion and skincare, then I applied my lipgloss and made my way outside my room.

As I emerged, I noticed a man stationed at the door, standing stiffly at attention. He had been waiting for me, and as for what the letter had said, he'd take me home.

"Good morning, madam." The man greeted me. He was Italian, dressed in a black suit.

"Good morning, where is my husband?" I asked him.

"He has left for Nigeria, something important came up. But he has asked that I take you home." The man explained, something about him seemed off, but in Aimar's note, which I was 100% sure was his handwriting, he said I should go with him.

"What was the important thing that came up?" I asked, and the man shrugged his shoulders.

"I have no idea, I'm only here to do my job and ensure you're taken home," he politely said, causing me to nod.

"Are we leaving now?" I asked.

"Whenever you want to leave, madam," he said. I saw no reason to remain here, so I asked that we leave. Though I felt very worried for Aimar, what was so important that he had to leave without telling me? I was confused, but I would be patient till I get home.

As I stepped into the sleek black SUV, the man sat in front with the driver, whom I realized I saw the other day. They drove me to the airport, where the man efficiently sorted out the formalities with the officials, ensuring a smooth boarding process.

My business-class flight afforded me comfort, but the man's thoughtful gestures—ensuring I ate and was well cared for—didn't ease my restless mind. For the entire 9 hours and 35 minutes to Nigeria, my thoughts were consumed by Aimar, anxiously wondering if he was safe.

As our flight landed in Nigeria, Lagos, the man helped me get off the flight and through the airport. The automatic sliding doors swooshed open, and I

walked through them, my eyes scanning the crowded hall. Hoping I'd find Aimar in them, but as I looked further, Ridwan walked forth instead.

"Good evening, madam," Ridwan greeted, his voice smooth. We exchanged pleasantries before he turned to the man and they conversed in hushed tones.

Abruptly, the man departed without a word, leaving Ridwan and me alone.

"Madam, the boss has asked me to accompany you to Kano," Ridwan said, his words sparking shock within me. "Your flight awaits."

"Kano? What am I going to Kano for? I thought I'd be flying to Abuja from here." I asked, unsure of what was happening. What was I going to Kano for? Has something happened at home?

"Madam, I was told nothing, I am only following the instructions of my boss." Ridwan said. Forcing me to pull out my phone and call Aimar, but when I called him, his phone was switched off, causing fear to consume my mind.

"Is he okay?" I asked, and he nodded in affirmative. "Can you call him so that we can speak?" I inquired.

"I am sorry I can't, he is busy at the moment." he informed me, I inhaled deeply.

"Okay, if it's Kano he wants me to go to, let's go." I said, and Ridwan led the way to the boarding area. After sorting out the necessary arrangements with the airport official, we sat down to wait for 1 hour and 30 minutes before boarding our flight.

When it was time to board, Ridwan assisted me, and we boarded the plane without any hassle. My mind persisted in conjuring worst-case scenarios, but I forced myself to push them aside. Maybe Aimar was waiting for me in Kano. Maybe something urgent required his attention.

I focused on positive thoughts, determined to stay optimistic until I reached Kano and uncovered the truth.



Chapter 26



Azrah Yusuf

Kano, Nigeria.

IT HAD BEEN FIVE DAYS since I left Italy and returned home to my parents without any explanation from Aimar, his family, or my family. Everyone remained silent, including my mother and Ismahan.

My father's anger intensified daily, yet he remained silent. His frustration was redirected at my mother, whom he blamed for the mess, and he'd frequently lash out at her.

My mind reeled with thoughts, but clarity eluded me. Confined to my room since my return, I struggled to speak to anyone.

Whenever I sought answers, they'd shun me. The isolation was suffocating, pushing me off the edge of sanity. With the maids constantly monitoring me and my movements restricted, I felt trapped and helpless. I couldn't even step outside to seek answers.

Aimar's phone remained unreachable, adding to my turmoil. I lost my appetite and sleep, my sanity hanging by a thread. Ismahan tried her best to avoid me, she'd only come to my room to bring me food, all she'd ever say was that everything would be fine. As for Nazeerah and Ummie, their phones were switched off, and I had no way to leave the house.

I'd even been offline lately, keeping myself occupied with my Quran recitation and studying various *duas* and *hadiths*.

This was the only way I could maintain my sanity, a lot of thoughts swirled through my mind. I needed answers, and that was what I was going to get. My mother and father had gone out for an errand, and Ismahan was finally alone in the house. So I barged into her room, and she was lying on the bed.

Shocked, she stood up. “Azrah, what are you doing here? Why didn't you just call me?” Ismahan said, as concern etched on her face as she took off her AirPods and closed up the book she was reading.

"Ismahan, what's going on? What's wrong with Aimar? Why are Mother and *Baba* keeping me from going outside and refusing to explain anything?" I sobbed, overwhelmed by pain and desperation.

My mind was racing with thoughts, and my deepest fear haunted me, that our intimate encounter had been a cruel deception, and Aimar had abandoned me without a word. Or even worse had happened.

"Azrah, nothing is going on, relax," Ismahan said, pulling me into a hug. I pushed her.

"Stop lying to me, Ismahan, stop! You know the truth, and you're keeping it away from me. I thought we were supposed to be sisters." I yelled, anger surging through me. I was tired of the lies and deception, no one wanted to tell me anything, and my father had forbidden me from going outside. He even took the measure of informing the security not to let me out. This made me worry, I didn't know what was happening.

"Azrah I cannot tell you," Ismahan said. "It's not my place to."

"Why?" I asked, and she looked away from me, her eyes filled with tears. I walked closer to her and held her arm gently in mine.

"Please, Ismahan, is Aimar dead?" I dreaded asking this, but this was all I could think about. What if he had died and no one wanted me to know?

"No, he isn't dead," she said finally, after much deliberation. "Azrah, you'll have to see this for yourself." She released her grip on my arm, picked up her iPad, and began scrolling and tapping furiously. Then she handed it to me.

My heart sank as I saw a wedding page on Instagram: **A&KFOREVER!** Aimar and Khadijah's names were boldly emblazoned on an invitation card posted on the page. The iPad slipped from my hands, and I covered my mouth in shock.

"Aimar is getting married?" I thought, incredulous. "To Khadijah?"

"This is a joke, right?" I said to Ismahan, and she shook her head, telling me it wasn't. I yelled and collapsed to the ground, overcome with emotion. I felt betrayed and used, my mind reeling with the devastating thought.

Had everything been a game to him? Was I just a pawn in his manipulation?

"And that's not all, Azrah, Aimar sent a letter in his handwriting proposing a divorce to you." My heart sank when I heard this, and my wails became louder.

The pain was unbearable—nothing compared to what I felt when I had lost Sameer. Ya Allah, was this a joke?

Just as I felt like I was drowning in my grief, my mother burst into the room. "Azrah!" she exclaimed, sweeping me into a tight, urgent hug.

"Mother, is Aimar truly getting married to another woman?" I asked, unable to still believe what I had seen. And the look on my mother's face was the reply I needed—he was truly getting married to someone else, not just anyone, but to Khadijah.

"Ismahan, why did you tell her? I told you not to tell, I wanted to do so myself." My mother yelled at Ismahan.

"Mother, she deserves to know," Ismahan said. My mother turned to me and cupped my cheeks in her hand.

"Is this a prank, mother? Did he truly send me a *talaq* in writing?" I asked my mother, and she glared at Ismahan, who looked away, but once again, her reaction was the reply I needed. It was true, he had sent me a *talaq* in writing, a divorce note.

"I didn't want you to find out this way!" My mother said, and I burst into more tears.

"How did you want me to find out then? Were you all planning on keeping this a secret forever?" I yelled. My mother looked away, tears washing her cheeks from her eyes.

Just then, my father entered the room, his gaze locking onto mine. I swiftly rose and enveloped him in a warm hug.

"Baba, is he truly getting married?" I had to ask again. My Baba's gaze shifted to Ismahan, who looked away.

"Yes, he is getting married. And I don't want you to have anything to do with him or that family ever again, they have betrayed our trust enough." My father said, anger in his eyes. This all felt like a nightmare, and the thought of having to live in the reality of it was killing me. Aimar Ali was truly getting married to Khadijah. So it is true that when men say they hate something, they actually do like it. My mind drifted to the time at the senator's business dinner when he had publicly broken up with her. Was that all a charade? Ya Allah, I couldn't breathe. This should all just become a dream.

My father and mother left the room, and Ismahan hugged me tightly as I cried. She patted my back soothingly and whispered that everything would be fine, but deep down, I knew she was wrong—everything could never be fine again.



Chapter 27



Azrah Yusuf

NO TEXT, NO CALLS, no explanation. Nothing came from Aimar, and I couldn't believe he'd treat me like this. After sharing that intimate night in Italy, I couldn't fathom Aimar ghosting me.

Ya Allah, the pain was unbearable. My mother and sister stood by me, trying to comfort me. They often brought me food, but I couldn't eat, and my mother complained dearly. I wasn't listening, though.

Ismahan often ordered my favorite snacks from Qudrah's Kitchen, and those were the only things I'd actually bring myself to eat. I'd grown thinner, my puffy and swollen eyes, from constant crying, seemed to overshadow my frail frame.

Why was all this happening to me? What had I done to deserve this? I refused to believe the *Talaq* was from him, but when my father showed me the paper, I recognized his handwriting.

On it was written, "*I divorce you, I divorce you*"—boldly, with no reason given. I read it a couple of times, trying to process it. It felt like a dream, and sometimes I'd laugh and cry simultaneously. It felt surreal, like a twisted joke where the man gets his way with the woman and disappears. I even had to make researches to ensure that a handwritten divorce counted in Islam, and when I read the words of Sharh Zad Al-Mustaqni, it said in vol. 3 p. 31 that, If a man clearly writes the word of divorce to his wife in such a way that it appears clear, it counts as a divorce even if he did not intend it as such, because it is clearly stated. Those words broke me as memories of our passion haunted me. His touch, his lips on my skin, his intimate caresses. Was it all just a game to him? Had he sought me out solely for his own pleasure?

And to make matters worse, Aimar and Khadijah's wedding invitation loomed, a constant reminder that their Nikkah, sealing their union, was mere days away—just three, to be exact. I'd been avoiding Instagram, but *TikTok* proved impossible to escape, taunting me with Khadijah's joyful bridal celebrations. As the president’s daughter, her events trended like crazy.

Six lavish events had already passed, with seven more to go. The sight of Khadijah and her bridesmaids laughing, showered in money and attention, pierced my heart like a dagger.

A knock on my door brought me out of my trance. I didn’t say anything, I didn’t want to speak to anybody right now. “Azrah.” The voice of my father called, causing me to stand up and walk over to the door, which I got open. As he stared at me, his eyes held the gravity of his emotions.

"*Baba*," I called. “Come in.” I said, and he walked in, he took a seat on my couch. It’s been years since my father entered my room. He loved to stay out of our personal space. And whenever he needed our assistance or to speak to us, he’d call out to us. And for him to be here today, it meant he had something very important to say.

“Azrah, I am sorry for everything.” My father began, tears streaming down his eyes. “I should have never pushed you into this marriage with Aimar,” he said, wiping his tears. “It was very selfish of me to do that.”

I felt sad seeing him cry, he rarely cried, and this was too much of a sight to bear, so I walked over to him and sat next to him. I took his hands in mine. “You did nothing wrong.” I told him. And he shook his head.

"I did," he said, squeezing my arm gently. "Don't worry, everything will fall into place. I'll ensure that I force that useless man, Aimar, to give you your final Talaq." My father's eyes burned with determination as he continued, his expression unyielding. "In fact, I've already made arrangements for your future. You will marry Prince Khalifa," he announced. "He claims to love you, and after your divorce from Aimar is finalized, we will arrange your marriage to him." I jerked my hands out of his grasp at the mention of Prince Khalifa.

“I am still a married woman, Baba. I cannot marry Prince Khalifa.” I said, and my father's expression morphed into a frown.

“Azrah, this is for your own good. Prince Khalifa is the next king of Kano, and marrying him will be beneficial to you.” His words only made me shake my head. His tears, I knew, were crocodile tears – fake. I can’t believe I almost fell for them.

“Is my life a game to you?” I asked, my voice trembling. “I cannot marry Prince Khalifa,” I whispered, tears pricking at the corners of my eyes.

“I am doing this for your own good,” he said, rising to his feet. “You will marry Prince Khalifa as soon as the divorce is finalized, and that is my final decision, he’ll come visit you tomorrow.” he informed me.

My fathers words tugged at my heart, making me realize that this was another part of his and the royal family’s schemes. And what scared me the most was that the final *Talaq* would mean our marriage was over, completely and irreversibly. Nothing could reunite us as husband and wife unless I married someone else, then divorced, and subsequently married Aimar again. And we all know that’s not happening on my father's watch.

The thought of a final Talaq and marrying Prince Khalifa filled me with dread. I was already in love with Aimar, and the idea of letting him go was suffocating. Yet, his betrayal stung even deeper - he was marrying Khadijah, and that hurt cut to the bone.

My father's voice cut through the air. "Everything will fall into place," my father said. "I've involved the king's men. They've visited his house several times, requesting he grant you your third *Talaq*, but that bastard refuses. I won't stand by while he marries another woman, leaving you tied to him. It's unacceptable." All I registered was Aimar's refusal to give me my final *Talaq*. The third *Talaq* would make it three, sealing the end of our marriage. My father continued to banter before he had left me alone, leaving me to my solitude and thoughts. If Aimar was refusing to grant me the third *talaq*, it could mean something, but my heart knew better.

Everything was going to end, and there would be nothing I would be able to do about it. And the idea of marrying Prince Khalifa and being tied to the Royal family, sent shivers down my spine.

Later in the evening, Ismahan entered my room. I was reciting the Quran, so I didn't pay her any attention, and she watched me intently as I recited. I could feel her eyes on me. And as soon as I was done reciting, she immediately sat next to me on the mat.

"Azrah..." she whispered, trailing off as she swallowed hard and gazed at the door. "I need to tell you something." She said.

"What is it?" I asked, my voice soft and faint.

"Azrah, the royal family, is the reason behind the divorce, they forced Aimar to write it." She whispered, scared that someone would walk in and hear us.

"I know, but how did they manage all this?" I asked, feeling confused and bewildered.

"They went to Aimar's house and coerced him into writing the *Talaq*," she said. "He didn't willingly grant it. Mother tried to fight for you, but Baba threatened to divorce her if she stood by you." Her words didn't make any sense.

"Are you saying that Aimar didn't willingly write the *Talaq*?" I asked, and a nod was my reply. But this all didn't make sense. Aimar wasn't one to bend to people's requests, he does whatever he wants.

"If you think I'm lying, go and ask mother, she'll tell you everything." Ismahan said, and with a nod and fierce determination to uncover the truth. I left for my mother's room, where I found her alone.

As I walked into the room, I found my mother seated on her bed with a prayer book in front of her. As she read, the scent of *Turaren Wuta* filled the air. My mother soon noticed my presence and turned to me.

“Azrah,” she happily called, she was excited to see me finally out of my room. I didn’t return the smile, I was only interested in knowing the truth.

“Mother, is the royal family involved in my divorce from Aimar?” I asked, she was stunned by my question, but she inhaled deeply.

“The Alis broke the contract by arranging Aimar's marriage to another woman, so your father had the royal family get involved in the situation, and when they found out, they terminated the contract and severed ties with the Ali’s, there will not be standing by Abubakar Ali during the presidential election.” My mother relayed.

Taking a deep breath, she continued. "My child, this means you can no longer be Aimar's wife," my mother said. "If we defy this order, severe consequences will befall our family. Your father cannot risk losing his position in the royal family."

I knew the royal family's power and influence all too well. My father valued his role as the king's advisor above all else. Losing that position would strip him of his status in Kano, and people would mock him as a traitor if I returned to Aimar.

This had become a battle between tradition and religion. I knew it now, my father was the type who would hide his cruelty. He would do good things so he himself would overlook the bad things he had done. Well, he never did this for me, it was all to himself.

Yet, one truth stood firm. Aimar Ali had betrayed me by marrying Khadijah without explanation. His actions were unforgivable.



Chapter 28



Aimar Ali

POWER, MONEY, AND WICKEDNESS defined my cruel father. I never believed he could stoop so low to get what he desired, until that night in Italy when my home was raided by goons from the government. What baffled me was his affiliation with the Italian government. In addition to being powerful, I hadn’t realized just how extensive his connections were until that same day.

I was fast asleep when a maid burst into Azrah's room, where we laid, side by side. A masked man loomed over us, a gun pointed at Azrah's head. To spare her the traumatic scene, I quickly arose and followed them outside.

There, I was confronted with a stunning revelation — my father had orchestrated my abduction to force my return to Nigeria. He had been trying to reach me, but I had ignored his texts and calls.

Initially, I resisted, but when my father spoke to me over the phone, his threats got everything twisted. He vowed to harm Azrah if I didn't comply. I knew his capabilities and the lengths he would go to in order to get what he wanted.

He further instructed me to arrive in Nigeria within 24 hours, warning that if I failed, Nazeerah would be forced to marry the president – a man who was four times her age. The thought was unbearable. Despite our complicated past, Nazeerah was my little sister, and I loved her dearly. My father knew my weakness, exploiting it to manipulate me.

Before I left with the men, I had a maid bring me a note and a pen, on which I wrote a message to Azrah. I couldn’t tell her anything because my father instructed me not to, and I didn't have much time. As for my phone, they seized it, not giving me the chance to make any calls for help or plan anything. My father knew me too well. And before we left for the airport, one of the men was instructed to remain with Azrah, and if I tried anything stupid, she would be killed, and it would be made to look like an accident. But if I did as they said, they would not hurt her and get her to Nigeria and back to her family safely.

When I returned to Nigeria, I was taken to my father. My father, along with Khadijah’s father, had planned to get my Nikkah done immediately and secretly. But, Khadijah always wanted an elaborate, grand wedding, she was not up for it and wanted the whole world to know that she was marrying me, especially after

the disgrace she had faced at the senators dinner party. She announced the wedding and created various social media accounts to show off to the world that she was becoming my wife. This allowed me ample time to think and devise a plan to bring my father down.

I had explained everything that happened to Azrah’s father and hoped he would understand. But to my utmost surprise, the king’s men evaded my house one night and, alongside my father, forced me to grant Azrah a *talaq* divorce. I couldn’t do it, but my father, who had Khadijah’s best interest at heart, forced me, I had no choice but to comply, if I hadn't, Azrah would have been killed. My father's ruthlessness knew no bounds, and he would have made it look like an accident. Losing her to his political games was unbearable.

I reluctantly granted two *talaqs* divorce, but when they pressured me for the third, I refused. "We'll return for it," they threatened, before departing.

Currently, I was under house arrest, constantly monitored by my father's guards to prevent escape. Although I could have easily fled, I chose to wait, prioritizing the execution of my plans.

My primary objective was to ensure Nazeerah and my mother's safe departure from the country, rendering my father powerless to harm them. And as for Aymah, I had ensured Helen had taken her to her maternal aunty here in Abuja in order to keep her safe.

Despite my father's formidable influence and malicious intentions, I was confident in my ability to outperform him. I had learned to play my cards wisely and would never underestimate him again.

I had tried to reach out to Azrah's sister, Ismahan, several times, but she wouldn’t reply to my messages. I had told her about the royal family’s role in separating us. However, she didn't respond to my messages, and even when I tried to call, she wouldn’t pick up.

Azrah was the last person I wanted to call at that moment, I couldn’t just bring myself to explain a matter as trivial as this over the phone. I needed to talk to her in person, and that was what I was going to do. Being away from her has been torture to my soul, and realizing the amount of pain she must be in was even more torture.

I wasn't going to spare my father, he cannot get away with hurting my wife. I would ensure he pays for all the pain he has put her through. This was a game, and he thought he had the ball in his court, but I am always a step ahead of my enemies.

A knock at my door broke the silence. I opened it to find Rayan standing there, holding the *kaftan* I'd wear to today's event with Khadijah. Being near her was torture, but I had to maintain the facade of helplessness.

“Have you gotten all the documents ready?” I asked Rayan, and a nod was his response.

“Very good. Have my private jet ready as well, I will not be attending today's event.” I told Rayan.

“Aimar, you’re playing with fire, how do you plan on escaping?” Rayan said, and I smirked, knowing what was to come.

“You’ll see, when I’m done, you’ll understand everything.” I explained to him. “But first, you have to call Ismahan and have her help us, she’s the only one that can get Azrah out of the house.” I told him, Rayan heaved heavily. Azrah’s father had restricted her from moving. I knew this because Ismahan had carelessly told Rayan when she had warned him not to call her ever again.

“Aimar, that girl is very rude, she told me never to call her again. I don’t think she’ll pick up my calls,” he said. Ismahan was refusing to speak to any of us, and I couldn’t possibly call her father because he was also a part of this. He wanted Azrah’s and my marriage to break off since it would help him in retaining his position as the king's advisor. They were all cunning men, after their own benefits and happiness.

“Rayan, I don’t know how you’re going to do it, but you have to help me get Ismahan to bring Azrah to me, please.” I pleaded. He nervously ran his hand through his beard a few times, then nodded resolutely. "I'll do my best," he assured me. After we had spoken on the plans on how to get Ismahan to agree to bring Azrah, I asked him to leave.

After he had departed from the house, I dressed in my *kaftan*. I left too, closely watched by my father's men. As I approached my car, Ridwan stood waiting, opening the door for me before driving me away from the estate.

Unknown to my father, Ridwan was loyal only to me. I’d manipulated events to make my father believe Ridwan had turned to his side, earning his trust. This allowed Ridwan to remain close, aiding my plans while furthering my own goals.

“Ridwan, did you speak with Farouq Armani?” I asked once we cleared the estate gates. “Have Nazeerah and my mother reached London safely?”

Ridwan turned to me, a wide smile spreading across his face. "Yes, I spoke to Farouq Armani, and everything is settled," he said, his voice filled with reassurance. "And as for your mother and sister, they're safe, I promise."

“Alright, first, we’ll visit my father,” I told Ridwan. “I have a score to settle with him.” Ridwan shook his head, and we hit the streets of Abuja.

I needed to settle some scores before I left. He couldn’t just ruin the lives of the people I loved and get away with it. I’d danced to his tunes and supported him long enough, now it was time to set things straight.

As we arrived at his mansion, I immediately hopped out of the car and asked Ridwan to wait for me outside. My father's guards were familiar with me, so they let me in. I walked into the house and made my way to his office, where I opened the door without knocking and found him seated with Khadijah's father and some other men.

"Good morning, gentlemen!" I greeted him, taking a seat on the couch in his office. They all stared at me in disbelief. I was supposed to be at Khadijah's event, which was taking place at this moment. Oh, I wish I could see the look on her face right now.

"Why aren't you at the event?" my father asked, while Khadijah's father stared at me quizzically. I smiled.

"I am not at the event because I no longer wish to marry her," I said, tapping my feet dramatically on the tiled floor. My father stood up, and so did those around him.

"Aimar, you've forgotten what's at stake right now," he said, which made me laugh. His comment left everyone in a state of confusion, and they turned to me for clarification.

"You are all pathetic!" I began. "Do you think you could threaten me, Aimar Ali, to dance to your tunes?" They didn't say a word. I walked over to my father, a smile on my face. "The game is over, *Baba*. You're going down."

My father erupted into a menacing laughter, pulled his phone from his pocket, and prepared to make a call. As I watched, his expression changed dramatically, when he heard the news on the other end of the line, and my smile grew wider.

Nazeerah and my mother were already out of the country.

"I told you, your game is over," I said. "Did you really think I was stupid enough to let you get what you wanted?" I asked. "It seems you're forgetting whose son I am—your son. That makes me just as dangerous and cunning as you."

"How dare you leave my daughter at her wedding?" Khadijah's father began, but I cut him off.

"Mr. President, I urge you to remain silent," I warned. "Otherwise, the fate that awaits my father will befall you, and worse." My words provoked my father, who grasped the neck of my *kaftan*, his grip tightening.

"How dare you betray me, Aimar?" he snarled. "After all I've done for you, I swear I'll have your wife killed." He spat the words, his eyes flashing with malice. I grasped his arm, calmly extricating it from my *kaftan*, reminding myself that, despite everything, he was still my father.

“You cannot harm my wife,” I said firmly. “And even if you manage to, I swear by God, I will ruin you.”

Just then, the sound of sirens filled the atmosphere, and my father’s gaze turned to confusion, mirrored by those around him. Soon, the police surrounded the room, and his expression shifted to shock and anger.

He glared at me, realizations dawning on his face. “Aimar, you...”

I cut him off, my voice unwavering. “Yes, I did. This is what you deserve for putting my wife, mother, and sister through pain. You’re a wicked man, and you will rot in prison.”

A police officer walked toward us,“Mr. Abubakar Ali, you’re under arrest for drug charges, embezzlement of government funds, and involvement in the rigging of the June 2018 presidential elections,” the police officer said. “Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law. Come with us now.”

My father’s gaze shifted to the president, but he quickly looked away, his eyes darting to me. It was a fleeting moment, but he understood its significance. With his tenure ending in a month, he realized I could ruin him afterwards. He faced a choice — make me an enemy or a friend. And it was clear which option was more prudent.

My father’s gaze shifted to me. “You choose a woman you barely know over me... your father?” he asked.

"Yes, that woman is my world, and there's no way I'll stand by and watch you harm her." I said. The police stepped forward, grasping his arm. He called out to the president, but the president remained silent. They took him away, and I felt a pang of pain seeing my father taken into custody. I knew I couldn’t let him go free, if I did, he’d harm my family.

As soon as my father was taken away, I turned to the president. “Ensure he remains locked up, or else...” he cut me off.

“You have my word, Aimar. I’ll ensure he never gets out if you ensure I’m safe,” he said. I smiled, giving him my word before I walked out. My name wasn’t Aimar Ali for any reason. I was the biggest player in the oil industry for a reason. My father knew that without me, he was nothing. Now that he had decided to hurt my wife, I would ruin him just as I had made him.

I soon reached outside, and Ridwan and I drove to the airport, where my private jet awaited. My plan had unfolded perfectly, and my father’s downfall had begun. I savored the thought of his demise, imagining him losing everything and being dragged through the mud.

It was a moment of vindication, one I had been waiting for. Looking back, I realize that Allah’s plan was at work, guiding the events that led to my father’s

downfall. No one who threatened Azrah's life would escape unscathed. I vowed to ensure their total destruction.

On arriving at the airport, I slipped on a nose mask to avoid drawing attention. The last thing I desired was to have my escape recorded and plastered across social media. Soon, Khadijah would realize that I'd abandoned her, left standing humiliated at the event. It was a calculated move, I wanted her to experience the same public disgrace she'd brought upon Azrah.

Let her become the laughing stock for once.

As I navigated through the crowd, my phone rang, and I checked the caller ID—it was Rayan. I picked the phone up immediately and received the call.

"Ismahan agreed to bring Azrah to you," he said. "She'll meet you both at the ice parlor where you last met."

"Perfect," I replied, thanking him. I remembered the last time I'd been at that parlor with Ismahan and Azrah. It was the very day Azrah had agreed to be my wife. And today, I would reclaim her. No one on earth could stop me. Anyone who tried to come between us would face the same wrath that my father was now enduring.

As I boarded the plane, I logged onto X and saw that my father was trending. His arrest had sent shockwaves across the country.

Yes, that's more like it. He separated Azrah and me for weeks, now he would spend years separated from his freedom, stripped of any chance at the presidency. Everything I'd gathered about his crimes had been handed over to Farouq Armani's father, my father's rival in the election—someone eager to do whatever it took to win.

Anyone who hurt Azrah would answer to me. I would do anything in my power to keep us from being separated again — anything, even if it meant playing with fire.

I loved her, and right now, she was all that I cared about.



Chapter 29



Azrah Yusuf

MOST PEOPLE IN SOCIETY mistake traditions for religion, assuming that if you're from the North, your actions represent Islam. However, just because some individuals act according to human nature doesn't mean Islam accepts it.

What was happening between Aimar and me was based on tradition and political considerations. But that still didn't justify the fact that he had abandoned me for another woman. He hadn't called in weeks, and I was left to ponder whether I was always a pawn in his and his father's game.

Now that they had lost the support of the northern district, they substituted to using the present president to be on their side in order to manipulate the north. Because they were the political party in power, and hence, the northern governors in the same party would have to dance to their tunes. This was all a game to them, and now that I wasn't needed, I was discarded like a piece of trash.

Apparently, the royal family wanted no ties connected to the Ali's since they had broken the bridge of the contract signed to bond us as family by having Aimar marry another woman.

I knew too well that this was not the end of it, there was more to come—more and more to come—that society would blame Islam and not the people trying to force their powers into causing a husband and wife to divorce.

The news outlets printed and published Aimar's and my separation on their media outlets, claiming that Muslims were to blame, and that I had left Aimar because he was marrying another woman. They blamed Islam, saying it shouldn't allow polygamy.

But they wouldn't understand - Allah had reasons for His rules.

The sound of a knock on the door distracted me from my thoughts, and as I listened closely, I heard Ismahan calling out to me, so I got up and opened the door, letting her in.

"Hi, Azrah, do you care to have some ice cream with me? Baba is not around, and mother said she has spoken to the guards." Ismahan said.

Sighing loudly, I replied, "I am not interested in going out." I told her, and she walked into my room and sat next to me.

“Azrah, I want us to talk about something very important, and I don’t want mother to hear, it's about a boy.” She demanded, catching my attention. For the first time in a while, I smiled. Realizing Ismahan liked a boy—that had never happened before.

“A boy?” I asked in order to be sure of what I had just heard, and she nodded with a blush.

“So can we go? I don’t want Mother to eavesdrop on our conversations, and you know how she gets about topics like this.” She whispered, and with a light chuckle, I gave her a nod.

“Alright, give me a minute to grab my hijab.” I said to her, and she did a dramatic happy dance. I chuckled.

I entered my closet and picked my *hijab*. I had so many clothes left in there, I hadn’t taken all of them, and I noticed that Ismahan had picked some of my clothes for herself.

Little sisters, right?

“Let’s go.” I said to her, and with that, we went downstairs and headed outside to where her car was parked. As we hopped in, we drove past the gates, and security remained quiet.

As we drove down the streets of Kano, I stared outside the window. It was sunny today, and it illuminated the towering mosques and Islamic architecture, blending harmoniously with modern buildings. Kano was beautiful, with vibrant ancient traditions and culture.

As we parked in front of the ice cream parlor, Ismahan pulled out her card and ensured she was parked well. After that, we both got down from the car and made our way inside. It was very empty, and no one was in there. Not even the owner of the parlor and its staff were present, and as I turned around, Ismahan wasn’t behind me.

As I looked toward the door, my heart stuttered as Aimar Ali emerged from the shadows, his piercing gaze locking onto mine like a magnet. Without warning, he swept me into a fierce embrace, his arms enveloping me like a vice. I remained paralyzed, time suspended, before adrenaline surged through my veins. With a burst of strength, I shoved him away, breaking free from the intoxicating hold of his arms.

“Don’t you dare ever touch me, Mr. Ali, don’t you dare.” I seethed at him, anger surging through my soul. How dare he think he could touch me after all he had put me through?

“Azrah I can understand why you’re angry, but please hear me out and I’ll explain everything....” I cut him off.

“Shut up, I do not want to hear anything you have to say, not an explanation and not your lies.” I exclaimed, boiling with anger. “How dare you, Aimar? You used me and dumped me like I was nothing to you, only for me to find out that you were getting married to another woman on social media.” I yelled, tears streaming down my eyes.

"Azrah, please listen to me. I did everything I did for a reason, if you can just calm down, I’ll tell you why I did what I did.” He said, he tried to touch me, but I pushed his arm off me.

“I do not want to listen to your lies.” In a bit of a calm voice, I blurted out. “I loved you, you made me fall in love with you, and then you deceived and left me confused in another country, you are wicked, just like your father.” Tears poured down my eyes as I said.

“Azrah, I never deceived you, and I meant every single thing I said to you that night. I love you, Azrah, and being without you has been torture to my soul, every time I spent away from you, it killed me beyond words could explain.” He said, and I laughed, I wouldn't allow him to easily deceive me with his sugar-coated mouth.

“You say love me, and you sent me a *Talaq* divorce in writing, that isn’t love, Mr. Ali, if you truly loved me, you would have fought for me.” I said. “You wouldn’t have written the *Talaq* or accepted the offer to marry Khadijah.” I said. Aimar’s eyes filled with tears, and they fell. A part of me felt moved by them, I had never seen him cry.

I was not willing to be weak, I also had feelings, and he had hurt them as well.

“I promise, all I did was for our sake, to protect you. Because I love you, I need you, Azrah.” He said, and I shook my head.

“You do not abandon those you claim you love without an explanation, life doesn’t work that way, Mr. Ali.”

He moved closer to me and grabbed my arm. I tried to pull it away, but his grip was so firm. “You can yell at me as much as you want, but please do not call me Mr. Ali, it kills me when you do,” he said, forcing me to jerk my arms away from his grip.

He moved back and began to speak, his voice laced with emotion."I have loved you from the moment I saw you in the garden, reciting the Quran," he said, breathlessly. "I have loved you at the stairs, where I'd wait eagerly to catch a glimpse of your face, just to see you smile at me. Your devotion to Allah has captivated me, you are everything I dream of and desire. The thought of losing you would not only shatter me but haunt my soul for eternity."

As he spoke, tears streamed down his face, his eyes shining with sincerity. Yet, I remained resolute, unwilling to listen. I was determined not to let my parents' marriage crumble because of someone who didn't value me.

“But I don’t love you anymore. You’ve lost my heart, and you have only yourself to blame for that.” I said, moving away from him. In a low tone, I added, “My marriage is being arranged to Prince Khalifa soon.” His eyes flashed with pain, as if he’d been stabbed with a knife.

“Give me my final *Talaq* within 24 hours, or pronounce it now and spare me the stress.” My voice was firm, and his eyes darted in shock. I’d never seen him look so vulnerable before, and it broke my heart. Yet, I stood firm.

"Azrah,” he called my name, and I cut him off.

“Save your words, I give you twenty-four hours, or else I’ll take the necessary step by dragging your ass to court.” With that said, I pushed past him and walked out of the ice cream parlor with a heavy heart, and he followed me, yelling my name. I didn't turn around but I walked to the car instead, where I found Ismahan seated with curious eyes.

As soon as I sat down, I yelled at her, urging her to drive me home, my anger and frustration boiling over as I ignored Aimar's persistent calls.



Chapter 30



Aimar Ali

THERE'S A DIFFERENCE between the pain of losing someone one loves to death and the pain of losing someone to one's own mistakes. These two kinds of pain proved distinct, and right now, I'd lost Azrah due to my stupidity.

My wish was that I had a way of telling her everything that happened, but I was careless and foolish. Now, she wanted nothing to do with me. Her sudden revelation of her marriage to Prince Khalifa pierced my heart like a dagger. I knew the royal family's involvement would lead to this, but granting her the final *talaq* divorce was unthinkable – it would only happen over my dead body. Azrah is my life, my world, and my soul. Would I let her go without a fight? No, I was willing to fight for her love. As I'd said earlier, I'd die at her feet to make things right.

As I watched her car drive out of the premises, my heart clenched, and an unbearable pain caused me to clutch onto my chest. Ridwan immediately ran to me and held me up by my shoulder.

“Are you okay, sir?” he asked, and as I wiped the tears from my eyes, I nodded ‘yes,’ telling him I was doing well.

“Ridwan, we need to visit the royal palace. I need to ask them to put a stop to this,” I said. I could see it in her eyes that she still loved me, but something held her back. Her anger was evident, but it wasn't the only thing driving her emotions.

There was something else.

After uttering that statement, Ridwan helped me do the car because I was still feeling the pain in my chest.

Was this how heartbreak really was? I had never experienced it before, so this was new, and I do not like it. It was like being stabbed in the chest a million times.

Ridwan drove me to the royal palace, and as we drove by, I muttered *Dua’s* to Allah, begging him to help me get my *wife* back. I am nothing without her, and my soul and heart were aware of this, the ache being unbearable.

I had been in love before, it was a beautiful feeling. But this, with Azrah, was entirely different. I felt like a new man around her, and it proved reasonable to remember the saying that a man would do anything to keep a woman he

loved. I was willing to do anything in my power to ensure that my wife didn't leave me. I loved her so much, so much that it would hurt to think of letting her go.

As we parked in front of the gates of the royal palace, a guard came forth, and as soon as he saw me, his demeanor changed. Everyone around here knew me, as I frequently visited with my father to discuss his plans to run for office of the president.

“I am here to see the king, please let us in.” I said to the guard, having my windows down.

The guard's expression was firm. “We've received instructions to deny any member of your family entry into the palace. I apologize, but you'll need to leave.”

I knew better than to argue, they wouldn't budge, and causing a scene would only bring trouble to Azrah and her family. I instructed Ridwan to drive us away, my mind already racing with alternative plans to reach Azrah and her family. Visiting her in her house was out of the question—her father would never grant me access. I didn’t know what to do, there was no other way to go—not her home, not the royal family.

I decided to call Rayan to help me out, I needed to know how I would be able to stop all this from happening and put an end to everything. I needed my wife back, and I was willing to take every necessary step to achieve that.

Rayan assured me he would get me the details of how to get the royal family to stop whatever they were doing. I counted on him to help me, so I returned to my house in Kano to rest. My chest and head were in pain, and I assumed I needed to sleep because I had rarely been sleeping, which actually could be the cause of the headache and chest pain.

As I returned to my house, I slept for a while, hoping to feel better when I woke up. But, when I woke up, the pain intensified, but it wasn’t something I couldn’t endure. It was time for *salah*, so I performed *wudu* and prayed. I asked Allah in *Sujood* to please help me get my wife back. I couldn’t let her go. I prayed to Allah in tears, asking for one person, my Azrah. After I prayed, I took my phone to check whether Rayan had messaged me, but instead, I got a message from Ismahan. And it read:

Al-Murooj District, Eastern Ring Road, Villa 888, Riyadh 11473.

Go there, you’ll find Haidar Jega, the King of the North. He can put a stop to this.

The message read, The King of the North was the leader of the entire northern district, and he was a young man just like me. I have met him only twice. And if he truly was the only person that could put a stop to this and get

me my wife back. I was more than willing to visit him and have him help me put a stop to this disgusting culture of forcing a woman from the royal family to break ties with her husband just because they had broken ties with the family. It was an insane tradition, and it needed to be stopped. The idea that women must always be the ones to sacrifice their lives was infuriating, and I felt compelled to challenge this notion. This wasn't Islam. This was a fight not just for Azrah and me, but for every woman in the north.

I swiftly instructed Ridwan to prepare my jet for departure. Simultaneously, I notified Rayan to have my personal assistant coordinate with the Saudi authorities to secure the necessary travel clearance. Remarkably, everything was arranged within 15 minutes, and I received approval to travel.

As that was sorted out, Ridwan and I drove to the airport, where my private jet was ready for takeoff. I immediately boarded the jet, and we flew to Saudi Arabia. The journey lasted 9 hours and 36 minutes, and all through it, I couldn’t bring myself to sleep or do anything, I was anxious, and the only thing on my mind was landing safely.

Our plane soon descended onto the runway, the gleaming light of King Khalid International Airport Riyadh stretched out before me. I felt a mix of excitement and relief wash over me.

“Beginning descent, sir.” The voice of the pilots came through the intercom.

The jet touched down smoothly, and I felt a jolt of the wheels making contact with the runway.

“Welcome to *Riyadh*, sir.” The pilot announced.

I instantly stood up, stretching my legs. Ready to get down from the plane, and as I descended along with Ridwan, I instantly made a call, and one of the airport officials was quick to welcome us. We proceeded to immigration, where we did our clearance. We bypassed the main terminal, heading instead to the exclusive VIP lounge for private jet passengers.

As I arrived there at the longue, a staff member greeted us and offered us seats. I smiled, returning their greetings.

“*Assalamualaikum,* sir.” Another staff member greeted us, offering us coffee, and I returned the greeting smiling. As we drank our coffee, Ridwan efficiently handled the formalities.

And within a few minutes, we were cleared to proceed.

As we walked through the crowd, my chest clenched even further, and this time the pain was unbearable and a groan escaped my lips. I clutched my chest, gasping for air. The room spun around me like a vortex.

“What’s happening?” I tried to speak, but my voice was barely audible.

Agony wracked through my body, radiating from my chest to my arm. My vision blurred. And suddenly, my legs gave out, and I crumpled to the ground, and sounds around me faded.

“Azrah,” I whispered, before my eyes closed.



Chapter 31



Azrah Yusuf

AS SOON AS I ARRIVED home, I stepped into the bathroom, turned on the shower, and burst into tears. I cried harder than I ever had before. I longed to hug him and tell him how much I loved him, but I couldn't. Not with the Royal Family involved in my father's decision. I felt helpless, unable to change my circumstances or forgive him for everything he had put me through. As the haunting image of Aimar trailing behind me, his desperate pleas for me to listen echoing in my mind, danced before my eyes, my tears fell harder.

But the decision was final: my father would force him to issue the final *talaq*, ending our marriage once and for all. If he refused, my father would take him to court.

Feeling like I had cried enough, I performed my *wudu* ablution and walked out of my bathroom. I laid out my prayer mat and began to pray. As I bowed my head in *sujood*, my forehead pressing against the ground, I burst into bitter tears. I poured out my heart to Allah, sharing all my problems and hoping for a miracle solution. But deep down, I knew it was futile. Their decision was final, and Aimar would have to divorce me, no matter what.

My life felt like it was shrouded in a haze, my body numb and unresponsive. For two days, I barely left my room, unable to face the world outside. My mother and sister tried their best to stay by my side, offering comfort and support, but I couldn't bring myself to talk to anyone. I had little appetite, and food became a mere necessity. Sleep eluded me, and I relied on sleeping pills to find some rest. I'd lost all interest in social media and couldn't even be bothered to check my phone. In those dark moments, my only solace was Allah and the Quran.

As my door creaked open, I remained calm, lying on my bed, unbothered by Ismahan's worried voice. "Azrah, Baba wants to see you downstairs," she informed me. I didn't respond, so she called out to me again. "I'll be right there," I replied simply.

I heard the door close, and then I got up, picked up my hijab, and put it on before heading downstairs. As I entered the living room, I took a slight step back, surprised to see Prince Khalifa staring at me. My father was nowhere to be seen.

With a slight courtesy, I greeted him, "*As-salamu alaykum*, *Yarima* Prince."

"*Wa alaikumussalam*, Princess Azrah," he replied. His formal greeting brought me back to reality, but my mind couldn't help but drift to Aimar - the way he would affectionately call me *"princess*."



"MAY WE SIT AND TALK?" he asked. I nodded, and we sat down, with a considerable distance between us. He cleared his throat, breaking the awkward silence. "I brought you a gift," he said, his eyes fixed on me.

I remained unresponsive, neither acknowledging his words nor meeting his gaze. Undeterred, he got up and placed the gift on the center table.

"How are you, Azrah?" he asked, his tone soft and inquiring. I didn't reply, instead offering a simple, silent nod.

After a moment of silence, he spoke again. "The king's men have tried to reach out to your ex-husband, but he isn't responding. Have you been able to contact him?" His words prompted me to lift my head, my gaze meeting his for the first time. His presence irritated me, and the casual way he referred to Aimar as my "*ex-husband*" ignited a fierce anger within me.

Composing myself, I asked bluntly, "What are you here for?" My question raised his eyebrows in surprise. "I am here to ask for your hand in marriage," he said, his voice steady. "I want to marry you."

His words were so absurd that I couldn't help but laugh. "Are you out of your mind?" I asked, my irritation and frustration boiling over.

"I beg your pardon," he replied, his expression taken aback. I shook my head, incredulous. "I am still a married woman, and you're sitting here telling me you want to marry me? Is that really acceptable to you?"

My words had a visible effect on him, and he rose to his feet.

"I didn't come here to be insulted, Azrah," Khalifa said, his tone dignified. "I came as a noble man to seek your hand in marriage." I couldn't help but laugh again at his audacity. He must be out of his mind.

"I'm still a married woman, Khalifa," I reminded him firmly. "My husband has yet to divorce me. Please, I advise you to leave my house immediately." With that, I stood up and headed upstairs, leaving him behind. What a stupid fool.

I knew I was taking a risk by speaking to him so bluntly, but I had to make my position clear. It was unacceptable in Islam for a man to propose to a married woman. And yet, here was Khalifa, disregarding all propriety.

Pushing the annoyance aside, I walked into my room and lay down, feeling exhausted and irritated. The silence was short-lived, as night began to fall, my

father burst into my room, his presence jolting me upright.

"How dare you speak to Prince Khalifa the way you did?" he thundered, his question hanging in the air. I looked away, biting back a retort, not wanting to respond to him in annoyance. But I was scared – scared that he was crossing a line, and I might just lose my temper.

“I don't want to get married, Baba. I'm still married to Aimar,” I said firmly. My father walked further into my room, his anger felt. “Aimar Ali, that useless man?” he questioned, his tone dripping with disdain.

I clenched my fists, struggling to control my anger. “He's not useless, Baba,” I said softly, my voice trembling. My father stared at me, dumbfounded.

“I don't care what you think about him,” he said, his voice cold. “I'll have him send the final *Talaq* and sever all ties between the two of you.” He paused, his eyes narrowing. “Get ready tomorrow; we're going to court, and you'll file for a divorce. Got it?” he asked, his tone brooking no argument.

With tears filling my eyes, I nodded, and he walked out. I had considered filing for *Khula'*, but I had hoped to avoid it. Now, with the way things were unfolding, I felt I had no choice.

A surge of pain shot through my heart, and I lay down on my bed, tears streaming down my face. I had told Aimar I wanted a divorce, but the truth was, I didn't mean it. I wanted him and Aymah in my life.



Chapter 32



Azrah Yusuf

WE HAD JUST RETURNED from court with my Baba, who had handled all the court applications for my *Khula* divorce, which I, as the wife, had initiated. My father was ecstatic, having taken care of everything while I watched and spoke only when necessary. I, on the other hand, felt weak and helpless.

As a northern girl from a royal family, I knew firsthand the life of a northern woman. What sickened me was how some people hid behind the facade of Islam, breaking its rules and causing the world to blame Muslims and label us with derogatory names. The Quran's true teachings were ignored by some individuals in the north, who believed the religion applied only to women. Men, they felt, were perfect and above the law, with the power to dictate the lives of women.

Forced marriages and pressured divorces were commonplace. Women were expected to marry someone they didn't love and then divorce them when things went wrong. And when divorced they are still tagged as the problem. This was unacceptable, but I struggled to speak out. My mother's marriage was at stake, and a divorce would be a disgrace for a woman of her age and background in the north. Coming from a noble family, this would affect my unmarried sister, Ismahan, in the future. Many men would label her just like her mother. People would conveniently forget that my father also bore responsibility for the divorce, instead blaming the women as if they were always at fault.

I hated how people blamed the woman when a marriage ended. The north had a backward mentality, and I despised it.

As my father pulled up in front of a familiar gate, I turned to stare at him, confused. “Why are we at the palace?” I asked, but he didn't respond. He simply drove in and parked in the parking lot.

“You're going to apologize to the King and Prince Khalifa,” my father declared. I took a deep breath, struggling to control my anger. “Apologize to him for what, exactly?” I asked, using a calculated tone to avoid sounding rude.

“Azrah, you're getting on my nerves,” my father snapped. “Now, get out of the car. Let's go in and do as I've said.” He left no room for argument as he stepped out of the car.

Having collected myself and adjusted the veil on my head, I got out of the car with my head low, reeling with thoughts. We approached the entrance of the palace. As we approached, I heard the guards hailing my father in Hausa, but I completely ignored them and walked into the palace.

As soon as we walked in, my father bowed in respect, and I followed suit, greeting the king. Although our eyes didn't meet, I heard him acknowledge my presence.

“How are you, my daughter?” The king asked, his eyes warm with concern. I raised my head to meet his gaze, offering a subtle smile. “I am fine, your highness,” I replied, my tone calm.

“I am sorry to hear about what your husband did to you,” the king said. “He even had the audacity to come to the palace, but the guards didn’t let him in.” Aimar had come to the palace? What had he come here for? Could he have come to ask for their help? My mind reeled with thoughts.

My father nudged my shoulder, prompting me to speak. “Thank you, your highness,” I said.

Just then, Prince Khalifa walked into the room, his gaze meeting mine, and an instant smile spreading across his face. My father nudged my shoulder, prompting me to greet him. "Good afternoon, Prince Khalifa," I said.

"Good afternoon, uncle," Prince Khalifa greeted my father, and they exchanged pleasantries. He turned to me and said, "Hi, Princess Azrah." I remained silent, ignoring his greeting. Which earned me a disdainful glare from my father, I shrugged it off.

After a moment of awkward silence, his father intervened. "Please, you are all welcome to take a seat," the king said. My father, Prince Khalifa, and I sat down, with my father positioned between us, facing the king.

“My king, we are here to discuss Prince Khalifa and Azrah's wedding, which will take place after the divorce from Aimar is finalized, of course.” My father's words sparked a mixture of irritation and aggravation within me, prompting me to shake my head, but I remained silent.

“But firstly, Azrah has something to say,” my father said, nudging my shoulder once again. I swallowed hard, my heart racing. Without meeting the king's gaze, I spoke in a subdued tone.

"I am sorry, your highness, for my behavior toward Prince Khalifa." The king's expression softened.

"It's fine," he said graciously. "And as for the wedding, it will be held after the divorce is finalized." The king declared.

After further conversation, which I tuned out, they concluded their discussion and we departed for our home. Throughout the journey, I remained

silent, refusing to speak to my father. As we arrived home, I got out of the car and headed straight to my room, without sparing him a glance or a word.

When I got to my room, I observed my *salah* and then lay down to take a much-needed nap to clear my head. However, my rest was short-lived, as a phone began to ring. I checked my bed and realized it was Ismahan's phone. With a hiss of annoyance, I got up and headed to her room but I didn’t find her there, and as I walked out of her room, I found a maid cleaning.

I asked the maid where Ismahan was, and she informed me that Ismahan was with my mother. I made my way to my mother's room. As I approached the door, I heard them speaking in hushed tones.

"I think he's dead... how do we tell her?" someone whispered.

"Who is dead?" I demanded, bursting into the room. They turned around, looking startled.

"Azrah, you're home," Ismahan said, smiling nervously. "We didn't even notice you were at the door."

"Who is dead?" I pressed, worry coursing through me.

My mother hesitated before speaking. "Aunty Inuwa's cat, Tiny, has passed away." I gasped, surprised.

"Ismahan, I told you not to take that cat," I scolded, turning to my sister. She shook her head.

“I'll buy her another cat, she won't notice,” Ismahan said, and I shook my head in disapproval. Ismahan was incredibly irresponsible, and I wondered why Aunty Inuwa had ever entrusted her with the cat.

“*Ke kike sani,* that's on you!” I said, passing her phone to her. She collected it.

I turned to my mother. “Azrah, how did it go at the court?” she asked. I shook my head, feeling a pang of sadness.

“Baba applied for the *Khula* Divorce,” I said. My mother smiled reassuringly.

“Allah will fix everything, and I trust that Aimar will do the right thing, because I know he loves you immensely.” Her voice trembled as she spoke, weighing heavily on my heart, and I forced a smile.

“Also, Azrah, tomorrow we will have to attend Aunty Inuwa's daughter's naming ceremony,” she said. I nodded and, with a faint smile, walked out.

As I reached my room, I wiped away the tears that had fallen on my cheeks. I missed Aimar immensely and wished I hadn't spoken to him the way I did that day.

But fate had already sealed our destiny, and it was time to bid a final farewell to the man who once held my heart. I whispered Aimar Ali's name to myself, the

sound echoing with a mix of sadness.



Chapter 33



Azrah Yusuf

"ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE comfortable?" my mother asked me, for the hundredth time today.

Finally after reassuring her that we were alright, she left us. We were at Aunt Inuwa’s daughter's naming ceremony event, and she kept on checking up on me and Ismahan. My father didn’t want me to attend the event, but my mother persuaded him, telling him it would help me get my mind off my problems.

As I glanced through the crowds of the event, my eyes landed on my cousin, Firdausi, and as she took calm strides toward us, Ismahan whispered something to my ear that caused me to struggle not to laugh. “Why is this *amebo* gossip coming over here?” Ismahan mumbled.

Firdausi could clearly tell that we didn’t want her here, but that's none of her business, her true business was in gossiping and trying to get information out of me. And as for the people at the event, who were mostly my aunties and cousins, they all stared at me with pity and talked among themselves as I passed through the crowd.

“Azrah and Ismahan.” Firdausi beamed happily at us, and without an invitation, she took a seat before us.

“Firdausi, how are you?” I said, trying my best to sound nice and welcoming.

“I'm fine,” She replied. “And you, how are you doing?” she asked, her eyes filled with a deep sadness for me. “I’m sorry about what happened with your ex-father-in-law, who could have imagined his own son would disgrace him like that.” She said, and Ismahan and I shared a confused gaze.

“What did his son do?” I asked, confusion gnawing at me. She looked at us, confused. And then, she brought out her phone.

“Don’t tell me you do not know that your ex-father-in-law has been arrested by the police for embezzling government funds and having a hand in numerous crimes." She declared, scrolling through her phone, as she finally showed me a clip of Aimar’s father being arrested and surrounded by police and the press. His head was bent down in shame as he navigated through the crowds.

I had no idea about how this happened.

“When did this happen?” I asked, surprised to the core. Ismahan didn’t look as shocked as I was and kept on swallowing hard, this was what she’d often do

when she knew something and was hiding it.

“A week ago.” She said, “Don’t tell me you’re not aware of this, his son Aimar Ali exposed his father's crime to the Armani family, and they used it to their own advantage, everybody in Nigeria is aware of this.” She asked, raising a brow at me in confusion.” How come you’re not aware?”

“Firdausi, that’s enough, you can leave now,” Ismahan said, her voice rather rude and regal. She was hiding a secret from me, of which I must get to the root — the very bottom. Firdausi, with a rude glare, got up and left.

I turned to Ismahan with furrowed brows, asking her to speak. “Ismahan, did you know about this?” I asked, and she nodded.

“Yes, I did, it was on the same day Aimar had come to Kano to beg you.” She said, “Azrah, you need to forgive him, he did all this for a reason, and Rayan told me everything.” With that said, she began to relay everything to me: the event in Italy, Nazeerah and her mother's sudden departure from the country, and the alarming threat from Aimar's dad - that if Aimar didn't marry Khadijah, he would kill me. I was stunned, feeling utterly foolish and blindsided.

“Why are you just telling me this now?” I asked, angry and petrified.

“Baba threatened us not to, Azrah Baba does not care about anything but his position, money, and power. And that’s not all he has made us keep from you.” She said, she looked away, tears sweeping her cheeks down from her eyes.

“What else have you kept from me?” I asked, my heart pounding at an abnormal rate.

“I was only trying to help, so I sent Aimar Cousin Haidar’s home address in Saudi Arabia, knowing he’d be able to put a stop to all this. But upon arrival, Aimar had a heart attack and has been hospitalized for a week.” With tears streaming down her eyes, she said, and my hands covered my mouth as I muffled my sobs. I didn’t want to call for attention, so I pretended like nothing was wrong. But my heart was wrenched in pain.

How could my father be so wicked and keep this from me? It was unacceptable, all because of his thirst for power and money.

“Oh God, our fathers are wicked!” I muttered to myself.

I couldn’t control my anger, so I stood up and walked to my mother and asked that we return home. She asked what was wrong, and I told her I was feeling uneasy, which she immediately took as a reason for us to leave. Ismahan drove us out of the event and back home, and as we returned home, I found my father seated in the living room.

“How could you keep this from me?” I asked my father as soon as I stood before him, he looked very confused, and so did my mother. Who stood at the side of the door along with Ismahan and watched everything unfold.

“Keep what? And why are you speaking to me in that tone?” My father asked, shocked and outrightly confused. He could have never imagined that I would speak to him this way.

“You knew my husband had a heart attack and you kept it from me, all because of what, Baba?” I asked, tears streaming down my eyes.

“Young lady, respect yourself and keep your tone down, I’m still your father.” My father said, “And I have every right to make a decision about your life, and you will not get back with Aimar Ali, and that is final.” My father added, his index finger pointed at me.

“This is not what Allah has commanded you to do as my father, and you have no right to separate me from my husband,” I said to him. I was tired of him hiding behind the facade of Islam, using it to justify making decisions on my behalf. I had tried my best to obey his every wish, but this was too much.

“Husband? A man who left you to marry another woman is who you’re calling your husband?” he asked and shook his head. "Pathetic."

"A man who tried to protect me by giving me up, driven by the love he had for me—that's who I'm talking about," I said. "I'll go to Saudi Arabia to see my husband, and you can't stop me this time." I declared to my father.

He stared at me in shock and disbelief, his gaze shifting to my mother afterwards.

“Hajiya, you'd better speak to your daughter!” My father said, “Or else..." and my mother cut him off.

“Or else what, Alhaji? you’ll throw me out and divorce me, then so be it. I am tired of your constant insults and threats. I will not let you destroy my daughter's life all because of your stupid position,” My mother said, her index finger pointed at my father.

“So this is how it’s going to be, right?” My father asked, and my mother said ‘yes.’

My mother's words cut through the air, her voice trembling with resolve. “I'll take my daughters and leave. I'm exhausted by your selfishness, and your pretense of caring about them when, in reality, the only person you care about is yourself.” I had never seen her like this before - standing up to my father, her voice unwavering. Their relationship had always been strained, but I never realized it had reached this breaking point.

My father's gaze shifted between Ismahan and me, his eyes cold and unyielding. “If you both leave this house with your mother,” he warned, “consider yourselves dead to me.”

“Then so be it,” I said, leaving him dumbfounded. I was tired of putting his happiness and aspirations above mine, I needed to think about myself, as well.

My mother instructed Ismahan, “Call Cousin Adnan to arrange a flight for us to Saudi.” Ismahan swiftly pulled out her phone and dialed Cousin Adnan, my mother's nephew - the son of her sister. Fortunately, he owned a private jet, always on standby in Kano.

My father watched all this happen before him, after we had finalized everything with Cousin Adnan. A car was sent to pick us up and take us to the airport and when we got to the airport, all the formalities were handled by Cousin Adnan’s personal assistant, and we boarded the plane to Saudi Arabia.

The only thing on my mind was Aimar, and I couldn’t wait to see him. The thought of him being in that situation scared the crap out of me.

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Saudi Arabia, Riyadh.

AS SOON AS OUR PLANE touched down in Saudi Arabia, we disembarked and met Cousin Haidar at the immigration office. All the formalities had already been taken care of, and he had arranged for a car to take us to our destination.

"Did he happen to contact you, Haidar?" I asked, turning to him as he sat beside me. Ismahan and my mother had taken refuge at his house, and they deemed it best for me to visit Aimar alone for now.

“His personal assistant contacted me as soon as he regained consciousness, I was skeptical about going to visit them, because I thought it wasn’t important.” He informed me, his voice curt.

“Did you at least speak to him?” I asked, and he shook his head, telling me ‘no.’

"I apologize," he said. "I wasn't informed that he was your husband. I was only told that my assistance was needed to address an issue in the Kano Royal District." My mind raced with worry about Aimar, wondering what dire situation he was in.

As we approached the Riyadh Healthcare Institute (RHI), our car immediately found a place to park, so Haidar’s bodyguard instantly got the door for us. And, as we walked into the hospital together, all eyes fell on Haidar. The staff greeted him as we walked by, and we halted in front of the reception desk. The receptionist promptly stepped forward. She was an Arab woman, dressed in scrubs.

“Good morning, Dr. Haidar. Do you have an appointment here today?” They looked familiar with each other.

Haidar was a medical doctor, so that clearly explained the familiarity.

“No, I don't,” Haidar said. “I'm here to see a patient, Aimar Ali.” She continued typing on the computer in front of her, then paused, pulled out a file, and began reviewing it.

"Aimar Ali is in room 32," the receptionist said, a gentle smile worn on her face. "Take the elevator to the third floor, and you'll find his room on the left." She informed us, and with that being said, we made our way toward the elevator, and Haidar tapped on the buttons. I nervously fiddled my hands, and he noticed.

“Everything is going to be fine, I promise to make them pay for this, they have no right to try and separate you both over a silly thing as stupid as a political office.” Haidar said, his words soothing that I felt so assured that everything would be fine.

As soon as we reached our stop, the elevator door opened, and we both walked out. A sense of anxiety washed through me at the thought of seeing him again. My heart beat accelerated abnormally, and my chest clenched at the thought of seeing him after everything we had been through.

I was excited and anxious all at once. Standing in front of the room, Haidar twisted the doorknob open and entered first. And then I followed, and my eyes landed on him. He was fast asleep, and Nazeerah sat next to him.

The moment she saw me, she got up and enveloped me in a hug, and we both cried. “Azrah.” She called, and I held her firmly.

“It’s okay, he’s going to be fine.” I said as we broke the hug. I walked over to him and placed my hand on his forehead and brushed it calmly. He was deep asleep and looked at peace, *my Aimar*. I felt so bad for not listening to him when he came to apologize, looking back, I realize I acted thoughtlessly.

“What happened to him?” I heard Haidar ask Nazeerah, “What did the doctor say?”

“He got a heart attack.” Nazeerah revealed.

“A heart attack? He’s too young for a heart attack, what could have been the cause?” Haidar asked, looking very confused.

“They ran some tests, and while there were some underlying conditions, the primary trigger appeared to be emotional stress.” Nazeerah said, and Haidar shook his head in acknowledgment.

“I see, it must have been triggered by his separation from Azrah,” Haidar said. “Who is the doctor in charge of him?”

"Dr. Abdulwaheed Adam is the doctor in charge," she informed Haidar. With that, he excused himself and walked out, saying he needed to speak with the doctor before he left.

I turned to Aimar, studying his features calmly. His pallor and gaunt appearance struck me, and tears pricked at the corners of my eyes. Nazeerah

enveloped me in a warm hug.

"This is all my fault," I whispered, overcome. She tightened her hold, offering comfort.

"It's not your fault," she said softly. "He's out of danger now, he's just resting. You'll have plenty of time to talk everything through and work things out."

She reassured me, and we spent the rest of the day together, catching up on each other's lives and sharing laughter. I even poked fun at her marriage to the president, playfully teasing her until we both giggled, unwilling to stop.

For a moment, everything was going on well, and I was convinced that it would stay that way.



Chapter 34

Aimar Ali

WHEN I OPENED MY EYES, the first sight that befell me were rays of sunlight, perching on the curtains. I struggled to sit up, and as I looked around, I found Nazeerah praying at a corner in the room. I heaved softly and laid my head on the headboard.

Imagining I had a heart attack was crazy, it all began with the chest pain, and the next thing I knew, I fell to the ground and woke up on a hospital bed with Nazeerah by my side, along with my mother. I was overjoyed to find them by my side.

As soon as I woke up, I asked if they'd spoken to Azrah, but they both shook their heads.

“No,” they chimed in unison. My father had confiscated their phones, effectively cutting off their contact with Azrah. Nazeerah, in her typical absent-minded fashion, hadn't memorized Azrah’s number.

I shut my eyes slowly, trying to enjoy the breeze that blew through the window, but suddenly I heard Azrah’s voice, but I loved to think I was hallucinating, until I felt a touch on my shoulder that jolted me to my senses.

And, as I opened my eyes, Azrah stood before me, staring at me with teary eyes. She was wearing a hijab and had been the one observing *salah*. I had mistaken her for Nazeerah because I knew the hijab belonged to her.

“Azrah?” I called, and she gave a slight head shake in tears and cupped my cheeks, her hands brushing briskly past my beards.

“I’m here, and I am sorry for putting you in this situation.” She cried, and as I tried to sit up, I groaned in pain.

“No, don’t apologize.” I said, crying along with her. “You didn’t cause any of this, you can never do any wrong in my eyes,” I said, and she engulfed me in a tight hug.

"Aimar, I love you so much, and I want to spend the rest of my life with you, forever and ever," she whispered, breaking our hug. Her lips found mine, and she kissed me tenderly. As we parted, she pressed her lips to my forehead in a gentle, loving gesture.

“Being without you has been torture,” I said, grabbing her hand and placing it over my heart. “I never want to know the taste of life without you, never.” she

gently wiped away my tears, planting soft kisses on both my eyelids. Her touch was incredibly tender and loving.

“You’ll never, because I’m never leaving you, Aimar. I love you so much, Aimar Ali. Without you, I’m incomplete, and I promise from now henceforth nothing will ever come between us, nothing.” She assured me, her voice trembling with emotion. I wiped away her tears and pulled her into a deep, comforting kiss. As we savored the moment, the sound of laughter and chatter drifted in from the doorway.

We broke apart to find Ismahan and a man I instantly recognized as Haidar Jega walking in, accompanied by Nazeerah, whose face was radiant with a wide smile. Ismahan and Nazeerah chimed in unison, “Ouuu, love birds!” Their teasing sparked laughter.

Azrah smiled, “This is my cousin Haidar.” We exchanged warm pleasantries.

Haidar cleared his throat, his face exhibiting seriousness. “Aimar, I assure you that I will handle everything and ensure that this never happens again.”

"Thank you, Haidar," I said. "The Royal Family is going mad, it would mean a lot if you could fix everything - not just for us, but for all those suffering similarly." Haidar nodded in understanding.

"I've already assigned delegates to handle the matter," he said. Then his expression became sympathetic. "Aimar, I spoke with Dr. Abdulwaheed. I'm sorry to hear you've lost mobility and will require a wheelchair."

Azrah's eyes widened in shock, her gaze darting to mine. "You can't walk?" she asked, her voice trembling.

I nodded, and she looked like she'd been punched in the gut.

"Don't worry, my love," I reassured her, taking her hand. "It's temporary. The doctor said I'll regain mobility soon."

“And I’ll be here to take care of you at every step of the way.” She said, then looked around. “Where is Aymah?” She asked.

"Aymah is in Nigeria, staying with her maternal aunt," I replied, my voice firm as she nodded.

We spent the rest of the day catching up on each other's lives. Ismahan and Nazeerah filled the room with laughter, playfully teasing Azrah and me. Ismahan jokingly declared, "I'll never marry until I find a man who'll have a heart attack when I leave him!" Azrah good-naturedly scolded her. And we all laughed.

Haidar on the other hand, excused himself, citing a meeting, and he bid us bye. Having Azrah back by my side was wonderful. Being with her made me feel whole and at peace.

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Two days elapsed in the hospital, and Azrah didn’t leave my side one bit, she stayed with me and ensured that I was well taken care of, and whenever I needed the sun, she’d help me to my wheelchair and take me outside. It was wonderful to be with her again, and being around her evoked a special feeling of uniqueness.

Azrah's presence transported me back to childhood, filling me with freedom, happiness, and peace.

I soon got discharged after the doctors had made sure there weren't any more signs of attacks. And I was taken home by Azrah and Nazeerah. But what Azrah didn’t know was that I had a surprise planned for her in my home here in Saudi Arabia. I was so excited for her to see it.

As our car came to a halt, Azrah immediately got down, and with the aid of Ridwan, they helped me onto my wheelchair. I had never thought in my life that I would ever use a wheel, but that is life, we live, we learn, and we grow.

Azrah and Nazeerah pushed my wheelchair calmly until we got to the doorstep of the house, and as the maids opened the door, confetti was poured on us, leaving Azrah to fall into shock.

"What's going on?" Azrah asked, confusion etched on her face.

As the lights flickered on, she instinctively covered her mouth. I nodded to Ridwan, and he promptly brought over a microphone. With my heart racing, I prepared to ask Azrah the most important question once more—this time, in the traditional way, with the whole world watching. I was about to ask Azrah to become my wife properly, with all the love and commitment in my heart.



Chapter 35

Azrah Yusuf

AS I LOOKED AROUND the room, I saw Adesuwa, my mother, Aimar’s mom, my father, Rayan, Haidar, and his wife Lailah, and to my greatest shock, I saw Mustapha Attah and Hisham. My jaw dropped, and I turned to Aimar, giving him a questioning glare.

"What's going on?" I asked.

Ridwan promptly appeared, handing Aimar a microphone. With a gentle smile, he took over, expertly wheeling Aimar's chair to the center of the spacious room. Aimar cleared his throat, paused for a moment, and began to speak.

“I am sorry I dragged you all here, but this was for my woman, and I needed the eyes and ears of the people she loved to witness it.” Aimar said, Ridwan turned his wheelchair around slowly, and he faced me. Nazeerah urged me to move close to him, and I did, my legs shaking from anticipation.

“The first time I met Azrah was when I was 18 years old, and she would often visit my home to hang out with Nazeerah, I always found her very annoying," Aimar said, and everyone in the room laughed. “And now that annoying little girl is now my lovely wife,” he said, grabbing my arm. I smiled at him, eyes filled with tears.

“I had such a rough relationship with Allah when I lost my late wife Aminah, may Allah grant her *jannah* paradise, but Azrah came and she fixed it, and the funny thing was that she didn’t need to do much,” he paused in his speech and wiped his tears. “Because her kindness toward me was enough to reach my soul and melt my heart. From the ‘*good morning*’ at the stairs to the random smiles as we walked past each other in the hallway, everything made me fall in love with her, and I hadn’t realized that I couldn’t leave without her until the day I had almost lost her,” he said, tears falling down his eyes. I wiped them with my palms and held both his arms firmly.

“It’s okay.” I mumbled.

"Azrah, I love you so much," he declared, his voice ringing out for all to hear. "I'm saying this in front of everyone today because I want the world to know that you are my wife, my woman, and my soulmate." His eyes locked onto mine, filled with adoration. "Azrah Yusuf, my days on earth are meaningless

without you. Will you be my wife once again?" he asked, his voice trembling with emotion.

I couldn't help but chuckle at the absurdity of the question. "We're still married, silly," I teased, and the crowd erupted into laughter. He grinned, his eyes sparkling with amusement, and joined in, his laughter blending with mine.

"I know, but this time, I yearn for the world to bear witness to the depths of my devotion. I long for every soul to know that you are the rhythm that harmonizes my heart, the melody that fills me with beauty and meaning." His voice trembled with emotion as he cleared his throat. Ridwan presented him with a delicate box, adorned with intricate patterns. He opened it, revealing a dazzling diamond ring that shone like a star, its brilliance illuminating the path to forever.

"Will you *marry* me, Azrah Yusuf?" he asked, his voice trembling with emotion.

I nodded enthusiastically, tears of joy welling up in my eyes. I bent down and wrapped my arms around him in a tight hug. Before I could catch my breath, he slipped the ring onto my finger. The room erupted in applause as Adesuwa, Nazeerah, and Ismahan rushed forward, beaming with happiness to congratulate me with warm hugs.

“I’ve missed you so much, girl!” Adesuwa said, making me chuckle.

“I’ve missed you too!” I said, and she hugged me once again. Soon, my mom and Aimar’s mom came and gave me a hug. They congratulated us and hugged me before they left.

My father approached me, his eyes brimming with remorse. He wrapped me in a warm, tender hug. "I'm so sorry for what I did to you both," he pleaded, his voice cracking with emotion. "Please, forgive me." As he stretched out his arm, begging for forgiveness, I felt a pang of sorrow seeing him so vulnerable. I gently took his arm and lowered it, offering a comforting gesture.

“Please do not do this, Baba, I have forgiven you, okay?” I said, and with a smile, he hugged me. Aimar also said the same, and we all spent that evening laughing and catching up. And to my surprise, Aimar was talking and laughing with Mustapha Attah, who had walked up to me.

"I'm sorry for how everything turned out between us," Mustapha said, his voice sincere. "As soon as Adesuwa informed me that she was coming here, I begged Aimar to come here and apologize to you, because you're a dear friend, and I deeply regret speaking to you the way I did that day."

“It’s okay, you do not have to apologize, I have forgotten about everything.” I explained to him. After Hisham made the funny remark, he earned a glare from Aimar.

“But my heart broke when I found out you were married,” Hisham said, feigning a pain in the heart, as he placed his arm on his chest.

With a glare, Aimar said, “That’s my wife, Hisham, I hope being in a wheelchair has not rendered me invisible.” Aimar made us laugh, we spent the night laughing and cracking jokes. Before we all retired to bed, the mansion was big enough to contain all of us.

And, Aimar had announced that our wedding dinner would be held here in Saudi, and as per my request, it was going to be a strict Islamic wedding, where we would invite *sheikhs* to give *khutbah* and lecture us on marriage and Islam.

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I pushed Aimar's wheelchair through the quiet, tree-lined streets of his estate, the cold night air crisp around us, as we video-called Aymah.

“Daddy, when are you coming to get me?” She had asked for the third time today.

Aimar didn’t want her to fly to Saudi Arabia because he knew she was scared of flying alone without him.

“Me and Mummy will come take you soon.” Aimar had assured her. She was excited and spoke to us for a couple of minutes before her aunty had asked her to come and eat, so we bid us goodbye.

As we settled at the gazebo, I took a seat on a chair and placed my head on Aimar’s shoulder. As we both watched the sky. “Aimar, we really do not need to do this wedding dinner, I mean, you’re still in your wheelchair, and I want you to recover first.” I said to him, and he squeezed on my arm tenderly.

“It doesn’t matter if I am in a wheelchair, all I want is for the world to know that you are mine,” he said. His words assured me that I would never lose him.

We spent the night talking about our wedding dinner and whatnot. And just like that, I couldn't believe how the memory of Sameer was slowly fading from my heart. Right now, I couldn't let the thoughts of him define who I was, or what I was doing. I wanted to be myself, to be happy, and Aimar made me happy beyond measure.



Chapter 36



Azrah Yusuf

EVERY AFFLUENT PERSON in Nigeria attended our wedding dinner in Saudi. The current newly elected president of Nigeria in person, along with his son Farouq Armani, whom I had recognized from Mustapha's company that day, also attended. It was a simple Islamic wedding dinner where the Quran was recited and various sheikhs like Mufti Menk and others attended to give sermons on marriage.

I wore a beautiful white flowy dress, styled along with my hijab, while Aimar looked dashing in a luxurious, handmade Bisht and kandora. Ismahan, Nazeerah, and Adesuwa were stunning in their elegant abayas. My mother and Ummie, on the other hand, opted for their finest *atampa* attire, having politely declined to wear abayas since we hadn't had a traditional northern wedding. They made a fuss about it.

I enjoyed every bit of the event, and Aimar did as well. This was my dream wedding—to have lots of *sheikhs* attend my wedding dinner and give *khutbah* sermons and recite the Quran. Back when Sameer and I were getting married, we had such plans, but his father wanted an elaborate wedding. He wanted the whole of Kano to know that we were getting married, but Allah knew better and took away Sameer.

May Allah have mercy upon his soul.

After the Islamic sermons and Quran recitation concluded, we gathered around a grand table for dinner. The serene atmosphere, filled with warmth and conversation, surpassed any musical entertainment. As we feasted together, everyone had the opportunity to get to know one another.

As I whispered into Aimar's ear, my eyes caught the look Farouq Armani was giving Adesuwa, and she was also showing him a dirty look, and that made me instantly realize that he must be the man who had ghosted her. I made a mental note to ask her about it later.

After the merriment at the feast drew to the end, our guests bid us goodbye and departed to their homes and hotels. Aimar and I then retired to our room, exchanging warmly good nights with our families before seeking the solitude of our own space.

As I wheeled Aimar into the room, I helped him take off his shoes and clothes, then led him to the bathroom, where he took his bath and then came out dressed in a thobe after a couple of minutes. Afterwards, I took my bath as well, and when I came out, we both observed *salah* together before deciding to call it a day and go to sleep.

The next morning, we woke up, got ready, and embarked on a trip to *Makkah*. There, we performed *Umrah* as a family and expressed our gratitude to Allah for our union. It was a truly amazing experience. My last visit to *Makkah* had been two years prior, accompanied by my mother and Ismahan. Returning felt wonderful, especially now as a married woman, alongside the love of my life.

As we stood in front of the *Kaaba* Aimar smiled his hands in mine. "*Alhamdulillah*, I got to share this beautiful view with you," he said, smiling from ear to ear.

"*Alhamdulillah*, may Allah continue to bless our marriage," I said and his grip around my arm tightened softly as we made our dua's. Ismahan and Nazeerah gathered around us, having their cameras in hand, and they began to capture some pictures.

The moment was truly unforgettable – sharing it with the people who were the most important to me, made it the best memory of my life.

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"Are you ready?" he asked, and I gave him a quick nod as I tightened my helmet, then my seatbelt.

"Ready!" I exclaimed, my voice overwhelmed with eagerness.

The car engine roared to life, its deafening growl akin to a gunshot. I winced, certain it would shatter the night's tranquility and disturb the entire city of Abuja.

As Aimar floored the accelerator, the car surged forward, speeding down the track. I squealed with delight, my excitement overtaking any fear. Even when my body bounced roughly against the door, I didn't flinch. This time, I was thoroughly enjoying the rush.

As we crossed the finish line, the car came to a stop, and Aimar leapt out, rushing to my side. He opened the door, helped me out, and we collapsed onto the track's floor, laughing uncontrollably, just like before.

Our giggles subsided, and we reclined there, gazing up at the starry night sky. I snuggled into his chest, feeling the warmth of his body beneath me.

Two months had passed our wedding dinner in Saudi Arabia, and those months had been the best time of my life. I cherished every moment with my husband, and thankfully, Aimar had begun to walk again. During those times, I

knew that Allah had a reason for everything and that whatever he has written will come to pass, no matter what.

"That star reminds me of you," he whispered, his finger tracing the constellation above. I chuckled, feeling a flutter in my chest. As I gazed up at the star, it twinkled with extraordinary brilliance, as if attentive to his words.

“How does it remind you of me?” I asked, and he turned his head around and faced me, a smile on his face.

“It reminds me of how much you’ve brightened my life,” he said, and I chuckled.

"When my time on earth is done, will you look up at that star and think of me?" I jokingly asked, and he sat up abruptly. I sat up as well, laughing hard. I knew I had hit his weak spot.

“Death can't have you, not now, not ever. If fate insists on taking one of us, let it be me. For without you, the world would lose its warmth, its light, and its meaning. You are my home, my heart.” He whispered, gently brushing my hair as he pressed his lips to my forehead.

“Don’t worry, I’m never going to leave you, our love will last forever.” I told him, and he smiled.

“*Forever, our love will last till Jannah in sha Allah,*” he said, wrapping his arms around me as he placed a kiss on my forehead.

Right at that moment, I knew I had won, and nothing in the world would ever compare to being in his arms. He completed me.

لْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ



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About the Author

Qudrah Adam is a student and writer living in Abuja, Nigeria, with her family. As an ambivert, she enjoys solitude, often spending time on solo dates and pursuing her passions for writing books and poetry. Kudirat Adam is her official name, though she believes "Kudirat" to be a clerical mistake by the doctor who registered her birth. Qudrah aspires to become a lecturer and is currently pursuing a degree in Educational Administration and Planning at the university. **"Broken Dreams"** is her debut novel, and it marks the beginning of an exciting series: The Billionaire Broken Series.