

Ex Husband 271

Chapter 0271

Ave

I wake with a start. I don't know what startled me. Maybe it was a dream or a memory. I'm not sure. It was vague, and the images weren't clear.

I detangle myself from Rowan and sit up. One name kept ringing in my head.

Ethan.

Was it someone I knew? Someone I should know? Was he important to me somehow? The questions were endless as I tried to figure out who the hell he was.

Our bedroom was lit by the moon. It cast an eerie atmosphere. Especially since I woke up shaken by whatever it was that plagued my mind. I turn the lights on still. Trying to chase away the goosebumps.

"Ava, is something wrong?" His sleepy voice makes me turn to him.

He looked really sexy. His eyes were sleepy, and his hair was disheveled Plus, his chest was totally bare. I swallow as I continue salivating over him. Rowan is a sexy and hot masterpiece. There was no denying that.

"Ava?" he calls, bringing me back from my thoughts.

Should I tell him? It's been a couple of days since I woke up, and the feeling that he's hiding something from me still persists.

I don't know why, but my heart tells me that whoever Ethan is, Rowan doesn't really like him. Everything was going so smoothly between us. I was afraid of messing it all up.

My mouth compresses so as to stop myself from blurting it all out. I was dying to know who this guy was and why his name filtered through the block that was keeping my memories from me.

Rowan sits up in bed, then turns me so that we are face-to-face. His hand on my bare arms sends shivers down my back. It makes me think that I wouldn't mind his hands all over me. In fact, I would much prefer

that.

Taking a deep breath, I try to calm myself. Everything was still so new. I didn't really trust his affections for me, so it would be a mistake to jump into bed with him, though we do share a bed.

Running my hand down my face, I decide to come clean with him. "I just woke up from what I think is a

1/2

+15 BONUS

body still next to mine, making me raise my brow at that.

Do you remember what the memory was?" he asks, his voice a bit hesitant.

And there it was. The reason why I think he's hiding something from me. That, or there is something he doesn't want me to remember.

I study him, but his face gives nothing away. Sighing, I shake my head.

"No, I don't remember what it was." I hear him exhale, "But one name kept ringing in my head."

He stills again. He was doing a really lousy job at trying to make it seem like he was detached. That, what I remembered, or the name didn't bother him at all.

Sure, if you look at his cold grey eyes and his stoic face, you would believe that, but I know Rowan... and I know right now that he is tense for some reason.

"What name?"

"Ethan." I pause and stare at my hands before looking back at him. "Who is he? Do you know him?"

Tension rolls off him in waves. He forces himself to relax, which completely fascinates me.

always had control over his emotions, seeing him like this... Fighting whatever was bothering him made him more human.

I see it in his eyes. He's debating whether he should tell me something or not. Seeing this, I grasp his hands, which were fisted on top of the cover.

“Rowan, who is Ethan?”

He takes a deep breath before exhaling.

“He’s Iris’s father.”

The simple sentence leaves me in a state of shock. I couldn’t believe my ears. I’ve wondered who Iris’s dad is since I woke up. Now I have the answer, but I don’t know what to do with it.

The mystery of how I got pregnant with another man still bothered me. I know myself, and I know I would never cheat on Rowan. I love him so much.

Unless things changed and I become a grade A slut, I don’t see myself being with any other man

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You told me that he never cheated, so what’s the story with this Ethan guy? How did I end up with him?”

Since we were on that topic, I might as well get the answer to the question that has been driving me completely insane.

He doesn’t answer for a while, and I just stay silent, I wait for him to gather his thoughts. I know he does love Iris, but I can also tell that Ethan is a touchy subject for him.

I wonder what Ethan did to get on Rowan’s bad side and why the hell I would sleep with him. Was it a way for me to get back at Rowan for not loving me? You know? Sleep with a man he doesn’t like.

I’m not really a vengeful person, but I also understand that pain and heartache can push someone to do things they would not normally do.

“When Emma came back, I wanted to be with her,” he begins.

It hurts to hear him say that, but I always knew something like this would happen when and if she came back. I just never thought it would hurt this badly.

“I knew that it wouldn’t be good for Noah if we ended things abruptly. We needed to first ease him into the idea of us no longer being together. You agreed and I started seeing Emma secretly as we prepared for a separation.”

I focus on him. Listening to every word he was saying. I didn’t want him to see my pain, so I hid it behind an indifferent mask

“You met Ethan when he saved you during an attack. He was one of the officers assigned to protect us during James burial. A threat had been made and they couldn’t risk anyone else dying.”

I frown because nothing of what he was saying rings any bells. There was nothing but blankness where the memory should be.

“When you say he saved me, what do you mean?” I ask curiously.

“There was a shootout. You got hit on the shoulder, but if it wasn’t for Ethan diving for you, you would have ended up dead.”

Well, that was a nice thing for him to do, especially for a total stranger. I guess that was our ‘How I Met Your Mother’ story... But where was Rowan? Before I can, he continues.

that us

don’t know the nitty-gritty details; all I know is two started seeing each other. It honestly made me jealous. I couldn’t understand why, but it bothered me to see you with another man. It wanted to rip

+16 BONUS

rprise

was balling his fist was proof enough that it still bothered him a lot. Never in my wildest vel ever thought that Rowan would be jealous and possessive towards me, so this is a total

7 had yet to understand my feelings towards you, so when you told me about him, I agreed that our marriage should be an open relationship. It didn't seem fair to keep you away from him when I myself was courting another woman."

Fuck. Why the hell did hearing him say that hurt so fucking much. It is pretty clear that he was ready to cast me aside for Emma. I always knew it was inevitable so I don't know why it hurts.

As for Ethan, I really don't understand. Was he able to capture my attention so much that I would approach Rowan with the issue, or did I just want to make Rowan jealous? Maybe get a reaction out of him.

What was it about this Ethan guy that accomplished what other guys never could? What was it about him that made me get so attracted to him that we even had sex?

"I was seeing Emma and you were seeing Ethan, yet my every thought was consumed by you," he exhaled, running a hand through his tousled hair. "It's funny, honestly. When Emma came back, I thought you would be a pain in my ass, like you were when we were younger. It surprised me when you weren't. You didn't even seem to care. I ended up being a pain because for some reason, I couldn't let you go."

Had I really been like that? My world revolved around Rowan and Noah. For him to say that it seemed like I wasn't even bothered that he was dating Emma is really weird

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Ethan and I dated for months?" I ask

“So I must have slept with him somewhere along that time line, which would explain how I got pregnant. Weren’t we using protection?” I voiced out my thoughts, so lost in them that I forgot that Rowan was next

to me.

He growls, the words coming out through clenched teeth: “Ava, please don’t mention you, another man, and sex in the same sentence. I don’t want even to think about it”

I don’t even want to think of another man’s hands on my body, so I keep quiet. It’s still hard for me to accept that another man has touched and tasted me. It’s hard to accept that I’ve had another man inside

Shaking myself from those thoughts, I focus on him and ask the question that I dread the answer to

“What about you? Did you sleep with Emma?”

My heart is painfully pounding as I wait for his answer.

Sharp grey eyes penetrate mine as he replies. “No. I didn’t have sex with her. I didn’t even kiss her

because it felt so fucking wrong.

Yet, I fucked another man. How can he even look at me and Iris?

I’m sorry that I let another man touch me.” I whisper, feeling ashamed of myself,

He gently grabs my jaw and forces me to look at him. Caressing my cheek, he places a soft kiss at the

corner of my mouth before his grey eyes turn to me again.

“It’s not your fault, and don’t ever fucking apologize for that. If it wasn’t for your relationship with Ethan,

then Iris wouldn’t be here, and I would never regret that little girl because she owns part of my heart.”

That touched me so much that I couldn’t stop myself from locking my lips with his. I thread my fingers into his hair as I bring him closer. Our lips tangle, and my desire spikes. Fuck, I wanted him badly.

Without breaking the kiss, I get out from beneath the covers and straddle his hips. The evidence of his arousal presses against my wet center.

My panties were drenched and stuck against my opening, but that didn’t stop me from rubbing against his hard on. The groan he releases travels all the way to Clit. I swear I could cum from just that damn sexy

HB BONUS

Nothing made sense except what was happening between us. What were we even talking about before?

nsure it wasn’t important right? Not when his tongue was in my mouth, his hardened length was rubbing

against center and his hands was kneading my ass. Nothing in this world mattered except for this

moment night here between us.

Pulling my hands from his hair, I was about to remove my nightgown when he stopped me.

“No.” His voice was firm and strained.

“Why? Don’t you want me?” I ask in confusion.

His hardness told me he did want me. Unless his arousal wasn’t because of me.

“You’re testing my fucking control, Ava.” He sighs. “Fuck yes do I want you, but that will be taking advantage of you.”

Using one arm, he lifts me from his laps and places me on the bed. Then he gets out of bed and starts heading towards the bathroom.

“I don’t understand,” I call after him, making him stop

He doesn’t turn, but he answers. “When I take you, I want you to believe my feelings for you; I want to be the only one you want and think about; I want to be the only one you have in your heart, and I want you to have nothing but love for me. Only then will I take you and claim you as mine.”

With that he walks into the bathroom, leaving me speechless and more confused.

What the hell did he mean by he wants me to have nothing but love in my heart for him? Did something happen that made me hate him? And also, if Ethan was Iris’s dad, where the hell was he?

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“I still think that I should stay home with you and Iris.” I reluctantly put my shirt on as my eyes met with

the brown orbs of Ava through the mirror.

She was seated on the bed, still in her nightgown. Noah had already left for school. He’d also been

reluctant to leave for school. Not that he had a choice.

“You need to go to work,” she insists as she stands up and walks to me.

She lightly runs her hand up my chest before she begins to button my shirt. Having her hands on me takes

me back to yesterday night.

The taste of her lips still lingers on mine. I can't get the image of her rubbing herself against my hardness out of my mind. She looked so beautiful and sexy at that time. I'd wanted nothing more than to rip off her very short night gown and fuck her till neither of us could walk.

The intensity of how much I'd craved her shocked me to the core. It was new, passionate, and all-consuming. It was something I never fucking thought I would feel towards her.

I'd felt the moisture of her arousal through her panties, and it had taken everything in me to stop.

I meant what I said. I wasn't going to touch her until her love for me had been revived and until she finally started believing that I did love her. No one but her.

“That's the thing, Ava, I don't have to go to work because I am the fucking CEO” I force myself back to the present. “What's the use of being the boss if I can't take a few days off to take care of my wife and my

princess?”

I shift to try and relieve the uncomfortableness of my pants which had become too tight. The last thing I need is a hard on. Last night I had to literally take matters in hand because of the massive case of blue

balls.

Ava finishes and places an unsure kiss on my cheek. I can tell she still doesn't trust what was happening between us. She was so used to being pushed away and her efforts shot down that she didn't understand

or trust this new intimacy.

Before she can pull away, I grab her waist and bring her flush against my body. I take her lips, finally

kissing her like I've been wanting to do since I woke up.

One of the things I've come to love about her, is how responsive she is. She immediately melts in my

I think the only thing keeping her from collapsing to the floor is my arm around her waist.

Breaking the kiss, I stare at her beautiful face. We were both breathless, but we didn't really care.

I still don't know how I was able to fucking resist her when she was a whole damn package. It boggles my mind every time I think about it. I can't even begin to imagine my life without her.

"I do want you, Ava and I hope that one day you'll believe that and that I want to make a life with you"

There is a struggle behind her eyes. She doesn't know if she should believe me. If she should trust my

words and actions towards her.

It kills me that she doesn't, but I have no one else to blame, but myself.

"I hope to believe you one day, because life since I woke up has been heavenly. It's been like a dream

come true and I want to keep it that way" she smiles gently at me.

Kissing her one last time, I lean my forehead against hers. "Like I said, I'll prove it to you, Ava. I'll prove that I've changed, that I want no one but you. I'm a man and I'll do stupid shit but I promise never to hurt

you deliberately"

She nods her head, but doesn't say a thing.

The intimate air is broken when Iris screams through the baby monitor.

"I should check on her she whispers, while looking in the direction of the monitor.

"Go" I tell her. "I'll finish here and then come say goodbye to you two"

After giving me one longing look, she leaves.

I finish dressing up and leave the room. Entering Iris's room I find Ava

her.

seated on the rocking chair feeding

"There's something really sexy about watching you feed her" I say then cross the room to them.

Kneeling down before them, I kiss Iris on the forehead. Ava and I both smile when she stops suckling for

a while, looks at me then continues on.

Iris is perfect and she had me wrapped around her tiny finger. I would never regret Iris, but I can't help but feel like my stupidity cost me a lot. If I hadn't been so stubborn and foolish maybe I would have had a daughter of my own by now.

Ava wanted more children with me, but I didn't, not with her anyway. I believed that I would end up with Emma one day and that having more kids with Ava would have just complicated things further,

Denying her request was also my way of punishing her. I wanted to hurt her with the knowledge that t

Jokes on me though. She got her desire. She got another baby. Only she had her with another man.

"Rowan..." her voice pulls me back to the present. "Are you okay? You zoned out while looking at Iris"

I shift my eyes to her and let her see the truth of my words "Was just wondering how our daughter would have looked like, had we had another baby after Noah"

"You didn't want any more children with me" she points out as pain and heartache filters through her soul.

I know" I sigh. "It's one of my many regret"

Fuck. I had a lot of regrets and so much to make up for. Not just the years during our marriage, but even

before that.

I

I wasn't that kind to Ava when we young, I knew she had a crush on me. Everyone did. It made me feel suffocated because I thought I would never feel that way about her, so I treated her as cruelly as I could

because I was afraid that she would come between Emma and I.

She's quiet as she studies me. I know I've shocked her with this new revelation, but I just wanted her to know that I would never regret any children we may have had.

"Maybe." she starts tentatively. "Maybe after Iris is a little older and you've proven yourself... maybe then.

we can add to our family"

Hope blooms inside me and I can't help it when I kiss her again because damn it, she was irresistible.

"Deal" I murmur against her lips.

I straighten after a few minutes and check my watch. I was going to be late if I didn't hurry up. Saying

goodbye to both of my girls, I leave.

I wanted to hold on to the hope she had given, but I couldn't it. Not when a nagging voice kept whispering

inside my head:

"What will happen when she finds out you've been lying to her?"

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I stare at the papers in front of me, but the words are nothing but a blur. I couldn't make sense of any of it, mainly because I couldn't focus on shit.

My thoughts were back home with Ava. I couldn't help but worry, even though I had bodyguards protecting the whole compound.

What if something happened and I wasn't there to protect her?

That was my biggest worry right now. I failed her the last time, when she was shot. I was just afraid of something like that happening to her again.

My phone rings, and I dive for it. I'm disappointed when I see Reaper's name flash. I bought Ava a new phone a couple of days ago, and I was hoping that it was her calling.

With a sigh, I answer, "What?"

"What's got your underwear in a twist?" he grumbles back.

bastard, and he sure as hell

I still didn't like the didn't like me, but for Ava and Iris's sake, we would work together to protect them.

"Did you call for something important, or do you just want to bitch at me?" I push the documents I was studying aside and lean back against my chair. "If that's the case, then I'm going to hang up because I'm not in the fucking mood to deal with you."

He doesn't say anything, and for a while. I almost think that he has hung up. I wouldn't put it past him anyway.

Pinching the bridge of my nose, I let myself exhale deeply. I've been at work for four hours, and I already have a migraine.

"Have you found anything related to that day?" I ask him instead.

It was better than just hearing him breathe on the other end. If he was calling, then there must be a reason why

His sigh is deep and loaded. That much I can tell.

"No," he replies. "And that's what has me worried. I'm usually able to find someone within days; It's now.

been months, and we still don't have a fucking clue on who could be behind her attack."

The police investigations led to dead ends after dead ends. I was hoping that working with Reaper would

"It's starting to get on my fucking nerve because, as long as this person is still breathing, Ava will probably always be in danger." I hear a growl, followed by a crash on his end.

He was right. That's what scares me so much. It's why I'm not big on the idea of leaving Ava home alone.

"Any lead at all? Anything at all that could point us in the right direction?" I almost plead.

We needed something. I needed something. Anything at all. The constant worry was starting to get to me. I couldn't risk losing Ava. Especially not now, when I feel like I've been given a second chance.

"Nothing," he breathes out. Though there is something that I can't figure out,"

"What is it?"

I

"How has this person stayed hidden?" he replies. "Like I said, it is not really hard for me to find someone. I mean, I'm king of the underground; no one stays hidden from me."

I thought about it for a while. He is right. Reaper is the king of his terrain. His name alone is enough to send someone into an early grave. The bastard is unhinged, and most people fear him. The fact that he isn't able to find out who ordered the hit and who actually carried it out is weird as fuck.

"Could it be that someone is protecting him or her? I murmur more to myself than to him.

"That's impossible"

"Just think about it. We are yet to trace this person, even with both our influences, meaning someone is backing them up. Someone is making sure that they're not found."

He's quiet for a while. It's a lot, but I think it's starting to sink in. It's the only explanation that makes sense. No one is this good at hiding unless someone else is covering their tracks for them.

"Even if that's the case, what about the one who fired? He or she might have fired themselves or paid

someone else to do it, either way, they aren't working alone," he summarizes.

"Exactly"

"That means that someone is hiding them from me."

A frustrated groan leaves my mouth. "That's what I've been trying to fucking tell you for the past few minutes."

Standing up, I head to my office bar and pour myself a glass of whiskey. I gulp the amber content and add

more..

Dealing with Reaper always gives me a damn headache and ruins my mood. I was already in a bad mood, but he just made it worse.

"Just fucking chill. I'm thinking, and I don't need you interrupting my thought process with your negative energy.

"Why you..."

He cuts off my rant before I can finish.

The glass in my hand was gripped so tight that I was afraid it was going to break. That's how on my

nerves he was.

“All this means only one thing,” he starts. “That whoever is protecting our target is powerful enough to defy us.”

“That or he or she is family,” I add as the thought filters through my thoughts.

“Fuck! You know what this means, right?”

“Yes,” I reply as my tone hardens. “If our target is family, which I suspect he or she is, then whoever is covering their tracks will do anything to protect them, including defying us

Damn it, this just made things more complicated. We need to find whoever hurt Ava before he or she can.

strike again.

Chapter 276

Ava

It’s official. I miss my husband so much. It has only been a couple of hours since Rowan left, and I’m dying to pick up the phone and call him.

I know I’m the one who insisted he should go to work today, but now I’m regretting it.

I’ve done every chore around the house, which, by the way, isn’t much because Teresa was already on top of things. I was bored out of my mind since there was nothing to do. Iris is asleep most of the time, and Teresa is busy, so there isn’t anyone to keep me company.

I tried baking, but it was a failed attempt. Like with the pancakes, I had difficulty remembering the recipe.

and also measuring

Sighing, I take the baby monitor and leave for the backyard. I head straight for the beautiful gazebo that

took my breath away the moment I saw it.

I don't remember it being there before, so it was probably added during the four missing years.

This amnesia is both a blessing and a curse. I consider it a blessing because Rowan has changed so much. He's everything I've always wanted him to be. I can't really complain. We were finally the family I'd

always imagined.

It was also a curse because so many things are now different. So many things are new. To be honest, I don't even find that to be a bad thing. What I hate about my current situation are the side effects. The inability to read simple words and numbers. It honestly makes me feel stupid.

"Ma'am, there is someone here to see you." Teresa's voice startles me since I'd been so lost in thought.

"Who is it?" I look at her, squinting my eyes against the bright sunlight.

"Scarlet"

I think about the name for a while, but it doesn't ring a bell. Clearly, if the person was here, it meant they

knew me, right?

Let her in.

She slightly bows her head and then leaves. Minutes later, she comes back with Letty.

“I thought your name is Letty.” I voice my confusion.

Teresa excuses herself while Letty takes a seat next to me. I turn and face her fully, I honestly didn't know

a stranger.

“Letty is just a nickname for Scarlet. My grandmother started calling me that when I was younger and the name just kind of stuck.”

I nod, but don't say anything else. A kind of awkward silence falls between us. It was deafening and spoke volumes. It's like none of us know where to begin.

Everything about this whole thing is weird. I mean, here is this woman who probably knows everything about me, but I know nothing about her.

“So how are you? How are things going?” She finally breaks the silence after a few minutes of silence.

I think about it for a while before answering. During that time, Teresa comes back with a pitcher of

lemonade and two glasses. She leaves again after serving us.

Taking a sip of the delicious liquid, I answer. “Not bad; I can't honestly complain.”

“So Rowan is treating you well, right?” she pushes.

The question sits wrong with me.

“Why would you ask that?”

Sure, I know that my relationship with Rowan has always been tense. She’s apparently my friend, so she would definitely know that, but Rowan told me that things between us changed. Was that a lie?

“Oh nothing. I just want to make sure that everything is okay.” The look in her eyes tells me that it’s more

than that.

The way she was trying to rearrange her features and control her emotions speaks of something else. going on. Just like with Rowan, I could sense that something wasn’t adding up. That, too, like

husband, was hiding something.

“Should I be worried or something?”

my

Maybe I could get her to tell me something. Anything at all on what Rowan might be hiding from me. It

would be a great help, instead of always just wondering and guessing.

“Nothing at all,” she said, taking a deep breath. “I’m just happy to see you so happy and peaceful. I knew

that being with Rowan was going to change things for you. I can see how happier you are by his side.”

“Was I sad a lot? Rowan told me that we agreed to have an open relationship when he started seeing Emma and I started seeing Ethan

She stares at me. Her eyes boring into mine as if she were searching for something. There is a raging debate behind her eyes. A certain kind of struggle. One I didn't understand.

“Yes. I wasn't there at the beginning when Emma came back, but I knew about your story with her. I could tell how much it killed you knowing that Rowan pushed you aside for her even though you refused to admit it. You locked away that pain and tried forgetting about it.”

That is really interesting. I'm not really surprised. It had always been painful for me to know that, despite how much I loved Rowan, he held on to his love for Emma and refused to give me a chance.

I still don't really understand how he came to change his mind about me. He tried explaining it to me the day we talked about Ethan, but the explanation just wasn't enough. He has hated me for so long. How is it possible that something as simple as seeing me with another man triggered his feelings for me?

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It was all so fucking confusing and frustrating. I hate that I have to be told about my life by other people. It's something that I should be able to remember instead of being told about it like it was a damn story.

“You hinted that you came into my life after Emma came back, but you already knew our story. How's that possible, and how did we meet?”

“Travis and I are dating. We've been dating for almost two years now. I knew of your history with Emma

and Rowan because Travis told me.

And things get even more interesting. I didn't see that coming. Given how thick he would warn his girlfriend to stay away from me.

Travis also despised me, I'd

Also, how are we even friends? Travis is a piece of work, and I'm sure his girlfriend is probably the same.

After all, don't birds of a feather flock together?

She must have seen the doubt in my eyes because she grabs my hand.

"I know what you're thinking, but it isn't like that. After Travis told me about you, I kept my distance. Not because I supported them and what they did to you, but because I was afraid you'd reject my friendship because I was dating him. It was after your attack that I came looking for you. I wanted to make sure you were okay and that you knew you weren't alone."

Taking a sip of my drink, I remain silent for a while. There was a lot to unpack from what she told me.

"If you were afraid that I wouldn't accept your friendship, then that means Travis and I weren't on good terms."

"Yes." She replied, shifting in her seat. "You'd cut him from your life."

Well, there is another surprise.

I only had one question, though:

"Why would I have cut him off and not Rowan? He's caused me more pain than almost everyone combined."

Panic flashes in her eyes. I see her begin to get nervous before she forces herself to calm down. If what, she was saying was the truth, why would she panic at my simple question?

That's something you have to figure out yourself," she finally answers. "But I think that it's maybe because, even though you tried killing your love for Rowan, you never succeeded. It was buried under years of pain, but it never faded. On the other hand, your love for Travis, Kate, and James. It faded. That's

I go to say something, but she cuts me off.

"Plus, it's hard to move on from someone when he is constantly around you. Because of the shared custody..." Her eyes widen as if she'd caught herself right before revealing something she wasn't supposed to. "Because of Noah, you two were always around each other."

I hum as my brain tries to figure out what she'd been about to say. Could she have meant to say shared custody? If so, doesn't that mean that Rowan and I divorced?

More questions just keep arising in my head. It was driving me nuts, honestly. All I wanted was to figure out the damn truth.

"What about my relationship with Ethan?" I ask her, maybe she could shed more light on that.

She answers with a question of her own. "What has Rowan told you?"

Shrugging my shoulders, I reply. "Nothing much. Just that I was seeing him during the time he was courting Emma... I can't help but wonder, though; I know myself. At least my current self, and I know! I would never have slept with another man if I at least didn't feel something strong for him."

Letty stares at me for a long time before answering.

“You were highly attracted to him, but apart from that, you were falling for him. You once told me that you felt really strongly for him and that you could actually imagine a future with him. That you could see yourself building a life with him and loving him”

Color me shocked. Shit. Was she honestly telling the truth? Was I really falling for some other man? I always thought that Rowan was it for me. I never considered other men because he was embedded deep in my soul. I thought I would never fall out of love with him, even if he went back to Emma.

To find out that this almost happened leaves me feeling some type of way.

I look up at her with unfocused eyes.

“And what happened to Ethan? Why isn’t he around? If I were falling in love with him, why am I now with Rowan? I don’t understand.” I stammer, firing question after question at her.

She goes to answer, but a cold and deadly voice stops her.

“That’s fucking enough Letty”

I swivel around in my chair, and my eyes collide with the gray, angry ones belonging to Rowan.

Chapter 278

He literary stomps towards us. When he reaches us, he pulls me out of my chair before kissing me ucking confusing and frustrating. I hate that I have to be told about my life by other people. It’s something that I should be able to remember instead of being told about it like it was a damn story.

“You hinted that you came into my life after Emma came back, but you already knew our story. How’s that possible, and how did we meet?”

“Travis and I are dating. We’ve been dating for almost two years now. I knew of your history with Emma

and Rowan because Travis told me.

And things get even more interesting. I didn't see that coming. Given how think he would warn his girlfriend to stay away from me.

Travis also despised me, I'd

Also, how are we even friends? Travis is a piece of work, and I'm sure his girlfriend is probably the same.

After all, don't birds of a feather flock together?

She must have seen the doubt in my eyes because she grabs my hand.

"I know what you're thinking, but it isn't like that. After Travis told me about you, I kept my distance. Not because I supported them and what they did to you, but because I was afraid you'd reject my friendship because I was dating him. It was after your attack that I came looking for you. I wanted to make sure your were okay and that you knew you weren't alone."

Taking a sip of my drink, I remain silent for a while. There was a lot to unpack from what she told me.

"If you were afraid that I wouldn't accept your friendship, then that means Travis and I weren't on good terms."

"Yes." She replied, shifting in her seat. "You'd cut him from your life."

Well, there is another surprise.

I only had one question, though:

“Why would I have cut him off and not Rowan? He’s caused me more pain than almost everyone combined.”

Panic flashes in her eyes. I see her begin to get nervous before she forces herself to calm down. If what, she was saying was the truth, why would she panic at my simple question?

That’s something you have to figure out yourself,” she finally answers. “But I think that it’s maybe because, even though you tried killing your love for Rowan, you never succeeded. It was buried under years of pain, but it never faded. On the other hand, your love for Travis, Kate, and James. It faded. That’s

I go to say something, but she cuts me off.

“Plus, it’s hard to move on from someone when he is constantly around you. Because of the shared custody...” Her eyes widen as if she’d caught herself right before revealing something she wasn’t supposed to.” Because of Noah, you two were always around each other.”

I hum as my brain tries to figure out what she’d been about to say. Could she have meant to say shared custody? If so, doesn’t that mean that Rowan and I divorced?

More questions just keep arising in my head. It was driving me nuts, honestly. All I wanted was to figure out the damn truth.

“What about my relationship with Ethan?” I ask her, maybe she could shed more light on that.

She answers with a question of her own. “What has Rowan told you?”

Shrugging my shoulders, I reply. “Nothing much. Just that I was seeing him during the time he was courting Emma... I can’t help but wonder, though; I know myself. At least my current self, and I know! would never have slept with another man if I at least didn’t feel something strong for him.”

Letty stares at me for a long time before answering.

“You were highly attracted to him, but apart from that, you were falling for him. You once told me that you felt really strongly for him and that you could actually imagine a future with him. That you could see yourself building a life with him and loving him”

Color me shocked. Shit. Was she honestly telling the truth? Was I really falling for some other man? I always thought that Rowan was it for me. I never considered other men because he was embedded deep in my soul. I thought I would never fall out of love with him, even if he went back to Emma.

To find out that this almost happened leaves me feeling some type of way.

I look up at her with unfocused eyes.

“And what happened to Ethan? Why isn’t he around? If I were falling in love with him, why am I now with Rowan? I don’t understand.” I stammer, firing question after question at her.

She goes to answer, but a cold and deadly voice stops her.

“That’s fucking enough Letty”

I swivel around in my chair, and my eyes collide with the gray, angry ones belonging to Rowan.

I normally wouldn’t mind the kiss, but something about it seemed different. It was full of anger and

he was trying bitterness. It was punishing and bruising. Almost as if he was trying to stake his claim. Like to erase Ethan’s name from my lips. 1

I stand stock still, refusing to kiss him back. I wanted answers, and he’d cut off Letty before she could tell

me where Ethan was.

When he notices that I'm not responding to his kiss, he stops and steps back. The anger is still raging in his eyes, but that doesn't faze me at all. Not when I was desperate to know what happened to the man that I'd apparently been falling for. The man who had achieved what I'd thought was impossible. Taking

me away from Rowan.

"I want answers, Rowan, and I want them now," I demand, folding my hand across my chest. "Tell me

where Ethan is."

The storm that was brewing behind his stormy grey eyes becomes almost chaotic.

"I don't want to hear his fucking name," he growls, his fist clenched. "I told you what's important, and

that's all you need to know about him. You don't need to know where he is."

His answer ignites a fire inside me. I mean, how fucking dare he? This is the father of my talking about, and he has the audacity to tell me he isn't going to tell me more about him?

child we are

"He's Iris's father, and I deserve to know who he is and where he is. This isn't something I'm going to budge on, whether you like it or not." I hiss at him as I stub my finger in his chest just to get my point

across.

"No!" His tone is hard, and it reminds me of the Rowan I was used to. "That's final"

“Maybe you should just tell her.” Letty comes to my aid, and those deadly eyes turn to her.

“Don’t tell me what to fucking do,” he snarls, his voice dripping with annoyance. “Now get the hell out of

my compound.”

His attitude towards her enrages me. I’d become so complacent because of his new change that I’d

forgotten how much of an asshole Rowan could be.

I yell at him, feeling even more pissed off. “Don’t talk to my friend like that.”

You barely fucking know her,” he sneers, and I can’t help but feel that he’s somehow mocking me.

My heart breaks at being reminded that I couldn’t even remember my best friend because of my head injury. Something that is beyond my control.

“You’re an asshole, but I shouldn’t be surprised because you’ve always been one towards me.” uttering this, I grab Letty’s hand and the baby monitor, then drag her across the lawn and into the house.

I can’t believe I let my guard around him. I should have known that everything with him was too good to

be true.

“Look, I’m going to go, but I’ll come back another day.” Letty begins. “I didn’t mean to cause any

between you two.”

trouble

I release the air I was holding and just sag in defeat. "It isn't your fault. I just don't understand why he's acting this way.

She looks at me like I'm joking. "Are you kidding me? Don't you see why he won't tell you where Ethan is or why he doesn't want you to speak his name?"

I shake my head because it doesn't make any sense to me at all. Ethan is a part of my life because of Iris. There is no way I would cut him out of his daughter's life unless he himself didn't want to be part of it.

"It's because he's jealous," she finally says. "It's obvious to everyone except you. He doesn't want you around Ethan because he is fucking jealous."

I almost laugh, but then remember the night he'd told me the same thing. I hadn't believed him, but could

it actually be true?

Before I can say anything to her, like maybe tell her she was wrong Iris chooses that time to start wailing.

"Go, she needs you more. I'll let myself out, and maybe one of these days we can arrange a girl's day out with Corrine," she says, giving me a smile.

"Alright then," I sigh tiredly, feeling bad that I didn't manage to make her stay longer, not that she event

I

gave me the chance to convince her.

She hugs me, and I head upstairs. I hear the door open and close right before I enter Iris's room.

Picking her up from the cot, I kiss her cheek and then take her to the changing table. Her diaper wasn't

wet, so it meant she was probably hungry.

Chapter 279

near large

Sitting the

I carry her, and we head to the library. One of my favorite places in the house. windows, I pull down my camisole and bra. She attaches immediately and begins to feed.

I watch her as she feeds. Her beautiful blue eyes staring at me with wonder and trust. I let out a small laugh when I realize that none of my kids have my eyes. Both took their dads' eye color.

Running my finger down her soft cheek, I continue staring at her. Wondering how Ethan looked. Iris looks. like me except for her eyes, so I have nothing to draw on when imagining how Ethan looks.

After she's done, I stand up and burp her. She isn't really a fussy baby and usually sleeps after feeding, but right now she was putting up a fight. She was crying and refusing to quiet down.

I all but gave up after a few minutes of trying to soothe her when Rowan walks in. He had discarded his coat, and his sleeves were folded. Silently, he takes Iris from me, and she immediately quiets down.

“Why is my princess crying?” he asks, smiling and in a really sweet voice.

Iris stares at him with so much wonder and fascination. If I didn’t know better, I would think she worships

him.

I take a seat and remain quiet as Rowan continues having a one-sided conversation with my daughter. I had so much on my mind. So much to figure out. My head was a fucking mess.

“I didn’t mean to shout at you,” his soft and remorseful voice pulls me from my musings. “You have to understand that I get jealous and angry every time I think of you and Ethan.”

His confession catches me off guard. I don’t know how to react to it, so instead I just keep quiet.

“It kills me knowing that I almost lost you to him. That my fucking stupidity and foolishness drove you into another man’s arms. That’s why I get so angry any time he’s mentioned, because he did the one thing no other man has been able to do. He was able to touch your heart, a heart that has always belonged to

me.

I

He is right... And that’s what I’m struggling to understand. How was Ethan able to do it? I don’t feel anything towards the man right now, but that doesn’t change the fact that I’d felt something or was starting to feel something towards him..

“Where is Ethan, Rowan?” I am afraid.

I’ve seen Rowan’s possessiveness back when Emma was all he saw and breathed, and what lengths it

drove him I was afraid he might have done something to Ethan.

He sighs before answering "Prison

My eyes widen at his answer, "Say what?"

I couldn't have heard him right.

"Ethan is in prison."

Well, I did not see that coming at all.

"What the hell happened?"

He proceeded to tell me everything. How Ethan was Nora and Theo's adopted son. He told me how he played me and how he ended up being caught and sentenced to prison.

"Holy Shit," I exhale while staring at Rowan in shock. "I was having sex with my adopted brother while he was planning my untimely demise the whole fucking time. That shit only happens in movies."

The deep growl that leaves his mouth startles Iris, who was beginning to fall asleep.

"What did I tell you about mentioning you, Ethan, and sex in the same fucking sentence?"

I shake my head, still trying to grasp everything he's told me. "Sorry"

We are

quiet for a while. Each of us lost in our own heads. I can't believe I went through all that and still

remained sane.

I mean, damn! The father of my daughter is my real parents' adopted son, and he tried to have me killed because he wanted to be the CEO of their company. That is CRAZY.

"I thought I would let him be around Iris; do you think that is a good idea?" I ask him, genuinely worried. I

didn't want a psychopath around my child.

Rowan groans before exhaling deeply. "I hate to say it, but yes. Let him get to know his daughter. Sure, he started this with the wrong agenda, but I also admit that, in the end, he was deeply regretful. It seems he'd fallen in love with you."

It's clear the words he said were uttered begrudgingly, but it was enough for me.

Thank you for telling me. All I wanted was the truth." I stand up, move, and then sit next to him. I lean my head against his shoulder, ignoring the troubled look that flashed in his eyes.

Right now, it didn't matter what he was hiding. I was going to find out sooner or later. What mattered was how the hell I was going to visit Ethan in prison without triggering another fight between Rowan and me.

Chapter 280

I'm seated in the living room, going over some words and numbers. If I ever want to go back to teaching.

then I need to relearn words and numbers

Iris was sleeping in a portable crib that I dragged from upstairs. I didn't like the idea of leaving her in her room all by herself all the time. So here we are. She was just chilling while I basically studied all over

again.

My head was still reeling from everything I'd learned yesterday about Ethan. I still can't believe that he played me in such a cruel manner. That I hadn't suspected a thing during the months he and I were

together.

I don't know what pushed me into his arms in the first place. Was it because Emma came back and I wanted Rowan to see that his relationship with her didn't affect me? Or was it because I'd been so desperate and starved of affection that I'd fallen for the first man who showed interest in me?

It frustrated me that I didn't know what had been going on in my mind when it all happened or what drove me. Unless I get my memory back, then I'll always wonder what motivated my actions.

My phone rings, pulling me from my thoughts.

I pick it up, but unfortunately, I can't read the number that was flashing on the screen. So far, the only numbers that were programmed on the phone were Rowan's, the driver's, my bodyguards, and Noah's

school office.

After a second of debating whether to pick it, I tap on the green answering icon.

"Hello?" I ask tentatively..

"Hey, Ava...how are you?" I don't recognize the voice though it sounds sweet,

"Who's this?"

A breath catches on the other side of the phone, making me feel terrible. It is obvious that I've managed.

to hurt their feelings.

She answers slowly "It's your mother, Nora"

I haven't seen her since we left the hospital. Rowan had told her and Theo to give me some time to adjust

to the idea before they could come to visit.

Everyone has confirmed that they are indeed my parents. Noah told me that I'm the one who told him was adopted by Kate and James. I then introduced him to Nora and Theo. Still, I was having a hard time

I clear my throat awkwardly. I honestly didn't mean to hurt her feelings.

"Hey...I'm sorry, I just didn't know whose number it was, and I didn't recognize your voice."

She's quick to answer, "It's okay, I totally understand."

"Did Rowan give you my number?"

Again, just like yesterday, today he'd gone to work reluctantly. If it weren't for the fact that he had an important meeting, he would have stayed. He did promise to come back home immediately after, though.

"Yes. I hope you don't mind," she states with hesitation.

From what I've seen for the few hours I was with her at the hospital, she seemed like a really sweet woman. I'd wanted Rowan to tell me about their story. How it is, I ended up as Kate and James daughter. He told me that it wasn't his story to tell and that he would leave it to them to fill in the blanks.

I still don't know how it is that such a sweet couple raised such a manipulative man. I mean, who does that? Who the hell seduces and sleeps with the woman he's hell-bent on killing? I was having a hard time

wrapping my head around that particular truth.

"I wanted to invite you to lunch," she begins, pulling me from my thoughts. "I will be honest and direct. I miss you, Ava. You're my daughter and it's killing me that after months of waiting for you to wake up, I can't even hold you because you don't remember me

The heartbreak in her voice is clear as day. Witnessing it even through the phone moves something I can't

honestly explain inside me.

As a mother, I feel for her. It would destroy me if any of my children ever forgot me.

"I really don't know about that," I tell her truthfully. "Rowan says I'm not safe since my attacker hasn't been caught yet."

I still wonder why someone would want me dead. Did I maybe piss someone off so much that they

decided I deserved to die? I mostly keep to myself, so someone wanting to harm me didn't make sense. I

mean, who would I offend when I barely have any friends?

Don't worry about that... I'll come pick you up" she says. "We're Howell's Ava. I dare anyone to come at you

There was that name again, Rowan told me that Iris's last name is Howell. It sounded really familiar. Like I'd heard it somewhere.

think about declining, but I decide otherwise. Maybe I could get more answers concerning Ethan, Sure.

"Okay then" I agree and she squeals in delight.

She tells me that they'll be by in a few minutes before hanging up.

I hurriedly change Iris then myself. I decided to just go with a silky blouse and some trousers. It will be easier to breastfeed Iris in that as compared to a dress.

I wait patiently as excitement starts buzzing inside me. I couldn't stay locked up in the house, forever. It was about time I go out. What's the worst thing that could happen?