My Brother's Best Friend's Secret Baby –

Chapter 7

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Chapter 7 Aiden's POV She still hadn't put her cleaning gloves back on. They lay on the table between us, pale gray and inside out where she'd ripped them off. For some reason I couldn't explain, I couldn't stop looking at them. Rosalie Russo was the girl who used to sketch elaborate designs on paper with a fifty-cent pencil. Now she was cleaning hotel rooms for a living. She wore a uniform with someone else's logo stitched over her heart, and the skin across her knuckles was red and chapped. She looked at me like I was the worst thing that had ever happened to her. Maybe I was.

She looked exhausted. Dark circles shadowed her eyes. Not the kind that came from one bad night, but the kind earned through years of carrying too much for too long. Her hands had been trembling ever since she'd picked up my phone. She was still beautiful. That hadn't changed. "I want to know her," I said. "And I want you to understand that I'm not here to make your life harder." The words came out harsher than I'd intended. Her jaw tightened and her chin lifted in that familiar way, as though she were bracing herself against something she refused to let destroy her.

"You want to know her?" she repeated slowly. "Yes." "You weren't there when she was born. You weren't there for her first steps, her first words, or the first time she woke up scared in the middle of the night." She moved closer. So close I could practically feel her anger radiating off her. "Seven years of silence, and suddenly you show up at my job telling me someone photographed my daughter." A bitter laugh escaped her. "You want to know her?" Her eyes flashed. "Where do you get the nerve?" Her voice rose.

"And how dare you stand there and tell me you're not here to cause problems?" "I didn't know she existed." (1) "Because I made sure you didn't." Her gaze never left mine. "That was my choice. I made it then, and I'd make it again." "She's six years old." "I know how old she is." Her fingers spread against the tabletop as though she needed something solid to hold on to. Read this novel at novelceo.com for the best experience. "I was there." "But I wasn't." My voice roughened. I forced myself to lower it. "That's the problem, Rosalie. I wasn't there. Not because I chose not to be.

Because you made sure I could never find you." Something crossed her face. Not guilt. Something more complicated. She straightened so abruptly that her chair scraped against the floor. "You think that was easy?" Her right hand lifted from the table, then stopped halfway, as if some thought had caught hold of it. "You think I enjoyed..." She broke off,

and took a breath. "No. You don't get to make me the villain in this story." Her voice shook. "You're the one who..." She stopped again. Her lips pressed together. I didn't move. I'd spent seven years imagining this moment.

And now that it was here, I didn't know which version of myself I was supposed to be, Was I the man asking for forgiveness or the man demanding answers? "I'm not here to take her away from you," I said. She laughed. It was a short, humorless sound that echoed through the conference room. "No?" "No." "Then what is this?" she demanded. "What exactly do you want? Alternate weekends? School pictures? Do you want me to explain to a six-year-old why her father suddenly showed up when she's never seen you before?" "I want to be part of her life." I stood slowly, careful not to startle her.

"She deserves to know where she comes from." "Her father." She practically spat the word. "You've been her father for about forty minutes." "I've been her father since the night we were together." Read the latest chapters at novelceo.com. I closed some of the distance between us. "I just didn't know she existed." She took a step back until her shoulder touched the wall. "You said you're not here to cause problems." Her voice dropped, becoming almost a whisper. "So are you taking me to court or not?" "Maybe." I paused. The tension between us vibrated like a live wire.

"But I'd rather not." I held her gaze. "I'd rather we find a solution without lawyers." "For our daughter's sake." She stared at me for a long time. Something moved through her dark. eyes. It wasn't fear or anger but exhaustion. The kind so deep it seemed to be holding her upright. through sheer force of habit. "For her," she said quietly. "Right. For her." She walked around the table and reached for her gloves. Her fingers brushed mine as she grabbed the gray fabric. She jerked her hand back as if she'd touched a hot stove. "I need to finish my shift.

I have a daughter to feed." She opened the door, then paused in the doorway without turning around. "You were cruel that morning." Her voice drifted back to me, soft and almost impossible to hear. "Not just to me. To yourself, too." Then she was gone. I sat there for a long time after she left, staring at the empty chair across from me. Thinking about all the years I'd spent searching for her And how completely unprepared I was for what came next. Not interesting at all Very interesting

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