**Chapter Fifteen**

**Mia**

Rowan’s mood since dinner is making me very uncomfortable.

It's obvious we convinced my parents easily, but Rowan isn't happy tonight. I've never seen him this emotional and I can tell that something is wrong.

I’m lying in bed, trying to pretend I’m asleep. Since we left New York he’s been playing the role of a loving fiancé effortlessly as if going on this trip was very natural to him, but tonight, I can tell he’s not entirely into it.

I watched him closely, noticing how in spite of the lively conversations at dinner, he seemed burdened , instead of the expected comfort.

At some point it even felt like His eyes hold a haunted look, like he’s trapped in something he can’t escape.

My mom has given us her old room for the night, which I’m sure was meant to be charming, but Rowan’s demeanor has been off.

I hear him sit up and get out of bed, and curiosity gets the better of me. Slowly, I get out of bed too, determined to follow him quietly and pulling a robe around myself as I catch him slipping out to the balcony.

The cool night air greets me as I step outside, the stars twinkling in the vast Florida sky.

Rowan leans against the railing, his posture rigid, his profile etched with a sadness I can’t ignore.

“Rowan,” I call softly, approaching him. “Do you want to talk about what’s bothering you?”

He tenses at the sound of my voice but doesn’t turn to look at me. “It’s nothing,” he mutters, but there’s a strained quality to his voice.

I step closer, placing a hand gently on his shoulder. “ It's not nothing, Rowan. It’s obviously something. You’ve been quiet and distant all evening.”

He heaves deeply and finally turns to face me, his eyes reflecting the pain he’s trying to hide. “It’s just... your family dinner reminded me of something I’d rather forget.”

I watch as he struggles to put his thoughts into words. “What do you mean?” I ask gently, trying to understand what's going on.

But his gaze drops to the ground, as if ashamed of what he's about to say. “It’s not about your family, Mia. It’s just that... I had a family once. We used to have dinners like that—warm, filled with laughter and happiness. But I ruined it.”

“I'm still confused, Rowan. What do you mean you ruined it? What happened?” Asher once mentioned they're orphans but what has that got to do with Rowan?

He hesitates, then folds his arms over his chest tightly. God, I hate to see him this way. A part of me wants to just hug him and comfort him but I did that earlier and it didn't change his mood. I just need to hear him out, no matter how hard it is to watch him this way.

“I was the one driving the car when my parents died. I caused their death."

My heart falls .“What?! How could you say that?”

He looks up, eyes pained. “Because it's the truth! I was the one behind the wheel. I wanted to play chauffeur that night. My parents were sitting in the backseat because I insisted on driving. And then...”

His voice cracks, and he swallows hard. “A car rammed into us from behind, brake failure or something. I was dragged out with injuries, but they... they didn’t make it.”

I feel a hard lump forming in my throat and my own tears begin to form quickly. Honestly, I feel his hurt.

The burden he carries is crushing. “But that wasn’t your fault. It was an accident.” No body deserves to go about with so much guilt.

“It doesn’t matter,” he replies bitterly. “I’m the one who made the choice to drive. They were there at that point in time because of me. Everyone tries to get me to forgive myself but it’s all my fault.”

I move closer, rubbing his tensed shoulders and arms, forcing his folded arms open up to me before wrapping my arms around him, caressing his back, our breaths in shudders. “It was an accident, Rowan. You can’t blame yourself for something that was out of your control.”

His breath hitches, and he leans into me slightly, seeking solace. “I’ve been taking care of Asher ever since but honestly, I feel like I’ve failed him, too because I took his parents from him. We became orphans because of me.”

“Rowan, I understand how you feel and the need to pour your heart out like this,” I say softly, rubbing his back. “But it’s not your fault. You didn’t mean for this to happen.”

“I can’t help feeling guilty,” he admits. “Nothing can change what happened. No matter how much I try, it’s always there, tearing my heart to bits."

I pull back slightly, looking into his eyes. “You need to let go of the guilt. It’s not fair to you or to Asher. You’re doing your best. You’ve taken care of him, and that’s more than most people would do.”

He looks at me and takes a long breath, his eyes glistening with unshed tears. “I don’t think I can ever forgive myself.”

“You don’t have to forgive yourself right now,” I say, my voice steady. “But you need to accept that it it was an accident. That's the first step to healing.”

He nods slowly, his shoulders relaxing. The tension between us shifts, and I can feel the warmth of his body against mine. His mood seems to shift slightly as he places his arms around my waist and my body crashes against his.

"I'm so sorry for getting you so worked up, I just... I can't fight off these demons whenever they come..."

"Hush.." I whisper, "don't struggle. Let it go. I'm here to take all of your pains away." With that, I lean in, and our lips meet in a tender kiss.

Rowan responds instantly. We kiss softly and gently as first, but our breathing quickens snd the kisses quickly turns into something deeper, more passionate.

I place my hand on his name, my fingers caressing the back of his head and he brings his hands to my face, taking my lips with shudders and groans.

He pauses and stares down at me with intensity, "Gosh, Where have you been all along?"

I don't get a chance to respond before his mouth crashes against mine again, and this time, I feel him guiding me back toward the room.

The room is shrouded in a heavy, expectant silence, broken only by the sound of our ragged breaths.

Rowan’s eyes lock onto mine, a smoldering intensity that promises more than just physical pleasure. His fingers graze my cheek, the touch so light it sends electric shivers racing across my skin.

He licked up the side of my throat and his hand moved to my pant underneath my robe, rubbing my clit slowly.

“Are you sure? Your parents?” His voice is a deep rumble, almost a growl, and it stirs something primal inside me.

"I don't care.."

The need that’s been building between us is a roaring blaze now, consuming every thought.

As if on cue, Rowan’s lips moves with an urgency that matches the pounding of my heart, his tongue exploring mine with a hunger that makes my entire body ache for more.

His hands roam greedily, skimming over my sides, fingertips leaving a trail of fire wherever they touch.

When his hands find the hem of my robe, he pulls it off with swift, deliberate movements. I gasp as the cool air hits my heated skin, and Rowan’s gaze turns molten as he looks at me.

He leans in, his lips tracing a scorching path from my collarbone to the swell of my breasts. Each kiss is a burning promise, each touch a demand.

I arch into his touch, every nerve in my body sparking with heightened sensitivity. When he unhooks my lingerie, I feel the weight of it lift away, leaving my skin bare and tingling under his adoring gaze.

Rowan’s hands explore my body with a reverence that sends my pulse racing. His fingers trail along my waist, slipping under my right thigh and raising it higher, squatting to kiss thighs.

The intensity of his touch makes my legs tremble, and he lifts me effortlessly, my back pressed against the wall. His solid, warm body against mine creates a friction that makes me shudder with anticipation.

When he finally carries me to the bed, laying me down with a tender care that contrasts sharply with the raw passion between us, I feel a heady mix of excitement and vulnerability.

He discards his shorts slowly, his full length aggressively popping up, stretched to it's limits. His own body is revealed in all its sculpted glory.

I reach out, my hands exploring the defined muscles of his chest and the ridges of his abdomen. Each touch is a revelation, each caress driving me wild with need. I let my fingers rub the cap of his manhood, precum wetting my fingers.

Then I rub gently the way I know he likes it, slowly and intentionally at first, before increasing my pace. Rowan groans and grabs my hands, pinning them above my head.

He immediately positions himself between my legs, the anticipation is almost unbearable. He moves slowly, deliberately, the sensation of him entering me making me gasp and arch my back.

The heat of his body, the intensity of his thrusts, and the way he fills me up completely sends waves of pleasure crashing over me.

We move together in a primal rhythm, every thrust driving us both closer to the edge.

My body trembles with each stroke, my skin vibrating with an electric pleasure that seems to pulse from the very core of me.

Rowan’s grip on my arms tightens, his breath coming in heavy, ragged bursts as he matches my frantic moans.

The pleasure builds to a fever pitch, my body on fire, each movement sending me spiraling into ecstasy.Each of Rowan’s thrusts feels like a jolt of electricity, sending shockwaves through my entire body.

The sensation of him moving in and out of me is almost explosive, a rhythmic pulse that ignites every nerve ending. His movements are powerful and deliberate, each thrust penetrating deep, igniting a fierce, consuming pleasure within me.

My body trembles in response, every muscle tightening and quivering. It’s as if his presence inside me stokes a fire that burns hotter with every thrust, a wave of molten pleasure crashing through me.

Rowan’s groans and the way his body tenses against mine only heighten the sensation, pushing us both to the brink. The feeling is almost too much to bear, an overwhelming surge of sensation that makes my breath catch in my throat.

Each time he pulls out, the loss of contact leaves me gasping, aching for more, and when he drives back in, it’s like a wave of heat and pleasure crashing over me, pulling me deeper into a state of ecstasy.

When we finally shatter together, the release is explosive. It sends ripples of sensation through me, making me cry out, my hands gripping his shoulders as I’m swept up in the overwhelming ecstasy.

I feel every muscle in my body contracting, while Rowan instantly goes off as well, his groan and shudders matching the burning passion of the moment.

**Chapter Sixteen**

**Rowan**

I wake up to soft silk hair on my neck, and Mia's head perfectly resting on my chest. The light filtering through the curtains tells me it's morning already but watching her sleep so soundly gives me an unusual satisfaction.

Her breathing steady and calm and I’m reluctant to disturb her, but I hear her father’s voice calling from downstairs, asking her mom if we're still asleep and he'll like me to join him for a morning of fishing.

The sound of that gives me the courage to wrap my arms around Mia, and lift her slightly, placing her head on the pillow. She stirs a little but drifts back to sleep again. Perfect.

Careful not to wake her, I slip out of bed and dress quickly. As I head downstairs, I find her father waiting with a grin that’s surprisingly welcoming.

Seems he knew what he was doing by talking so loudly. Obviously, he was luring me out of bed. Thinking of it now, I chuckle lightly.

"Good morning, Mr vhkchkvvhnjn"

"Morning, son!" Son? That's new and tell you what, it make some feel like I won a lottery.

He hands me a fishing rod, and we head out to a nearby lake, the sun just starting to peek over the horizon.

The morning is crisp, the air filled with the sounds of birds and the gentle lapping of water against the shore.

As we get settled, adjusting and settling up our hooks and lines, I notice how much easier it is to relax here, away from the bustle of New York.

“So, how’s life treating you in New York?” he asks, casting his line.

“It’s busy, hectic,” I reply, trying to focus on the task at hand. “But I don't really have a problem with it. It’s where I belong.”

He nods. “That’s good to hear. You seem to have a good head on your shoulders.”

How does one reply that? If it were Ethan I'd have a host of snarky responses but this is Mia's dad. “I try,” I say with a chuckle. “Mia’s told me a lot about you all. You’ve done a great job with her.”

He smiles, clearly proud. “She’s a special girl. She’s been through a lot, but she’s strong.”

We fall into an easy rhythm. The more we talk, the more I understand why Mia is the way she is. Her father’s calm and straightforward manner are a big part of her personality.

We spend hours fishing, sharing stories and courteous laughter. There’s a genuine camaraderie that is building between us and I want it to last.

By the time we head back home, the fish we’ve caught are neatly packed in a cooler, ready to be handed to his wife.

When we arrive back at the house, the smell of something sumptuous in the air. Mia’s siblings are bustling around, setting the table, and her mother is busy preparing sides.

The atmosphere is lively and warm, and it feels oddly comforting.

Brunch is a simple yet satisfying affair. The fish we brought is already grilling and the conversations eat conversation flows easily.

I'm glad I came for this trip.

Mia is sitting beside me, and I catch her glancing at me with a shy smile, which I return. I wink at her and try to remain focused on the family and she keeps smiling.

I never expected to feel this sense of belonging I feel now.

With most part of the day spent fishing and eating brunch, I'm not surprised to find out that it's almost evening already. I join Mia's dad to work on his truck and it's fascinating how I have a ton of cars but I don't really pay attention to how these engines function.

Later that night after a light dinner of chicken and mashed potatoes, we all gather in the living room to watch a movie.

The movie’s a classic, and I relax completely, wrapped up in the comfort of Mia’s family. They tease each other, laugh, and enjoy the simple pleasure of being together.

"Rowan , you look like you're floating on something we can't see, sure you're good?"

"Uh, sure," and that's how the attention was shifted to me.

I notice how much Mia is opening up, how she interacts with her family with a warmth and ease that’s infectious.

The weekend passes in a blur of familial love and togetherness and as we prepare to leave, I feel a bit sad. Being here kind of reminded me of what it felt like to be with family.

The weekend has been beautiful, and I’ve come to realize how much I’d like to be a part of Mia’s life, of her family. It’s a strange feeling, one I hadn’t anticipated, but it’s there, undeniable.

And between Mia and I, it seems our conversations have gotten more deep and genuine. There’s an unspoken understanding that we’re more than just a pretense and it feels as if we’re beginning to understand each other on a more profound level.

The journey back to New York is quiet but filled with a sense of contentment. My driver , Will, is already waiting at the airport and we get in. Shortly after we take off from the airport and head home, Mia is already dozing lightly beside me, her hand resting gently on her stomach.

With the way she's been sleeping lately, it must be a lot carrying a growing baby in your stomach.

I adjust myself and move her lead to lean on my shoulder, while I continue the rest of the ride thinking about the future, about what it would be like to share every part of it with her.

We finally arrive home and I’m struck by how different it feels compared to the warmth of the weekend.

"Hey, are you okay?" She seems a bit pale.

"Yes, I am. Just worn out by the journey." She admits. "Glad to get back to my everyday life."

"I think you need to slow down on the busyness and rest more. "

"Common Rowan, don't be grumpy. It's just a little tiredness. I'll be up and bubbling tomorrow."

With that she strots into our room while I bring in our bags.

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It's Monday morning and I’m eager to dive back into work, but as I slip out of bed and prepare for working, my mind keeps drifting back to Mia.

I’m convinced now more than ever that I can’t do without her.

I dress up in my second room where I normally do most of my paperwork at home because I don't want to wake her up. Hopefully, she oversleeps and doesn't go anywhere today.

The nanny will be here any moment and she'll be fine. With a final peek at Mia to ensure she's now awake, I descend the stairs and head to my garage.

I'm sort of in a good mood so I go with my blue Maybach Exelero.

As soon as I get into my office, Ethan catches up with me. He’s his usual curious self, peering at me over the rim of his coffee cup.

“So, how did the weekend go?” he asks, his tone light but his inquisitiveness is beyond imagination.

“It went well,” I reply, trying to sound casual. “Her family bought the whole engagement story.”

“That’s great to hear,” Ethan says, raising an eyebrow. “You know, you seem pretty settled into this whole thing.”

“I am,” I admit. “I really think I’m going to marry her. It feels right.”

Ethan leans forward, studying me with a critical eye. "It feels...right?"

"That's what I said, gossip." That sends Ethan hollering because he knows I caught him.

“But do you love her?” He pushes.

"Have you always been this nosy or I'm just noticing today?"

"Relax dude. We both know you're dying to tell me the sizzling details and how much you love Mia." That cracks me up.

“I like her. A lot. In fact, I think she’s great and there's no other person I'd rather have carrying my baby. But love... I don’t know. It feels like an unrealistic fantasy to me. I know I want her so bad but do we have to tag it as love?"

Ethan’s eyes narrow. “You don’t believe in love?”

“Not really,” I confess. “I think it’s more of an idealistic notion than something tangible. Reality is different."

Ethan shakes his head, a mix of skepticism and amusement on his face. “I can’t say I agree with you. But I’m happy for you nonetheless. If you think this is right, then hold on to it. You'll figure out everything else later."

I nod, feeling strange relief and doubt. Ethan’s reaction only adds to my own thoughts but I push it aside.

I’m committed to this path, even if it means grappling with my own beliefs and feelings.

As he heads out of my office, I’m left with lingering thoughts. I know I want to be with Mia, to build something with her. Even if it’s not love in the conventional sense, it’s something real, and for now, that’s enough.

**Chapter Seventeen**

**Mia**

The next few weeks go by quickly in a haze oflaughter, tender moments, and growing anticipations. Rowan and I have settled into a rhythm that's surprisingly comfortable.

His presence in my life has become a source of solace and joy, yet there’s a lingering question I can’t quite shake off: Does he truly love me in the midst of everything that's happening? I understand he cares about me and the baby, but I care about love. I don't just want to do this because I'm pregnant from a one night stand.

I’m staring blankly at the paperwork strewn across my desk, the numbers and dates blurring together in a haze.

The office is quieter than usual, the hum of the fluorescent lights and the distant sound of typing my only companions. I feel like I’m moving through a fog, my energy drained.

Every task seems more monumental than the last, and I can’t shake the nagging worry that Rowan’s feelings for me might not be as deep as I hoped.

Jenna’s voice cuts through my thoughts, breaking the silence. “You look like you’re about to pass out. Why don’t you call it a day?”

I shake my head, forcing a smile. “I’m fine. Just a bit tired. I’ve got to finish these reports.”

She eyes me with concern and exasperation. “You’ve been pushing yourself too hard. It’s not good for you at this point.”

I want to argue, to insist that I’m fine, but my shoulders sag with fatigue. “I just... I can’t stop thinking about Rowan. He hasn’t mentioned anything about us getting married lately, and I’m worried. What if everything he’s doing now is just because of the baby? What if he doesn’t really want this life with me?”

Jenna gets up and walks up to me, her gaze softening. “Mia, I understand how you’re feeling. But Rowan really cares about you. He might not be talking about marriage anymore, but that doesn’t mean he doesn’t love you. It could just be that he’s trying to process everything in his own way.”

I try to absorb her words, but I can't shake off the doubts in my mind. “What if I’m just fooling myself? What if this is all temporary?”

She places a comforting hand on my shoulder. “Take it one step at a time. Rowan’s feelings might not always be verbalized, but that doesn’t mean they’re not there. You’ve seen how he acts around you, how he cares for you. Trust that.”

I nod, though the worry doesn't go away. Jenna’s right—I need to trust Rowan and give him space to express his feelings in his own way.

With that, I try to push aside my fears, focusing on the task at hand.

Jenna’s gaze lingers on me, and I can see her resolve strengthening. “You know what, Mia? You look like you need to go home. I can handle things here.”

“No, Jenna, I—” I start to protest, but she shakes her head firmly.

“Seriously, Mia. You’re exhausted. Let me take care of things for the rest of the day.”

I open my mouth to argue, but before I can say anything else, my phone rings. Jenna picks it up and glances at me, a mischievous glint in her eyes. I raise an eyebrow, wondering who could be calling.

Jenna answers, her tone casual. “Hi, Rowan. Yes, Mia’s here. She’s actually supposed to head home, but she’s being stubborn. I thought you might want to come over and carry her away.”

Jenna’s playful guilt is evident as she glances at me, a smirk tugging at her lips. “Yes, she’s right here. I think she is ready to go now.”

I open my mouth to protest again, but Jenna gives me a look that says there’s no arguing with her.

About ten minutes later, Rowan walks into the office.

The sight of him fills me with a slight relief and nervousness. His expression softens as he takes in the sight of me, looking tired and worn out.

“Hey, Mia,” he says, his voice warm but tinged with concern. “Jenna told me you’re overworking yourself. Are you okay?”

I nod, though I know I must look less than okay. “I’m just... a bit tired. Jenna was trying to get me to leave early.”

Rowan’s gaze shifts to Jenna, who’s trying to hide her grin behind a stack of files. “Thanks for letting me know, Jenna.”

Jenna’s eyes twinkle with mischief. “No problem. Mia’s stubborn, but you probably knew that already.”

Rowan chuckles softly, his eyes never leaving me. “Yeah, I’m learning that.”

I grab my bag and the paperwork Jenna reluctantly hands over, knowing she’s just being accommodating. “If I’m going home early, I’m taking these with me. That's the only condition for sending me off this way. I want to finish them up tonight.”

Jenna gives in with a sigh. “Fine. But remember to rest too, okay?”

With that, I walk out with Rowan, feeling at peace for the moment.

Rowan helps me into the car, and I lean back, letting the fatigue take over. He starts the engine, and we head home.

Hours later, I’m buried under a mountain of charity event paperwork. Rowan strolls into the living room with a purposeful stride. Pausing just in front of me, my curiosity piques, "Is everything okay?"

His eyes lock onto me with a serious intensity. “Mia, please cancel your meeting tomorrow,” his tone leaves no room for argument.

I blink, surprised by his sudden surge of control. “But I’ve got so much to do. The event is just around the corner.”

"I am well aware of that, " he places his hands on my shoulders, his touch reassuring and gentle. “You’re getting too exhausted and I'm worried. You remember what happened the last time you stressed yourself too much. You're beginning to go beyond your limits again and I'm worried. You need to take it easy. I can’t have my fiancée wearing herself out.”

The warmth in his gaze makes my heart flutter and I smile, touched by his concern. “I appreciate it, Rowan. But you know, I’m perfectly capable of handling every part of this. This is my job and I'm excellent at it."

His fingers squeeze my shoulders lightly. “Yes you're an amazing event planner, but I’m not taking any chances. You and the baby are my top priority right now, I'm sorry.”

I nod, hiding the blush that creeps up my cheeks. But my doubts steal the joy of the moment and I convince myself that his concern is for the baby, nothing too personal.

However, a part of me hopes it’s more than that.

Few hours later, we head for our doctor’s appointment to find out the gender of our baby.

As we sit in the waiting room, I notice Rowan’s leg bouncing with nervous energy. He glances at me, trying to hide his excitement behind a nonchalant expression. “You think it’s a boy or a girl?” he asks, trying to sound casual.

I struggle to hide the laughter threatening to spill out of my mouth, watching his face. “I don’t know. What do you think?”

He grins, a hint of mischief in his eyes. “I was hoping for a girl. You know, so I could be that grumpy father-in-law who scares away any potential suitors.”

It's difficult to hold back the laughter this time, feeling a rush of affection for him. “Oh, really? And what would you do if she brings someone home?”

He raises an eyebrow, his grin widening. "I have a lot of options and I've told you one of them. "

I shake my head, still smiling. “And what if we end up with a boy?”

He doesn't get a chance to reply as the doctor enters, and we both turn our attention to him. He pauses, gauging our expression before announcing, After a few minutes, “It’s a boy!"

Rowan’s reaction is immediate—his eyes light up with pure joy.

“Well,” he says, his voice rich with teasing, “I was secretly hoping for a girl. I had this whole plan to be the grumpy, intimidating father-in-law, scaring off any boy who tried to win her heart.”

The doctor and I laugh, the sound bubbling up from deep inside me. He leans closer, his gaze intense and playful. “I’d have put him through a rigorous test. But now, with a son on the way, I guess I’ll have to prepare him to win over his old man instead.”

It's very obvious that Rowan is overwhelmed with happiness, irrespective of the gender of our baby and for a moment, all my doubts melt away with the tears forming in my eyes. *Gosh, I cry too much lately. These hormones need to take it easy on me.*

Rowan's words are light-hearted, but there’s something in his tone that makes my heart flutter. I reach out and touch his arm, feeling the warmth of his skin beneath my fingertips. “I think you’ll make a great dad, Rowan.”

He looks down at me, his expression really emotional. “I hope so. And who knows? Maybe I’ll still get my chance to be the grumpy father-in-law someday. We’ll eventually have more kids for that. Two girls and one more boy sounds exciting.”

His comment takes me by surprise and more tears escape from my tear pores. “More kids? You’re thinking about that already?”

The doctor leaves and shuts the door behind him, surely understanding what is going on.

He nods, a shy smile tugging at the corners of his lips. “Yeah. I want a family, Mia. I want us to have a future together, with all the messiness and love that comes with it.”

The weight of his words settles between us, and I feel a rush of warmth and happiness. Rowan wants more than just a temporary arrangement; he’s thinking about a future with me.

My doubts start to be replaced by a sense of hopeful certainty.

It's already evening when we get home. We share a quiet, intimate dinner of Lobster mac and cheese together and I'm lost in the simple joy of his company.

Our night is filled with laughter, playful romance and easy conversation, and I can’t remember the last time I felt this at ease with someone.

“You know, Mia, I’m glad we’re doing this together. I wouldn’t want to go through this with anyone else.”

His words take me unawares and I'm on the verge of telling him how I can't get him off my mind.

I'm falling head over heels in love with this man and at thiss point, it's either he loves me as passionately as I'm beginning to fall for him, or he's going to be the worst heartbreak I've ever had.

**Chapter Eighteen**

**Rowan**

I’m on my way back from work, the streets of New York bustling around me as I navigate through the sea of people.

My mind is preoccupied, the day’s stress gnawing at my edges. I notice a flower shop as I drive by, and immediately hit the brakes.

This is the first time I'll be doing this. I don't know what's driving me but my gaze is drawn to the colorful display of blooms in the window and I can't stop thinking about Mia.

On a whim, I step inside, the jingle of the doorbell announcing my arrival. The shop’s cozy interior is a contrast to the grayness of the city outside.

The florist, a middle-aged woman with a warm smile, looks up from arranging a bouquet. “How can I help you today?”

I fidget, feeling a bit out of my depth. “I need flowers. For my fiancée.”

Her eyes twinkle with curiosity and a hint of mischief. “Are you thinking of something romantic?”

I nod, my throat tightening slightly. “Yeah. Romantic. But I’m not sure what she’d like.”

She starts selecting flowers, her hands moving with practiced ease. “What kind of person is she?”

I think about Mia—her kind heart, her warmth, the way she lights up when she’s excited about something. “She’s… thoughtful and genuine. She’s got this way of making everything feel brighter.”

The florist picks out a vibrant mix of roses, peonies, and lilies. “These should do the trick. They’re elegant and full of life—just like you’ve described her.”

I nod, watching her wrap the bouquet with care. “How much do I owe you?”

I pay her and leave her a generous tip for helping me out.

As I leave the shop, I glance at the bouquet, feeling a twinge of uncertainty. I know Mia will appreciate the gesture, but I can’t shake the nagging confusion about my own feelings.

I’ve convinced myself for years that love is just an illusion, a concept reserved for fairy tales and sappy movies. And yet, here I am, unable to ignore the evidence that Mia is shaking up my entire belief system.

It’s both thrilling and terrifying. I’ve seen so many broken relationships, shattered by betrayal, distance, or simple incompatibility.

My parents actually had something rare, something I thought was a fluke, a mere aberration in the chaos of the world. And seeing Mia, with her laughter and her unwavering kindness, I can’t help but wonder if that rare thing is still possible.

I arrive home and find Asher waiting for me, a wide grin on his face.

"Hey, Rowan!" He walks up to me and we embrace then shake hands.

The sight of him is a relief. I haven’t seen my brother since I sent him off on his exclusive trip around three countries—his wedding gift from me. *Also the day I first ran into Mia.*

“How was the trip?” I'm very happy to have him around.

He chuckles, the sound rich with memories. “It was amazing, man. Exactly what I needed. But I had to cut it short.”

I raise an eyebrow. “Why’s that?”

Asher’s grin fades a bit, replaced by a more serious expression. “I saw the news about your engagement. Couldn’t stay away after that.”

I smile, feeling pride and disbelief that even though the news is fake, I got a good woman I really like. “Well, it’s not just you who can find love, you know. I guess you're not the only one with a heart capable of finding something real.”

Asher chuckles softly, shaking his head. “You always had a way of surprising me. I didn’t think you’d be settling down soon.”

I shrug, feeling a bit defensive but mostly amused. “Neither did I, but here we are.”

We head inside, and I set the flowers down on the kitchen counter. Asher looks at them, then back at me with a knowing glance. “So, tell me about her. What’s she like?”

I feel a smile tugging at my lips as I think about Mia. “She’s incredible. Kind, funny, and genuinely caring. She makes me question everything I thought I knew about relationships."

Asher nods, his expression thoughtful. “Sounds like you’ve found something special.”

I lean against the counter. “Yeah. It’s weird. I always thought these things aren't real, But with Mia, it’s like I'm experiencing something new.”

Asher looks at me with a strange expression, “You really care about her, don’t you?”

I run a hand through my hair, struggling to articulate the complexity of my feelings. “I do. More than I ever thought possible. But I’m still trying to figure out what this all means. I’ve convinced myself that love isn’t real, that it’s just a story we tell ourselves.”

Asher claps me on the shoulder, his touch reassuring. “Well, it sounds like you’ve got a lot to figure out. But from where I’m standing, it looks like you’re on the right path.”

I nod, “Yeah, maybe.”

Asher’s eyes soften with empathy. “Sometimes, the best things in life come when you least expect them. Just be honest with her and with yourself. That’s all you can do. " He scans the kitchen, "I'm starving man, anything for lunch?"

My nanny isn't around yet and Mia is still at work so I don't bother thinking of cooking. "Let's order something."

Forty minutes later, I'm sitting at the kitchen table with Asher, the remnants of dinner still scattered on our plates. The room is filled with a comfortable silence, but I can sense that something is off.

Asher has been unusually quiet, his gaze drifting to the window and then back to his plate. It’s like there’s a shadow hovering over him, and I can’t ignore the tight knot forming in my stomach.

I take a swig of my drink and break the silence. “You’ve been quiet since you got back. What’s on your mind?”

Asher looks up, his eyes meeting mine, but they’re guarded. “It’s nothing. Just… adjusting to being back.”

I lean in, studying him closely. “Come on, Asher. I know when something’s bothering you. Just tell me.”

He hesitates, then shakes his head. “It’s really nothing. I’m just… not used to all the changes.”

My patience wears thin. “Cut the crap, Asher. You’ve got something you’re not saying. Just spit it out. We both know these things."

Asher’s eyes flash with frustration, and he takes a deep breath. “Fine. You want to know what’s wrong? I’m worried about you. About Mia.”

My heart skips a beat at the mention of Mia. “What about her?”

Asher’s expression hardens, his tone serious. “I’m not sure she’s who you think she is.”

I laugh, but it comes out forced, trying to mask the sudden spike of anxiety. “Come on, Asher. She’s been nothing but good to me. You’re not seriously saying that she’s… what? Not genuine?”

Asher’s face is a mask of concern. “I’m telling you, Rowan. She’s not who she seems.”

I can feel my adrenaline surging. “Stop playing games. What’s your real issue with her?”

Asher stands up and raises his hands with a weird look on his face, clearly about to leave, but I can’t let him walk away with this hanging in the air.

My hand shoots out, grabbing his arm with a firm grip. “Don’t walk away from me. Tell me what you mean.”

Asher flinches slightly at my touch but doesn’t pull away. “Rowan, listen. I came here to warn you.”

I’m on edge, the intensity of the moment making my heart race. “Warn me about what?”

Asher looks around as if searching for the right words. “Mia is my ex.” *What?!*

The floor feels like it’s dropping out from under me. I can’t believe what I’m hearing. “What? You’re kidding. Mia? My Mia?” *Mia is his ex? And why is he telling me now? Did she know who I am before we met?*

He shakes his head, his eyes filled with regret and determination. “No, I’m not kidding. She’s my ex, and she’s probably with you now because she couldn’t get what she wanted from me.”

I feel a rush of anger and confusion. “You’re wrong. Mia told me about her ex, and he’s the one who broke her heart. She said he was a jerk. That can’t be you.”

Asher’s expression doesn’t waver. “She lied to you. She’s a gold-digger, Rowan. She’s using you. She’s not the woman you think she is.”

My world tilts on its axis. “You’re saying Mia’s been lying to me? That she’s just with me for money? She spent months avoiding me? How is that even possible?"

Asher’s eyes are hard. “That’s exactly what I’m saying. Take it or leave it but She’s very manipulative. She’s good at pretending. And definitely good at playing games with people. Let me guess, she wasn't interested at first but after a while, you chased her and you fell for her, isn't it? That's what she does when she wants you to do exactly what she wants."

My head spins as I try to process his words. I don’t want to believe him, but the intensity in his voice is unsettling. “You’re just trying to mess with me. Mia’s been nothing but honest and loving. There's no way I can believe this."

Before Asher can respond, the sound of the door opening pulls my attention.

Mia walks in, her face lighting up as she sees me. But then her gaze shifts to Asher, and her face goes ashen. It’s like all the color drains from her.

“Rowan?” she says, her voice trembling slightly as her gaze shifts from Asher to me.

The sight of her reaction is like a punch to the gut. *They know each other. T*hat confirms everything Asher said because he's my brother and we've always had each other's backs.

I can’t ignore the sinking feeling in my chest as I feel my heart begins to shatter, bits by bits.

Asher’s words echo in my mind, each one slicing through my hope like a razor.

I turn back to Asher, my heart pounding. “Is this true? Tell me, Mia. Is he telling the truth?”

Mia’s eyes dart between Asher and me, her expression filled with fear and desperation. She takes a shaky breath. “Rowan, I can explain—”

“Explain what?” I cut her off, my voice trembling with anger and hurt. “Explain why you never told me about Asher? Explain why he says you’re just using me?”

Mia’s eyes fill with tears, and she steps closer, reaching for my hand. “Rowan, please. It’s not what you think. I never meant for any of this to happen.” She never meant for any of this to happen? *What does that even mean when she's singlehandedly broken me?*

I pull my hand away, the betrayal cutting deeper than I can express. “How can I believe you now? Everything you’ve told me, everything we’ve built… is it all a lie?”

She shakes her head, her voice breaking. “No, Rowan. It’s not a lie. I love you. I never wanted any of this to come out like this. I didn’t know Asher would be here.”

I look at Asher, then back at Mia, my mind reeling. “So what’s the truth, Mia? Are you really with me because you couldn’t get back with Asher?”

Mia’s shoulders slump, and she's crying now but all of it seems like mere threatrics now. “No. It’s not like that. I broke up with Asher a long time ago. I never wanted to see him again.”

My whole world is shattering, and I don’t know which way is up. I want to believe Mia, but the evidence is staring me in the face. Asher’s claims and Mia’s reaction have thrown me into a spiral of doubt.

I turn to Asher, my voice raw with emotion. “Why are you telling me this? Why are you trying to ruin everything for me?”

Asher looks pained, his gaze softening for a moment. “I didn’t want to hurt you, Rowan. I just thought you should know the truth before it’s too late.”

Mia steps forward, her voice pleading. “Rowan, please. Don’t let this destroy what we have. You can't trust Asher.”

“I can't trust my brother who told me the truth you couldn't spill for months? How can I trust anything you say now? Everything feels like a lie.”

“I’ve done what I came here to do. I’m leaving now.” Asher said quietly and makes to pick up his bags.

**Chapter Nineteen**

**Mia**

Rowan's eyes lock onto mine, and his face falls, the warmth and affection that usually light up his gaze replaced by cold confusion and hurt. I can feel my heart drop into my stomach.

Rowan looks at me as if I’m a stranger, and the dismay in his eyes hits me like a physical blow.

Asher notices my reaction and turns to Rowan. “I’ve done what I came here to do. I’m leaving now.” His voice is low, almost smug, and it sends a chill down my spine.

Asher strides towards the door, and I catch a glimpse of his face—there’s a trace of triumph there, a look I haven’t seen before. “I’m sorry it had to be this way, Rowan,” he says over his shoulder, before walking out.

I’m frozen, staring at Rowan, who looks shattered. His usual composure is gone, replaced by a raw, intense emotion. His anger is brewing like a storm ready to burst.

“Mia,” Rowan says, his voice strained, almost breaking. “Is it true? Was Asher really your ex?”

The question hangs in the air, and I can barely get my thoughts together. I want to explain, to tell him everything, but the reality of the situation crashes over me like a tidal wave. “Yes, Rowan, Asher was my ex.” I badly want to explain but where do I begin?

Rowan’s face contorts with pain, his eyes narrowing, and his body stiffening with rage. “And you knew all along that I'm Asher’s brother?”

The way he asks it—so hurt and incredulous—it’s as if the ground has been pulled out from under him. My heart aches seeing him like this. “Yes, I knew. But Rowan, please—”

He doesn’t let me finish. “So it’s true, then. You knew who he was and still decided to be with me? Were you just using me? Is that why you’re here? To get back at him through me?”

The accusation hits me like a slap. My breath catches in my throat, and I can barely process his words. “No! Rowan, that’s not true. Asher—”

But Rowan cuts me off with a harsh, cutting tone. “He said you’re a gold-digger, that you’re only with me for my money. Is that why you’re here?”

I stumble back, my vision blurring with tears. “Asher is lying. He’s the one who hurt me. He’s the one who left me, who destroyed me. I didn’t come here to use anyone. I—”

Rowan’s face is a mask of fury and hurt. “Then why didn’t you tell me? Why keep it a secret?”

I open my mouth to explain, but no words come. I can feel the weight of my own secrets pressing down on me, the pain of Rowan’s disappointment cutting deeper than any physical wound.

The truth feels so heavy, like it’s suffocating me. “I was going to tell you. I didn’t know how. It was just so complicated. I didn’t want to bring any more pain—”

Rowan’s eyes flash with a fierce, almost desperate anger. “You should have told me from the beginning. How am I supposed to believe anything you say now?”

I feel a sharp pain in my chest, like a knife twisting inside me. I look at him, the man I thought I was building a future with, and see the coldness that has replaced his usual warmth.

It feels like the entire foundation of our relationship has crumbled beneath me.

“Rowan, please,” I plead, my voice cracking. “You know I'm not a gold-digger. I didn’t come here to use you or hurt you. I was just trying to move on from Asher, from everything he put me through. I thought I could start fresh with you. Have I ever asked you for anything? All I care about is your love, Rowan, nothing more."

Rowan shakes his head, disbelief and sorrow etched on his face. It's obvious my words are useless.

The tears won't stop streaming down my face. “You have to believe me. I love you, Rowan. I didn’t want to hurt you. I was trying to protect myself, to protect us.”

Rowan’s eyes soften just a fraction, but his expression is still filled with doubt and pain. “If you love me, why didn’t you just tell me the truth? Why hide it? All of a sudden you're saying everything thinking I'll believe you? If Asher didn't say a word, how long were you planning to thrive in your secrets?"

I take a deep, shuddering breath, trying to find the right words, but the lump in my throat makes it nearly impossible to speak. “I was afraid, Rowan. Afraid of losing you. Afraid of the way you’d look at me if you knew. I didn’t want to jeopardize what we had.”

He steps back, the space between us feeling like an insurmountable chasm. “You’ve jeopardized everything by not being honest. I thought we had something real. But now… I don’t know what’s true anymore.”

The hurt in his voice pierces through me, and I want to reach out, to close the gap between us, but I’m frozen in place. My heart aches with the weight of his disappointment and anger.

“I’m sorry,” I whisper, my voice barely audible. “I’m so sorry for not being upfront. I never meant for any of this to happen.”

Rowan’s shoulders slump slightly, looking exhausted and defeated. “I need some time to think, Mia. I can’t deal with this right now.”

I nod, feeling a deep, hollow ache. “I understand. I’ll give you the space you need.”

Rowan turns and walks away, leaving me standing alone in the middle of the room. The silence that follows is deafening, and I’m left with the shards of my broken heart and the realization that everything I thought I had is slipping away.

I scream out, hoping to deafen the hurt I'm feeling but it doesn't help. “It’s the truth, Rowan." I cry out loudly, "I'm saying the truth. didn’t know. I didn’t even know you were Asher’s brother until after we got the job at Slade's Industries. That's why I avoided you, you have to believe mee!!!!.”

I didn't realize he came back to the sitting room till I heard his voice,“So you’re saying this was all just a fluke? That you didn’t realize what you were getting into?”

“I didn’t! I didn’t plan any of this. I was just trying to move on from Asher. I didn’t want any of this to happen. I didn't plan anything!"

He glares at me, his eyes filled with an icy fury that makes my heart ache. “I don’t believe you, Mia. You’ve manipulated me from the start. And now, because of your lies, I’m supposed to trust you with this show you're pulling off? with my child?”

"I can't take the pain anymore," I sob uncontrollable. "I wish I can just walk away easily but I deeply care about you and I understand that it's all my fault." My head is beginning to pound and I'm exhausted.

The accusation feels like a physical blow. I can’t breathe through the pain. “I haven’t lied to you, Rowan. I haven’t manipulated you. I just wanted to be honest, to build something real.”

He steps closer. “You’ve ruined everything. I don’t want to see you again. And when the baby is born, I will do everything in my power to win custody. A woman who can’t be honest from the beginning doesn’t deserve to raise my child.”

His words are a blade twisting deeper into my heart. I can’t believe he’s actually saying this, that he’s turning his back on everything we’ve shared.

My love for him feels like it’s being ripped apart, and I’m left standing there, broken and devastated.

“I was a fool,” I say through my tears, my voice barely above a whisper. “I never thought anything would come of this. I didn’t mean for any of this to happen. Heck, I didn't even think a one night stand could get me pregnant. How exactly did I manipulate you?"

The weight of his words crashes over me, and I feel like I’m being dragged under by the force of his anger and pain.

Rowan’s expression remains cold, unyielding. “I can’t be with someone who deceives me like this. You’ve made your intentions clear. And now, I have nothing left to say to you.”

"Great, because I'd rather be left alone than spend my life with a man who doesn't know the things I'm not capable of. Asher is your brother and I get it. You have to believe him. But you know what? You both can go to hell and rot till eternity!" With that, in a sudden, desperate move, I grab the ring from my finger and throw it at him, watching as it lands with a dull clink on the floor.

With one last, lingering look at him, I turn and walk out of the house. Each step feels like I'm being rejuvenated, but with excruciating pains.

The cool night air hits my face, and I welcome it, even though it does nothing to ease the pain inside me.

As I walk down the street, the world around me blurs through my tears. I feel like I’m walking through a fog, my mind reeling from the confrontation, from the weight of Rowan’s accusations.

The pain of his rejection is a crushing force, and I can’t escape it, no matter how fast I walk.

**Chapter Twenty**

**Rowan**

The days have dragged on like a relentless, gray fog, each one blending into the next in an indistinguishable blur.

It’s been over three weeks since Mia walked out of my life, and every day feels like I’m trudging through a mire of my own making. I can’t shake the hollow emptiness that has settled into my chest, a constant, painful reminder of what I’ve lost.

I’m not myself anymore.

I hate that I can’t stop thinking about her, that I wake up every morning hoping it was all a bad dream, only to face the cold, hard reality of my own making.

The ache is making everything feel pointless and bleak. What's more? I hate that I miss her.

It makes me feel weak, and I despise that I let myself fall into this trap called love. *Funny how I'm now admitting it was love after we've broken up.*

Life has a very weird sense of humor.

I was supposed to be stronger, more in control. But despite everything, despite how much I try to fight it, the realization settles in like a heavy stone in my gut. It’s a love I never wanted, a vulnerability I never asked for.

I see her everywhere—in the way the light filters through my office window, in the soft, muted colors of the evening sky, in the quiet moments when I’m alone with my thoughts.

It’s stupid and it's maddening. I find myself clutching at the fragments of what we had, trying to piece together the moments that now seem like a distant dream.

The more I try to forget her, the more the memories cling to me, stubborn and unrelenting.

My grumpiness has reached new levels of absurdity.

I snap at everyone around me, unable to contain the storm brewing inside. The office is quieter than usual because my temper is a ticking time bomb that I can’t seem to defuse.

I’m a storm of frustration and anger, and no one knows the real reason behind it.

Ethan, ever the concerned friend, tries to reach out but his attempts to get me to talk are met with my cold, indifferent responses.

I know he’s trying to help, but I can’t bring myself to open up. My walls are higher than ever, and I’m determined to keep everyone out.

“Rowan, you’ve been off lately,” he says, his voice tinged with genuine concern as he approaches my desk. “You want to talk about it? Maybe it’ll help.”

I barely glance up from the piles of paperwork that are supposed to keep me occupied. “I don’t have time for that, Ethan,” I snap. “I’ve got too much on my plate. Can’t you see I’m busy?”

His brow furrows, but he doesn’t press. He knows better than to push too hard. He gives me a sympathetic look and walks away, leaving me alone with my thoughts.

The emptiness settles back in, heavier now, as if it’s feeding off my refusal to confront it.

The charity event is getting closer, and it’s all I can focus on. It’s the only thing that keeps me going, the only thing that distracts me from the relentless pain of missing Mia.

I throw myself into work, trying to drown out the feelings that threaten to overwhelm me. The event is supposed to be a success, a distraction, but even that seems tainted by the shadow of what once was.

I hate how much I need her, how much I long to hear her voice again, to feel the warmth of her presence. But it's all her fault. She broke us with her Kies and deceit and I have to accept that.

I hate how I can’t stop replaying our last conversation, her hurt and anger cutting through me like a knife. I hate that I was so quick to push her away, to let my fears and insecurities drive her out of my life.

The day of the charity event dawns with a pallor that mirrors my mood. The excitement I once felt for this event has been replaced by an all-consuming sadness, as though I’m mourning my parents’ deaths all over again.

I move through the motions mechanically, a shell of my former self, burdened by the weight of regret and loss.

The grand hall is bustling with activity, the usual clamor of high society mingling with the clinking of glasses and the low hum of conversation.

But it all feels distant, like I’m watching from behind a glass wall. The vibrant atmosphere of the event contrasts sharply with the darkness I feel inside.

My attention drifts as I scan the room, and that’s when I spot Jenna standing few steps away. She's backing me, her phone pressed to her ear.

I move closer, not knowing what to say together but feeling we can have a conversation.

Jenna’s voice is rising above the hum of conversations in the hall and I can hear her on phone. She’s standing near the refreshments table, and I can’t help but listen, especially as she mentions Mia’s name.

“I don’t know, ” she says into the phone, her tone frustrated. “I think Mia’s gotten her heart broken again. The poor thing.”

My heart lurches at her words, a mixture of guilt and curiosity driving me closer. I can’t make out the other side of the conversation, but Jenna’s next words are clear, striking deep into my chest.

“She was heartbroken by both brothers, you know. Her ex cheated on her and then got engaged to the lady she caught him with. And now Rowan thinks she's a liar and a deceiver, I just feel so heartbroken for her, she deserves better…” Jenna’s voice falters slightly, but the bitterness is still there.

“I really hate those two brothers. They’ve done a number on her, and I have to finish this job for work ethics. I can't stand how they’ve treated her and I'll stay far away from Rowan after this deal is concluded.”

Her words are a punch to the gut, a fresh wound reopening. The bitterness in Jenna’s voice, the way she speaks about Mia, it all paints a picture I wasn’t fully aware of.

I know I’ve been distant, my grumpiness a shield against my own feelings, but this? This makes it all feel so much worse.

I step forward, unable to ignore it any longer. Jenna’s gaze meets mine, and her eyes widen slightly, a flicker of guilt crossing her features.

“Rowan,” she begins, her voice hesitant. “I didn’t mean to—”

I cut her off, my voice strained with the rawness of my emotions. “What’s this about Mia being heartbroken again? Why didn’t you tell me?”

Jenna’s face flushes, and she takes a deep breath and tries to walk away.

I block her path. I can’t hold back the pain that laces my voice. “What exactly is going on, Jenna? What did you mean by ‘the two brothers’?”

"Are you ready for this conversation? And why are you asking me these now when you already drew conclusions from your perfect brother's lies?" She seems infuriated, “Mia’s ex was Asher, your brother. She was deeply hurt by him, and now… you're judging her by the devil's storyline. Do you know Mia came to that wedding to ruin it? She was in so much pain she wanted to get revenge. Nobody thought about your existence. She told me was couldn't bring herself to ruin the wedding as she planned and I was there with her when she rushed out, crying. That's when she bumped into you."

I remember vividly, the tears on Mia's face that day, she wore the sexiest red dress I've ever seen but her sadness was so evident that I spent the evening trying to make her feel better. But she disappeared the next morning.

"Mia never wanted any part of this drama between you and your brother but guess what? It's better this way because you sure as hell do not deserve her!"

The words hit me like a wave, crashing over me, dragging me under. I feel a sharp pang of guilt and confusion, the weight of Jenna’s accusations sinking in. I thought I was making things right, but now it feels like I’ve only added to her pain.

“You think I’ve done this on purpose?” I ask, my voice trembling despite my attempt to sound firm. “You think I wanted to hurt her?”

Jenna shakes her head, her gaze sympathetic but resolute. “No, Rowan. I don’t think you meant to, but the way things turned out… just stay away from my bestfriend.”

I’m left standing there, grappling with the realization that I've been a fool by not listening to her.

The event continues around me, but it feels like a blur of color and sound. My mind is consumed by thoughts of Mia, by the pain I’ve caused and the love I still feel.

I want to fix things, to make things right, but I’m not sure how. The pain of missing Mia, combined with the guilt of knowing I’ve hurt her, is almost too much to bear. The charity event, once a symbol of hope and change, now seems like nothing, compared to what I've lost.

I leave the event and bump into Ethan, "Please be in charge, there's something urgent I need to take care of and it can't wait." I don't wait for him to respond as I rush out, and get into my car.

On second thoughts, I need to see Asher first. The realization that my brother whom I trusted had a hand in Mia’s heartbreak, that he might have caused her suffering, is almost too much to bear. I feel a surge of anger and betrayal, a hot, searing rage that makes it hard to think straight.

I force myself to stay calm, though the anger churns within me. “Where is he?” I ask, my voice low and dangerous. “I need to talk to Asher, where is he?" I ask Ethan whom I met at the hallway of the event center .

"I spotted him inside a while ago." I don’t wait for further explanation. I push past Ethan, making my way through the crowd until I find Asher. He’s standing by the side of the room, his posture confident, talking with a lady I don't recognize. *The stinking cheat!*

The sight of him makes my fists clench at my sides, my body brimming with the need to punch him hard.

“Asher,” I snap, my voice cutting through the noise. “We need to talk. Now.”

Asher turns to face me and meets my gaze with a troubled look.

"Did you really think I won't find out the truth eventually?" He seems shocked. His gaze drops.

"I'm so sorry, I didn't mean for things to turn out this messy."

“Didn’t mean for what to turn out this way?” I demand, my frustration boiling over. “Didn’t mean to break Mia’s heart? Didn’t mean to lie to me?”

“I didn’t want you to find out what I really did to her. I know I hurt Mia deeply, but I didn’t want you to know the extent of it. She deserved better, Rowan. She deserved so much more than I gave her.”

“You think that makes it better?” I growl, my voice low and dangerous. “You think saying sorry is enough after what you did?”

Asher flinches at my tone, and I see a flicker of fear in his eyes. “I’m sorry, Rowan. I know I’ve messed up."

The temptation to beat him up is high, my anger and pain almost too much to handle. But I shouldn't. I take a deep breath, forcing myself to stay in control. My fists are still clenched, and I can feel the tension radiating from me.

"We're not done with this conversation." With that, I turn and walk away.

The drive to Mia's house is a blur, my mind spinning with thoughts of Mia and ways I can possibly make it right with her. When I finally get there, I find the place eerily quiet.

Her door is locked and the emptiness of the house reflects the void in my heart.

Desperation grips me as I try to think of where Mia might be. I pick up my phone and call Jenna, hoping for any clue that might lead me to her. When she answers, I can hear the hesitance in her voice.

“Jenna, where is Mia?” I ask, my voice urgent. “I need to know where she is.”

There’s a pause on the other end of the line before Jenna finally speaks. “She’s not in town, Rowan. She went to see her parents.”

I bet I'll have to walk into the lion's den if I want my woman back. A wave of panic washes over me, and I don’t waste a second. I quickly bring out my phone and book the next available flight, my mind racing with thoughts of finding Mia and trying to make things right.

I call Will to meet me at the airport so he'll take my car back home. The flight takes off in an hour and if I'm lucky, I might make it. The thought of her being away, of her being with her parents while I’m left with my regrets, is almost too much to bear.

I get to the airport and the odds are in my favor. I scroll through my phone's gallery, fighting the tears as I go through our pictures together; pictures I couldn't bring myself to delete after trying severally.

When I finally land and make my way to her parents’ home, my heart is pounding with fear and hope. The drive to her parents’ house is filled with a desperate hope that I’ll be able to make things right.

When I finally pull up to her parents' home, the house looks serene, almost peaceful in the evening light. But as I step out of the car, a knot tightens in my chest. I approach the front door with trepidation, and when I knock, the moment feels suspended in time.

Mia’s father answers the door, his expression guarded. “What are you doing here?” he asks, his voice clipped.

“I need to see Mia,” I reply, trying to keep my voice steady. “Please, I just want to talk to her.”

Mia’s father’s eyes narrow, and he shakes his head. “I don’t think that’s a good idea. Mia’s been through a lot. Get your ass out of my property before I do something I'd regret."

“I understand,” I say, my voice cracking with the weight of my emotions. “But you don't know if wants to hear me out. Please just give me a chance, I promise I'll get lost if she tells me to. Please don't stop me from making this right."

At this point, I can only hope that Mia is willing to take me back because I'm sure her father would not take it easy if she wants me to leave.

He hesitates for a moment, then steps aside reluctantly. “Fine. You’ve got ten minutes. But if she doesn’t want to see you, you need to leave.”

I nod, my heart pounding as I wait for Mia. The minutes seem to crawl by, each second amplifying my desperation. Mia doesn't come down.

"You need to leave, " her father announces, holding the door wide open. Her mom doesn't say a word but just stares at me, eyes shooting daggers.

I step outside the house, pretending to walk away, but I can't leave here without seeing her. Its not possible.

I hover around, praying she'll have pity on me and come out before her father finds me here.

Just then I hear soft sobbers , I strain my ears and follow the sound behind the house. That's when I spot her, sitting alone in a garden, sobbing.

Seeing her again, so close and yet so distant, is almost more than I can bear. I rush towards her sobs become worse as she shudders and wails uncontrollably.

“Mia,” I start, my voice trembling. “I’m so sorry. I know I messed up, and I can’t tell you how much I regret it. I should have trusted you. I should have believed you.”

“ I thought we had something real. I thought you were different.”

Her words cut through me like a knife. I can see the pain I’ve caused, the trust that’s been shattered. “I know,” I say, my voice breaking. “I was blind and stupid, I should never have listened to him. I didn’t want to believe that you could be genuine but everything Jenna said... I let my insecurities and anger get the best of me. I was so wrong. I don't deserve you and I'm sorry.”

Mia doesn’t respond immediately. She just sits there, her eyes fixed on the floor. The silence is heavy, filled with the weight of everything unsaid.

I take a deep breath, summoning the courage to say what’s been on my mind for weeks.

“Mia,” I say softly, “I love you. I’ve been so lost without you. I’ve realized that I can’t even continue my life without you. I want to make things right. I want you to be with me, not just because of the baby, but because I love you.”

Mia’s eyes meet mine, and for a moment, there’s a flicker of something in her gaze—hope, maybe. But then she looks away again, her shoulders slumping. She's stopped sobbing, but her face is still wet from the tears.

“You really hurt me, Rowan,” she repeats, her voice hoarse. “I don't think I can let it go in a hurry. I don’t know if I can just forget everything that happened.”

I nod, understanding the depth of her pain. “That's okay by me, I don’t expect you to forgive me immediately. But I’m asking for a chance to prove myself. I want to make it up to you, to show you that I’m serious about us.”

Mia looks at me, her eyes filled with conflicted emotions. “You were so quick to believe the worst about me. It was like you didn’t trust me at all. I'm not sure I want to have such a man in my life."

“I know,” I reply, my voice filled with regret. “ I deeply regret my words and actions, Mia. I should have known better.”

We sit there, the weight of our conversation hanging in the air.

“I’ve been thinking a lot,” I say, my voice trembling. “About everything that’s happened, and about what I truly want. I realized that what I had with you was real. It was the kind of love I thought only existed in fairy tales but I was too blind to see it.”

Mia looks at me, her eyes searching my face for sincerity. “You really mean that?”

“Yes,” I say earnestly. “I love you, Mia. I know I haven’t shown it well enough, but I will spend every day of my life telling you that with my actions and words. I just don't want any future without you in it. ”

I reach into my pocket and pull out the new ring I had intended to give her before everything went wrong. It's been in my car for weeks and I had the opportunity to grab it before getting to the airport.

I go on my knees before her ans I hold it out to her, my hands shaking. “I know it’s not much, but it’s a symbol of my commitment to you. Will you be mine, officially?” At this moment, I know that my life depends on her response right now.

“I know,” I say, my voice filled with desperation. “Its not what it seems like. I’m not trying to rush you or make you say something you're not ready for, I'm only asking for a chance. We can take our time before the wedding if you wish to. I just need to show you that I can be the man you deserve. I want to prove to you that I can be better.”

Mia’s eyes widen as she looks at the ring, and tears start to spill down her cheeks.

Mia takes the ring from my hand, her fingers brushing mine. The touch is electric, sending a shiver through me. She looks at the ring, then back at me, her expression softening.

“I love you too, Rowan. I never stopped loving you. I still want you but it’s going to take time for me to heal from all this.”

“I understand,” I say, my voice breaking. “I’m willing to wait. I just need you to know that I’m here for you, and I’ll do whatever it takes to make things right.”

With that, I get up and pull her up. She doesn't struggle.

I pull her into my arms, enthralled by the warmth of her embrace. She hugs me back, and at that instant, I know I'm home.