

Chapter 129

THREE MONTHS LATER

Noah's head throbbed. It banged like the world's noisest drummers were having a nonstop concert in it. His eyes felt like they were going to bulge out of their sockets as he walked-no- stumbled his way out of the bar he had been getting wasted in for hours.

"Out of my way, you," Noah growled, shoving someone out of his way.

"What the- Watch where you're going," the man he had pushed shouted. "Such a fucking asshole."

If only everything wasn't spinning so fast, Noah would have gone back to plant his fist in that asshole's face. It might have made him feel slightly better, hurting someone.

Hate burned within him. He hated his life. He hated this noisy, shitty bar he had chosen to get drunk in. He hated every freaking thing.

Eager to get some fresh air, Noah hastened his steps the closer he got to the door. He had just gotten outside when he lost his footing and-

THUD!

He fell on his face, gasping for breath, inhaling the smell of dust on the cold floor.

"Look! It's Noah Allen!" someone yelled.

And in a flash, reporters swamped Noah just as he began to shakily get to his feet. They were nothing more than a flock of damned vultures, Noah thought as he watched them surround him.

Vultures, sensing weakness and closing in for the kill. Vultures with flashing lights, cameras, phones, microphones which they were getting ready to shove into his face the first chance they got. And shove it they did. The questions started coming like a flood as their cameras flashed and whirled while a bunch of lookie-loos stood and gawked at the scene.

"Mr Allen," shouted a reporter who wanted to be heard over the others. "Is it true that your company is now bankrupt?"

With barely a split second's pause, the next question came from another.

"Rumours have it that you are on the verge of declaring bankruptcy. Can you confirm or deny this?"

"Have your investors really pulled out?"

"What other options will you explore to get your company back on it's feet if the rumours are true?"

"Do you think you could have done something to stop your supposedly downward spiral?" a nerdy looking reporter asked, pushing his rimless glasses up his sweaty nose.

Downward spiral. He'd show them a bloody downward spiral, Noah thought. No. He was drunk. A part of his brain knew that. His first priority was getting out of here, out of the reach of this media circus. The ground still felt like it was shifting beneath his feet as Noah shoved reporters out of his way as he staggered to his car. But did they leave him alone? Hell no!

They dogged his footsteps. One of them, more excitable than the rest, maybe eager to get a notable mention in that evening's news, rushed forward, planted himself in front of Noah and said, "Mr Allen, tell us, do you regret wrecking and ending your marriage to Amelia?"

Amelia! That was it!

The name of his ex-wife was potent enough to penetrate the fumes of alcohol clouding Noah's brain. His fury spiked to an insane high. He saw the reporter who had asked the question through a haze of red. With a growl of rage, he smashed the bottle of booze he had been gripping on his car. The bottle shattered, spilling glass and liquid everywhere.

The overeager reporter, perhaps reading the murderous intent in Noah's eyes slowly began to back away. Noah charged at him like a bull, the jagged tip of the bottle held out in front of him. It sank into the reporter's stomach. There were shocked, panicked gasps from the crowd.

"That will teach you, you nosy piece of shit!" Noah gibbered at the reporter down on his knees, clutching his bleeding stomach. "That will teach all of you!"

Before Noah could pull the weapon out of the wound, he was conscious of feeling a draught of air around him. He looked around to see that the reporters had all fled to a safe distance, out of his reach.

Noah shoved his hands into his pockets, and pulled out his key. He really needed to get out of here. His fingers slipped on the keys as he struggled to press the button that would unlock the door of his car.

As he struggled, he could hear panicked voices. People were calling the police, an ambulance, anything that could help the man he had stabbed.

He knew it a few minutes that the entire area would be swamped with policemen. And even if he did manage to escape them, his brutality was captured on camera. They would come after him.

But he had nothing to lose, he thought. He had lost it all, hadn't it? What else could he fight to protect in his life?

He managed to unlock his door and just as he was about to get in, he heard the siren of police cars.

"Hey! Freeze! Police," someone cried.

In a thrice, Noah had been surrounded by the police. The next moment, he was wrestled to the ground while the broken bottle was wrenched out of his grip.

"You're under arrest," said an officer. "Anything you say-"

"No. No. No," Noah croaked, shaking his head. "I didn't mean to." Just a few seconds ago, he thought he didn't have anything to lose. But being handcuffed somehow jolted him back to reality.

"I didn't mean to stab him," he begged. They ignored his pleas and pushed him into a car and drove him away. "Please, I didn't want to hurt him."

He kept saying this even when he was bundled into the police station. The police officers who brought him in had a conversation amongst themselves, and then with others through the phone when they got there.

"You," sneered the officer who took Noah to a cell and locked him in. "You're lucky you are being locked up for bail. Thank your lucky stars that the man you stabbed survived. If he hadn't, you would have been thinking of doing jail time now. Years in jail time."

"He survived?" Noah asked breathlessly.

"What do you think?" The officer hissed. "You stabbed a fucking journalist. Are you crazy?"

Noah shook his head and sank to the ground. The hours passed with Noah hunkered down in one corner of his cell and with no one to bail him out. He was still too drunk to think for himself, too drunk to plan his next course of action.

"Have you ever seen a sorrier sight than that?" the policeman who had locked him in asked one of his colleagues as he jerked his chin in Noah's direction.

"Can't say I have, Mark," his colleague answered with a slight shake of the head. "He looks like a whipped dog."

"Yeah. No one has even come forward to bail him out," another chipped in. "No one seems to care about him now."

"I just keep asking myself everyday how the mighty Noah Allen fell from grace. He's practically nothing now." Mark exhaled. "I used to envy men like him but it just seems they are all twisted. Their lives are nothing more but an endless cycle of misery."

"I don't think you should judge others based on him," one of them chuckled. "That one is nothing already."

"Less than nothing," another officer corrected as he walked over to join in the conversation. "I heard on the news that most of his workers have resigned. It was after his company went under that he took to drinking." He shook his head pityingly. "Such a damn shame, a man like that, going to waste."

They all turned to look at Noah, pity and shame gleaming in their eyes.

More hours passed. Still no one came by the police station to bail Noah out or even to enquire about him. The officer who had locked him in, who also happened to be on night duty, finally approached his cell with a mixture of pity and slight disgust.

"Hey!" he called. Noah's head snapped up. He had more or less sobered up by this time. He had been weeping quietly in his corner. "Hey no one has come to get you out of here. If you have enough money to bail yourself out, you can do so."

"No," Noah sighed.

The officer frowned, perplexed. "No?"

"I don't want to leave. I'm not leaving."

"You don't want to- What are you even saying? You want to stay locked up in there?"

"In here. Yes." Noah nodded while the shocked officer just gaped at him, thinking Noah still had to be drunk to have made such a statement. "I know what I'm saying," Noah said, guessing the officer's thoughts. "At least here, in this cell, there won't be reporters flocking around me like a bunch of crows. In here, people won't keep pointing fingers at me wherever I go shouting 'Here goes Noah, the drunk former golden boy of this city, now down on his feet for having a fucking luck.' Noah pulled himself to his feet by holding the bars, and gave a bitter, shaky laugh. "Look at me now. Know what I had always wanted so badly, officer?"

The man shook his head.

"Kids," Noah said. "Children. I wanted them desperately. I wanted to have them so when I was gone there would be people, versions of me, who would inherit all the wealth I worked so hard to acquire. I wanted them to push my name. To tell the fucking world that I was the greatest man to exist in our time. Now look at me. I have nothing left, absolutely nothing. No children and no wealth. Irony, isn't it? It's like life is playing cruel tricks on me. Or no. No. I have to say the truth now. I've been the one sabotaging myself all this time. I'm only just realizing it. Want to know something else? What I regret the most?"

"Tell me," said the policeman quietly, slightly invested in his pity story.

"I regret cheating on Amelia. I curse the day I took that dumb decision." He impatiently wiped off the tears trickling down his face. "I wish I could turn back time. I really told myself that hurting her would have no consequences. That life wasn't the movies and...and I would be happy with Lucy. My life wouldn't be such a mess as it is right now if I didn't ruin our marriage. She turned her grief to vengeance and destroyed everything. Now... I'm finished."

"Don't say that," the policeman mumbled sympathetically. "It's not too late to turn your life back around. Hey, I've seen people fall but they get up. You can do that."

Noah shook his head sadly. "It's too late for me, here in this city at least. If I ever get out of this cell, I'll leave the city. I'll go somewhere else, somewhere far away where I can try to start afresh but I doubt I can even make it." He chuckled again. "I'm a pathetic failure. That's what I am."