

Chapter 8

I woke up in a hospital bed again, the sharp smell of antiseptic filling my nostrils. Ayla was crying softly in the chair beside me. When she saw my eyes open, she quickly wiped her tears.

"Hey," she said, forcing a smile. "How are you feeling?"

I shook my head, my own eyes starting to burn. "Why were you crying, Ayla?"

Her composure broke. Tears streamed down her face, her voice trembling.

"Elana," she choked out. "The baby... it's gone." 

The words didn't register at first. I instinctively placed a hand on my abdomen. It felt empty. The faint connection I had started to feel, the tiny flicker of life, was gone.

It was really gone.

I had thought losing this baby, a baby I had planned to give up, would be a relief. But a pain, sharp and devastating, pierced through my numbness. This child, my child, was gone not because of a choice I made in a sterile clinic, but because of his violence. Because of his betrayal.

Would he even care? Would he feel a moment's sadness for the child he never knew he had?

No. His heart belonged to Hayden and their son. My baby was just collateral damage.

"It's okay," I heard myself say, the words tasting like ash. "It was never meant to be."

I sent a distraught Ayla to get me some food, just to have a moment alone.

The moment she left, the door to my room swung open. It wasn't a doctor or a nurse. It was two large, menacing men.

A cold dread washed over me. I tried to scramble out of bed, to hit the call button, but they were too fast. One of them grabbed me, his hand clamping over my mouth, stifling my scream. A sharp, cold object pressed against my ribs. A knife.

"Don't make a sound," he growled, his breath hot and foul against my ear.

I struggled, kicking and thrashing, but his grip was like a vice. The world started to go dark around the edges, my lungs screaming for air. Then, everything went black.

When I came to, I was in the back of a moving car, a coarse burlap sack pulled over my head. The air was thick with the salty smell of the ocean and the damp chill of a coastal night.

I could hear the waves crashing against rocks. We were by the sea.

And then I heard a laugh. A familiar, triumphant laugh.

Hayden.

"What do you want?" I yelled, my voice muffled by the sack.

"Emilio is very upset with you," she said, her voice dangerously close. "He said you hurt his precious Leo. He said he can't let you get away with it."

Her lies were like daggers, each one twisting in my already broken heart.

"He wants me to get rid of you," she declared, her voice filled with a chilling finality. "Permanently."

Before I could react, I was shoved from behind. I stumbled forward, my arms flailing, and the sack was ripped from my head.

I was standing on the edge of a cliff. The wind whipped my hair around my face, and the dark, churning water of the lake below looked like a gaping mouth, ready to swallow me whole.

I turned to see Hayden standing a few feet away, a cruel, victorious smile on her face. In the distance, the city lights twinkled, a world away.

from this desolate, terrifying place.

My body plunged downwards, the air rushing past me. I hit the icy water with a brutal impact, the shock of the cold stealing my breath. I thrashed, my lungs burning, but the darkness was overwhelming.

My last thought before I lost consciousness was of Emilio. He had tried to kill me.

I woke up coughing up water on the floor of a small, rustic cabin. A grizzled old park ranger had found me washed up on the shore of the lake. He and his young daughter had saved my life.

I stayed with them for six days, slowly regaining my strength. On the seventh day, a call came through on the ranger's satellite phone. It was the director from Zurich.

"Everything is ready for you, Elana. Your ticket is booked. We're expecting you."

I looked out the cabin window at the vast, wild landscape. I had been given a second chance. A chance to disappear. A chance to be reborn from the ashes of my old life.

I gave the ranger a thick envelope of cash, more money than he had probably ever seen. I called Ayla and told her to ship my things. I called my lawyer and told him to file the divorce papers.

The next day, I took a bus to the airport. As the plane climbed into the sky, I looked down at the city shrinking below me, a place of ghosts and broken promises.

I pulled down the window shade, shutting it all out.

From now on, Elana Gomez was dead.

I was finally free.