

Chapter 525 Spotting Milton

As Lilah's words hung in the air, Cole went still. The suggestion that she'd once wanted him would've been laughable if not for the look on her face. There was no teasing in it. Only quiet devastation, like someone nursing a wound he never realized he'd inflicted.

A deep crease formed between Cole's brows. Something sharp jabbed at his chest, sudden and senseless. Nothing had ever happened between him and Lilah. He was sure of it. And nothing ever would. So why did it feel like he was watching something irreplaceable slip through his fingers?

Cole stared at Lilah, throat constricting, every word on the tip of his tongue dissolving before it could form.

Next to Cole, Allan's face twisted in confusion because he didn't get Lilah's words either.

But Adah did. Cole hadn't forgotten a woman like Paige—a manipulator cloaked in charm. He had even clung to his previous promises. And yet, he'd completely erased Elliana from his mind. How could that not sting?

Adah saw it all in Elliana's eyes. Not rage. Not sarcasm. Just disappointment and newfound resolve. And because it was so raw, so real, Adah said nothing. She understood. This moment wasn't hers to mend.

Elliana didn't look away. Her gaze stayed locked with Cole's, unwavering, heavy with everything she wasn't going to say. Then, with practiced calm, she picked up the glass he'd pushed toward her and, echoing his earlier move, tossed it into the trash without a glance. "Goodbye for good."

She rose and turned without hesitation, walking away while Adah hurried to catch up, her footsteps echoing in the silence Elliana left behind.

The air inside the booth pulsed with unspoken emotion. Allan, now alone with Cole, looked utterly lost.

Cole's eyes followed Lilah as she walked away, his brows drawn tightly

together. With every step she took away from him, the knot of panic in his chest tightened. And the moment she vanished beyond the doors of Nightfall, he sprang to his feet and gave chase.

Allan opened his mouth to say something, but then thought better of it. With a sigh, he rose and trailed after them.

Outside, Elliana moved like a storm in retreat, composed on the surface, but violent within. Her face was an icy mask, every footfall purposeful, determined. But the weight in her chest told a different story. She wasn't okay. Not even close. Since Cole had erased her from his mind, maybe it was time she let go instead of struggling to jog his memory. She might just let him think he'd never known her at all.

Tears burned at the corners of her eyes. She wiped them away with the back of her sleeve, defiant in her grief. But her eyes, already red-rimmed, betrayed her pain.

Adah caught up quickly, falling into stride beside her. "Don't be sad, Elliana," she said gently. "He's an idiot. If he's out of your life, good. Let him stay gone. You'll find someone a hundred times better than him."

"I know," Elliana replied, her stride still quick and purposeful, and forced a smile. But the smile she gave Adah was thin, like a brittle mask stretched over a soul still breaking.

There was a time Elliana had resisted Cole's advances, scared of the impermanence of love, haunted by the certainty that one day, she'd lose him. But she had been drawn to him helplessly from the first moment she met him. The thought of going through life without ever truly being with him felt like a void she could never fill. So she had given in, loved him heart and soul, to be his wife in every sense of the word.

But now, it was over. Her heart felt like a cavern, hollow and echoing, the grief so sharp that it throbbed like a bruise. But she carried no regrets. She had loved. She had lived that love and breathed it in deeply. If it was over, then so be it. Time, she told herself, would dull the ache. One day, his name would stop hurting.

With that thought, Elliana wiped her eyes once more and pressed forward, her footsteps growing steadier, more deliberate.

Several paces behind, Cole followed at a careful distance, his eyes

locked on her. He watched as she lifted a hand to her face to brush away the tears she thought no one saw. And each time she did, it felt like a blade twisted deeper into his chest. So. It was true, then. The way she had flung herself into his car and melted into his arms. It wasn't a misunderstanding. She had been coming on to him.

But now, because of Paige, she was walking away. And the decision was clearly tearing her apart. That alone told him everything he needed to know. She wasn't some flirt playing a game. Players didn't grieve over a missed chance. To them, it was all part of the chase.

Her pain was unmistakably real, which meant her feelings had been real. Could she truly care for him that much? Emotions that raw didn't just surface out of thin air. She must've been watching him for a while, quietly carrying feelings from a distance. Then, when had they first crossed paths? When did she start to develop feelings toward him? And why did Paige's presence unravel everything?

A storm of questions crashed through Cole's mind. He was just about to step forward, to demand the truth, when Lilah suddenly stopped in her tracks. He halted. For one breathless moment, hope flared. Did she stop for him? But then he saw it. She wasn't looking at him. She was staring at someone else.

Cole followed her gaze and saw that her eyes had landed on Milton.

Milton had just stepped out of the office building next to Nightfall, exchanging a few words with the man beside him. They shook hands, and then, without so much as a glance in their direction, Milton slid into his car. Moments later, the vehicle pulled away from the curb and sped off.

Abruptly, Elliana bolted after it.

Cole's brows drew together in confusion. Why was Lilah chasing Milton's car?

But the car was already gone, swallowed by the endless stream of taillights bleeding into the city night. There was no catching it. Elliana slowed to a halt, panting, eyes fixed on the place where the car had disappeared.

Adah rushed over, breathless and bewildered. "Elliana, what's going on? What happened?"

Elliana's voice came out in a faint, tremulous whisper. "The resemblance ... " She swallowed hard. "That man... He looks just like my mother."



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