

17.

Third Person POV

“What is this storm inside me, this confusion that clouds my every thought? I can’t even name the emotion that has taken hold, only that it’s both foreign and overwhelming.”

He stood in the shadows, his gaze fixed on the hospital entrance. The night was thick with the promise of rain, the air heavy and cold. He wasn’t sure what he was doing there, staring at the door, hoping to see her again, when he had just attended her burial ceremony. Maybe it was guilt or just a habit. Either way, he found himself standing in the quiet of the hospital parking lot, lost in thought and fuming with barely contained anger - at her, himself and every other d*mn person she had left him for.

His knuckles tightened into fists, his gaze hardening as he recalled how empty and impersonal her burial had been. For a woman who had spent her whole life nurturing children that weren’t even her own, it was a cruel irony that no family had bothered to show up to say a final goodbye. And it was that pity—no, that anger—that kept him from forgiving her, despite the guilt and loss gnawing at his heart. Loss? He chuckled bitterly at that. He had never had her so there was no loss. Yet, how could she make him feel guilt when he was supposed to feel nothing but anger toward her? How?

His attention was suddenly drawn to a figure emerging from the building, slowly moving in a wheelchair. At first, he thought it was just another patient, someone looking for a breath of fresh air. But as the figure wheeled closer to the exit, toward the familiar spot she usually occupied, something inside him stirred, and he stood at straight, at attention.

He watched as she hesitated at the threshold, her hand trembling as she pulled out her phone. There was something hauntingly familiar in the way she moved, in the way she seemed so lost, so broken. His breath caught as she tilted her head to the sky, and for a moment, time seemed to blur. Unwanted and unforgiving memories flooded back.

He remembered another night, another woman. The same haunted look in her eyes, the same unbearable pain etched into her features while he stood in the shadows, watching her just as he was now. He had let her slip through his fingers when he should have held onto her. Isn’t that all he has ever wanted? However, he had gone against his long-time wish by pushing her away. He had allowed his anger to cloud his judgment when she needed him the most. Not that he should care, yet he couldn’t shake the pain and guilt that had eaten away at him every day since. And now, here was this woman—a stranger—wearing the same look of despair, the same silent plea for help that he had ignored once before.

His heart froze when she looked forward, her gaze locking onto something. It was like seeing a ghost, like staring into the eyes of a memory he could never escape. That look—that deep, soul-crushing agony—was the same one that had haunted him for days, the look that had kept him awake at night, wondering what he could have done differently.

Then, her trembling hands rose to her chest, and he knew something was wrong. She wasn’t herself. She started to move, the wheelchair rolling down the incline, faster and faster, her expression dazed, and his heart leaped into his throat. She isn’t herself, he thought against his pounding heart. His eyes darted to the side, spotting a car, then back to her as she hurtled toward it. He saw the impending disaster, and his body reacted before his mind could catch up. He sprinted forward, his legs pumping hard with the desperate need to save her, the world narrowing to the single task of reaching her in time.

Move! He wanted to scream but she was frozen in terror, her eyes wide and unseeing. He could feel his own panic rising. But he couldn’t fail again. Not this time. The need to save her pumped hard in his veins like fire. And without a second thought, he threw himself forward, arms outstretched, and just as the car barreled toward her, he yanked her from the wheelchair in one swift move.

For a second, everything was still. He held her close, his heart hammering in his chest, his breathing harsh with adrenaline coursing through his veins. When he looked into her eyes, they were filled with the same fear, the same vulnerability, and something he couldn’t quite place.

He didn’t know who she was, or what had brought her to this place of despair. But there was a sudden, overwhelming need to save her—not to let her go—as if she were his second chance at redemption. It seemed absurd because he still didn’t think he needed one, yet he couldn’t shake the feeling as he stared into her half-shut eyes, which rolled back into her head in seconds, while his brow furrowed in confusion.

What is this? He thought, still grappling with the confusion swirling inside him.