

### Chapter 17 Spitting Image

When Mia returned home, she found Adam in a panicked state, making calls and barking orders on the phone. As soon as Adam saw Mia, he dropped the call mid-conversation and rushed toward her.

“Mia!” His voice trembled with relief and mixed emotion as he hugged her tightly. "Thank God you came back home," he murmured, then his worried eyes took in her bandaged wounds.

“What happened to you, baby? And where were you? Your phone wasn't even reachable?” Adam's voice was a mix of annoyance and concern as he fired off a string of questions.

“Calm down, Adam. First, tell me where Gia and Maximo are,” Mia asked about her children, her voice steady but anxious.

“They're inside, playing with their toys,” Emily emerged from a room, closing the door behind her as she spoke. Mia's eyes met Emily's, silently conveying her deep concern for her children.

As if reading Mia’s mind, Emily answered her unspoken question. "Don’t worry, they don’t know anything. For them, you're at work."

Mia sighed in relief.

“Now, are you going to tell me what happened to you and who did this to you?” Adam asked again with desperation in his voice.

“I met with a small accident, and my phone was broken in it. I couldn't contact you, but some people helped me get to the hospital. After the checkup, I returned home. Don't worry, nothing major happened, and I am perfectly fine,” she said, concealing the truth.

She couldn't tell them about her abduction. Revealing that would mean explaining the entire story and mentioning Alessandro. She didn't want anyone to be suspicious of her past. She wasn't willing to let anyone know about it.

"Nothing happened?!" Adam scowled. "Nothing happened, huh? You have scratches all over and marks as if someone had beaten you.” He peered deep into her eyes, searching for the truth.

Mia averted her gaze, not wanting Adam to uncover the hidden secret in her eyes.

"I was hit badly by a car, but the impact didn't hurt me much. I'm safe," she lied, crossing her fingers in hope that Adam would believe her and stop asking questions.

"God, Mia. My heart almost stopped and I couldn't breathe when I couldn't reach you. Don't do it again," Adam pleaded, taking her face in his large hands.

Mia's heart melted. No one had ever cared for her this much. She didn't have many friends, but Adam and Emily were the only people she could rely on.

"I am fine and safe, Adam," Mia whispered, taking Adam's hands from her face and holding them in assurance.

"Ma'am, you don't know what we went through when we found out you were missing. We were so worried and scared. Every phone call seemed like it was you, but..." Emily trailed off, her voice trembling with the thought of something untoward happening to Mia. "Mr. Whitmore called everyone and sent many people to search for you," she added, concern etched on her face.

Mia's heart filled with gratitude and guilt at the same time for the stress her friend went through because of her.

“Emily, we’re not at work. No need to be formal,” Mia said with a soft smile.

Emily nodded and then hurried to hug her tightly. “I’m so happy you’re alright,” she said, her voice thick with emotion.

“Thank you for taking care of Gia and Maximo,” Mia said, her gratitude evident.

Emily shook her head. “Ah, they’re my little angels. You don’t have to thank me for taking care of them.”

Emily had been with Mia from the beginning. She had witnessed Mia’s struggles and her rise to success through sheer hard work. She truly adored Mia, both as a single mother and as an entrepreneur. To Emily, Mia was the strongest woman she had ever met.

“Mommy!” Gia and Maximo came out of their room after hearing the commotion.

“My babies!” Mia kneeled down as both twins ran and jumped excitedly into their mother’s embrace. She winced slightly, the pain still lingering despite the painkillers.

“What happened to you, Mommy?” Gia asked, taking Mia’s beautiful face in her small hands. Her cute eyes blinked with concern.

“Mommy slipped and fell on her face,” Mia giggled humorously as she took her daughter's small hand in hers and kissed it gently.

“Oh, Mommy, I have told you so many times that you have to be extra cautious while walking. But you always talk on the phone and never pay attention to the road,” Maximo whined sullenly.

Mia was slightly amused and slightly scared as he had taken after his father and was as intimidating as Alessandro, even at just five years old.

“Okay, baby boy, I will be more careful next time,” Mia smiled as she promised her son.

“”Hmm!" Maximo nodded, and Mia couldn’t help but shake her head. There was absolutely no doubt about it; he was the spitting image of his father in every way.

"Alright kids, let mommy rest, and how about I make your favorite pasta?!" Emily suggested.

"Yes, you're the best, Emily," Gia grinned happily.

"And Mia, freshen up and change clothes. I'll whip up a nutritious soup for you, packed with plenty of vegetables," Emily said with the warmth and reassurance of a good friend. Mia nodded in agreement.

"I'll be there in two minutes," she replied as she made her way to her room.

"Take your time and go easy. If you need any help, I'm right here for you," Adam offered, a hint of mischief in his seductive voice.

"No, thanks. I can manage,” Mia rolled her eyes before heading to her room.

As she went to her room and stood before the vanity table, she saw her reflection. She was still wearing Alessandro’s jacket over her torn and dirty clothes. The memories of the previous events surged through her heart. She hugged the jacket as if it held the warmth she needed in this time of distress. Surprisingly, she felt a sense of relaxation. But the need to protect her heart and her kids remained strong. She would do anything to keep her cruel husband from discovering the truth she was hiding.