

## Ex Husband 231

### Chapter 0231

He glares at me, but within seconds, his features soften. He grabs my hand, turns it, and kisses my palm in a really gentle kiss.

“I don’t know when I fell in love with you or how; all I know is that I love you, Ava. I didn’t see it back then. I was so overcome with bitterness and anger that I didn’t realize what a true gem I had married. In the last few months, it’s been hard to be without you. Seeing you in pain or hurt destroys me every time. It has taken me time to realize that I’m in love with you, but here I am, begging you to give me a chance to show you the love you deserved from me but never got.”

I watch completely stunned, as he gets out of the chair and kneels before me. This all seems like a dream. It’s like I am in a completely different world right now.

“Oh, Rowan,” I start, trying to make my brain function. “You don’t love me. You’ve never loved me. Emmal

I

is your one and only love. She’s the one that has your heart, remember?”

Pain and regret flash in his eyes. I feel bad for him, but I know that maybe he’s just confused about things.

It just doesn’t make sense. How can he be in love with me when he hates me so much?

“You’re not listening to me Ava” he says as the pain changes to frustration.

“I am; you’re the one that’s confused, Rowan. How can you be in love with me now? You’ve hated me up until a few months ago. You have proven over and over again how little you care for me. You have

hurt me more times than I can count, all in the name of punishing me for ruining your relationship with Emma. You held on to her for years, and now all of a sudden, you want me to believe that you love me?"

The familiar pain creeps back up, but I force it down. I have no time or energy to feel the constant

heartache.

"I know, and you'll never know how much I regret hurting you, but if you could only give me a chance, I promise I'll never hurt you again and that I'll heal the wounds I caused." He whispers brokenly, his eyes staring at me.

"You have to realize that just because you say you love me doesn't make it true, Rowan. You had nine years with me, but not once did you give me a chance. I loved you with everything I was, yet you broke me with everything you had. How do you expect me to overcome that? Why would I give you a chance when you never gave me one?"

shift my eyes away from his. I didn't want to see his pain. I didn't want to see the regret and guilt. It was too much.

Please

"Why now, Rowan? Answer me that. If you're being truthful, what has made you love me now and not years ago?" I ask him.

He stares at me for a while before looking at the floor. He couldn't answer m

that would make sense. ↑

because he had no answer

I sigh. "You have to see just how unbelievable all this sounds. I'm sorry, but no. You can't expect me to believe you love me when, for nine years, all you saw was Emma. You lived and breathed her, it's hard to believe that in a few months that has changed."

I watch as his shoulders slump. If it wasn't for the fact that my ankles were killing me, I would be pacing all over the floor.

It only takes a minute for the heartbroken look in his eyes to turn into determination. He leans forwards and cups my cheek.

"I know this is a lot to take in, and I understand why you don't believe me, but I am not giving up. I'll prove

to you that I love you, Ava, even if it takes me a fucking lifetime to do it. I won't stop until you're

convinced that what I feel for you is true." His voice takes on a deep tone as he vows to me. 1

He bends soon after and gives me a quick kiss before he stands up and leaves. I stay rooted in my chair, still unable to understand all that just happened.

He said he loved me, could it be true? And should I believe him or am I setting myself up for more

I

disappointment and heartache?

Whether I believe him or not, something told me that my choice would soon be taken away from me concerning that matter.

## Chapter 0232

THREE STRIKES AND YOU'RE OUT, AVA.

I read and re-read the note. My heart was beating so hard that I thought it would punch a hole through my chest. I was scared shitless and I didn't know what to do. This was the third note I was getting.

I had just come from dropping Noah off at school when I found it in front of my door. When I first saw the box wrapped in a red bow, I thought that it was a gift. That is until I opened it and found a dead rat and

the note next to it.

I was now panicking because the threats seemed to be getting worse.

I dump the box and the rat in the trash bin before I take my phone and call Reaper. I prayed that he would

have answers for me. That by some miracle he had found out who was behind all this.

He answered after the second ring and I breathed a sigh of relief.

"Ava" he answered roughly. He sounded like he had been smoking.

"Please tell me that you have something for me" I plead desperately.

I know it is rude not even greet him, but I am scared. I am constantly worried and looking over my shoulder. I've become so paranoid that anyone I accidentally bump into in the street or store, immediately becomes a suspect.

I haven't told my family or friends because I don't want to worry them. If this continues though, I'll have to tell them and also report it to the police. The more people who are looking into this, the better the chances of finding this bastard.

"I'm sorry, Ava, but I have nothing. No one seems to know anything and all the leads we had turned out to be dead ends" he says remorsefully.

I want to scream and shout. I want to curse the whole damn world, but what would be the use of it? I need this person found, because I couldn't shake this gut feeling that everything is about to go horribly wrong.

"How can there be nothing? I just got another note and it was attached to a dead rat. I'm afraid, Reaper. So fucking afraid"

try holding back the tears, but they fall anyway. They stream down my face like waterfall, soaking the top of my dress in the process.

I'm sorry, Ava, but I am doing all that I can

I don't know what about his words triggered me, but they just did.

and burst throughout my entire body.

"Then try harder!" I scream, my voice echoing through the walls.

"Ava" he calls through clenched and I freeze before sagging in defeat.

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, Reaper. I'm just frustrated and I took it out on you" I apologize when I realize how rude and bratty I sounded.

He sighs, "I know and I get you, but you don't have to worry about a thing. I won't let anything bad happen

to you, okay?"

I don't answer him. How can I when everything inside me tells me that nothing is going to be okay? That something really bad will happen.

"Let me call a few of my contacts then I'll let you know what I find" he adds when I don't say anything more.

"Okay"

Without waiting for another word, I hang up.

I sit there on the kitchen stool as I stare at the dustbin. Thought after thought invade my head. I couldn't find peace or a moment of respite. I was tired and worn out. I haven't been able to sleep this past few weeks. I'm suffering from a case of insomnia.

When I do sleep, my dreams are filled with nothing but nightmares. All of them consist of me and my baby dying.

Between thoughts of this new threat and Rowan's confession a couple of days, I haven't gotten a time where my mind is still. If I'm not thinking about the notes, then I'm thinking about Rowan's unexpected confession of love.

Feeling jittery, I stand up and begin pacing. I needed a distraction or else I was going to go absolutely insane.

After a few minutes of pacing I grab my phone and call Letty. It rings, but she doesn't pick up. I try again, the same thing happens. Maybe she was in a meeting or something.

I then dial Corrine's number. She picks after the third ring.

Hey, love. How are you?" she asks, though she sounded a bit distracted.

I'm good. I was wondering if you would like to go shopping with me?"

I was desperate. I had enough things for me and my kids, but if it was the only way to distract my mind.

then so be it.

"I'm sorry, hun, but I have so much work, I don't think today will be possible. How about Thursday? I'll

make time for you"

I am disappointed, but I get her. She has a business to run after all.

It's okay. I totally understand"

"Thanks. I'll see you on Thursday, okay?"

"Sure"

Once we hang up, I stare at my kitchen. I couldn't stay here until Noah came back from school. I had nothing to do and the last thing I want is to be left alone with my thoughts. That was probably going to

end in disaster.

Taking my car keys and the purse I usually store my cards and money, I leave the house. I was going to go.

to my favorite ice cream shop. Ice cream cures everything.

I get there quickly. Time really flies when your head is preoccupied.

I park across the street and walk to the shop. When I get there I order a big bowl of ice cream. If I couldn't stop thinking so much, then I was going to give myself a brain freeze. Maybe that will help with stilling my running thoughts.

I take my time as I eat my blueberry swirl and vanilla ice cream. It made me feel better for a while. As I focused on enjoying the flavor, I didn't think that much. Plus the shop also had free books, so you can enjoy your ice cream as you read.

By the time I was done, I felt so much better.

I'd been there for like two hours and I thought it was time for me to go home. Since I was more relaxed, maybe I could get some shut eye before Noah come back from school.

When I go to pay. I get this strange feeling. Like warning bells were ringing in my head and soul.

Something inside me told me to stay inside. For some reason my heart felt heavy. Like I had this dark cloud that had suddenly attached itself to me.

Against my better judgement, I pay and leave.

I should have listened to my instincts. I should have stayed in the fucking shop.

I was about to cross the road to the parking lot when I heard a screech of tires, followed by shots.



The last thing I remember is people's horrified screams and this intense pain right before cold darkness

embraced me.

Chapter 0233

Rowan

"Sir? Is there anything you need me to get for you from the restaurant?" My secretary asks, but I continue staring outside my office window.

The view was really great. It was one of the reasons why I chose it, but today it didn't offer me the tranquility it usually does.

"No. Not today," I answer without looking at her.

"Okay then, I'll be back in thirty minutes"

I don't answer her and after a few seconds I hear the door closing. I sigh in frustration. For some reason the feeling of foreboding clung to me. It surrounded me in waves. Today more so than the previous days.

I don't know what it is, but my heart is anxious. I can't settle nor can I fucking focus. It's like

trying to tell me something, but I can't figure out what.

my soul is

Trying to distract myself, I think about Ava and our talk. I get her. Damn do I get her hesitation. I've spent

more than ten years drilling into her that Emma was the only woman I'll ever love.

I did everything in my power to show her just how little I cared for her. I've spent nine years punishing her

for something that was beyond her control. I drilled into her head that I hated her with every fiber of my being.

How then could I turn around and claim to love her?

It's frustrating as hell, but I understand her. I understand her reluctance to believe me. If the roles had been switched I wouldn't have believed it so easily.

Apart from all that, I also have to consider the pain I've caused her. Nine years of pain and mistreatment isn't something you get over within a day or week. Hell. It will probably take years to heal the wounds! inflicted.

The scars will remain with her though and considering the damage I caused, I can't help but wonder if she'll ever forgive me.

I want her. I want her in my life. I want to build a life with her. I crave that more than anything, but if she doesn't take me back, then let it be so. I'll have no one to blame but myself. It will be my penance for the hurt I've caused over the years,

I try to focus on her. To focus on her beautiful face and tactics I could use to get her to take me back, but

I've never felt this way before. Never had this unshakable feeling like something bad was going to happen.

ry to assure myself, but it doesn't work. I stand up and start pacing again. I felt wired. Like I was going

I

crazy.

I run my hand through my hair, probably messing it up, but I don't fucking care. Not when I feel like my fucking heart was being squeezed by a tight fist..

I turn on the TV. Maybe hearing other people's voices will help me calm down. It was better than listening

my own since it was distorted, jumbled and confused the hell out of me.

to my

I don't know for how long I stood pacing through the room when my door opened. I turn to find Gabe. He looked like hell froze over. He was breathing heavily, his eyes looked bloodshot and there was worry and

anguish in them.

I still in my tracks. Fuck. My brother is usually impeccable and not easily fazed. We share that trait as

twins. If he looks anything other than that then something serious must be wrong.

"What is it?" ask as my heart rate picks up.

Fuck was it our parent's? Maybe Noah?

"Ro..." he starts but doesn't finish his sentence. His voice was mixed with pain.

"Fuck, Gabe. Tell me what's wrong. Is it mom or dad?"

## Chapter 0234

I see him swallow, before his eyes focus on me.

“It’s Ava” he finally says.

I’m about to ask him what’s wrong with Ava when an unrecognizable voice mentions her name. I begin to

turn in the direction of the TV.

“Please, Rowan...don’t watch it, focus on me” My brother begs me, but I don’t pay attention to him.

I needed to know what the hell the reporters have to say about Ava.

**BREAKING NEWS.**

The headlines written in big, bold letters.

“News just in, Member of the Sharp family and founder of The Hope Foundation was today gunned down

by unknown people. We are yet to know the state she’s in, but the gunman opened fire to what seems to

be a hit targeted at her. The video you’re about to watch maybe disturbing to some”

I feel my knees weaken, but nothing could have prepared me to watching the woman I love being shot

multiple times.

The video showed Ava as she was walking out of an ice cream shop. Her eyes were downcast and she had a small frown on her face. Whoever took the video captured a black SUV with tinted windows speed in her direction. Just before the drove past her, a masked person, rolled the window down just enough to fit the gun, before shooting several times. They sped past her, leaving Ava to crumble on the ground in a pool of blood

The video ends, and the presenter comes back on.

“We are yet to establish why these gangsters would shoot a pregnant woman, but stay tuned as we try to find out.”

She proceeds to talk about the damage to the shop and how two other people were injured, but that doesn't concern me. My focus was Ava. I couldn't erase the image of her body lying motionless in a pool of her own blood from my mind.

“Rowan?” I hear his voice but it doesn't registers.

Nothing fucking registers in my head. I felt so fucking broken. I felt lost. My heart was fractured to tiny pieces. How am I supposed to survive if something happens to her?

“Ro...”

His hand on my shoulder makes me jump into action.

“I need to go to her...I need to see her” I struggle to say against the waves of emotions that were choking me.

I don't wait to hear what he says, before I am out of my office door. I rush down the corridor towards my private elevator. My employees stare at me in confusion. I probably looked like a deranged person, but ! don't give a damn.

Jumping to the elevator, I key it in for the underground parking. My need to see her intensified with every

bit of my heart.

I got underground and immediately rushed to the reserved parking space. My car was there and so was

Gabe's.

I struggled to unlock the doors. My hands were shaking and I couldn't stop the tremble no matter what.

The keys fell out of my grip, frustrating me even further.

"Fuck" I yell, kicking the tire in anger, fear and frustration.

Bending down, I pick the keys and manage to unlock the doors. I had my hand on the handle, about to

open it when a hand stopped me.

I turn around pissed off, about to lash out when his voice stops.

"I'm not about to let you fucking drive while you're in this state" he says before pushing forward his hand. Give me the keys, I'll take you to the hospital."

I deflate and hand him the keys. He was right. I wasn't in the right mental state to drive anywhere. The last thing Noah needed is to have both parents in the hospital.

I get in and Gabe starts the car, all the while praying that Ava was okay because I don't how I'll survive if I were to lose her.

Today's Bonus Offer

Chapter 0235

Fuck. What did this have to happen to her? Why would someone do this to her? Were there signs that I ignored? Was she in danger, and I didn't notice?

The questions keep bombarding my head as Gabe drives out of the underground parking. I would never forgive myself if she was in danger and I didn't notice it, or even do something about.

"Is she alive?" I ask as the fear of his answer chocks me.

She had to be alive. She just had to.

Gabe gives me a side way glance. "I don't know much, but I know she's alive"

'Barely'

The words aren't said, but they are implied.

I saw the video. Whoever was after her wanted to make sure that Ava died. That she didn't have a chance

of surviving. I don't know the extent of her wounds, but I know at least two bullets hit her.

"Do you know which hospital she's at?" I ask, my voice sounding gruff even to my own ears.

I had been so focused on getting to her, that I didn't even bother asking which hospital she was taken to.  
I

just wanted to be there for her.

“Yeah, don’t worry. I called around and got the info. I was told they’re taking her to Avenue Hospital” he answers.

At least they had the mind to take her to the best hospital in the city.

I try to calm my heart. Try to breathe through the panic that threatened to drown me. It’s hard though. So fucking hard. I won’t get a moment of peace until I know that she’s okay.

“She’s going to be okay, Ro” Gabe tells me after a minute or so of silence.

I want to be confident about that, but I am not. She might survive, but what about the baby? Not only was she shot, but when she fell to the ground that impact couldn’t have been good for the baby.

If she survived, but the baby died in the process, she would be devastated. I know Ava. The loss would destroy her. It would probably be her undoing.

“Can you please hurry up? I demand.

it felt like we were moving at a snail pace. Like time was crawling. Why the fuck is it always like that?

slow motion.

“I’m going as fast as I can, Ro”

“It’s not fast enough. I need to be with her” I tell him desperately.



Why can't he understand that I have to be there? That I need to be there? What if she woke up and she was all alone with no one by her side? She needs me by her side.

I should have trusted my instincts when I first got that sense of dread. I should have listened. I should have dug deeper and made sure that all my loved ones were protected. I failed to listen to fucking intuition, and now Ava has paid the price.

"Do you have any idea who could be behind this?" Gabe asks.

I know what he's trying to do. He's trying to distract me so I wouldn't focus so much on all the negative stuff.

"Reaper" I growl his name in anger. "He's the only one with motive."

If it's him, then he has won. He has managed to destroy me and get his revenge. Nothing he can do could

hurt as much as this.

"What about Noah. You have to tell him" Gabe adds.

Fuck. I had completely forgotten about him. He was going to be so heartbroken. He loves his mom so much and this is going to hurt him.

"What am I going to tell him? How am I supposed to face him and tell him that his mother was fucking shot? That I wasn't able to protect her"

I feel the avalanche of emotions try to suffocate me. I can't fall apart now. Noah needed me and so does Ava. My emotions will just have to fucking wait until I can deal with them.

“It wasn’t your fault, Rowan. You couldn’t have predicted any of this”

I wanted it to be true, but the guilt was too powerful. I should have just listened to my intuition.

I stay quiet because there is nothing to say. A few minutes later, we arrive at the hospital. I don’t wait for Gabe to park the car, I just jump out while it’s still moving and rush inside.

Chapter 0236

“Ava Sharp” I almost shout when I get to the nurse’s station.

One of the nods and motions for me. “Come this way, she was brought in about ten minutes ago.

currently in the emergency room”

“How is she? How is the baby?”

She’s

“I’m sorry Mr. Woods, but I don’t know. The doctors are with her and I was given directions to guide her family to the waiting room when they arrive”

I want to scream and yell at her, but I know that won’t do a thing. It won’t help in anyway.

She leads me to the waiting room, and then proceeds to leave a few second later. I’m left with my racing thoughts and a dam full of worry. Just when I thought I couldn’t take it anymore, I feel small arms wrap

around me.

I turn to face the intruder only to find my mom staring back at me.

“Mom” I whisper. I feel my eyes tear up, but I refuse to let the tears fall.

I’ve never felt so helpless. So weak.

“She’s going to be fine. You just have to have faith”

I nod my head unable to force any word out of my mouth.

“Have you heard anything from the doctors?” it’s only when I hear Letty’s voice, that I realize that everyone was here.

Travis, Kate, my dad, Gabe, Corrine and even Emma. The only ones that were missing were Nora and Theo.

“No” I answer. “Have you informed her parents?”

“Yes. They traveled yesterday on a business trip, but they are on their way back. It will probably take them at least four hours before they are back”

I turn to face my brother as something hits me. I couldn’t let Noah hear it from teachers. If someone was going to tell him, then it will have to be me.

“Gabe, get one of our contacts to take the video down”

“On it he says, before taking out his phone and stepping a few feet away.

“I need someone to get Noah” I murmur, my eyes focused on the emergency door.

Corrine answers. "I've already talked to Calvin. He'll pick him up and bring him here as soon as possible"

I see Emma going still at the mention of Calvin's name, but I honestly don't care. Her issues with him weren't important right now.

The door to ER burst open and a doctor comes out. We all stand and face him.

"Are you all Ava's family?"

"Yes" I answer. "How is she?"

"Her wounds are extensive, but our main concern is the baby and the bullet that is lodged in her skull" he

answers truthfully.

I hear the women's gasps, but I don't pay them any attention. My focus is on what the doctor is saying.

"Since Ava is unconscious, we need permission to perform a C-section"

months along Co

"But she's only six cries.

"Yes. I failed to mention that one of the bullet hit her stomach causing the amniotic sac to rupture. If we don't do something, we might lose the baby"

My breathing becomes labored and it literally becomes hard to breathe. Fuck. This is worse than I imagined. Worry for both mother and baby consumes me.

“Go ahead” I murmur. If it was the only way to save the baby, then so be it.

The moment those words are out of my mouth, an alarm starts blaring and the lights on top of the emergency turns red. I knew what that meant. It was a code fucking red.

A nurse rushes outside and whispers something in the doctor’s ears. I see the panic in both their eyes right before the doctor turns to face us.

“Ava just went into cardiac arrest. The rest of the doctors are doing everything they can but we need to be prepared. In these cases we may need to make a decision and that’s where you come in” he says and the nurse picks up from where he left.

“Given Ava’s injury both may not survive, so we can only save one of them. Who will you have us save? The mother or the baby?”

The blow of her words hit me square in the chest. How can they ask me to choose? I can’t lose Ava, but choosing her over her baby is a sure way to make her hate me for life.

Chapter 0237

I stare at the doctor as if I’m a damn idiot who can’t comprehend what he just said. In my defense, his words didn’t register wholly with me. He was asking me to choose between Ava and her baby. Does he know how difficult that is?

“Mr. Woods, time is of the essence. We need to know your decision,” he all but begs.

I open my mouth, but no words come out. I try again, and the same thing fucking happens.

“Mr. Woods?” the nurse calls, concern in her voice.

“The baby,” Letty’s soft voice suddenly says, breaking the silence. “Save the baby, if it comes down to it.

The doctor and nurse nod their heads before rushing back to the ER. I turn to face Letty with mixed feelings waging war inside me.

My look must have communicated something because she hardens her eyes in defiance before speaking.

“Don’t look at me like that, Rowan. This is what Ava would have wanted,” she says through gritted teeth.

Corrine comes to the defense of her friend.

“She’s right. Ava would have picked her baby over herself any day, any time. If we picked her over the child, she would have hated us.

I deflate after she voices what I was thinking just a few minutes ago. I know she’s right, but that doesn’t take away the heaviness I feel in my heart.

I would never wish her baby harm. All I pray right now is that it doesn’t come down to that. I hope that both of them make it. Ava deserves to know happiness, and her baby deserves to live.

I resume my seat and wait. It killed me to wait, but what choice do I have? I’m not a doctor, so I can’t really help her. All I can do is continue praying.

I don’t remember the last time I prayed. Probably when I was still a kid in Sunday school. Right now, I’m willing to pray to anyone who’ll listen and answer my request. If it was possible to trade places with her, then I would have gladly done so, even if it meant that I wouldn’t have survived.

As long as she got to live her life, then I would do it. I would sacrifice everything I have right now just to see her scowling or glaring at me. I would give up the world to reverse what happened to her if I could.

It's my fault.

I turn towards the voice to find Letty silently crying.

"She'd tried calling me, but I was unreachable. When I got her missed call, I told myself I'd call her after got out of work. I should have just called her back immediately."

Travis pulls her into his arms as she continues to cry.

"It wasn't your fault, Letty. You couldn't have predicted this"

"He's right Letty, if anyone is to blame, then it should be me. I picked up her call. She wanted us to go shopping, but I was busy, so I asked her if we could postpone. If only I'd gone with her. Maybe I could have done something to prevent her from getting hurt." She had her arms wrapped around herself as if she were cold. Just like Letty, she was crying.

Looking at them, I see the love for their friend shining through their eyes. They haven't known each other for long, but their bond is unmistakable.

"None of you could have predicted something like this happening, so don't blame yourself. The only one responsible is the bastard that hurt," Kate tells them in a trembling voice.

"Playing the blame game right now won't help. We need to focus on Ava and the baby. We should send our best prayers for them," my mom adds.

I don't say anything. I just focus on the emergency room, waiting for someone to come through the door.

intell

Fuck. This was killing me. The waiting. The worrying. The uncertainty. I just need someone to fucking tell me that she is going to be okay. That she and the baby were out of danger. That they will be okay.

Everything in me screamed and begged for a silver lining. For a kind of miracle. My heart and soul begged for the angel of death to stay away. Their souls weren't his to claim. Not now. It wasn't their time yet; how can it be when they've both barely begun to live?

"Remember when we went to the mall and she didn't see the glass wall in front of her?" Letty says with a smile.

Corrine chuckles. "Yeah. She hit it right in the face before she fell on her ass."

"She was so embarrassed, but she couldn't stop laughing about it because it was so funny."

They laughed, and some of the others chuckled. There was just something about it that rubbed me wrong. I gritted my teeth and forced myself to remain quiet.

"Or the time the hot waiter caught her talking about how cute he is. We tried signaling to her that he was right behind her, but she didn't get it, not until the man cleared his voice," Corrine says with a fond smile. on her face.

"She was mortified, She begged us to leave because she couldn't face him after that." Letty adds, "He to that place again."

There was a moment of silence. Everyone was probably lost in memory lane. For the others, there probably weren't any good memories. After all, they'd treated Ava like shit, but Letty and Corrine had lots of them.



“We have so many memories to share with Noah and her newborn. So much to tell them about how amazing their mom is”

When those words leave Letty’s mouth, I blow up.

a like

“Can you just stop!” I growl as I feel anger bubble up inside me. She had no right to talk about Ava that.

“What? Stop what?” she stutters.

“Stop talking about her like she’s fucking gone!” I shout. “She isn’t. She’s still alive, and she’s going to through.”

pull

They were talking about Ava as if she were already dead. That’s what pissed me off. You only talk about someone in the past tense if you believe that she’s not making it out of the hospital.

“Tha—that’s not what...”

Her response is cut short when the doors to the ER open and a different doctor comes out.

“How is Ava doing, doctor?” Kate asks while her fingers fidgeted.

“We’re now prepping her for surgery in order to remove the bullets. The C–section went smoothly on the

baby’s part.

Everyone sighs in relief, but I feel like there’s something the doctor isn’t saying. What did he mean when he said the C–section went smoothly for the baby? What about Ava? Did that mean it went the opposite

way?

Before I can ask him, he speaks again.

“Congratulations! You have a baby girl.”

Chapter 0238

I stand rooted in my spot as the words keep ringing in my ears.

A baby girl.

Ava has a baby girl. She has a little daughter. Noah is going to be so fucking happy. He has been praying that he gets a sister, and his prayer has been answered.

“Can I see her?”

“I know you’re eager to see your daughter, Mr. Woods, but you’ll have to wait a bit until we’re done

checking her,” he says.

At first, his words don't make sense to me, but soon enough, I realize that he assumed that I was the baby's father. I don't mind it at all; it just came as a fucking shock.

"She's premature since she's only twenty-six weeks old, and given the trauma she faced when Ava was shot and fell to the ground, we'll place her in an incubator. She'll be in NICU until we feel she's healthy enough to be with family."

I notice that he has not mentioned anything about Ava. Does that mean they have no hopes of her surviving?

My heart rate increases at that possibility. She has to survive. She just has to. Otherwise, how are we supposed to live without her?

"You have to be prepared though. We will do everything in our power to make sure she survives, but you have to know that she may not. If she does, she may have severe disability such as cerebral palsy. learning difficulties or hearing and vision problems"

"But that is just a probability, right? It is not something that is set in stone." I ask him, already feeling sorry

for the little girl.

She came into the world too early, and already she's faced and will face more than most people will ever face in their entire lives.

"Yes. It's just a possibility, but it doesn't always happen. We just prefer giving parents all the angles in case something happens."

I nod my head.

“What about Ava?” I ask before he can turn and walk away.

“I’m sorry, but I can’t tell you anything right now. Her situation is delicate, so as of now we aren’t sure how things will turn out.” He doesn’t give us time to process anything before he walks back into the room.

I stand numbly as his words hit me like sharp shards of glass. They pierce my heart and soul and cause a

load of pain.

Minutes later, a nurse comes to let us know that Ava is now in surgery. I thought I would see her before they took her to surgery, but she told me that they used a different door.

She said that her wounds, especially the one on her head, wasn’t pretty. They couldn’t allow her family to

see her like that.

After she leaves, I take my seat and continue praying to a God I have lost touch with. I bargain with him, I threaten him, and finally, I fucking beg him. Beg him to listen to my prayers. Beg him to save the woman I

love.

“Can I get you something to eat, Ro?” My mom asks me.

I shake my head. I couldn’t even stomach the thought of food right now, let alone eat it. I was a nervous fucking wreck. Food was the last thing on my mind.

Gabe takes the seat next to me when mom vacates it. With dad sitting on my other side. I don't like admitting weakness, but in this moment, I am. I am weak and helpless, and I didn't know how to stop

feeling that way.

Time passes with no word from the doctors. Before I know it, the waiting room door opens, and Noah comes running to me. His body collides with mine and I take time to just breathe his scent in. It calms

me, but not by much.

I spot Calvin entering with Gunner. I give him a nod to say thank you, which he reciprocates. Emma freezes upon seeing them, but Kate's eyes fill with tears when her eyes land on her grandson.

Chapter 0239

"Dad, where is mom? I asked Cal why he was picking me up instead of mom, but he said, You'll explain everything," he says, a mask of concern firmly on his face.

Damn this was hard. I had time to come up with a way of delivering the news, but words fail me.

"Is she having the baby? Is that why we are at the hospital?" he pushes.

I take a calming breath before opening my mouth to speak.

"Your mom was hurt really badly, Buddy. The doctors are with her right now and they're doing everything

to make sure that she'll be fine."

My heart breaks at seeing the tears that fill his eyes. He shouldn't be going through this. He shouldn't be

here worrying about his beloved mother.

“What about the baby?” His voice is hoarse when she asks that.

I smile at him. “You have a baby sister, Noah. Just like you wanted.”

His eyes widen, and wonder fills his face, right before a smile takes over his features.

“Can I see her?”

“Not yet. Not until the doctors are done checking her out to make sure she’s fine”

The smile stays in place for a while until it starts slowly slipping. The tears that he had controlled, start falling down his cheek. He doesn’t make a sound though. He silently cries.

“Will she die like grandpa? I don’t want her to leave me, dad.” His voices catches at the end and I pull him

into my arms.

I hug him to my chest while fighting my emotions and trying to be strong for him.

That is a question he shouldn’t have to wonder. A possibility he shouldn’t have to consider.

Whoever did this to Ava was going to pay dearly. He or she messed with the wrong person. For the pain

they have caused they are going to feel it tenfold.

“No, she won’t. Your mom is strong. I’m very sure that she’ll pull through” I murmur in his ear.

We stay like that for a while before he lets me go and climbs on my thigh. He then lays his head on my

chest and holds me tightly. Noah is a strong boy, and the fact that he’s behaving this way shows just how

vulnerable he is.

+15 BONUS

We continue waiting. I stand up, pace, and then sit down over and over again. Noah never leaves my side, even for a moment. Every minute that passed without a word, I slowly die inside. I was afraid that the delay meant that things weren’t going as was expected

It was hours after Ava had been taken in for surgery when her parents arrived.

“Where is my daughter?” Nora rushes in. Her eyes were bloodshot and puffy.

This is the first time that I have seen Nora and Theo disheveled. They’ve always been put together. Even when Ethan was sentenced. Yet today they looked like hell had frozen over.

It’s understandable, though. They lost more than twenty–five years with their daughter, and now they face.

the risk of losing her for good.

Before anyone can answer, the door opens, and a doctor comes out. The look on his face tells me everything I need to know. He didn’t have good news.

I turn to my mom. “Could you take Noah and Gunner to get some snacks, I’m sure they’re hungry.”

She nods her head and calls the boys to her. Noah gives me a look, but I assure him that everything will be okay.

I know I fucking lied, but I can't have him here in case the doctor delivers terrible news.

"Mr. Woods..." he begins, but stops.

I grit my teeth and force my jaw to work..

"Fucking say it," I snarl as I brace myself against what might be an announcement of a death.

"She's alive, but she slipped into a coma during surgery," he says calmly, delivering one more blow that none of us were expecting.

Chapter 0240

"What do you mean she slipped into a coma?" Theo asks with an unmistakable tremble in his voice.

My heart was once again thudding against my ribcage. It felt like it wanted to punch a whole right through my fucking chest.

I try to think clearly, but it's like my brain can't function. Time slowed down as the doctor spoke. All I heard was a ringing in my ear.

I stumble back and fall on the seat I had vacated. Gabe and my dad put their hands on me, but I shake them off. I didn't want their comfort. I wanted the doctor to tell me that the surgery had been a success



and that in a few hours Ava would wake up.

ch, and “She had a total of four bullets. One hit her head, the second hit her chest, the third hit her stomach, the final one hit her thigh. We were able to remove three of them successfully, except for the one in her skull. It was lodged too deep and removing it would have killed her.”

Fuck. I don’t know what to feel or think about that. He is telling us that Ava will have to live with a bullet stuck in her head. How is any of that fair? She was okay this morning before things took a turn for the

worst.

‘At least she’s alive,’ a voice whispers.

I ignore it. She was alive, but would she stay alive? That was the main fucking question.

“We were able to stop the bleeding, both internal and external. We, however, had to drill her skull to drain. fluid, which helped with the swelling in her brain. She flat-lined twice. It’s after the second time that she

slipped into a comma. For now, she’s in ICU.”

If I thought nothing could hurt me worse than seeing Ava get shot, then I was wrong. Hearing that we

almost lost her twice destroyed me. It is like being stabbed by a thousand sharp knives. I wouldn’t wish

anyone this fucking pain. Not even my worst enemy.

“Will she wake up?” I breathe hoarsely. “Will she be able to make a full recovery?”

in

“At this point, we can’t really say. This isn’t an induced coma, and we can’t assure you that she’ll wake up in a few days. She might wake up tomorrow, in a few days, in a few months, or she might not wake up at all. For now, we’ll give it a few days to see whether she’ll wake up.”

The possibility that she might not wake up nearly brought me to my knees.

I push those thoughts away. I can’t think like that. She’s strong; she’ll wake up. In a few fucking days, she’ll be up, glaring and snapping at me.

“What about the bullet in her brain? Will living with it have any effect on her?” Nora asks as tears run down

her cheek.

I can’t even begin to imagine how hard this must be for her. I can’t ever imagine facing the likelihood of losing Noah. It’s just too much to even think about.

“There are some who live perfectly normal lives, and there are others who are affected. She might have trouble remembering things, have speech and hearing issues, or have trouble recognizing words, letters, and numbers. These are just a few things that might be affected by the kind of injury to her brain. Right now, we can’t say for sure. We have to wait for her to wake up.”

If she wakes up.

He doesn’t say the words verbally, but it’s in the way he looks at us. The uncertainty is in his eyes.

Nora nods as more tears fall down her face. Theo pulls her into his arms and hugs her close to his chest. The strong couple I know is nowhere to be seen. The only ones standing in their place are two concerned,

heartbroken parents.

“Since it’s already past visiting hours, you’ll have to come back tomorrow, and even then, we will only allow one person in the room with her. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’ll take my leave.”

We nod at him, and he leaves just as mom comes back with the boys.

Noah immediately comes to me, while Gunner goes to his father.

“What did the doctor say? Is mom okay?” He looks up at me with hope, shining his eyes.

This is the hard part of being a parent. Knowing whether to tell your kid the fucking truth or lie to them. Should I tell him that the doctors aren’t really sure his mother will wake up from the coma, or should I lie

and tell him that she’s okay?