

Can't Win Me Back

Chapter 2266

Uri pressed on, "More than that, how absurd is it that he found a ridiculous substitute like you? Did he truly think that he was so deeply in love with Blake? Was it because his love for Blake was so unforgettable that he needed someone to ease his lovesickness?"

Substitute, substitute, substitute!

The word sliced through Julien's suffocated heart like a sharp knife.

He had never dared to hope he would be the only one Jonah ever loved. But it would be enough for him to be Jonah's last. He didn't care about the past. Yet, what he couldn't bear was that it was his face-so similar to Jonah's ex-lover-that had drawn Jonah in and made him fall in love.

Uri laughed mockingly. "If I had the chance, I'd ask Judas if he was being fair to Blake by finding a new lover. I'd want to know if he was being fair to you by making you Blake's substitute."

His laughter was so hysterical that tears streamed down his face.

In an extremely sarcastic tone, he continued, "I doubt Jonah feels he made a mistake. He's an arrogant, crazed, and heartless man, willing to do anything to get what he wants. Dr. Lovelace, Judas has been scheming against you for a long time."

He had been scheming against him for a long time?

To hell with those schemes!

Julien staggered back. His moistened eyes became bloodshot. The look in his eyes dimmed as he sank heavily to his knees.

Seconds and minutes passed, and it was well past 8:00 pm.

For Julien's convenience, Jonah had purchased a four-story villa in a quiet, private area near the center of Solana City. This was their home and his small gift to Julien.

That night, Jonah went to buy two full bags of ingredients and a bottle of fine red wine. He then prepared dinner personally.

Even though it was his birthday, every dish he made was to Julien's preference. He never considered himself Julien was all that mattered to him.

As he served the delectable dishes to the dining table, he was filled with bliss despite being

covered in sweat.

He waited and waited, but Julien still had yet to come home. He knew Julien was a workaholic, often losing track of time when busy. But tonight was special; he had promised not to work late.

Jonah couldn't help but feel worried. He pulled out his phone, wanting to call Julien, when his doorbell rang.

He walked to the entrance and opened the door, only to find Alyssa and Sean standing there,

arms laden with cake and gifts.

"Jonah, happy birthday."

A warm smile spread across Alyssa's face. She was doing better mentally. Or, at the very least, she looked to be much better.

With a smile on his face, Sean gave Jonah his wishes too. "Happy birthday to you, Mr. Jonah!"

"Thank you. Come in and have a seat."

Jonah felt warmth spread in his chest, but concern quickly followed. "Lyse, you've been discharged from the hospital so soon? Are you doing okay physically?"

"I've been fine for a while now. I'm Iron Woman! Jul is at home, isn't he?"

Alyssa craned her neck and playfully peered into the house, her big, round eyes searching. "Don't worry, Jonah. Sean and I are just here to drop off your gifts. We'll leave right away. We won't third-wheel you two. Time always flies when you're having a good time. I get it..." "Julien isn't home yet."

"He's not? But it's already so late!"

"I was just about to call Julien. I'm not sure if he's being held back at the hospital."

Right at this moment, his phone rang.

Jonah looked down at the screen and saw that the call was from a number he didn't recognize. He frowned. For some reason, his chest tightened too.

He swiped on his phone to answer the call, then held the phone to his ear. In a deep voice, he said, "Hello. Who's calling?"

A man's cold and macking voice came from the other end of the line.

"Happy birthday, Judas."

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The night was silent and cold, and a chilling breeze suddenly swept across Jonah's face.

Judas.

That was a name he had not heard in ages. It echoed from a bloody, misty place far away, igniting a storm of turmoil in his chest. The voice that carried it felt vaguely familiar, but he couldn't place it immediately.

"Who are you? Are you an ex-Cloudtop member?" Jonah turned away from Alyssa immediately and lowered his voice as much as he could.

"Jonah.." In an instant, Alyssa sensed something was wrong when she noticed the shift in his expression.

"Judas, high status really does make one forgetful, doesn't it? Uri's icy, sinister voice pierced through Jonah's thoughts like a venomous snake. "It seems that the ever noble Judas has eyes only for Blake."

"You're.. Un Holland?"

An uncertainty clawed at Jonah, and a sharp pain shot through his heart. The night closed in around him like a crushing, mottled wall. Blake-his hidden ex-lover-haunted him still, a scar he dared not revisit. Panic surged within him, sensing something was amiss-Uri's unexpected call and Julien's tardiness.

A wave of dread washed over him as he feared the worst had happened. Content is

Uri chuckled coldly. Judas, sorry to intrude on your romance with him."

"You're with Julien? What are you trying to do?" Jonah clenched his fists so tightly that his veins were bulging.

"I wanted Dr. Lovelace to see your true colors." Uri's laughter dripped with hatred. "Blake died unjustly because of you. I can't bear to see such a nice man like Dr. Lovelace falling for your despicable lies again.

"After all, seeing Dr. Lovelace reminds me of my younger brother who died so tragically. I just couldn't help but feel an urge to save him from the fiery pit."

Jonah's eyes became bloodshot. He snapped, "Un Holland! I know that you've hated me all these years. But just come at me if you have any grievances. Don't hurt Julien!"

Uri clicked his tongue. "He's just a substitute to you. You're pretending your love for him is as deep as the sea. Don't you think it's ridiculous that you're putting on such an act in front of me?"

Jonah couldn't bear to hear such cruel words. He roared, "No.. He's not a substitute. He's not!"

Alyssa and Sean were just at the door. Naturally, they heard his every word.

Sean was perplexed, but Alyssa, who knew about Jonah's past, had a sudden realization. She felt a chill wash over her.

Uri stopped laughing and bellowed, "If he's not a substitute, what was Blake to you then? You once said you would die with him. What's going on now? Have you forgotten him now that you have a new lover? Your so-called 'love' is worthless! The biggest mistake Blake ever made was to fucking fall in love with you!"

"That's enough!" A primal rage consumed Jonah, causing his body to shake uncontrollably as if a beast had been unleashed within him.

His bloodlust surged. "If you dare to call Julien a 'substitute' again, I will kill you!"

"Come and try. Since Blake's death, every day has been unbearably dull." With malice, he added, "Dr. Lovelace is at the villa in Solana City where you and Blake used to live. Hurry, Judas. I'm sure you'll have an unforgettable 32nd birthday."

With that, Uri ended the call.

Snow fell that night, bringing a sharp chill. Yet Jonah didn't stop to grab a jacket. He dashed from the villa, leaped into his black sports car, and sped away from the courtyard in a flash. "Mr. Jonah!" Sean shouted, alarmed.

Alyssa's heart sank. "Something might have happened to Jul. Let's follow Jonah, quick!"

Jonah ran through all the red lights, the engine's roar shattering the night's silence. He gripped the steering wheel, knuckles turning white as he frantically called Julien.

At first, his calls went through, but Julien's phone was off by the third attempt.

"Julien... Julien... Don't scare me!" Jonah gasped, cold sweat beading on his forehead, suffocating fear rising within him.

Every brutal image flashed through his mind, and he felt like he might crumble under the weight of it all.

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Jonah could not bear to think about the void that would swallow him if he lost Julien. The skies could fall and crush him, turning his life into a hopeless wreck. Gasping for breath, Jonah raced into the villa, which was cold, dark, and silent.

Suddenly, memories he had buried deep surged back, overwhelming him. He gripped the hem of his shirt, struggling to steady his breathing while anguish clawed at him. Since Blake's death, he had never returned to this place.

The man he loved had died when Jonah loved him most, and the depth of that devastation was unfathomable to anyone who had not experienced it themselves. But this was not the moment to drown in sorrow.

Jonah called out Julien's name again and again as he searched every room in the house for him.

When he reached the second floor, he spotted lights flickering in the home theater. His heart raced as he burst inside.

'Julien!

Julien sat alone on the couch, a dazed look in his eyes. Scattered around his feet were white roses. The video of Jonah and Blake's intimate moments was still playing on the screen, but it was muted. Julien was staring straight at it. Slowly, his pale lips curled up into a smile. He was mocking himself. "Julien... don't watch. Don't watch that!"

Jonah couldn't turn the screen off. He could only block Julien's view by standing in front of him. "Un's targeting me. Don't let him get to you. Don't believe what he said!"

"Even if 99% of what he said was a lie, one thing was true." Julien raised his swollen eyes to Jonah, a broken smile touching his lips. "That man was the love of your life. Not me."

Jonah's heart sank. "That's not-"

*Actually, your heart... is gone. It's gone to be with that person." Julien's voice dragged out as though he had traversed great distances, wearied by his torment. "He is the love of your life, the one you could have given everything for. As for me, I am merely a balm for your broken heart. A fleeting substitute.

"I know you thought of him during those nights when you held me close. You must feel lucky to have found someone who looks just like him.

*Coincidentally, this person also fell hard for you. But what a pity... nothing can ever compare to that one true love. The fake will always be fake. You cannot deceive yourself about your own feelings."

Tears welled in Jonah's eyes as he shook his head. The pain within him was becoming unbearable.

"I refuse to be a substitute. I would rather die than be someone else's shadow."

With that, Julien pulled a white rose from behind him. His expression turned cold and resolute as he raised the sharpened stalk to his cheek. He dragged it along his cheek, leaving a long, bloody mark.

He smiled and asked, "Look, Jonah. Do I still look like him?"

"Julien! Don't!" Jonah's eyes widened. As he reached for the rose, Julien cut himself again.

The intersecting, bloodied lines on his face mirrored the agony of his shattered heart.

Tears streamed down Julien's face as he laughed. "Tell me. Do I... still look like him? Do you still want me?" "Don't do this... Julien, please!" Jonah dropped to his knees before him, gripping Julien's wrists. The man who once held such pride now seemed to care for none of it. He cried out, "I beg you...don't hurt yourself. You can do anything to me! Hate me, hit me... kill me! Just don't inflict pain on yourself. Please..."

His love for Julien ran deep, and nothing tormented him more than witnessing this self-inflicted suffering.

"Is your heart aching for me?" Julien laughed, tears and blood staining his cheeks. "No, your heart doesn't ache for me. You're using me to ease your guilt over losing your true love. But now that you've redeemed yourself, who can save me?"

He closed his eyes, letting the white rose slip from his grasp. "Jonah, let's end it here."

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The once pristine white rose petals were now marred by the dark stain of Julien's blood.

'Let's end it here.'

Julien's voice was soft, yet those four words shattered Jonah's heart into fragments.

*Julien, I will not allow you to leave me!" Every muscle in Jonah's body trembled with desperation. A ferocious rage ignited in his eyes. "I know who I love. You are not a substitute for anyone! Julien, don't leave me... I cannot let you go!"

Panic coursed through him.

He cried and pleaded, desperately trying to hold Julien back. Torn between gentleness and force, he was willing to accept any outcome as long as the man he adored stayed with him.

The first time it happened, Jonah had barely survived the emotional turmoil. If it happened again, it would drive him to the brink of insanity and death.

His breathing became ragged; his bloodshot eyes blazed with determination.

With open arms, Jonah moved to embrace Julien, who had been reduced to pieces. But just as he leaned in, a sharp pain shot through his left eye.

"Don't touch me!" In a moment of uncontrolled rage, Julien had grabbed another rose, dragging its thorny stem across Jonah's face.

Jonah was fortunate to have closed his eyes just in time; otherwise, that thorn could have slashed his eyeball, leaving him blinded.

Julien stared at the bloodied cut on Jonah's face, momentarily forgetting his own pain. Dazed, his hands trembled as the instinct to care for Jonah flickered within him. Yet he fought against it, forcing out the words, "Jonah, you need to go to the hospital-

Jonah couldn't be bothered about himself. A drop of blood trickled down his face. Fiercely, he pulled Julien into his arms. "Promise me, then... Don't break up with me!"

*Jonah, I admit that I still love you. But now that it has come to this, I'm unable to convince myself to stay with you."

Despite allowing Jonah to hold him, Julien's eyes were vacant. All the passion that he once had in his eyes had disappeared.

"Even if I force myself to stay in this relationship, living by your side in the future will only make me feel like I'm acting as somebody else. That initial purity of your love for me is now gone. Yet, what I want, in particular, is just that bit of purity."

As he said that, he smiled. In a throaty voice, he continued, "I really envy you and him. It was thanks to him that I was able to have such an unforgettable relationship with you. Jonah, that's enough. This is it for us..."

By the time Alyssa and Sean arrived, Julien had already left.

In the expansive room, Jonah knelt, a forlorn shadow of his former self.

Alyssa's heart sank. She stumbled backward slightly. The man before her was alive but resembled an empty shell, crushed and battered.

"Ms. Alyssa, what in the world happened to Mr. Jonah and Dr. Lovelace?" Sean questioned anxiously. He had been probing her the entire journey there but was unable to get a single answer from her.

He had assisted Jonah for a few years when Jonah was KS Group's president. Yet, he had never seen him looking

as devastated as this!

Alyssa took a deep breath, forcing herself to remain composed. "Sean, wait for me outside. Let me have a talk with Jonah in private."

Knitting his brows together, Sean nodded. He had no other option but to retreat and wait outside the door. Looking at Jonah's downcast expression, Alyssa welled up with tears. She walked to his side slowly, knelt down, and picked up the roses that had scattered across the floor, one at a time. Content is

When she picked up the greeting card containing Julien's heartfelt confession, she couldn't contain herself any longer. Tears blurred her vision, smudging the elegant words.

Following that, a ball of fury exploded within her.

She was usually composed, but she could not hold back when her loved ones were suffering! Moreover, it was Jonah's birthday today.

Stirring up such a huge commotion on such an important day was the cruelest way to break a person's heart. Undoubtedly, they had rattled her cage.

*Jonah, I've mentioned this to you in the very first place. If you are both in love with one another, you have to give one another your absolute trust.

"Not only do you have to be honest with one another physically, it's the same emotionally too. You can never hide anything from one another, especially when it comes to your feelings."

Alyssa knelt right next to Jonah. In a raspy voice, she continued, "I believe you're deeply in love with Jul. But you cannot deny the fact that you were once attracted to him because of how much he resembled your ex.

"You should have been frank with him much earlier on. But Jonah, you didn't. Instead, you hid the truth from him till this day. Jul put all his trust and invested all his emotions in you. This was why this ended up being such a mighty blow to him.

"How could he take it? How could he continue to stay by your side? He's such a proud person... He's risked everything to be with you. Yet, you lied to him from the very beginning..."

*Julien isn't like Blake... Other than their locks, they're not alike at all..." Jonah's head hung low as he replied, his voice bitter and weak. "Julien isn't gentle. He's capricious, arrogant, and rebellious. At times, he's even more unreasonable than a woman..."

Chapter 2270

'But I just love him... I can't stop myself from loving him," Jonah said.

Alyssa blinked hard to stop herself from crying. Many a time, Julien was like the male version of herself. At the same time, Jonah's love for Julien was just like how Jasper used to love her. How could he be so affectionate and tolerant if he wasn't in love with him to the core?

"Lyse... I was wrong. I've made a grave mistake." Jonah's broad shoulders trembled violently. "It was true that I was attracted by Julien's looks. However, what I love is his soul.

'At the same time, I was afraid of Julien leaving me because of my past with Blake... So, I didn't dare to be honest with him. I was too embarrassed to tell him the truth. I wanted to give him a perfect relationship.

"I was wrong... If I had known... If I had known that it would turn out like this..."

Jonah choked back his tears and couldn't bring himself to continue speaking. The thorns on that stalk of rose that he was clutching tightly onto pierced into his palm.

Alyssa kept her cool. In a soft voice, she asked, "Jonah, you received a call before you came here. Who called you?"

"Uri Holland... He's an older guy whom Blake met when he was at the orphanage. They were as close as blood brothers. Both of them were my core subordinates when I was leading Cloudtop."

"Has this person always been pestering you in secret?"

Jonah shook his head. "He has never shown up ever since I disbanded Cloudtop after Blake's passing."

Alyssa frowned. A suspicion rose within her. "Of all times, he chose to wait till today? All just because he can give you an 'unforgettable' birthday?"

The more she thought about it, the more bizarre it felt.

When Jonah and Julien's relationship was revealed back then, it caused an uproar and even became a trending topic on Twitter.

Uri had probably already found out that Jonah found a lover who looked incredibly similar to his younger brother. He endured silently for a whole year and didn't take any action. Of all times, he put in so much effort to have an outburst at this time?

Was it all so that he could avenge his dead younger brother?

Alyssa kept getting the feeling that this wasn't such a simple matter.

*Jonah, let's talk in detail later on. You're hurt. Let me take you to the hospital."

Alyssa went forward to help Jonah up. Nevertheless, having just recovered from a major affliction herself, she wasn't strong enough physically to help the strong-bodied Jonah up.

"Lyse... I want Julien."

Jonah's eyes filled with tears. Even though the pain in his left eye was so intense that he couldn't keep that eye open, he gazed at Alyssa. "I don't love anyone else... Julien is the only one I love. I want him to come back..." 'Jonah, let's go to the hospital now!' Alyssa's heart wrenched at the sight of the wound on his face. "I'll talk to Jul. He loves you too. I'm sure he can't bear to leave you either!"

Jonah insisted on going with Alyssa to see Julien, but she forbade him from doing so.

For one, she was worried about Jonah's eye injury. Secondly, under a circumstance like this, it wasn't the right time for them to meet. They each needed time to cool down. Otherwise, they would just be making the situation

worse.

Sean accompanied Jonah to the hospital while Alyssa tried to contact Julien, albeit to no avail.

Solana City was massive. Even if she sent people to look for him, it would be like searching for a needle in a haystack. More than that, she was worried about Julien doing something foolish.

Out of desperation, she contacted Axel.

An hour later, Axel got back to her. "Dr. Lovelace is in the departure hall at Solana City International Airport. He purchased a red-eye flight to Mosgravia, and the flight will be taking off in an hour's time!"

Wasting no time, Alyssa drove her sports car and sped toward the airport.

The night was cold and dark. Even with the high beam, her visibility was not as great as it was during the day. Moreover, the recent snowfall meant that the road conditions weren't ideal and speeding became extremely dangerous.

However, Alyssa didn't have the time to think of all these. For Jonah's sake, she had to stop Julien from leaving tonight no matter what!

Alyssa's heart pounded against her chest as she sped up to 110 miles per hour, or perhaps even higher, on the empty freeway.

Her driving skills were superb. Even if the road conditions weren't great, she was confident that she would be able to get to the airport before the plane took off.

She mumbled softly, "Jul, don't go... Don't leave us!"

Her chest was in a knot as she rubbed her moistened and swollen eyes.

All of a sudden, a beam of white light flashed from behind her.

Feeling confused, she looked into the rearview mirror. Nonetheless, all she saw was the freeway with no end. There was nothing else there.

At this very moment, a black vehicle came at her suddenly from her right, closing in on her from the side. Alyssa widened her eyes in shock. Immediately, she turned the steering wheel.

Bang!