

Ex Husband 241

Chapter 0241

“The doctors aren’t sure, Bud. We’ll just have to wait and pray.” I decide to go with honesty.

If lied and, God forbid, Ava never wakes up, he would end up hating me for lying that his mom was okay.

He doesn’t say anything. Just looks at me before looking at the floor.

After a few minutes of silence, I turn and face the rest.

“Since we won’t be able to see her today, I think you should all go home, get some rest, and come back tomorrow.”

“No,” both Corrine and Letty refuse at the same time, followed by Nora and Theo.

I try to convince them that I’ll let them know if something comes up, but they refuse to budge. In the end, everyone decides to stay except for Emma, Cal, Kate, and my parents.

My parents agree to go home only after I tell them that Noah can’t stay in the hospital and that he needs someone with him. Cal agrees for the sake of Gunner. The boy was already yawning even though you

could see the worry in his face.

Gabe sits by my side after they leave. There is little talking. Mostly we just sit in silence, that is until Brian

arrives.

"I'm sorry I got here late. We had to interview the witnesses about Ava's shooting. I'm really sorry for what happened to her."

I nod my head.

"Have you found anything?"

"The witnesses couldn't give us anything beyond what we already know and have seen on the video"

Shit. I was hoping they would have something. A starting point.

"Is she in any state to be questioned?"

My face shuts down, and my voice hardens. I know it's not his fault since he doesn't know the details, but

it just pisses me off.

"She's in a coma," I grit out.

"I'm sorry," he says remorsefully, but it doesn't do anything to elevate what I feel inside.

Is there any information you can give me? Has anyone been threatening her? Following her? Any

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I shake my head. "None. I have nothing."

He just nods before turning to the rest.

“I don’t know if I’m imagining it, but when she called me, she sounded stressed and desperate. It may not be anything, but she just didn’t sound like herself. I thought that maybe she was struggling with her past traumas given that the news about Gunner triggered her.”

“Who is Gunner?”

“Emma’s son. She kept him hidden until Ava found out the truth and revealed it to us,” Travis answers,

still clearly angry at his sister’s betrayal.

Emma looks at the floor, hiding her emotions.

“Why would she keep him hidden?”

“She didn’t want him in her life, and she didn’t want us to know about him. Calvin, who is the dad, and Gunner moved next door to Ava. That’s how she was able to connect the pieces.”

Brian was now fully facing Travis. “And how did that go down?”

“Not w

well. We are all pissed at her and since she still insists on this stupidity, mom gave her an ultimatum:

mend the fences or we cut her off from our lives.”

“I’m sure Emma didn’t take that well.” Brian questions further.

“Not at all. She was and still is pissed, especially at Ava for revealing the truth.”

Brain rubs his chin as his mind works. You can clearly see the wheels turning in his head. I've known Brian

for a long time. Something was going on inside his head,

"I a while.

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"See what, exactly?" Gabe and I ask him at the same time.

"According to what Travis has told me, I may have my first suspect."

"What?" Travis asks, just as Corrine whispers,

"Who?"

He gives a firm and thin smile. "Emma"

The rest look at him like he has grown another head or something. I just stare at him contemplating. If

The only question is: is her anger, hatred, and bitterness towards Ava enough to want her dead and to actually plan a hit on her?

Chapter 0242

"That's not possible. Emma could never do something like this." Travis defends his sister.

Sure, he was pissed at her, but when it came down to it, she was still his baby sister. He would defend her with everything that he had.

“Son, in my line of work, anything is possible,” Brian says tonelessly.

He then takes out a note book and begins scribbling down something. It’s only for a few minutes before he looks up at us.

“But seriously, Emma wouldn’t hurt her; sure, she and Ava don’t see eye to eye, but she would never hurt her,” Travis insists, while the rest just stay quiet.

I want to believe that Emma wouldn’t do something like this, but I wasn’t sure any more. The woman who came back months ago isn’t the same woman who left years ago.

She was filled with so much anger and hatred towards Ava. So much so that she would threaten a child and make up fucking lies just to get Ava in trouble.

“I’m not saying that she did it, all I’m saying is that she’s a suspect,” Brian clarifies. “Hatred and anger are pretty strong motives to have someone killed as some sort of revenge. It’s also not coincidental that Ava’s shooting happened not less than three weeks after she revealed Emma’s big secret. One that she had gone to great lengths to hide.”

Looking at things, everything pointed to Emma. She’s the only one Ava has had a falling out with recently, and given the strenuous relationship, it’s easy to see how Emma could have snapped and hired someone

to kill Ava.

I look at Travis; he looks like he has been struck by lightning. I see it in his eyes. He regrets why he opened his mouth, because he might have just gotten his sister in trouble.

“What about Reaper?” I ask, remembering he had targeted Ava and Emma.

“Yeah, I considered him, but for some odd reason, I feel like he isn’t behind this. His beef is with you. Sure, he kidnapped Ava and Emma, but from those of his men we captured that day, he was just messing with you. He didn’t plan on killing them—well, Ava, that is. He didn’t plan on killing her. He specifically told them not to lay a hand on Ava or he would slit their throats.”

I’m surprised at that little piece of information, but I don’t show it.

“That’s odd,” I mutter as I feel my brows pull together.

“Definitely. Even more weird is that the man who hit Ava died in prison under mysterious circumstances,” he adds. “Anyway, as I was saying, his target is you. It has always been you. I believe that if he ever get his revenge, he’ll either kill you or ruin your business.”

Both Gabe and I snort in unison. The bastard can try, but he won’t succeed in ruining my company. Many have tried. Fuck. Even the Howell’s did try, and they still failed. As for killing me, well, we’ll just have to

see.

“So you honestly don’t believe it was him?” Nora asks in a small voice.

“Yes. Whoever shot Ava had a grudge with her. A huge one. It’s in the way he or she shot her. Reaper has

no grudge with Ava so he wouldn’t go after her the way this person or people did.”

He confirmed what I had already suspected. Whoever shot at Ava wanted her dead. That is the reason for

the multiple shots. He or she didn’t want her to escape death.

“What about the number plate of the SUV they used?” Theo looks like he has aged so much in the few

hours we've been here.

"Nothing on it. They took out the plate, so we only know that it was black," Brian sighs. "There are probably thousands of black SUVs in this city."

We stay silent for a while. Each of us is lost in our own thoughts. There was so much going on in my head that I could barely think straight.

I pushed all of those thoughts to the back of my head. What matters is Ava's health. I can deal with who wanted her dead after she recovers.

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"Okay, I'll leave you all and go back to the station." Brian breaks the silence. "For now, I'll advise you make sure not too many people know she's alive. The last thing we need is whoever is after her coming back to finish the job, though I'll send two officers to guard the door to her room, just in case."

I nod my head, and Gabe leads him out.

"I'll call our contacts, and you call yours," Theo says. "Let's make sure word of her being alive doesn't get out until she's out of danger."

"Yes." I agree.

I take my phone and begin making calls.

This was sure as hell going to be a long night.

I wake up to someone tapping my shoulder.

Fuck. I had slept in an uncomfortable angle and now my back and neck hurt like a bitch.

I open my eyes to find that it's already morning. I look up to find an older nurse staring at me with a warm

smile.

"Morning, Mr. Woods, I just wanted to inform you that I'll be Miss Ava's nurse.

I give her what I think resembles a smile, but I can't really be sure.

"You can call me Rowan."

I look at

her room door and find the two officers still there. We had been transferred to the ICU waiting room sometime during the night.

"Okay then. My name is Rosa," she says, kindness radiating from her. "Is there anything I can get you?"

"No, but thank you." I don't think I can stomach anything right now. "When can we see Ava and the baby?"

She looks down and checks her watch. "In about two hours or so. That's when visiting hours start."

I nod my head and thank her. By the time she leaves, all the rest are already up. Some looked confused at

first, until yesterday's events hit them.

"What did the nurse want?" Nora asks.

"She just wanted to introduce herself as Ava's nurse," I mumble.

My thoughts were jumbled, and I was bone tired. Maybe I should have asked her for coffee and maybe some breakfast since I haven't eaten a fucking thing since yesterday.

"Did she say when we could see the baby and Ava?"

I was about to answer her when someone entering the waiting room caught my attention. Maybe it's the fact that I didn't sleep much last night, but it takes a while for my brain to load.

The minute his face registers, my face shuts down and hardens. You've got to be fucking kidding me. What the hell was Reaper doing here?

Chapter 0243

I feel as my anger starts rising to the surface. I know what Brian said, but I still haven't ruled out Reaper from my list of suspects.

I mean, come the fuck on, he had Ava kidnapped. You just don't do that unless you have an ulterior motive. Plus, what Brian says just doesn't make sense. Why would he kidnap her and then force me to

make a decision if he really didn't want her to get hurt?

"What the fuck are you doing here?" I snarl at him.

His eyes sweep over me to the rest. They've all stood up in guard, but that doesn't seem to faze him at all.

One thing that makes Reaper really dangerous is the fact that he was maniac. Sure, I am cold, but Reaper takes that to a whole new level. He is a sociopath and a psychopath, all wrapped in a pretty ugly and deadly bow.

"I'm here to see, Ava. Why else do you think I would be here? To see your sorry ass?" he asks with a devious smirk.

I grind my teeth, willing myself not to start a fight in a fucking hospital. It would be the sure way kicked out, and I couldn't have that.

"And you honestly think we believe that? Gabe asks him. "You kidnapped her a few months ago."

to get

He turns those deadly eyes towards my brother. I'm not easily fazed, but Reapers eyes radiate a kind of coldness that had you feeling chills down your spine.

His eyes were dead and cold. Almost like the man didn't have a fucking soul. Maybe he didn't. Who the fuck knows anyway?

"I personally don't care what the fuck you think because I am not here for any of you." he doesn't lose his composure at all. "Now are you going to tell me how she is or should I find her doctor myself?"

His condescending tone, not to mention his attitude was grating on my nerves. I don't even understand what he is doing here in the first place.

"Why would we tell you that? For all we know, you're the bastard that put a hit on her" I tell him through clenched

He stares at me with wide eyes, before throwing his head back and laughing. It rings off the walls of the waiting room, leaving goosebumps all over my skin.

He suddenly stops and his gaze fixes on me.

“Trust me, if I wanted Ava dead, she’d be dead” he says in that same icy tone.

“Then if you’re not the one responsible, then why are you here? I don’t really see how her health is any of

your concern” Nora speaks.

His gaze leaves mine before it sweeps over the rest. They finally rest on someone behind me. I slowly turn to check who he was looking at. It’s Corrine.

He lingers there for a while. He looks enraptured while Corrine looked like she couldn’t keep her eyes of him. He finally pulls his gaze away with what I am damn sure is great difficulty.

Interesting.

He focuses on Nora. “Well she’s carrying my niece, of course I will be concerned about her”

He delivers the line smoothly, but leaves us shocked.

The man must be delusional or something. There is no way I just heard him right. How the fuck could he

be the baby’s uncle. I don’t think he is related to Ava in anyway. Unless he’s a long lost brother of hers.

“Th—that’s impossible” Letty stammers.

By Nora and Theo's reaction, Reaper couldn't be their son, so if he was telling the truth then he is related.

to the baby some other way.

I study him and that's when it clicks.

"You're Ethan's brother" I announce as the similarities ring in my head.

"Bingo"

"But how?" Nora whispers. "When we adopted Ethan we were told that he had no family left"

"I was in juvie then, word got back to me from one of my father's men that Ethan was in foster care. I told them to mess with his records so that it seemed like our dad was the only family he had." He pauses. Like I told Ava, I wanted him to have a chance at a normal life. So that's what I gave him. I didn't want him to turn out a criminal"

"And yet he still ended up in prison," I tell him sarcastically.

He laughs, but this time it isn't chilly. It's sort of warm. If you can even call it that.

"Ava said the same damn thing"

We are quiet for a while until Theo speaks.

Chapter 0244

"From your tone of voice, it seems you've been around my daughter"

"I can't say around...we've been communicating." He begins.

He then tells us everything. His plan when he kidnapped Ava and how he went to her afterwards and asked her if he could be in the baby's life. Ava, bless her kind soul which will one day probably get her in

trouble, accepted.

"You do realize that if the police ever find out you were in contact with her, she'll be in trouble?"

Corrine

asks.

"Don't worry about that. I've got to a plan in the works" he gives her a mischievous smile, but doesn't say

anything more.

"Since you were in communication with her, did she ever mention anything to you? Maybe she felt unsafe or threatened? Anything at all" I plead with him. We needed something to give us a start on where to look.

Reaper tells us about when Ava first got the note and proceeds to tell us about the two more that came after. She got the last note yesterday. The same day she was short.

I get this ugly feeling when I think of her going to Reaper instead of me. Before it can consume it away. Right now that didn't matter. Not when she was lying in a coma.

ime me,

push

“I hate that I wasn’t able to protect her. I should have dug deeper, maybe I could have prevented all this’

I recognize an emotion that I never thought I would see reflected in his eyes. He was struggling with it

because he has never had to feel guilty about anything.

No one says anything because we are all struggling with something. We all think we could have prevented

this somehow.

I sit down and sigh just as Emma walks into the waiting room.

The moment Reaper sees her, all traces of warmth and guilt disappear. Before any of us can do anything.

he storms over to her, wraps his hand around her neck and shoves her against the wall.

“What the hell are you doing?” Travis shouts at him, but he doesn’t stop.

Emma releases a strangled cry. Fear masking her entire face.

I look to the ceiling and sigh. “Let her go, Reaper”

He doesn’t listen. In fact he squeezes her neck.

Travis tries to get him off his sister, while the rest stand frozen, but he doesn’t budge.

“If I find out that you had anything to do with hurting Ava, I swear I will gut you. I will make the serial killer documentaries you like watch seem like a fucking fairytale as compared to what I will do to you, am I

understood?”

I don't know how the hell he even knows she likes watching serial killer documentaries. Then again, this is Reaper we're talking about. Nothing he does or knows surprises me.

She nods with wide eyes and tear stained cheeks.

Reaper gives her one more squeeze before letting go.

“You bastard” Travis snarls and swings at Reaper, but he sidesteps him.

“Try to hit me again and you'll be buried next to your father within a week” he warns him.

That seems to sober Travis up pretty quickly. He back away from Reaper. He knows that it's not an empty threat. If reaper says he'll do it then that's exactly what he'll do.

A nurse comes out and cuts the tense atmosphere.

“Hi, I'm Mary the head nurse in NICU...”

Before she can finish, I cut her off.

“Is the baby okay?”

She gives me a small smile. “She's in an incubator which you already know, but so far she's doing okay.

We'll have to keep a special eye on her within the next few days to make sure what happened to her mother didn't leave any permanent damages, but we're confident that she'll survive"

I breathe a sigh of relief and I feel the same from Reaper who's standing next to me.

"I'm here because we need to name her. Do you know what name her mother chose for her?"

No one speaks. For a while until a small voice behind answers

"Iris"

I turn and find Noah. He was with my parents.

He immediately leaves their hand, takes a few strides and takes mine before looking up at the nurse.

"She didn't know if the baby was going to be boy or girl, but she told me that if it's a boy, we'll name him Kaden and if it's a girl then she'll be called Iris."

Mary gives him a small smile. "And what's her last name?"

Noah answers confidently.

"Howell." He pauses. "She's called Iris Renee Howell"

Chapter 0245

I stare at my son. I'm so proud of him and of the bond he has with his mother. No one, not even her best friends and her parents, knew the name she had chosen, yet she had told Noah.

“That’s really good,” Mary says, smiling at Noah. “You’re already shaping up to be a great big brother.”

Noah just nods, then looks up at me.

“One day we were on her bed while eating ice cream because she wanted it so much. I asked her what name we were going to give to the baby. We spent hours going through baby names until we settled on those two. It was so much fun, and we laughed a lot.”

Tears start filling his eyes once again, and I pull him to my side. It physically hurt to see him hurting. To see him in pain. I wanted to ease his heartache, but I didn’t have the power.

“When will she get better? I miss her so much,” he continues to cry.

I kept quiet because I have no answer to that. Not even the doctors know when or if Ava will wake up.

Mary kneels down to his level. She gently tugs at him a little. Noah doesn’t let me go, but he twists his head to face her.

“Tell you what? How about I let you visit your sister? You’ll be the first person to see her,” she tells him.

“Really?” he asks as he wipes away his tears.

“Really” she smiles. “Just give me a few minutes, and I’ll come to get you. Is that okay?”

Noah nods his head as a small smile takes over his lips. The sadness is still there, but it’s been pushed back.

When Mary stands up, I give her an appreciated nod. It may seem like a small thing, but she has done something huge. She has given Noah hope. Something, or rather, someone to hold on to while he waits

for his mother to recover.

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She nods to the rest and then turns to leave. Taking Noah's hand, I lead him to the seats. I was damn

exhausted. Mentally, psychically, and emotionally. I could use some sleep, but I won't get it until I see

both mother and child.

To my surprise, Calvin, Gunner and Kate walk in. Gunner's hand is held firmly in Kate's. They were chatting while Calvin walked behind them. I can't really tell whether they've told Gunner the truth.

I watch as Gunner's eyes land on Emma. They become huge. I don't understand that part, because I'm

He let's go of his grandmother's hand and literally launches himself at Emma. Emma doesn't have it though. She gently pushes him away from her with a look of disapproval. Gunner's face falls, and tears

start filling his eyes.

He turns around and hugs his father. Calvin in turn glares at Emma, as do Kate, Travis, and everyone else

who had watched the interaction.

Emma shrinks into herself but doesn't say a word.

I look away and stare at Noah. He had his head on my shoulder and was holding my hand. His eyes were

closed, but I knew very well that he wasn't asleep.

"What is he doing here?" The bitter voice makes me look up, only to find Kate pointing a finger at Reaper

as hatred and bitterness filter through her eyes.

"He's here for Ava," I tell her tiredly

Her face twists into something ugly. "I didn't know that Ava was buddies with criminals."

"Of course you didn't, since you know nothing about my daughter," Nora scoffs at Kate.

The women have a stare down. Sure, Kate is a powerhouse, especially as the matriarch of the Sharp family, but she has nothing on Nora Howell.

"If you don't like the fact that he is here, then you're free to leave. Personally, I don't get why the hell you're here in the first place, given that you treated Ava like shit for years."

That seems to shut Kate up, but it also drenches up something that I wasn't ready to deal with.

Noah's eyes snap open. He looks at the rest before looking at me.

"What is Grandpa Theo talking about?" He didn't say the words loudly, but it was enough to catch everyone's attention.

A look passes over all their faces. It's like they'd completely forgotten that Noah was here.

"Nothing, buddy. It's just a spat between adults. Nothing for you to worry about," I try to assure him, but he doesn't buy it.

"No. I know what shit means, and grandpa is talking as if mom wasn't treated well. Is that it?" His voice becomes hard as it nears the end of the sentence.

Fuck. I was afraid this day would come. I notice that everyone except for Calvin and Gunner stiffens. How do I tell him that Theo was right without making him hate us? Without making him hate me for the way we

"Noah, are you ready to see your baby sister?" Mary comes back out with a smile on her face.

I heave a sigh of relief and thank the heavens for the distraction. Noah seems to have forgotten everything as excitement takes over his features.

"Mr. Woods, you'll have to accompany him," she says, turning around as Noah takes her hand.

Chapter 0246

I nod my head and follow them.

We first enter a separate room where they sanitize us before giving us a medical gown, gloves, and

masks to wear. Once that is done, we are then taken to the NICU unit. We pass a few babies who were also in incubators before stopping at one in particular.

Mary smiles at us. "Noah, meet Iris."

One look at her, and she had me wrapped around her tiny fingers. She wasn't my blood, but she already has my fucking heart in her hands.

Iris, though small, is beautiful. She had her eyes closed, so I couldn't see her eye color, but everything else, from her nose to her lips and the piece of hair that was sticking out of her pink hat, was Ava. She was a spitting image of her mom.

I feel my heart break watching the tubes sticking out of her. She didn't deserve this. She should still be cushioned in her mother's womb.

She's alive.

Right. That's what matters.

"Can I hold her?" Noah asks in a small voice.

Mary was right. Noah was already shaping up to be a great big brother. The love and care he has for his sister were plastered all over his face. There is no fucking way you can miss it.

"No, honey, you can't... But you can touch her only if you promise to be careful."

He nods. Mary helps him get his hands inside the incubator. He softly touches her cheeks, and she leans into him, though she doesn't wake up.

We stay inside for a while until the nurse lets us know it's time for us to leave. I walk back to the waiting room with Noah after we get out of the protective gear. I felt like I was in a fucking dream. Like I was in the

present, but not at the same time.

“Where is Theo?” I ask my brother while taking a seat near him.

Nora was by herself, and she looked so sad. So heartbroken.

“He’s with Ava. The nurse couldn’t let both of them in so Nora went first.”

Mary comes back again and asks who else wants to see Iris. Reaper step forward No

“How’s Iris?” he asks.

“Beautiful” Noah still looks mesmerized. “For some reason, I think she looks like Mom.”

“He’s right,” I add. “She’s the spitting image of her mother.”

We stay in silence after that. A few moments later, Reaper comes out, phone in hand. He answers and,

after a few words, hangs up.

leave but

“It’s time for me I’ll be in contact.” He tells me “For Ava and Iris’s sake I’m willing to put our

differences aside and catch the bastard that did this to them.”

“Fine,” I mutter, and give him my hand, which he shakes.

“Aren’t you going to wait to see her?” Theo asks as he emerges from the room.

“Not today. I’ve run out of time.”

With that, he turns and leaves. I watch him, wondering why he left in such a hurry. My question is answered when Ethan walks in, escorted by police officers.

I can’t figure out if Reaper’s hurried rush has something to do with seeing his brother, the police, or both.

I feel the familiar anger every time I think about Ethan, I don’t think I’ll ever forgive him for playing and

I I

deceiving Ava.

Standing up, I’m about to confront the bastard when a hand clamps down on my shoulder.

“We pulled some strings to get him here,” Theo begins. “You’re a father, so you understand that he has as much right to be here as the rest of you. Probably more, given he almost lost his daughter.”

That stops me in my tracks as I watch Nora stand up and hug him. He hugs her back while fighting his emotions.

“Don’t start a fight. It isn’t worth it. Besides, I think you’d much rather go see Ava.”

I grit my teeth but nod my head. He’s right. No matter Ethan’s sin, he deserves to see the daughter he came close to losing.

I turn around just as the nurse calls for the next visitor. I ask if it's okay if Noah and I go in together, and thankfully, she agrees.

We go through the same procedure we went through before seeing Iris. The moment we get inside her room, my tough resolve crumbles

Her head was wrapped in a bandage. The neck was in a neck collar. She had scratches on her face, probably from the glass that broke during the hit. As if that wasn't bad enough, she had all these tubes sticking out of her and machines surrounding her.

I take one of her hands while Noah takes the other one.

"Mommy," he calls, but of course she doesn't answer.

She looks so peaceful. As if she were just sleeping, but we all know that's not the case, and that's what breaks my heart.

I try to force the words out, but nothing leaves my mouth except a strangled cry.

'Please come back to me,' I beg. "I need you'

I kiss her palm and then run my hand down her cheeks, hoping against all hope that she'll wake up soon.

Chapter 0247

Ethan.

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When I got the news from one of the inmates that Ava had been shot, I felt like my heart had been split wide open by a sledgehammer. Everything in me died when he told me that there was no further news, but the grapevine believed that she was dead because no one could survive that shooting. That, and the

fact that her family kept quiet about it and there was no official report that was released,

I love Ava, and I love my baby even more. Knowing that they both hadn't made it almost drove me to insanity.

I waited the whole time with my heart in my throat. I waited for my parents to reach out and give me the bad news. When night arrived without a word from them, I was convinced that the rumors must be true. somehow. Otherwise, why would they take so long to make contact?

I barely slept an inch the whole night. Worry and anxiety were constant companions, driving me to the edge of insanity and filling my head with painful thoughts.

At one point, I cried to God. Praying that he could somehow do a fucking miracle. I didn't believe in

any deity, but at that point, I was willing to believe in anyone who would tell me that they were both alive and okay.

My cellmate, the guards, and other inmates gave me pitying looks. I felt horrible, I looked horrible, and I was pretty sure that I was fucking dying inside.

When morning came, I could barely keep my breakfast down. The images of one adult-size casket and another tiny one kept wreaking havoc inside my head. It's all I could think about. It's all I saw.

My heart skipped a beat when I was called into the warden's office. I didn't say anything when I saw my parent's lawyer.

When he told me that I had been pardoned for a few hours, a ray of hope started rising inside me. On our way to the hospital, that small ray bloomed into something bigger when Christopher, the family lawyer, told me that Ava and the baby were alive but in the ICU.

I thanked whatever power that had done it. They were alive, and that's what mattered the most.

Ethan, are you okay?" Mom's voice brings me back to the present.

I stare at her, wondering how the fuck I got so lucky. Most women in her position would have kicked me out of their lives, but she didn't. Neither did my father.

My eyes search for him. They finally land on him. He was a few feet away from me, and he had his hand clamped on Rowan's shoulder.

Rowan looked ready to kill me as his eyes seared me with hate. I didn't mind at all. The feeling was fucking mutual, given how he treated Ava in the past.

I watch as he turns around with Noah, and they follow a nurse.

"I'm just relieved, Mom," I tell her as my eyes tear up.

I was so happy. I hadn't lost them. There was still hope for them.

"I love you, Ethan," she says as tears fall down her face.

I hate watching her cry. I hate seeing her heart break. I can see it in her eyes. The possibility of losing Aval

was killing her.

I pull her into my arms since they had removed my cuffs.

“I love you too, mom,” I breathe. “And don’t worry. Ava and the baby are going to be just fine. You’ll see”

“You have a daughter,” dad says, and mom and I let each other go.

“What?” I stammer.

They both give me a radiant smile. “You have a baby girl. Her name is Iris.”

The tears I was holding back? Yeah, I couldn’t hold them back any more, so they fell freely down my face.

“Who named her?” It was a beautiful name, but I was afraid Ava would be pissed that they named our baby without consent.

“Noah,” mom answers. “Apparently they were discussing names one day and they settled on Iris if she was a girl and Kaden if he was a boy.”

My breath gets caught in my lungs, and my parents notice this.

“What’s wrong? Aren’t you happy with the name?” dad asks.

“It’s not that. Iris is a beautiful name. It’s just that I once mentioned to her that I loved the name Kaden.”

Mom gives me a watery smile, and Dad gives me a side bun

We were in bed that day. I just happened to mention it to Ava. I told her if I ever had a son, he would be named Kaden. The fact that she took me into consideration and decided to give the baby a name I loved in case it was a boy meant the fucking world to me.

Before any of us can say anything, a nurse calls for me.

“We arranged it. You’re her father; you deserve to see her,” mom says.

I nod at her and follow the nurse. After they’ve dressed me up, she leads me into a room and straight to my daughter.

Seeing her so small with tubes attached to her brings me to my knees.

“Is she going to be okay?” I choke out.

I didn’t know I could ever love someone so much that it felt all-consuming, but I was wrong. Right there, Iris becomes my world. I doubt anyone could ever be as important to me as she will ever be.

“Yes. She’s doing well so far, and we’re confident that she’ll be okay,” she answers with a kind smile.

I know every father probably thinks the same, but damn, Iris was really beautiful.

I touch her tiny face, unable to believe that Ava made such a perfect being. She was everything to me and she now owned my heart.

I thank Ava because if she hadn’t convinced me when she told me she was pregnant, then I would have given up on the best gift anyone could ever give me.

I might be in prison for the next few years, but I will do everything I can to protect her, and because of her, I will be on my best behavior just so I can be granted parole.

I spend a few more minutes with her before Mary, as she introduced herself, tells me it's time for me to leave.

I feel fucking heartbroken to leave my daughter, but I have no other choice. The few minutes I got to spend with her were the best moments of my life.

Next, I get to see Ava. Fuck, I love her so much. Seeing her like this hurts me in ways I can't explain. I will forever regret ruining my chance with her, but I've come to realize that everything happens for a reason. It may not make sense, and maybe it never will, but there is a reason behind it.

I was holding her hand when mom came and told me that my time is up. I sigh, but nod.

Til always love you, Ava. I hope you know that." I tell her still form before

It takes everything for me to leave, but I remember that I promised Iris to get out of prison early.

Leaving her room, I go and hug my parents. The guards were just about to cuff me when Letty's voice spoke from behind.

"Ethan?"

I turn around and face her. We'd become friends during my time with Ava. She was like the sister I never had.

"I'm still pissed at you, but I'm glad that you're okay. I'm sorry I haven't come to see you"

"It's okay Letty I understand."

“Can I hug you? I’ve missed my friend.”

I nod my head, and she launches herself at me. I hug her close to me, feeling almost whole, but not quite.

“Take care of yourself,” I whisper.

“You too, Ethan,” she whispers back. “I’ll come see you once things settle.”

“I’m looking forward to that.”

I release her only to find Travis glaring at him. I glare back. I also hated him for the way he treated Ava. I just never understood why Letty was still with him.

I hug my parents one last time before letting the guards cuff me.

As they lead me back to prison, I pray for another miracle. One that entailed Ava waking up from her coma and Iris surviving.

Chapter 0248

Rowan.

It’s been three months. Three fucking months since Ava was shot, and she’s yet to wake up. With each month that goes by, everyone is slowly losing hope that she’ll ever wake up.

It’s frustrating as hell, but there’s nothing I can do about it. It’s now beyond anyone’s power.

She was taken off the machine a month after her accident. She didn’t need them to breathe since her

lungs were doing just fine. They even transferred her to a normal room. We all thought she'd come out of the coma then, but it never happened. Two months down the line, and we are still waiting.

"Should I wait for you, Mr. Wood?" my driver asks just before I get out of the car.

"It's not necessary. I'll call you when I'm done."

I get out of the car and walk into the hospital. The staff greets me because I have been a regular visitor for the past few months.

I just nod my head. I feel the tiredness down to my bones. I haven't had a moment of peace since that day. Sleep flees from me every single night, and I'm left either staring at the ceiling all night or working.

Due to the circumstances, Noah is back to living with me. He's here every day after school. Visiting his mother and sister. I see the toll everything is taking on him, but I know it'll only be better when Ava and Iris leave the hospital.

I head first to see Iris before seeing Ava. That little girl has won my heart these past few months. Her resilience and strength to overcome what was thrown at her remind me of her mother.

"You're here, Rowan, let me just get our little princess ready," Mary says as she busies herself.

Iris was taken out of the incubator a week ago. The doctors said that she was now healthy and out of danger. Since she had reached the nine-month milestone, there was no need for her to remain there.

Minutes later, Mary is handing Iris over to me.

"Hey princess, How are you doing today?" I ask her with a smile.

I hold her tiny form in my chest and rock her back and forth. She doesn't cry; she just stares at me in fascination. She looked like Ava, but her blue eyes were Ethan's. She's definitely going to be a knockout

da

I run my finger down her cheek, and she grips it in a tight hold. I smile at that. She's become the highlight of my day, a part from Noah. She may not be my biological daughter, but in my heart, she was. Nothing can change that.

"It's now time for her bath," Mary informs me.

I look up at the ticking clock only to realize almost forty minutes have gone by. Iris is precious. While with her, you easily forget everything else going on around you.

I let Mary take her away from me. This is usually the hardest fucking part. Letting her go.

"I say as I stand.

"I'll come to say goodbye to her once I'm done visiting Ava," I say

She nods her head and turns to leave. I watch them, feeling the heaviness in my heart get worse with

each step she takes away from me.

I was just about to leave when the pediatrician stopped me.

"Do you have a minute, Rowan? I want to talk to you," she asks in a gentle and kind voice.

She's around my mother's age, and she just has this aura that immediately calms you down when you're

around.

“Sure, about what?”

“It’s about Iris. As you know, she reached nine months a week ago, and since she’s healthy and no longer in any danger, we’ll have to release her from the hospital.”

Chapter 0249

I stare at her, not really knowing what to do. “You can’t do that. Her mother hasn’t woken up yet.”

“I know, but those are the rules of the hospital. One of you has to take her home whether Ava wakes up or

not”

Fuck. I run my hands through my messy hair. “Can’t she stay for just a little bit?”

“I’m sorry, but no. We can only allow her to stay until tomorrow, but that’s it”

I nod my head. “Okay. I’ll discuss it with her grandparents.”

Without waiting, I walk out of the nursery and head straight towards Ava’s room. I was about to enter,

when the door opens. Nora and Theo come out of the room:

“Just the people I wanted to see” the doctor’s voice makes all three of us turn to face him.

“Is there a problem?” Theo asks, concern marring his face.

“Yes. I want you to consider a certain option for Ava. Usually patients wake up from the coma within a month, the fact Ava hasn’t concerns us and we are afraid that she won’t be able to”

I feel dread rising in my back. I don’t want to jump to conclusions, but I don’t fucking like where this conversation is going.

“But you told us she might recover,” Nora points out.

“Yes, might, but now I’m not too confident. Not when there is little brain activity” he takes a deep breath.

suggest you consider stopping her treatment”

The sounds that comes of my mouth can only be described as a snarl. “In other words, you’re asking us to end her life. To kill her”

“I’m sorry, but yes. She hasn’t responded to treatment and I fear that she may never will. At this point, it would take a miracle for her to wake”

Feeling tired of hearing his nonsense I turn.

“Then that is what we will wait for. A fucking miracle, cause there is no fucking way we’re going to do what you’re suggesting.

don’t wait to hear his response or those of Nora and Theo. I walk away and enter Ava’s room.

“Please, Ava. Come back. We can’t do without you. Noah misses you so much, and so do I. Iris also needs you, now more than ever. They want to release her from the hospital. Please. Please wake up,” I

beg.

There is nothing from her side. She doesn’t move. She doesn’t open her eyes. She doesn’t speak.

“They want us to consider ending your life. Please don’t make me do that. Don’t make me watch while they kill you. You need to open those fucking beautiful eyes.”

I place my head on my hand and just lean into her. For the first time since her shooting, I let my tears fall. I can’t stop them even if I want to, so I just let them fucking flow.

I let the sorrow and heartache that I’ve been holding in wash over me. I was supposed to be strong for Noah, Iris, and her, but now I feel like the weakest fucker to ever walk the earth.

I continue silently crying. Begging God for a miracle and begging Ava to wake up I don’t know how long I was bent over when I felt soft, trembling fingers running down my face.

I

At first, I thought it was just my imagination until a voice called my name. It’s hoarse, but it’s

unmistakable.

“Rowan”

I take a deep breath before rising my head, so afraid that it was all a dream, but it wasn’t. My eyes clash

with her confused ones.

Holy fuck. Ava was awake.

Chapter 0250

I stare at her, not really sure if this was a dream or not. Her eyes were unfocused as she surveyed the room before they finally landed on me.

I probably looked like an idiot, gaping at her with my mouth wide open. I know that I've been praying for a

miracle. Begging her to wake up. Now that it had finally happened, it all felt surreal.

"Rowan? What's wrong?" She asks, her voice filled with confusion.

"Fuck, Ava. You're awake!" I yell in happiness, startling her in the process.

I grab her and hug her to my chest. It felt so good. So damn good seeing her with her eyes open.

Everything in me screamed in fucking joy. I was happy. I was amazed. I was mesmerized.

"Why wouldn't I be?" Her voice comes out smothered.

I pull her away from me and just look at her. I couldn't believe my eyes. I couldn't believe the miracle that

had taken place.

Just a few minutes ago, I reached the end of my fucking limit. Her doctor had told us to consider the option of letting her go, and here she is. Breathing, eyes opened, and fully awake. It was a fucking miracle.

I hug her again, just to feel grounded. I wanted to treasure this moment for the blessing that it was. Tears.

cloud my eyes, and I let them fall. Fuck. Noah was going to be so fucking happy.

Hell, everybody was going to be. We've waited for this moment for three fucking months. Prayed every single day that she would wake up.

Life without her has been gloomy. It was as if all of us were drowned in our sorrows and there was no ray.

Now she was awake, everything could finally fall back into place. I didn't have to worry about Noah or Iris because now they have their mother back. No one could take care of them or love them better than Ava could.

"You're scaring me, Rowan" she whispers.

kiss her cheek and wipe away the damn tears. I'm just glad that you're back. That you came back to me. That you came back to us

gar down her soft cheeks. It's been three months, so her wounds were healed. The place

ved her head to stitch her skull had even grown hair. No one could ever tell that she h

"Are you okay? You're acting uncharacteristically," she asks as she feels my head for what I'm sure is a

fever.

I laugh a full-body laugh. I haven't laughed in weeks. It was good to have her back.

"I'm damn fine now that those beautiful eyes are open." I can't help myself, so I kiss her again.

She stares at me as if she's trying to figure something out. Her eyes drop from mine to my lips, then back

up again. She then shakes her head as if trying to clear some cobwebs. She looks at me like she has

never seen me before.

That should have been the sign that something was so fucking wrong, but I was so excited that I didn't pay that much attention.

I squeeze her hand and then grin. "Let me just get the doctor."

"Wait!" she shouts before I can leave.

She moves close to the edge of the bed and tries to take the pitcher that was on the side table. I take the

few strides to her bed and help her when I see her hands shaking.

Pouring some water into a glass, I help her drink. I hadn't even thought that she must be parched after

waking up from a coma and not speaking for months.

After she finishes her water, she faces me. Her brows are furrowed and her mouth is turned down.

“What is happening, Rowan?” she asks in a small voice. “Why am I in the hospital?”

“You were shot; do you remember that?” I take her hand in mine, reveling in their warmth.

She shakes her head. “No”

I sigh. I’ve read a few things about brain injuries. One article said that it’s to be expected when a patient doesn’t remember exactly what happened to them.

Kissing her hand, I stand up.

She looks at me suspiciously. Like she can’t figure out why I kissed her or why I was being nice to her. That should have been the second sign that something was seriously wrong.

Let me just get the doctor, and he can explain everything, okay?”

She nods her head. I turn around, and I almost bump into Rosa, her nurse.

was just about to go look for the doctor” I tell her happily. “Ava is a wake.”

the looks at me like I’m insane before looking behind me. The moment she sees Ava, her eyes glUW

Oh my gosh, let me just get Doctor Charles.” Before I can ask anything, she rushes out of the door.

Turning around, I head towards Ava and take the empty seat next to her. I still can’t believe that she is
awake.

“Why did the nurse look shocked to see me up?” She asks after a while.

“Because you were in a coma.”

“What? Seriously?” Now she’s the one shocked. I guess she didn’t expect that.

“Seriously. You’ve been unconscious for three months.”

Her

eyes get even wider if that’s possible, and her mouth drops open. I would have laughed at how fucking comical it was if it weren’t for the fact that it’s serious.

Her mouth opens and closes as if she’s trying to form words. Words that she’s having a hard time saying and expressing.

“How’s that even possible?” Panic was now laced in her tone. “I don’t remember being shot. So how am I suddenly waking up in the hospital only for you to tell me that I have been in a fucking coma for three whole fucking months?”

The last part is yelled.

Her chest moves up and down rapidly. Her trembling gets worse, and her face contorts into what I’m fucking sure is anxiety.

Take a deep breath, Ava,” I calmly tell her, and she does. “What’s the last thing you remember?”

Before she can answer, the door bursts open. Nora, Theo, Rosa and Doctor Charles walk in.

Nora's eyes fill with tears, and before anyone can stop her, she launches herself at Ava.

The panic that had dissipated has become full-blown. I know shit has hit the fan when Ava scowls right before she pushes her mother away.

"Who the fuck are you?" she screeches while looking at Nora.

Fuck Something was definitely wrong.