

Ex Husband 201

Chapter 0201

“Thank you” I say

We get back to work and eventually finish cooking. They both help me set the table and we sit down to eat..

With the three of us, or should I say four, we almost clean everything, but I put my foot down for some left overs. Calvin was probably going to come home tired and hungry. He won't have time to cook something.

After dinner, I make them shower and then it is off to bed for them.

It was after they were asleep that the idea came to me. I had a five bedroom house. There was still an extra room even after turning one of them into a nursery. The last remaining bedroom could be Gunner's

room.

He could sleep there anytime he was over and it could also be his safe space while he was here. I quickly get excited about the idea. Immediately I take a note pad and started scribbling down what I would need.

I'll have to ask Calvin for permission, but I was sure he'd agree. Well I hoped he would. Plus he'll be helpful when it comes to the design of the room. He knows Gunner better than anyone. He'll know what he likes.

I was just finishing up the list of essentials when the doorbell rang. I wiggle up and go to open it, pretty sure that it will Calvin on the door. I wasn't

wrong

"Hi" I tell him.

"Hi to you too" he says, giving me a tired smile.

I step aside and he comes in. We move to the living room.

"It's quiet. Are they asleep?" he asks

"Yes"

I didn't know what to say. I had so many question, but I was afraid of stepping out of boundary.

"About today? Gunner was crying because of his mother" I start slowly.

The moment I say those words, his face turns stone cold.

Don't mention that bitch to me again! She has done nothing, but hurt me and my son over and over again. What kind of woman abandons her son? I get and understand that she doesn't love me and she never will, it hurts, but I learned to accept that. Turning her back on Gunner is something else. I will never

Unrequited love. Wasn't it just a bitch? I've suffered through it since I first fell for Rowan. I didn't want my friend to go through it, but it looks like he has.

"Every time i call and she refuses to come see Gunner kills me. He is amazing, yet his mother wants nothing to do with him. I tried hiding it from him, but as he got older he started to understand things. He

started to understand that his mother doesn't want him and she wants nothing to do with him. Fuck I hate her so much, but I also can't stop loving her" he says before continuing. Pain radiating from his eyes.

"I want to give Gunner the world, but the one thing he wants is totally out of my reach. I regret ever falling in love with her. Regret ever meeting her. But the thing is, regretting her means regretting Gunner and that

is one thing I can never do"

Where have I heard those words from? Yeah from my own lips. Didn't I tell Rowan the same thing? That

as much as I want to regret him, I can't because it means regretting Noah.

"I don't have the right words for you. Hell. Our situations are the same, but different at the same time. All I can tell you is; be there for Gunner as best as you can. Love him so much that he doesn't miss the love of his mother. Show him that he is enough and that it's his mother's loss not his"

Those are the only words I can offer. I wanted to say more, but I didn't have the words to comfort him. He nods his head and we stay in silence.

"Thank you, Ava. For being there for me and my son" he says after a while.

"You're welcome"

After, he leaves carrying Gunner's sleeping form and the food I saved for h

Hours after he leaves. Hours after I go to bed. Gunner's smile still haunts my mind. His smile and his mysterious mother invade my every thought.

There was something I was missing. If only I could piece the pieces together then maybe I could figure

I out why this whole issue bothers me so fucking much. Maybe I can figure out why my mind won't give me piece concerning the matter.

Chapter 0202

Rowan.

My feet hit the pavement as I run. I usually run in the morning, but today I decided otherwise. It was around seven in the evening, and I needed this run.

I speed up, feeling my muscles burn. I wanted to outrun my guilt. Wanted to outrun my heartache. I wanted to outrun my fucking foolishness.

The guilt of how much I had hurt Ava was eating me alive. Destroying me from the inside out. I haven't been able to face her since I discovered my feelings for her.

I look at myself in the mirror, and all I see is a despicable human being. I am disgusted by my actions.

Disgusted by all that I did to her.

I thought I was a good man. The kind that loves fiercely. I was always proud of myself for holding on to my love for Emma. I thought it meant that my feelings for her were true. What I didn't realize was that while doing that, I was hurting the woman I actually loved.

"Fuck!" I curse myself and the world.

How the hell did I get here?

I push myself harder as I run past the gas station a few miles from my house. I don't have time to slow down because once I do, my demons will be back to haunt me. To taunt me with all my mistakes.

Every time I close my eyes, I see her face from many months ago, before she asked for a divorce. I don't even remember what I said to her, but it hurt her pretty badly. I remember her eyes shutting down in pain as she told me she hated me. I scoffed. Not knowing that I would one day crave the love she used to have for me.

I messed up big time. Now everything is fucked up and I don't know how to fix it.

My phone rings, and I am pulled from my drowning thoughts.

"Hello, I answer without checking the caller's ID. My breaths coming in hard and fast.

"Dad, it's me! Noah shouts in excitement.

We've talked on the phone, but I haven't been by to see him. Not when seeing him means seeing Ava.

Hey, buddy. How are you?"

The good. I'm super excited," he all but shouts.

My curiosity gets the best of me, even though part of me thinks that I will regret asking.

"Why? What's got you in such a good mood?" I chuckle.

Talking to him brought a sense of peace. Right now, he was my lifeline because I felt like I was drowning. Like I was dying from the inside.

"Well, you remember my best friend Gunner?" he asks

"Yeah"

and she agreed.

“Well, a bunch of things happened, and I wanted to cheer him up, so I talked to mon We’re going to an amusement park tomorrow. Mom, me, Gunner and his dad,” he shouts the last part.

I feel jealousy take control. The thought of having another man near her was driving me insane. I know I

said she deserves better, but I honestly don’t think I can let her go.

“Is that right?” I ask, my voice taking a hard tone.

“Yeah” Noah replies. “Are you okay, dad? You don’t sound fine,” he says after realizing that I wasn’t as excited for him as I should be.

I spin around and begin my walk back home. My insides burned from envy. What if she chose this man? What if they were in a relationship? What if she fell in love with him? The more I thought of all the possibilities, the more I got pissed at myself for being such an idiot.

“I

“Where is it?” I ask him crisply.

“Oh, in the next town,” he replies. “Are you okay, dad?”

“Yes. Absolutely,” I lie.

“Okay then,” his voice is incredulous. “I’ll talk to you later. Just wanted to let you know that I won’t be around tomorrow, in case you wanted to see me. Bye dad, goodnight.”

“Goodnight too, buddy,” I said, hanging up the phone.

I continue my walk. I'd come out tonight in the hopes of calming my thoughts

top of all the stress, I was now pissed as hell.

Chapter 0203

I get to my home thirty minutes later. The cold air had done nothing to cool my frayed nerves. I wanted to storm to Ava's place and claim her. I wanted to tell her she can't go out with this Calvin guy. I wanted to declare my love for her.

"Mr. Woods, there is someone here to see you," my butler informs me the moment I step into my house.

"Who is it?" I ask.

Before he can answer, her voice interrupts us. I swear as I turn around to face her. Fuck! I didn't have the

time or patience to deal with her.

"How can I help you, Emma?" I feel it as Rodgers, my butler, leaves,

I study her features. She was beautiful, yes, but her beauty had deemed in my eyes. I tried searching for the scorching feelings I used to have for her, but there was nothing. The place that once housed them was completely empty.

"How are you, Ro?" she asks instead of answering my question.

I didn't want to be rude, but I didn't have time for her.

Tell me why you're here, Emma. I have a lot of things on my plate.

She sighs. Her face losing its color. "I'm here because of us. I want us to talk about our relationship."

My face completely shuts down. I feel coldness radiating from me. She flinches, but I don't give a shit.

"What relationship? There is no 'us' Emma. Don't you understand that?" I ask her in a hard tone, my hands fisted at my side.

Damn it. I wanted her to leave. Doesn't she understand that being near her irritates me? That things have changed and it's like I can't stand being around her.

"That's not true. I love you, and you love me. It's always been that way. You can't tell me that things have changed. Is it because of Ava?" Tears were swimming in her eyes.

I didn't love her, but I cared for her. I didn't want to hurt, but if it means that's the only way she'll understand that we're done, then so be it.

"Yes, but I also came to realize that I don't love you. I may have in the past, but not anymore. You're wasting your time on me. You should be looking for someone who'll give you the love I can't."

The tears she was holding back begin to fall. Pain flashed in her features. I wanted to E

"You love her, don't you?" she asks in a broken voice.

Her pain tugs at the parts of me that used to love her. I stamp them down. Not allowing them to win.

you “Yes, I know it’s not what you want to hear, but yes I love her” I tell her as gently as I can. “Now that know the truth, I’m also letting you know that I’m going to pursue her and I don’t want you standing in my

way”

“She’ll never give you a chance. She’ll never forgive you.” Her voice is bitter and wounded.

I run my hand through my hair in frustration. “That may be the case, but it still won’t stop me from trying to

win back her love.”

“And I won’t stop trying to win back yours. I lost you once, Rowan, and I’m not going to lose you again. I

won’t accept defeat that easily,” she says determinedly.

Before I can tell that she’s wasting her time, she flounces past me and leaves.

I head upstairs while pushing the encounter with Emma to the back of my mind. Nothing she said

mattered. Ava is my main focus now.

It was time for me to win back my ex-wife.

Chapter 0204

Ava

“Mommy, are you almost done?” Noah yells through my bedroom door. “It’s almost time. We are going to

be late.

“Just give me a sec” I yell back as I quickly put on my outfit for the day.

Nowadays, I’m more comfortable with dresses, so that’s what I had on. I had on a cute sundress with thin straps and that reached above my knees. I paired them with sandals. Since we were going to spend most of the time walking, I assumed they will be more comfortable.

My hair was in in a curled pony tail with loose tendrils framing my face. I didn’t have much make up on. Mainly because I felt too lazy to do it.

I didn’t want to do this whole thing. I easily get tired nowadays and I didn’t want to ruin the day by being worn out too quickly. The smile on Noah’s and Gunner’s faces is what made me change my mind. They were both so excited for this day.

Gunner needed this after what happened last week. He needed to feel loved and treasured. I hoped that being surrounded by those that love him will give him new memories Memories that would replace those few painful ones of his mother.

I take my purse and open my door only to find Noah waiting for me outside,

“I’m ready. Let’s go”

Just as I finished the sentence, we hear a honk outside my house. I guess that both Calvin and Gunner were also ready to go.

Since we were going to the same place, we saw no need for travelling separately. We decided that we would take Cal's car since it was bigger and that he would be driving.

"I'm so excited...I've been waiting for this day since you agreed" Noah says as he gently pulls me down the stair while being mindful of my condition. "I even called dad yesterday. He was sounded funny, but I let him know that I won't be home today"

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At the mention of Rowan, I get an uneasy feeling. In the past months he has been what I can only describe as unpredictable. I don’t think he would show up, but I also wouldn’t put past his new persona.

Pushing thoughts of him aside, I focus on the day ahead.

We get out of the house and Noah rushes to Cal’s car. I follow behind him once I’ve locked the door. Climbing into the passenger seat, I smile at the father–son duo.

“Hello you two” I greet as cheerful as I can.

“Hey Ava!” Gunner screams with excitement.

Cal smile back at me “Hey”

We all buckle up and then Cal starts the engine and drives off.

Thirty m

minutes into the trip, the boys are still as excited as the first day we made these plans. They were

so hyper that it was funny how they behaved.

“How long till we get there?” Noah asks, buzzing with joy while Gunner bounced up and down his seat.

“About forty minutes give or take” Cal answers.

They are quiet for a while before they start conversing on their own. Their talk mostly consisting of all the

things they’re going to do while there. The games they’re going to play. The rides they’re going to try and

the foods they’re going to eat.

“They’re really excited” Cal says, his eyes flashing to mine before going back on the road.

I chuckle. “That is an understatement. Noah barely slept last night and he when he did. He was up again

at the crack of dawn, waking me up like there was a freaking apocalypse”

He laughs at that. Real laughter. I stare at him in wonder. Unable to tear my gaze from him.

“What is it?” he asks when his laugh dies down.

I shake my head to clear my thoughts. “Nothing. I’ve just never heard you laugh like that before. You should laugh more often. It suits you”

The smile he had earlier disappears. He was back to being unreachable and detached.

really needed to help. Show him how to live. Whoever Gunner’s mom is, sure did a number on both father and son. I’m only grateful that Rowan only hurt me. I don’t know what I would have done if my situation had been similar to that of Calvin.

We drive in silence after that. Mostly it's the kids that engage us in their conversation. Those two surprised me at how in sync they were with each other. They were even finishing each other's sentences which Calvin found hilarious. M

Soon we get to our destination. We get out of the car immediately Calvin finds a parking spot.

Where to first?" Cal asks as we faced the gate to the amusement park. There were probably thousands of people walking about.

"The rides, definitely" Noah and Gunner chorus together.

The faces were split into wide grins and their eyes were shimmering with excitement.

"The rides it is" I grin and take both their hands as we head into the sea of people.

About two hours later, my legs were aching, but I was happy. I take a seat by the bench and watch as Cal,

Gunner and Noah play around.

an't help b

Rubbing my feet I turn wistful. This is what I always wanted for me, Noah and Rowan. I

always wanted us to do such fun things together. Every time I broached the subject, Rowan would turn me down.

He always said that he didn't mind spending time with Noah, so long as I wasn't there to ruin their

moment because my presence disgusted him.

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It hurt as always, but I swallowed it down. Except that vacation we went to as a family, and which Noah insisted. We never did anything as a family. It was always either Rowan and Noah or Noah and me. Never

the three of us.

“I don’t like another man playing dad to my son” I sit frozen, unable to believe that I’d just heard his voice.

It’s like my thoughts had conjured him out of thin air.

Yeah. I should have definitely listened to my brain when it told me that Rowan was probably going to show up. This was sure going to be a fucking disaster.

Chapter 0205

I slowly turn in the direction of the sound to find Rowan seated next to me. It’s like I’d wished him into existence. That wasn’t all. For the first time since I’ve known him, Rowan wasn’t wearing a suit. He had a black V-neck t-shirt and blue jeans.

“What are you doing here?” I stammer, still not believing he was here.

“Noah mentioned you’d be here, so here I am” he shrugs his shoulder casually as if what he just said

wasn’t insane.

Unable to withstand his presence anymore, I stand up and walk away without saying another word. I hear him calling my name, but I ignore him.

I go to the bathroom and try to calm myself. Why now? Why couldn't he have been like this years ago? Just when I've decided to move on, he gets a change in character? It doesn't work like that.

Splashing water on my face, I harden my heart. It doesn't matter why he all of a sudden wants to be part

of my life. He and I are done. We were done before we even began.

After I feel more anchored, I step outside only to bump into someone. The scent of the cologne

immediately alerts me to who the person I bumped into is.

I rip myself away from his body as if he'd scorched me. With my hormones all over the place, I didn't want

him to get the wrong idea.

"Ava" he calls, his voice husky and deep.

"What do you want, Rowan? What game are you trying to play?"

I still don't understand him and parts of me doesn't want to. All I know is that he caused me pain. I don't want to experience that again.

"I'm not playing any game. I just want to talk. There's something important I have to tell you" he says hesitantly.

I become curious. Rowan is a lot of things except hesitant and unsure. I've known him all my life and he has never been this hesitant. He usually gets straight to the point. Whether you like what he has to say or not, that was none of his business.

I study him closely. His grey stare at mine in a way I've never seen him staring at me. There was

something about him. Something had changed in him. I just couldn't tell what it is.

Apart from that, he looked almost fearful. Like he didn't know how to tell me what he wanted to say and

I get more curious when I notice how he keeps shifting from one foot to another. He was nervous. His nervousness was another thing out of character.

"What is it?" I fold my hands on top of my belly and tap my foot impatiently against the floor.

-Before he can say anything, Calvin joins us.

Ava, is he disturbing you?" he asks standing near me in a protective stance while glaring at Rowan.

Rowan sneers. "Of course it's you. What is it with you salivating over what's mine? First it was Emma when we were in high school. Following her around like a damn lost puppy. Now? Now it's Ava. Stay the fuck away from her. She's mine"

I feel pissed at what he said. He had no right to talk to Calvin like that. Besides, I wasn't his. Never was.

Never have been.

"You're a fucking bastard. Stop talking about Ava as if she's a piece of meat you can claim" Calvin all but

snarls.

His hands were fisted at his side. His jaw was clenched and he looked ready to pounce on Rowan and beat him to shit.

I look between the two of them unable to believe that they were behaving like kids. While Calvin looked at

Rowan with nothing but hatred, Rowan looked at him in jealousy.

There was something odd about Calvin's look. Sure, he used to crush on Emma when she was with Rowan back then, but so did hundreds of other boys. The fact that she only had eyes for Rowan didn't warranty the hate in his eyes. Besides, it was years ago. So why the hell did he hate Rowan?

"Stay out of this. This is between Ava and me" Rowan growls, his eyes flashing, a storm brewing behind them.

Calvin steps forward and pushes Rowan back. He doesn't even stumble, but it's enough to piss him off more than he already was.

"Guys, please don't do this?" I plead.

No one responds. There are too far gone to hear me or even reason.

I nervously look around. A small crowd was already forming. Given Rowan was well know, some already had their phones out.

Don't fucking touch me" Rowan says. They were now head to head.

Chapter 0206

He was a bit taller than Calvin, but that didn't make Calvin back down.

"I've had enough of you. Enough of you controlling my fucking life Why doe

us all the trouble" Calvin tells Rowan.

you just drop dead and save

I stand there frozen unable to believe what he just said. There was malice in his eyes. Something I never thought I would associate with Calvin. Anger and bitterness sure, but malice? Never.

"Wouldn't you wish that? Even after all these years you're still trying to prove that you're someone when you're not. The truth is you'll never be me. Emma didn't fucking love you then and Ava won't love you now

because her heart belongs to me"

Those words seemed like the push Calvin needed because he swings his fist and get Rowan in the jaw. Rowan doesn't take long to recover before he's retaliating. Soon, they're full blown fighting.

I stand there watching them, wishing I could be anywhere but here.

Trying to separate them proves futile. I almost get hit in the process. The security are called and we are

escorted outside. Before leaving, I go and pick the boys. I find them in the park. Seated on the bench and

completely sad.

“Come, let’s go home” I tell them as gently as I could.

“I can’t believe dad and Calvin were fighting. Why were they fighting?” Noah asks.

“Noah and I are best friends. Even if they don’t like each other shouldn’t they try to get along because of us?” Gunner adds looking as disappointed in his father as Noah was in his.

“Sometimes adults fight. I’m sure they’ll put aside their differences” I tell them trying to suppress my anger and frustration.

We get outside in time to see Rowan arguing with the management.

“Do you know who I fucking am?” he snarls. “I can by this whole damn place and put you all out of a fucking job!”

Calvin was pacing a few feet from Rowan. He occasionally stopped and glared at him.

“I understand Mr. Woods, but you caused a disturbance...” the manager doesn’t get to finish.

“Shut up!” Rowan commands. “I hear nothing of use to me..Now, you’ll allow us to go back”

I sigh in tiredness, I really should have stayed at home.

Rowan had a split lip while Calvin had a bleeding nose (Probably broken), bruised cheek and a split lip.

“Stop it, Rowan” I tell him tiredly. “Both you and Calvin have done enough without forcing this poor man to let us back in after starting a fight not only publicly but also in front of your sons. What example are you

becoming?”

I stare both of them down before turning to the manager.

“I’m really sorry for the trouble. We’ll leave immediately” he nods at me before leaving.

Grasping the hands of Noah and Gunner, I turn to face their fathers.

“Both of you should be ashamed. Today was about the children and yet you ruined the day for them. They had to watch their dads fight like little kids fighting over a damn toy.

“He started it” both of them say at the same time making me even more pissed.

“I don’t give a damn who started it! My point is that you should have had more control and remembered

the boys!”

While Calvin looks contrite, Rowan just smirks at me. His eyes roaming over me.

“I like this version of you. It’s se...” he goes to say sexy but remembers that Noah and Gunner are with us

so he stops.

Letting out a breath of frustration, I turn and leave. I had no more energy to deal with them.

“Where are you going?” Rowan shouts.

“Far away from both of you.” With that I walk away and leave them standing outside the amusement park.

I hail a cab and get me and the boys inside. It was unreasonable given the amount I would have but hell, I had the money so it didn't matter.

“Can we get ice cream before going home?” Gunner asks lowly.

Noah adds “And milkshake”

“Year sure. We all need some comfort food after today's disaster” I smile at them which they return.

to pay pay.

We drive in silence till we reach. We get ice cream, burgers and milkshake then we head home. The day finally ends and even though I should have been relieved, I wasn't. I couldn't get Calvin's words out of my head.

Tve had enough of you controlling my life”

Those words keep replaying in my mind. Why would Calvin say that? As far as I know, this is the first time they've seen each other in years. So why did Calvin behave like Rowan was the bane of his existence?

Chapter 0207

My head was going to blow up and leave pieces of meat scattered all over my living room. I haven't had a

moment of peace at all.

Thoughts keep running through my head. Never stopping. Never ceasing. It was driving me insane, for

heaven's sake.

"Okay, now I want you to focus on the key and the insects we are studying," I tell Mary, one of the students I tutor. "If you want to master the dichotomous key, you have to focus on those two."

I'd hoped that this would distract me from my thoughts, but I was damn wrong. My head

every single damn time.

Mary nods her head, giving me the signal that she has understood.

rent straying

"The first character has large wings and has small or no wings... What do you think the answer is?"

She studies the insects in the book before turning to me. At first, she seems unsure, but finally she opens her mouth and speaks.

"Only one insect has large wings in this list, so the butterfly will go under that category"

I smile at her, glad that she got it. "Good. So since it's the only one with large wings, the rest will fall under the small or no wings. Given that this is like a game of elimination and they're a lot, we will subdivide them into categories. So what do you think the next two categories will be according to the insects we have?"

Her eyes go back to the book. She doesn't say anything for a while, but she keeps throwing me glances as if she's nervous.

"Don't worry, Mary, just take your time," I tell her softly.

I believe the key to being a good teacher is having patience. Understanding that not all students will get it on the first try. There are just some that are a bit slower than others, and that is absolutely okay.

"I don't know if I am right," she begins. (1

"And that's okay. If you're not we'll find out where you went wrong"

She nods her head. "Long rear legs or short rear legs"

"Good, that is excellent. So which will go to which?"

I see the moment her confidence comes back, and I smile.

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“With very long legs, the category will end with mosquitoes, while for short rear legs, I’ll divide the category into another two parts. Small eyes and large eyes” 1

I clap my hand in glee, just to make her feel appreciate. After all, everyone deserves praise when they have accomplished something.

“Very good”

“Thank you,” she says, her smile shining as bright as the sun.

After that, the rest is easy for her. I give her exercises, and she excels in all of them. After our session, I give her an assignment to do at home.

“Thank you, Ava” she says at the door. “You make Biology easy to understand.”

“Anytime dear”

After she leaves, I head to the living room and drop down on the couch like a sack of potatoes. My mind was still wired and I wanted a distraction, I just couldn’t think of anything.

Noah was at Gunner’s house so I was alone for now.

Rubbing my belly, I try to come up with something to do. The issue about Gunner’s mother still bothered me. That, along with what Calvin told Rowan. There was just something about everything that niggled in my mind.

I stand up and go to my room to change. I put on some old clothes then head out to the backyard.
Maybe

gardening will take my mind of the thoughts in my head.

I get down on my knees after getting some seeds from the shed. Today I plan to plant some carrots and
tomatoes.

“You seem lost.” His voice pulls me away from my task.

I look up to see Calvin standing right in front of me. I don’t know for how long I was gardening, but I had
been so lost that I hadn’t heard him when he arrived.

“Yeah....I just have a lot on my mind. I’d hoped this would help,” I tell him while wiping some of the dirt
from my clothes.

“Anything I can help you figure out?”

Chapter 0208

“I don’t think so”

He was always tight-lipped about the mother of his son. I didn’t know anything. Were they married,
then divorced? Were they just in a relationship? How long have they known each other?

I doubt he will ever willingly give me the information I need to piece things together. Besides, I didn’t
want to cause him hurt. It looks like every time I mention her, either he gets really pissed or really angry.

“That’s okay... I get it. A lot of the time, I prefer processing things on my own,” he pauses. “But that
doesn’t mean that I can’t help you with this,” he points at the small garden.

“Thank you,” I smile while he gets down on his knees.

I hand him a pair of gloves, and he follows my lead.

“What are the boys doing?” I ask.

“Playing video games... It honestly surprises me how close they’ve become. They’re basically inseparable. I never even imagined this scenario in my wildest dreams, given how much I hate Noah’s father”

I frown at that. He can’t even bring himself to say his name. Why?

“Why do you hate him so much? Whatever happened between you two was years ago. Shouldn’t you have

been able to get over it by now?” I ask him, referring to how he had a crush on Emma back in high school.

He had been obsessed, just like me. While my obsession had been for Rowan, his had been for Emma. Just like Rowan said, he had followed Emma around like a lost puppy. He would write her love letters. Buy her flowers and leave them in her locker. He would also buy her gifts. He really went above and beyond and that used to piss Rowan off to no end.

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“It’s nothing,” he answers, but I know that he’s lying to me. There was something he wasn’t telling me.

I choose to leave it at that instead of pushing it.

“Regardless, you have to set your differences aside. Our sons are best friends, so you’ll have to see him once in a while and you can’t go picking a fight with him every time.”

I make a mental note to have the same talk with Rowan. They both need to start acting like adults.

“Think about what Gunner needs. This isn’t about you or what went down between you and Rowan. This is about Gunner and Noah,” I add when he doesn’t say anything.

Thinking about Gunner brings a mental picture to mind. I try to push it, but to no avail. It stays there as my

to Gunner’s

+15 BONUS

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I freeze. My bones locked tight. My heart beating wildly. It can’t be. It just can’t be. She would have said something. She would have told her family. I try to deny it, but the proof is there.

“Ava?” he calls my name, but it’s like I am in a trance.

It was no wonder his smile was so familiar. No wonder it bothered me so much. His smile was similar to

hers when she was a little girl. They were identical.

“Emma,” her name slips from my lips, as if it was forced out.

I feel it as Calvin stills next to me. If my memory didn’t convince me, then the way his body locked, did.

“I need to go.” I mumble, struggling to stand up.

Finally, I manage to get up. His hand on my arm stops me. I face him. He must have seen something in my eyes. I'm not sure, and right now, I don't care.

"You know," he whispers. "You've figured out the truth."

I nod my head as tears cloud my eyes. Without a word, knowing he will take care of Noah, I pull my hands

from his. I walk back into my house and get my car keys before leaving.

I can't believe this. Not her.

I needed answers because the Emma I knew would never abandon her child. She would never be so cruel.

to her own flesh and blood.

Chapter 0209

Rowan.

"Is Noah coming?" my mother asks me.

"Not today, mom. I forgot to let Ava know, and I didn't want to spring this on her all of a sudden," I tell her

as I walk into Kate's home.

It was our monthly get-together. Just like the last one, I didn't want to be here. The only reason I was there was because I'd promised Mom that I would attend.

“I’ve missed him so much, and so has Kate. She really wanted to see

him.” She pauses. “Now that she

and Ava are estranged, the only time she gets to see Noah is during these get-togethers.”

I wanted to feel sorry for her, but I don’t. That makes me a bastard, sure, but I believe that we were all

getting what we deserved. This was our punishment for how we treated Ava.

“Maybe next time,” I say as I walk past her.

Mom and Kate have been friends for years. She would do anything for her best friend. The last thing I

want or need is to stand there for almost thirty minutes just listening to how Kate was suffering.

I didn’t need to hear about someone else’s suffering when I was dealing with one of my own.

She follows me as I make my way to the backyard. I know Kate’s home like the back of my hand. After all, they’ve lived here for years. This is the same house where Ava and I got married. The same house she tried to escape when she found out she was pregnant with Noah.

I stop dead in my tracks. Mom, who was following behind me, collides with my back.

“What the hell, Rowan?” she asks, but I don’t turn around. Nor do I answer.

She comes to my front when I don’t answer. My eyes stare at her, unseeing.

“Rowan? What is it?”

My throat bobbles as I try to form the words.

I just remembered the day I caught Ava trying to escape. Looking back now, I can't imagine how my life would have turned out had she managed to escape me.” I tell her.

Rowan, darling Don't think about such things. It didn't happen and we should be grateful to God for that.”

sigh, remembering how foolish I had been

“Ava was eighteen and scared, mom. She begged me to let her go because, deep down, she probably knew that I would destroy her if she stayed, and I did. I broke her heart more times than I can count. Right now, I don't know what to even think. Part of me wishes I had let her go because maybe she wouldn't be as broken as she is right now; the other parts is grateful I'd stopped her because I wouldn't have gotten to know Noah or the wonderful woman she is.”

The crushing weight that descends on me every time I remember all I put her through is almost

unbearable. I should have tried harder, maybe then I wouldn't have this much regret weighing down on

me.

“You're taking too much on your shoulders, Rowan. Sure, you hurt her, but you forget that we all played our roles in breaking her. Both families have a hand in destroying her heart. You're not the only one to blame for her broken pieces.” Mom puts a hand around my forearm, trying to comfort me.

“Your mother is right.” I turn to find my father standing next to the sliding doors.

“We all played our part in hurting, Ava. We forgot that she came into our lives as a tiny baby girl. We forgot how much joy she brought us. We forgot how she used to make us all laugh. We forgot that she was a girl who needed our love. That is on us. We were the parents, and you children followed our lead.

We shunned her, and so you followed suit. If anyone is to blame, then it's us. We failed as adults and that is

on us," he finishes, clasping my shoulder in a tight grip.

I know what they said was meant to make me feel better, but it doesn't. The rest mainly ignored Ava and

treated her like she was invisible. I did worse. So much fucking worse, and that shit is all on me. 1

I give them a small smile. I didn't want to dwell on this for long.

Mom must have believed me because she takes my hand in hers.

"Come on, let's go before the others start wondering what's taking us so long," she says, pulling me along

while dad follows behind.

I internally groan when I spot Emma. I knew she would be here, but knowing and seeing are two different things.

Chapter 0210

"Hey Ro, I'm glad you came." Kate kisses both of my cheeks.

"Yeah" it's the only response I can master, given that I'm not really glad to be here.

She gets distracted by my parents, and I see that as my chance to slip away.

cht to

I bead straight to my brother.

“How are things going?” he asks after the initial greeting.

“Terrible” I mumble, remembering the fight between me and Calvin the weekend before

It wasn't one of my greatest moments, but he just reminded me of the time he used to chase after Emma. That scared me because I was afraid that he was doing the same to Ava. Regardless of everything. Calvin

is a good guy. That, more than anything, scared the crap out of me because it means that he actually has

a chance if he were to shoot his shot.

“Any progress so far?” he asks.

“None. The only progress is that I managed to piss her off even more.”

Gabe sighs. “What did you do?”

“I got into a fight with Calvin. Turns out he is Gunner's father”

I don't need to explain who Gunner is. Noah talks about him all the damn time. He tells everyone that he

is his new best friend.

“I'm confused. Who is Calvin?” Gabe asks, looking confused as hell.

“Nerdy Cal. You remember him?”

It takes a while, but I see it the moment it downs on him. I

“You’re shitting me!” he yells. “That Nerdy Cal? The one that used to follow Emma around all the time.”

“Yes, the same one”

I still can’t believe it. It’s such a damn coincidence that I don’t know what to think.

“What’s going on?” Travis asks as he walks towards us.

I look behind him, thankful that Emma hadn’t followed him. In fact, thinking about it now, I wouldn’t mind

Calvin resumed his obsession and started

“Just that nerdy Cal is Gunner’s dad, and Ro got into a fight with him,” Gabe answers.

“Seriously?” he asks before turning to me. “Why? Was it because of Emma?”

Before I can answer him, we hear the front door open and then bang shut. Moments later we hear Ava’s clear and angry voice shouting Emma’s name.

“Emma?” she shouts again as she walks out of the house.

“What’s going on?” I turn to Travis.

“I have no idea”

We step closer. Our eyes on Ava as she stomps towards Emma, who was standing next to our parents.

Before anyone can do anything or stop her, she slaps Emma so hard that she falls to the ground.

“What the hell, Ava?” Travis shouts as she rushes to help his sister.

Emma, just like everyone else, was shocked. Ava, on the other hand, looked wired. She looked downright

pissed. As if she was ready to rip someone’s head off.

“Shut the fuck up, Travis” she says at him through clenched teeth.

“What’s going on, Ava? Why would you attack your sister like that?” Kate asks as tears fill her eyes.

She was torn. She didn’t know which girl to choose, so she was waiting to see if Ava had a good reason before picking sides.

This just shows how much she’s changed. The previous Kate would immediately take Emma’s side.

“That’s what I would like to know.” Ava snarls and then glares at Emma. “I would like to know why you would do that, Emma. Why would you abandon your child? Your own son”

We all stand stock still. Maybe we weren’t hearing it right. Maybe Ava got it wrong. There is no way Emma had a child. She would have told her family.

“That’s bullshit. Emma doesn’t have a child, and she would never abandon her kid,” Travis defends.

Ava laughs as if she had lost her goddamn mind.

That's what I thought at first, but I am not wrong" she asks

Said woman was now in Travis' arms. Clutching his arm like her life depended on it. She had tears streaking down her cheeks and fear in her eyes. She was even fucking trembling. Even with all that, she didn't answer.

Ava continues while looking at Emma like she is the scum of the earth.

"You're Gunner's mother, isn't that right Emma or are you going to continue pretending that you're not?" Ava delivers the final blow. One that none of us saw coming. A blow that none of us were prepared for.