

The moment of truth

"Is something wrong," Jackson asks his girlfriend Emma. "You haven't said a word for the past two hours."

"Nothing. I am just tired. There was a lot of work at the office yesterday. Lots of cases to close before the holidays." Emma lies to him.

"It's all right," Jackson says, "you can sleep and rest until we arrive at your parent's house. It's the New Year's Eve today, try to relax and have fun."

Although Jackson knows that Emma is lying and something serious is bothering her, he doesn't want to say anything more and argue with her. He wants to spend the next three days happily and create joyful memories with her family. After all, he doesn't want to argue with her today since he is planning to propose to her at midnight.

They spend the rest of the trip in silence and arrive at Emma's paternal house around 11:00 a.m. Everyone is already there. Her parents, Violet and Christopher, and her older brother Ken with his wife, Jane, are preparing lunch in the kitchen. Their daughter, Juliet, is playing with her new toys in the living room. After Emma and Jackson greet everyone and tidy up their suitcases, they go to the dining room with the rest of the family to eat lunch.

Everyone is sitting in the large, wooden table, eating and catching up on their news. The only people who are not participating in the conversation are Emma and Jackson.

"Is something wrong, dear", Emma's mother, Violet, curiously asks Emma. "You seem distracted."

"Nothing, mum. I am fine", Emma responds. "I am... tired and stressed because of work."

Jackson can't hide his frustration anymore. He gets up from his seat and starts walking towards their bedroom.

"Jackson, where are you going?"

"I can't hear any more lies, Emma. Something is going on. No more excuses. I just want the truth. If you are not ready for that, I just want to go to the bedroom, pick up my stuff and go home".

"Ok," Emma responds, "we need to talk. Let's go to the backyard."

"I can't understand, why...why you want to....?"

"There is no reason, Jackson. I just want to break up with you. Our relationship is not as it used to be, I...I....am not in love with you anymore". Emma slowly lowers her head. She doesn't want Jackson to see the teary eyes on her face.

Commented [MG1]: Readers might be curious to learn how Jackson knows that Emma is lying to him. You can add Jackson's thoughts to show what is unusual about Emma's behaviour to orient the readers.

Commented [MG2]: Readers can get confused about the setting of the story. You can add more details about the location of the trip to orient the readers such as where was the beginning of the trip, where is Emma's house, and how did the travel e.g car, or plane.

Commented [MG3]: Jackson's actions seem inconsistent. On the one hand, he doesn't want to say anything to Emma and on the other hand, he gets up angrily showing his frustration. Revise the passage to show Jackson's thoughts about Emma's lies so that readers can justify his actions.

Commented [MG4]: The setting of the scene is not mentioned until later in the scene when "Emma goes back in the house". Add a short description (1-2 sentences) to establish the setting of the scene. Mention the place (e.g garden, backyard) and the time (afternoon, night) to orient the readers. Also, the scene consists mostly of dialogue with no action or narrative. While the characters are speaking, show their gestures, their reactions, and Emma's thoughts (since she is the pov character) to make the characters more interesting to the readers. (Example: Look at the next comment.)

“Look at me in the eyes, Emma. Look at me and repeat your words. I know you, I know us, our relationship is fine, I know that you still love me, but I can’t understand why you are lying. Whatever is happening, we can deal with it together. Emma.....”

While Jackson is speaking, he slowly grabs Emma’s hands, and she raises her head. At that time, Jackson kneels and takes out of his pocket a wedding ring.

“Emma, I love you and I want to spend the rest of my life with you.”

“Jackson, stand up” Emma answers in a soft voice. “We are talking about our breakup. This is not the right time for a proposal.”

“This is a perfect time,” Jackson responds. “If I don’t express my feelings now, I might not have another opportunity to do so. I am certain that you don’t want to break up with me. Something else is going on. Tell me the truth and we will figure it out together.”

“How do you know that? How can you be so certain?” Emma’s says with tears in her eyes. She is about to cry but she wants to hold back herself as much as possible.

“You should just look yourself in the mirror. The look in your face, your eyes, your reaction.....what is it? Is it your job? Are you sick?” Jackson asks worriedly.

“No, I...I don’t know what to do.....I got promoted. I am officially going to be an associate lawyer in three weeks.”

“Congratulations, that’s great news. Then, why are not happy about it, where is the problem?”

“The company wants to transfer me to their main offices in London. If I accept, I’ll have to move out and stay there. I can’t ask you to move with me, you have your family and your job here. I can’t ask you to give everything up and follow me to London. I think that the best solution is to let you go, I can’t force you to move with me to London.”

“That’s YOUR opinion, YOUR decision.”

“What do you mean?”

“How do you know if I want to move with you in London if you don’t ask me? Don’t make assumptions and don’t come to conclusions on your own. Ask me, talk to me. You don’t know what I want unless you ask me. Don’t do that again.”

“What do you want to do, then?”

“You are asking me now?! Do you think I didn’t notice the change in your behaviour? I noticed that something was bothering you but every time I was asking you, you were saying lame excuses.”

“You are angry with me, for not telling the truth. I know that we don’t have secrets and that we share everything between us, but this is my decision to make. I had to figure out what I want first and then....”

“and then....what? announce your decision?! Yes, I am angry, frustrated, and disappointed. It’s your choice to accept this promotion and move to another city but it’s

my choice to follow you or not. And I need to know everything about it so that can make the right decision for me, for us. So, it's our decision. We should have talked about it, share our opinion and thoughts. Don't make decisions on your own."

"Wait? Why are you leaving? Where are you going?"

"I am going to take a short walk, I need to clear my head, I will be back in a while."

"Do you want me to join you?"

"No, I need to be alone now."

Emma goes back inside the house and straight to her bedroom. She finally bursts into tears, realizing now that not talking earlier to Jackson was a huge mistake and that he may not trust her again.

Two hours after their argument, Jackson comes back from his walk and enters the house. Emma hears the front door and realizes Jackson is back. She gets out of the room and goes to the living room where everyone is gathered, including Jackson. Jackson starts talking first.

"I have one question," he says in a calm voice "What changed now? We used to discuss everything so why you didn't say anything this time?"

"I was afraid", Emma answers reluctantly.

"Of what?" Jackson curiously asks. "You can accept or decline the promotion. That's entirely up to you."

"I know that. I was afraid I might lose you. I was afraid that you wouldn't want to move to London with me. I...I won't do that again. I have learnt a valuable lesson today. We should be completely honest with each other, no more secrets. Never again."

At that moment Jackson notices something. He stands up and sits next to Emma. He softly whispers to her right ear "Is that a yes?"

"What?" Emma asks confused.

"You are wearing the ring. Does that mean that you accept my proposal?"

"Yes, I do. What about you? Do you accept to move to London with me?"

"Yes, I do."

THE END

Commented [MG5]: It seems that Jackson is suddenly leaving with no explanation. Add a narrative sentence of Jackson leaving before Emma asks him where he is going and Emma's reaction to orient the readers.

Commented [MG6]: This was such an enjoyable short story!