

Ex Husband 301

Chapter 0301

I stare at the father of my daughter. The man that I'd trusted and wanted enough to sleep with. My eyes take in his features as I try to get my brain to work.

He looked different. Don't get me wrong, he was still really good-looking, but he seemed different from the man I had a glimpse of in my memory. He even has a beard now. It made him all the more good-looking.

I know, I'm in love with Rowan, so why am I checking out Ethan? I'm not. I'm just noting that he's handsome.

"Hi," I finally reply. It was the only word that I could master.

I feel so awkward. So unsure of what to do or what to say.

His eyes drop from mine to stare at our daughter. His unreadable expression changes. Softness and love take over.

"Can I hold her?" he asks, his eyes still fixed on her.

It's clear that he loves Iris. That fact alone warms my heart. I was really afraid that he wouldn't want anything to do with her. Afraid that he thought of her as a mistake. You know? Because he was only using me while planning to kill me.

"Sure"

I stand up and gently lay Iris in his outstretched hand.

Ethan kisses her forehead. "Hey, baby girl?"

He tries to hide the tears that fill his eyes, but it's obvious there.

Reading him proves to be difficult. Just like with Rowan, he hides his emotions well. I don't know what I expected when I decided to see him. But warmth and gentleness aren't it.

After being told what he did to me, I expected this cold, unfeeling and mean person. I'm shocked that it isn't what I've found. Letty did tell me thought, that when I was around him I was happy. I was free and that he helped me a lot in becoming a different person.

She told me that, Ethan helped me get out of my shell. That he helped me experiment and embrace my sexuality. I didn't believe her at first, but now I do.

I don't feel anything for him, but there is just something about him. Something that draws me in. Maybe

+15 BONUS

"Thank you so much for bringing her. I haven't seen her since the day she was born" his voice is gruff and full of emotions.

"Why? Didn't Theo and Nora bring her to see you?"

“She was in NICU, remember?” he says softly. “Though they did bring me pictures of her”

Sometimes I forget that Iris is a premature baby. I always forget that during the time I was in a coma, she was in intensive care unit.

“I’ll try to bring her as often as I can” I assure him.

We are silent for a while, with him playing with Iris’s tiny hands. She holds his finger so tight, which makes me wonder if on a deeper level she knew who he was. If she was aware of their connection. I know it might sound absurd, but I feel like she knows Ethan is her father.

“Not that I’m not glad you’re here, but why are you here? I’m surprised you came. Mom told me that you lost your memories”

Damn. That is something I don’t think I’ll ever get over. The fact that he’s my real parents’ adopted son yet he and I have a daughter together.

“Apart from bringing Iris to see you, I wanted to meet you. Get to know you as a person since we’ll be sharing custody of Iris”

“I’m surprised you would” he murmurs, his eyes still on Iris.

I keep quiet for a moment. Ignoring his words.

“I know what others have told me about you and me. Now I want to hear it from. I want to know our story from you”

His snap up to look at me. I see the surprise playing in his eyes. I guess, he probably thought that I would take others point of view and not his.

He takes a deep breath, before beginning.

He doesn’t hold back at all. He tells me everything from how he found out that I was alive, to how he devised the devious plan and to finally putting things to motions.

My heart aches at how he had manipulated me. I can’t imagine the heartbreak I felt when I found out that he had betrayed me. My lungs are clenched. I feel like I have a tight fist wrapped around my chest.

I don’t remember what happened, but his actions have marked my soul. That is why his confession hurts

I fall back against the chair and just watch him. By the time he was done, Iris was already asleep. Snuggled against her father’s chest.

I never got to truly apologize, but I am truly sorry, Ava. I have no excuse for what I did to you, only my absurd reasoning that the company should be mine and not yours. You’ll never know how deeply repentant I am” his voice was more of a painful whisper.

The truth of his words are written in his eyes. I don’t know how I know this, but deep inside I know that he means every single word he said. What he did is completely messed up, but will I honestly resent him,

especially when he seem to be sorry?

"I don't know what to say

And it's true. I am speechless and confused.

I'm not saying what I did was right, but everything changed once I realized I had fallen in love with you. I went into it thinking I have the whole narrative, but you changed things. I never saw you coming, Ava, I never thought that you would flip my world around"

Fuck. What the hell was I supposed to say when a man you have no memory of confesses to being in love with you?

Luckily, I don't have to say anything because one of the guards interrupts us.

"Time is up"

Silently, I watch as he kisses the top of Iris's head before giving her to me.

I may not remember what happened, but I hope we can put the past behind and move forward for the sake of Iris. Look like a good man, despite your sins and you deserve to know your daughter, so, friends?"

I ask him hopefully.

At first he looks shocked at first, but then a smile graces his lips.

"Friends"

It was a lot to d*****d all that happened and my current feelings, but I know this is a step towards the right direction.

T'll try to come as often as I can so you can see Iris"

T'll appreciate that

He stands up and the guard cuffs him. They were about to leave when Ethan turns around and faces me.

Be careful who you trust, Ava. Not everything is as it seems and Rowan isn't being as honest as he portrays himself to be" he warns. Take care, my love"

Before I can even reply or ask him, they both leave. I stand up with my daughter and head towards the exit. All the while his warning about Rowan still ringing in my head.

Chapter 0302

Rowan.

"You've got to give me something, Reaper... Anything at this point, honestly." My voice was strained, and I

was doing all I could to prevent myself from lashing out.

It was frustrating as hell that we still don't know who the fuck was behind Ava's attack. It was fucking with my head that whoever hurt her was still out there. Was still walking scot-free, as if the bastard hadn't

hurt the woman I love.

Every day I leave the house or Ava leaves our home, worry fills me. I can't help the questions that flood and attack my mind. What if someone hurts her when she's home? What if someone attacks her when

she's out in the streets?

I know I have hired the best bodyguards, and Reaper has his men watching over her too, but I still can't

help the worst scenarios that keep flooding my mind day in and day out.

"You're not the only one frustrated by the whole damn situation." Reaper snaps back, his restlessness very clear in his voice. "But I've tried everything to find this guy, and nada. Absolutely nothing. I couldn't

even find the damn car they used."

I frown as the details pour out of his mouth. I would have snapped back, but his statement distracted me.

"That's impossible? How is there no record or evidence of the car?" I ask. "Unless the bastards torched it

after us."

It's the only thing that made sense,

worked close together, but there hasn't been anything. Nothing

to point us in the right direction. My men can't find a damn thing, and neither can his men. The police are

also useless in this case.

"That's what I thought, too." His reply is cold.

I'm not one to be unnerved, but Reaper does unnerve me. There was just something about the fucker that was devious and sinister. If it weren't for the fact that I needed his help in keeping Ava safe, I wouldn't be

associated with him in the first place

"So what will we do now?" he asks after a while.

It's a question that I've been asking myself a lot lately.

"We wait and hope that whoever they are, they'll slip up. Once that happens, we'll be there to catch them."

My mind wanders to Ava. Every minute and every hour, she's all I can think about. I'm not ashamed to say

of hold she has on me.

+15 BONUS

“By the way, I need a favor.” Reaper rips me from my musings, bringing me back to the present.

Leaning forward in my chair, I clutch my phone tightly, curious about what Reaper would need help with.

We were alike in some aspects, such as this. We both would never ask each other for help unless it was truly necessary.

“With what?”

“I need Corrine’s address,” he states in a flat voice, devoid of any emotion.

I fall back into my chair and grin. Ah, so I wasn’t wrong that day at the hospital. Something had passed between them. It was in the way that both of them stared at each other. As if they couldn’t pull their eyes

away.

“Can’t you just have her checked out? I’m sure it wouldn’t take one of your men long before you had the address you’re looking for.

Men like us always get what we want. It doesn’t even take that much digging to find the information we are looking for. Which makes me all the more curious about why he would ask me for a favor.

“Yes, but I want to do things the right way. Somehow I feel Corrine isn’t the kind of women to appreciate a

stranger digging into her life.” He breathes out. “This is the best course of action. If I show up at her

doorstep and she asks how I got her address, I will simply say you gave it to me since she and Ava are

friends.”

“Seriously? Do you want Ava to castrate me? Especially if she finds out that you’re a criminal. That is just

not fucking right.” I growl standing up.

I am double sure that Corrine would tell Letty... And even though Ava doesn’t really remember Reeper,

Letty would still fill her in because the woman simply doesn’t know how to keep her mouth shut.

“Say’s the guy that’s still fooling Ava by making her believe that you two are still married,” he says, clicking

his tongue before hanging up.

Touche’.

Sighing, I stare at my office, wondering why the hell I was still there when it was already time to go home Reaper is right, though; I was a fucking hypocrite for speaking about rights and wrongs when I was still

lying to Ava.

Chapter 0303

+15 BONUS

Without wasting time, I cross the soft carpet and head out of my office. I walk down the hallway, heading

towards Gabe's office.

"Is my brother in?" I ask his secretary once I get to his side of the floor.

We were the only board member's that were on this floor. Mainly because we retained the highest percentage of shares along with my father, though he is now retired.

"Yes, Sir. He's still in."

I nod at her and walk into my brother's office after noting that this was yet a new secretary. Gabe went through them at an alarming rate. I blame it on the fact that he is still a notorious playboy. He sleeps with

them, and once they start getting attached, he fires them.

"Rowan..."

"What happened to the other one?" I ask, knowing that I don't need to elaborate. "This is the fourth secretary you've hired this month."

“Well, it’s not my fault that they keep expecting me to profess my love and put a ring on it after a day or two of S**,” he grins, a grin that I know very well he uses to draw women into his fucking web.

Shaking my head, I stare at my brother, wondering if there exists a woman who can actually tame him.”

You really should stop mixing business with pleasure.”

“Nah... Where is the fun in that?” He shrugs, and I sigh, knowing that he won’t stop sleeping with every fucking secretary he hires.

At least he respected my decision when I told him my secretary was out of limit. The last thing I wanted or needed was to search for new ones because my brother can’t keep his dick in his pants.

“So, what brought you to my office?”

“I don’t really feel like going home,” I answer, avoiding his gaze.

“Color me shocked... Why? I thought things were going great with Ava.”

“They are...” I leave the sentence hanging.

Well, they were, that is, until she got back from visiting Ethan in prison. I don’t know what happened or what he told her, but Avá has been eyeing me suspiciously since then. Every time I do something, I say something, kiss her, hold her, or even do the smallest of things. Suspicion mars her eyes, making me

1/2

+15 BONUS

“I think Ethan may have said something to her; she’s been off lately. It started after she went to see Ethan

about a week ago. Or maybe something happened between them, and she’s wondering what the hell

she’s doing with me when there is Ethan.”

“She loves you.” Gabe tries assuring me, but it doesn’t work.

“But for how long? And what happens when she regains her memories and realizes that she killed and buried her love for me a long time ago?”

My insecurities are showing, but I don’t care. In addition to worrying about her safety, I worry about the day that she’ll regain her memories. I’m so fucking afraid of admitting that losing her scares me to death.

This past month and a half has been fucking amazing. I never thought that Ava could be what I wanted.

What I needed. I was wrong. She fucking lights up my world in a way I never thought possible, making me

realize how much of a fool I was to hold myself back from her.

Kissing her, waking up beside her, holding her, having our late-night conversations, and having Noah and

Iris is everything I didn't know I needed, but now I know I can't live without it. She's embedded so deeply.

in my fucking heart that it would be impossible to dig her out. Not that I would want to anyway.

I want everything with her. Everything I denied myself and her when we were married. I want a future with

her. I want to re-marry her and grow our family. I want to watch our kids grow and be there for her every

step of the way. I want a happy ending with her, and I want to spend the next sixty-plus years with her.

"You're overreacting. I'm sure nothing is wrong." He assures me firmly.

I sigh, defeated and tired. "If you think that's the case, why don't you come home for dinner then? You can

see for yourself that I am not overreacting, as you put it."

"Fine"

I smile as we both rise up. I just hope that Ava won't be angry that I invited Gabe. After all, he had never

antagonized her, but he wasn't welcoming to her either.

Chapter 304

Ava

“Is it okay if Corrine and I come by the day after tomorrow?” Letty asks.

She had called a few minutes ago. I’d been surprised, but happy that she had. The last time she was here, we talked, and I got why I’d become her friend despite her relationship with Travis.

She was a fun person to be around. Apart from that, she was also really sweet and nice. I had taken to her immediately, glad to have her in my life.

I move around the kitchen with Iris in my arms. She had refused to take her afternoon nap, and because of that, she was now very cranky. Whenever I tried putting her down, she would fall into a fit of crying until I picked her up again.

“Ava?”

I hesitated for a moment. The last time I saw Corrine was at the hospital. She hasn’t contacted me or come by to see me. I didn’t understand, especially since she was supposed to be one of my closest friends.

“Will that be alright with her?” I inquire, unsure of myself. “It’s just that we haven’t seen each other since that day at the hospital.”

“That’s because she was giving you time to settle and get used to the new normal,” she replies. “So, is Wednesday okay with you?”

“Yeah, sure. It’s not like I have anything to do or anywhere to go,” I reply, trying to hide the bitterness and sarcasm from my tone.

Every day, it gets harder and harder to stay at home. I wasn’t built to sit around and do nothing. Even when I had Noah, I still had my studies and my afternoon job at the grocery store to keep me occupied.

“It’s settled then... We’ll be there. We have a lot to catch up on.”

That catches my attention. Maybe they’ll tell me something that will give me a hint on how my life has been for the past four years.

For a minute, I’m tempted to ask her if she knows what Rowan could be hiding. I decided against it, though. If anyone is going to tell me the truth, then it will be Rowan. I’d rather hear it from the horse’s mouth.

“Fine. See you then.”

I hang up and put the phone down. I look down at the bundle of joy in my arms, hoping that

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+25 BONUS

“Come on Angel, please go to sleep... My hands are getting tired here, not to mention numb.”

Her forehead creases, and she simply continues staring at me, her full lips twisted. If I am not wrong, then I would think that she was offended. Displeased by my words.

Sighing, I continue moving, swinging her gently in my arms. I start singing, hoping that a combination of all those will lull her to sleep.

She was just closing her eyes when the door opened.

“Ava!” Rowan shouts my name, making Iris snap her eyes open. Her face twists right before she lets out a big wail.

“Son of a bitch!” I snap when her cries get louder.

I transfer her to my shoulder, holding her there while gently patting her back, hoping to calm her down.

“What is it?” Rowan appears at the door before rushing towards. “I heard you cuss.

“What happened is that she was almost asleep when you woke her up with your shout!” I glare at him, releasing all my pent-up frustrations into that one look.

It wasn’t just that he woke Iris up; it’s also because of what Ethan told me and the fact that I know deep down he’s hiding something from me.

My mind has been driving me crazy as it continues to come up with all the worst possible scenarios. I don’t want to lose what we have, but something inside me tells me that there is a chance of that once I learn what he’s keeping from me.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t know,” he states softly.

I push my raging thoughts away. Maybe I was just being paranoid. Maybe I’m mistaken.

The love in his eyes draws me in like a moth to a flame. It hypnotizes me, making me forget even my own damn name. The look in his eyes promises me everything that I’ve always desired. Love, passion, warmth, peace, and happiness. It promises me the world, and a part of me just wants to forget about everything else and drown in it. Drown in his lies.

“It’s okay,” I whisper, stepping away from him and breaking the spell that he had woven around me.

He stares at me. I shift, just so I can avoid his piercing gaze.

“By the way, I invited Gabe for dinner”

It’s only then that I notice Gabe standing near the door. His gaze, similar to his brother’s, was piercing. As if he were trying to assess something.

+25 BONUS

“Hi,” I simply say, not really sure how to be around him since Gabe and I have never been close. We weren’t enemies, but we weren’t friends either.

He simply nods in acknowledgment of my greeting. He and Rowan had different personalities despite being twins, but they had some similar traits. Both were men of very few words.

"I'm just going to go to her room and try to put her down."

Iris had stopped crying. What remained were her hiccupps.

They both nod as I excuse myself.

I'd just left the room when I heard them. At first, I didn't mean to eavesdrop, but that was until Gabe's sentence got my attention.

"Yap, Ethan definitely mentioned something. Do you think he told her the truth?"

What the hell? So I was right. Rowan was hiding something from me.

Chapter 0305

My heart beats wildly as I listen to them.

Do you think he told her the truth?

and over again, like a broken da mn

That single sentence keeps playing in my mind record. I feel paralyzed as I wait for Rowan to reply.

entire body

I hold Iris tightly in my arms because I could feel not only my hands but my shaking. I try to breathe in and then out, but the air gets stuck in my wind pipes.

I lean against the wall, just to keep myself standing upright. I was weak in the knees, and the last thing I wanted was to collapse to the ground while holding my daughter.

Thankfully, Iris had fallen asleep; otherwise, I would have been caught.

"I honestly don't know," Rowan murmurs, his voice strained.

Remember when I said that my heart was beating wildly? Yeah, now it's a hundred times worse.

"She's suspicious of you, meaning someone mentioned something to her. Given that Ethan doesn't like you, then it's probably him."

They were quiet for a moment. My ears are ringing, and the only sound I hear is the beating of my heart. It was so loud in my ears that I was afraid they would hear it and know that I hadn't left.

"What are you going to do now? You only have two options: either you tell her the truth or go on pretending like nothing's wrong," Gabe tells him after a while.

F uck. This was hard to listen to. To know that my husband was hiding something from me.

I was waiting patiently for his answer when I got this sense of deja vu.

Had something like this happened before?

Before I could answer that question, a memory filters through my mind. Something like this had happened only it wasn't Gabe and Rowan I was listening to. It was Noah and Rowan.

I was in this exact position, leaning against this exact wall, only instead of holding Iris, I clutched some documents close to my chest.

"Don't you love her?"

He clears his throat. "Noah..."

"Dad, do you love mommy or not?" Noah asks him again.

+25 BONUS

I hear him sigh in defeat. "I love her for giving me you," he finally answers

I stumble at the pain that rips through me. The pain that I felt when he said that. My breaths come in and out hard as I try to breathe through the pain that suddenly attacks me.

Was the memory from before or after we chose to go our separate ways?

I try to remember more; I'm successful, but it isn't what I was expecting.

"Has anyone ever told you it's rude to listen to other people's conversations?"

His voice was cold and emotionless. The look of hate and disdain filtered into his eyes as he asked me what the hell I was doing there.

My eyes as he

in

in my

Fuck, this was the Rowan I was used to. The Rowan who destroyed my heart. Seeing him memories like this and knowing that his every word, action, and look was like a stab to my heart almost brings me to my knees.

"Mom, what are you doing standing there?" Noah's voice breaks through the fog, bringing me back to the present and cutting short my memory.

At his voice, Rowan and Gabe rush out. They silently looked at each other before facing me.

"Ava, are you okay?" Rowan asks in concern.

He goes to touch me, but I step away from him. Hurt flashes in his eyes, but I don't really care right now. Not when the pain I felt is still fresh in my mind. Not when I've just gotten another reminder of how cruel Rowan had been to me.

"Yeah, a memory flashed in my mind. I got lost in it," I reply quietly, avoiding his eyes.

"A memory?" The way he asks me makes me look up. In his eyes, I see fear. Meaning, for some reason, he was afraid of my memories coming back. "What was it about?"

"I don't really know; it was a bit hazy." I lie, not really sure why. "I'll just go put Iris down and maybe take a nap before dinner. All of a sudden, my head is pounding."

Noah looks worriedly at me. They all do. For Noah's sake, I fake a small smile and kiss his cheek before heading upstairs.

My mind is in turmoil. I didn't lie when I said my head was pounding; it actually was. I had so many things on my mind, and there were secrets to uncover. It was beginning to be too much for me to handle.

I get into Iris's room and gently lay her down before kissing her forehead. After taking the baby monitor, I head straight to the master's bedroom.

I enter, and I just take a minute to stare at it. At first, I didn't care because I was just happy that Rowan was sleeping next to me, but now? Now I see the difference. Everything had been

The bed, the color scheme, the furniture. There was nothing remotely familiar about this bedroom. It's like whoever redecorated it was trying to get rid of every trace of me.

Rowan had said that he and Emma had started seeing each other after she came back. Did she sleep here? Did they ever make love on this bed? Was she the one who redecorated the room, or was it Rowan? Maybe it was both of them.

Feeling unsettled by the questions, I leave the room and go to a guest bedroom that is down the hall. I couldn't sleep there, knowing that there was a possibility Emma and Rowan had slept and fucked on that same bed.

It was gut-wrenching to think of that possibility, but did I have a right to feel hurt when I'd slept with another man?

Getting under the covers, I will my tired body to sleep. My head was killing me, and I couldn't keep this up much longer. I was tired of the questions. Tired of the doubts. I was tired of trying to figure out what he was hiding

The key to knowing what secrets Rowan was keeping was in my memories. Now more than ever, I needed to remember; the only problem is, I don't know how to bring those lost memories forth.

Chapter 0306

"Ava, wake up; dinner is ready." His voice pulls me from my dreams.

It wasn't a really good dream, but neither was it bad. It was one of those dreams that left you with confusion and vague images of what you dreamed of.

"Iris?"

"Don't worry. She woke up; I gave her a bottle, and she went back to sleep," he answers, his eyes searching mine.

I nod my head, then push the sheets aside and get up. Stretching, I feel my bones loosening and realigning themselves in the most delicious of ways.

“Why are you sleeping here instead of in our bed?” Rowan asks, staring deeply into my eyes.

Everything that I’d been running from crashes into me. Reminding me of the reason why I was here in this bed and not the master bedroom.

I feel irritation and anger surge inside me. My calmness disappears, and in its place is a bitter aftertaste. Why would he lie to me? Why was he keeping things from me? Is this really how he wanted us to start our new relationship? By building it on a foundation of lies and secrets.

“Don’t start with me, Rowan. I’m not in the f u c k i n g mood,” I snap before brushing past him.

I am a fully grown woman, but there was this part that just wanted to slap him silly. After everything he’s taken me through, he still has the audacity to keep things from me. What the hell is wrong with him? Isn’t the fact that he’s taken me through hell and back enough?

I don’t wait for him to follow; instead, I head to the dining table, where I find Noah and Gabe already seated. I take my seat and begin loading food onto my own plate. A few minutes later,

Rowan joins us.

“So,

Ava,

how have you been?” Gabe asks, breaking the tense atmosphere.

I don’t know how to answer his question. First of all, because right now I was pis sed as hell, and second of all, I found this small talk strange. Like I said, Gabe and I have never been friends. We barely even talked to each other, so to have him ask me how I am is a bit weird.

“It’s been good so far... The only downside is staying at home. I’m not used to that,” I answer honestly.

I put a piece of steak in my mouth and almost moan in pleasure. It felt like it just melted in my mouth like butter. Teresa’s is a really great cook.

I sigh, feeling a bit jealous of her. I am a great cook too, or at least I was. The other day, I wanted to try a new recipe and cook for my family. Let’s just say that the food wasn’t edible by

1/2

+25 BONUS

You see, because of my special case (my inability to read numbers correctly), I’d added two and a half table spoons of sugar instead of just a half. I’d cried for a good half an hour after that before I managed to pull myself together.

Teresa had cooked something else, and we didn’t mention that incident again.

“Will you go back to teaching?” Gabe shoots another question, distracting me from the turmoil that is raging inside me.

“That’s the plan, but obviously, because of certain circumstances, it won’t be happening anytime soon,” I replied after swallowing the food I was chewing.

Rowan remains quiet. His eyes mainly remain focused on mine. I see the turmoil inside him.

The war that was raging inside. I internally scoff; he is probably torn about whatever it is he is hiding from me.

“Mom, Gunner never came over,” Noah chimes in. “You’d said that he would come last weekend, but you never spoke to Calvin.”

My eyes flash to Rowan’s. His are now unreadable, which makes me curious. We’ve never talked about Calvin, so I don’t really know if they had set their beef with each other aside for the sake of their sons.

“I’m sorry, darling, I forgot to mention it to your dad.” I pause. “How about this? Since your birthday is next week, he can come to celebrate your day and then sleep over.”

Noah pumps his hands into the air in happiness, making everyone smile.

“Definitely yes, that will be so cool.”

“You can also invite your classmates. I think we’ll hold it in the backyard, since we have enough space,” I suggest, and Noah’s grin becomes wider.

Seeing him happy makes me forget everything that is wrong in my life right now. I live for

him and Iris, and it doesn’t matter what happens between me and Rowan. Those two come first, and if they’re happy, then I’m happy too.

“My friends will be so happy... I’ll invite everyone,” he pauses as a frown takes over his face.” Well, everyone except for Sierra. I don’t want her to come to my party. She’ll just ruin things.”

Chapter 0307

The happiness I’d been feeling moments ago completely evaporates as a surge of irritation takes over my entire body.

“When I said everyone, I meant everyone, Noah. There will be no exceptions.” I grind out between clenched teeth.

“But I don’t want her to come,” he snaps at me.

“Who is Sierra?” Rowan cuts in.

“It’s this annoying girl in my class that I don’t like. She’s such a pain in the butt, and seeing her on my special day will just ruin the day for me.’

I get that Sierra annoys him, but to refuse to invite her to his birthday when everyone else will be invited is downright mean and uncalled for.

“Do you know how hurt she’ll feel when you invite everyone else except for her? It will most likely break her heart.” I try to reason with him calmly, but I know it’s not doing any good, especially when he glares at me.

“I. Don’t. Care” comes his reply, which is said in a harsh and hard tone.

I was starting to lose my patience with Noah. It’s not like I’m siding with this girl, but I’ve been there. I know how it feels when everyone else is invited to birthdays and occasions, but you’re not.

I know how much it hurts when others treat you with contempt when you haven’t done anything that would warrant their hatred towards you.

“Noah...” I warn.

“I’m not going to invite her; she can cry and fill up a whole ocean and I would still not inviting her!”

I reach my limit, and the seams that were holding me together snap. Banging my hand on the damn table, I turn to Noah with fury written all over my face.

Everyone is surprised. I’ve never lost my temper, but Noah had just pushed me to the fucking edge.

“I don’t care whether you like it or not! You’ll invite her to the party if you’re going to invite your whole class, or there won’t be a damn party, am I clear? You either invite her also or I cancel the whole thing,” I shout.

“You wouldn’t dare.” Noah looks at me in shock.

“Try me,” I snap.

1/3

+25 BONUS

He stares at me with a cold look before shoving his chair and leaving the table. I hear his feet stomp against the floor. I would usually follow him, but not today. I was still angry. Still wired. Plus, this had to be done.

Running my hand through my hair, I stand up. I need to breathe. I need some space.

“Ava...” I avoid his and his brother’s shocked eyes.

“Don’t... Don’t fucking talk to me until you’re ready to tell me what the hell you’re hiding from me,” I snarl before walking away.

I rush to the bedroom I was in a few minutes ago. I want to scream, to shout, to punch something or someone. I am so worked up, and the frustration made me want to cry.

“Ava, please talk to me.” His soft voice penetrates my mind. I hadn’t even noticed that he’d followed me or that he’d entered the room.

“Are you going to tell me what you’re keeping from me?” I ask as I feel the tears I’d been holding back fall down my cheeks.

He just stares at me, turmoil behind his grey eyes.

Finally, he shakes his head. "I can't, Ava. I just can't."

"Why the hell not?" I shout at him before grabbing whatever was near me and lunging it in his direction.

He skillfully steps aside, avoiding the hard cover book that would have done some damage.

"I just want to know the truth; why can't you just tell me, Rowan?" I crumble and fall on the bed, feeling all the fight leave me.

He walks the short distance and kneels before me, gently taking my hand in his.

"Because you'll leave me if you ever find out the truth. I can't have that, Ava. I can't live without you." Love and fear shine in his eyes.

That's when I see it. He really is afraid that I'm going to leave him. He really is afraid of losing me.

"But you know that anything built on lies eventually crumbles, right?" I ask, wiping away my tears.

"I know... but I just need a chance, Ava."

"A chance? A chance for what?"

"A chance to win you over. To write my wrongs and fix what I broke. After that, I promise, I'll tell you the truth myself," he answers, his grey eyes pleading with me.

Should I trust him? He has left the ball in my court. Should I give him the chance and hold off on knowing the truth, or should I insist on knowing the truth he's hiding?

Damn it. Why was this so hard?

Chapter 0308

These past few weeks have been hectic, and I'm not talking about the time I spent in prison. Am I okay? Definitely not. I'm so far from okay that nothing in my life makes any sense right

now.

I won't hide the fact that I'm lost. I had this plan. This goal and a dream to one day be with Rowan. I focused on that dream for so long that it became the very air that I breathed. Everything I did, I've done was propelled by dreams of having Rowan back one day.

I mean, damn, I even became a lawyer because of him. I knew that one day he was going to ask Ava for a divorce, and I'd be there to support him. I truly believed that Ava would fight it, would refuse to let go, and I would be there to fight her because I've never lost a case. I'm the best divorce lawyer there is.

All of that crumbled, though. The moment Rowan sent me to prison, my fairytale dreams and illusions were destroyed. Now here, I am feeling like the rug has been pulled from right under

me. I have no direction or purpose, all because I made a man my priority.

Don't get me wrong, I have accepted that Rowan doesn't belong to me anymore, but that doesn't mean that it still doesn't hurt, because it does. It hurts like a motherfucking bitch.

Standing up, I get off my bed and slowly head towards my dressing table. I felt like a zombie, to be honest. I sit down and just stare at myself. The woman staring back at me is a complete stranger. There is nothing familiar about her.

I look pale, I have dark purple eye bags, my lips are chapped, and my blue eyes are dull. I pull my gaze away from the mirror and stare at my folded hands on my thighs, unable to look at myself anymore.

Sighing, I stand back up once again and move to the window, staring outside, hoping to find some peace and comfort.

I should have known. It was clear as day, yet I refused to accept what was staring at me right in the freaking face. Rowan loved Ava. I was delusional, thinking that he still loved me and that he still wanted me. I mean, come the fuck on, there is no way you could stay with someone for nine freaking years unless you felt something for her.

He had so many chances to walk away. He could have asked for a divorce a year or so after Noah was born, yet he didn't. Why is that? We all thought Rowan would be the one to divorce Ava, but we were all shocked when it turned out to be vice versa... And if Ava hadn't asked for a divorce? That means they would still be together.

The more I thought about it, the more the pieces started falling into place. Rowan isn't the kind of person to be forced into doing anything. He didn't have to marry Ava years ago. I mean, hell, he could have just agreed to pay child support and have half custody, but he didn't.

+15 BONUS

He also didn't have to stay with her for nine freaking years, yet he did. No one forced him. No one pressured him. It was his decision to stay because some part of him knew he couldn't let Ava go. That's why, even after their divorce, he just couldn't stay away from her.

"Emma?" I release a tired sigh at the sound of my mother's voice.

She doesn't knock; she just enters my room like she owns it. She did, though, because since I was released from prison, I've been staying at the family estate with her.

"Yes, Mom"

Her brows pull down in a frown, and her nose scrunches up in distaste. "You desperately need a shower. You stink, Emma."

I don't say anything. Instead, I move around and sit on my bed before facing her. She was here for a reason. I just had to sit patiently and wait for her to tell me why she was in my room.

"I'm worried about you, Emma. You've been cooped up in this room since you came back home. It can't be healthy at all. Plus, Molly is worried about you, and so are your friends. Molly told me you've been ignoring their calls." She crosses the room and sits down next to me.

Chapter 0309

How do I tell her that I feel lost? How do I tell her that nothing in my life makes sense? Why was I even placed in this world to begin with? I've lost the energy and will to do anything because I feel like nothing matters anymore.

"I just want to be alone, Mom," I reply. "There are things I need to work out."

I didn't want to tell her that I'm struggling with everything, including my identity. She will just circle it back to Rowan and tell me to move on and leave the past behind. I know I should, but it's hard to leave the past behind when you've held on to it for so long. It is hard to let it go when you let it become an anchor.

your

"I know. I know that things aren't easy for you, but I promise, when you give yourself a chance, everything will fall into place and you'll find your happiness." She pulls me into her arms, and I lay on her shoulder as tears fall down my cheeks.

"I just don't know what to do, and I don't know if I'll ever be happy, not that I've been happy these past few years. I was faking it most of the time."

"You say you don't know what to do? How about you start by righting your wrongs? Maybe that will give you the peace you clearly need."

My hands clench, and my nails dig into the skin of my palm before I let go. I wanted to argue with her, but I know she's right. Maybe that will give me a new purpose in life.

"Thank you, Mom."

"I know I've been hard on you these past few months, but I need you to know that I was pushing you for your own sake," she says, rubbing my back in a comforting way, like she used to do when I was younger.

"I know"

Mom gives me a kiss on the forehead before detangling herself from me and then standing up.

"Alright then, I'll let you get some rest, and please remember to shower. It will make you feel better; trust me."

I nod, and she leaves. Closing the door behind her. I sit there for a while, staring off into nothing. Thoughts are flashing through my mind, and it's hard for me to focus on any of them.

Feeling like I was going to lose my freaking mind, I stand up and rush to my closet, almost tripping in the process. I fling the doors open and dig up a pair of sweat pants, a camisole, and a hoodie. I throw them on quickly before taking my car keys and leaving my room.

I hear Mom calling my name as I run out of the house, but I don't turn back. I just want to be

+15 BONUS

will just remind me of the days Rowan and I spent there.

It will remind me of the movie nights and dinners. He never slept over, but the few hours he was there felt like heaven.

Pushing those memories away, I make a mental note to have my real estate agent put it up for sale.

I jump into my Audi and drive off. I had no final destination. I just wanted to clear my head

and drive around.

The scenery flashes by, but I don't pay any attention. My head is a mess, and my heart and soul are in turmoil. I wish I could make the pain go away. I wish I could pull myself together. I just fucking wish that I could heal my wounds and move on, but I don't know how to do any of

that.

I don't know for how long I was driving when I came to a stop. I survey the street in confusion, wondering where the hell I was. I look to my left, and a gasp leaves my mouth. I'd ended up right outside Calvin's house.

Chapter 0310

I can't stop the panic that fills me or the way my heart beats so wildly that I'm afraid it's going to punch a hole through the center of my fucking chest.

What the hell am I doing here? Why would I come here of all places?

The questions keep swimming in my head, but for the love of me, I have no answer to any of them.

When I decided to drive around, ending up where Calvin and Gunner live wasn't on my mind. I just thought that I could drive around for a while just to escape the depressing atmosphere

that surrounded me, then I would go back home, shower, and then take a nap.

Now here I am, at his place, and I'm confused about what to do. Should I just leave? Or should I check up on him? Maybe he's not even at home. It's a weekday, and I bet he's at work.

Things between Calvin and me have always been complicated. Right from when we were in high school. He wanted me, and I didn't. His efforts at trying to win me over when we were younger used to irritate me to no end.

I hated that he never gave up. I hated that he wanted me to be his, even though I had a boyfriend. Even though he knew that I was in love with Rowan. It used to piss me off when he

would start trouble with Rowan over me.

I just couldn't get why he didn't get that I didn't want him and would never want him. Looking back at everything now, I see how he and Ava were so alike. Their determination to get the people they were in love with. Their stubbornness and refusal to give up are so similar. Sometimes I wonder how the hell they didn't end up together.

It would have been perfect if they did. It would have saved all four of us the heartache and pain we have all been through.

Sighing, I push those thoughts away. There is no use wishing for things that can't come true. Shit has already happened, and there is just no going back. What I have to do is look forward.

I looked outside for a moment before turning off my car. I debate for one second too long, then get out and just stand next to my car all the while staring at his house.

Maybe this is a bad idea.

Before I can chicken out, I suck in a deep breath and force my feet to move. I don't know why I'm here or how I ended up here, but there is a damn good reason. The funny thing about a human's instincts is that it always knows what you need, even when you don't or don't

understand.

I get to the door and start pacing. Fuck, I probably look like a deranged person, but damn it. I

1/2

+15 BONUS

My wish is shattered when, all of a sudden, the door is wrenched open and Calvin's pissed-off face appears.

“What the hell are you doing here, Emma?” He all but growls, the coldness of his voice sending shivers down my back

“I—I” I try to form the words, but nothing comes out of my mouth except a jumbled mess.

Heck, I didn’t know why the hell I was in here in the first place, so how can I even answer his question?

“Speak the fuck up!”

I fold my arms around myself. For the first time, I look at him. I mean, really, look at him.

I see the agony I’ve put him through over the years. I see the pain that is reflected not only in his eyes but also in his attitude towards me. I’ve been so selfish. Only thinking about myself and not really caring about the hurt I’ve put him through.

“How did you know I was here?” I ask instead, blinking away the tears that are now forming in

my eyes.

“A neighbor called and told me there was a suspicious woman outside my house,” he answers curtly. “Now tell me why the fuck you’re here.”

Fuck, I’d been so stupid. I thought I was a good person and that Ava was the evil one, yet I was cruel towards Calvin. His only mistake was to love me. I hurt him over and over for that. Using him and treating him like trash,