

Chapter 2

"Mommy, wake up! I'm scared!"

The room was pitch dark. Luca was shaking me, his voice trembling.

I tried to scoop him into my arms, but my hands went straight through him. I couldn't touch him.

"Mommy, I'm scared of the dark! Turn on the light!"

When I didn't answer, he sat on the bed and started crying, the sound tearing through me.

Normally, I'd give in right away, rushing to comfort him, but now—no matter how much he cried—I couldn't do anything.

Eventually, he slid off the bed, sniffing, and turned on the light himself.

He hesitated, looking back at me, then shuffled to the kitchen.

I watched him rummage through the cabinets and fridge. I'd always kept snacks out of reach because of his weak teeth, so all he found was a cold apple.

He rinsed it carefully under the tap, then padded back to the bedroom, holding it out.

"Mommy, are you hungry? Here, eat the apple. I washed it for you!"

When I stayed silent, his little face fell. He pulled the apple back and climbed into bed, tossing one of his legs over mine like he always did.

"Mommy, are you just tired? That's okay. You sleep, and we'll play tomorrow."

He kissed my cheek, tugged at my hand, and made a tiny pinky promise with himself.

I covered my mouth, sobbing silently. 'Luca, baby, it's not that I don't want to. I just... I can't.'

Eventually, he fell asleep again.

At dawn, the slam of the front door startled him awake.

Luca sat up, and instinctively buried himself in my side—then froze, realizing I wouldn't move. Heart pounding, he bolted for the door.

Bill stood there, yawning.

"Why are you up so early? Where's your mom? Why hasn't she made breakfast yet?" Bill grumbled, heading to the kitchen and pouring himself a glass of milk. "It's late, and she's still lazing around!"

Luca tugged at his sleeve, his hands moving as he spoke. "Daddy, Mommy's in the room, but she won't move. I'm so hungry. I want fried eggs."

I practically shouted in my head, 'Yes! Luca, take him to the bedroom. Hurry!'

If Bill saw me, he'd know I was gone. At least then Luca wouldn't be stuck like this.

But Bill shrugged Luca off, irritated. "If you're hungry, go ask your mom. Stop bugging me—I need sleep!"

Under his breath, he muttered, "Rhea, seriously. Letting the kid run around barefoot first thing in the morning. Doesn't she care if he gets sick?"

Still complaining, he finally trudged after Luca toward the bedroom.

I held my breath.

Three steps.

Two steps.

One.

Any second now, Bill would see me—and realize I was dead.