My Brother's Best Friend's Secret Baby –

Chapter 5

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Chapter 5 Rosalie's POV Seven Years Later "Mommy, I'm hungry." I looked down at my daughter. Lucy had my dark hair but her father's eyes. Those same deep brown eyes that had haunted me for seven years. "I know, sweetheart. We'll eat soon. I promise." We were walking home from her school. It took us forty minutes because we couldn't afford the bus pass this month. My feet ached inside my worn-out sneakers. My back hurt from scrubbing floors all morning. But Lucy skipped along beside me, happily telling me about her day. She was six years old and beautiful.

She was my entire world, and her father didn't even know she existed. When I'd found out I was pregnant seven years ago, I'd been terrified. I almost told my father and Jeffery. Then I saw the post on Facebook. Aiden King was engaged to Elena Vasquez. The announcement was everywhere. There were photos of them at a military ball. Her hand resting was on his chest, showing off a huge diamond ring, while he looked handsome and distant in his dress uniform. The caption read: [She said yes. I couldn't be happier.] I stared at it for hours. He'd been engaged the entire time.

When he'd kissed me, taken my virginity, and told me I was perfect... He had a fiancée. And I'd been the other woman without even knowing it. (3 That was when I made my decision. I packed a bag, took every dollar I'd saved from my part-time job at the library, and left. I didn't leave a note. I didn't say goodbye to anyone. I simply disappeared. I moved three states away. Changed my phone number, Deleted every social media account I had. Enrolled in community college under my mother's maiden name. Found a tiny apartment. Got a job waitressing. And nine months later, I had Lucy.

My father reported me missing. I knew because I'd seen the posters. I even called him once from a pay phone to tell him I was alive and safe, but that I needed space. He begged me to come home. I hung up. That was six years ago. I hadn't spoken to him since. I hadn't spoken to Jeffery nor had I told anyone from my old life where I was. I told myself it was for the best. Aiden had made it clear that he didn't want me. So I wasn't going to force a man to be a father if he didn't want to be one. "Mommy, look! A bird!" Lucy pointed excitedly at a pigeon. Despite my exhaustion, I smiled.

"That's a pigeon, sweetheart. Remember? We saw them at the park." "Oh, right. Can we go to the park this weekend?" "Maybe." If I could pick up an extra shift. If we had enough money for groceries. Or... if the universe decided to give us a break for once. We finally

reached our apartment building. It was old and run-down. The elevator was broken again. We climbed four flights of stairs. Inside our tiny one-room apartment, I made Lucy a peanut butter sandwich with the last of our bread. She happily ate it while watching cartoons on our ancient television.

I sat down at our small table and opened the mail I'd picked up downstairs. A bill. A past-due notice. An eviction warning. My hands started to shake. It was the second eviction notice. If I didn't pay the rent by the end of the week, we'd be out on the street. I had two hundred dollars in my bank account, while the rent was eight hundred. I buried my face in my hands. I'd worked so hard.

I'd earned my associate's degree and had become an elementary school art teacher, But the pay was terrible, and there were never enough hours, I'd taken a second job cleaning hotel rooms on weekends and evenings, Lucy stayed with our neighbor, Mrs. Willow, a sweet elderly woman who refused to accept any payment. But it still wasn't enough. "Mommy? Why are you sad?" I looked up. Lucy was standing beside me, worry written all over her little face. "I'm not sad, sweetheart. Just tired." "You're always tired." "I know. I'm sorry." She climbed into my lap and wrapped her arms around me.

My heart shattered. She deserved so much better than this. Better than a cramped apartment with peeling paint or macaroni and cheese five nights a week. Better than a mother who was too exhausted to play with her. She deserved a father, but I couldn't go back. I couldn't face Aiden or watch him reject Lucy the way he'd rejected me. That night, after Lucy fell asleep in our bed, I sat on the fire escape and cried for hours. I'd made so many mistakes. Loving Aiden Sleeping with him Running, away. Believing I could do this all I on my own. But I had to keep going, for Lucy. For my daughter.

Tomorrow, I'd ask my boss for more hours. I'd sell my laptop. I'd find a way. I always did. The next morning, I dropped Lucy off at school and headed to my weekend job at the Grandview Hotel. It was the nicest hotel in the city. The kind of place I'd never be able to afford to stay in. I changed into my housekeeping uniform and grabbed my cart. My supervisor, Mr. Gregor, stopped me in the hallway. "Rivers. Conference Room Three. Now." A knot formed in my stomach. "Did I do something wrong?" "Just go." My legs trembled as I made my way to the conference room. Was I being fired?

I couldn't lose this job. I needed it. I knocked on the door. "Come in." I opened it... And my world stopped. Sitting at the conference table in an expensive suit, looking older, harder, and far more dangerous than L remembered, was Aiden King. Our eyes met. At that moment, seven years of running and hiding was gone in an instant. "Hi, Rosie," he said softly. "We need to talk."

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