

## Chapter -1

— Diana —

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The beginning was simple - quiet and even. The kind of beginning you don't think much about at the time, but that later comes back to haunt you. It was July 4th, 2022, a night I would have otherwise spent mindlessly scrolling through my phone. I was alone in my room, headphones in, my world drowned out by the beats of a song I had on shuffle - "Ghost" by Justin Bieber. The lyrics seemed to speak to me, like he understood the space I was in.

I wasn't looking for anything. Just a bit of peace in the chaos of my own head. And then, out of nowhere, came a message from an unfamiliar user on Discord.

*"Hey, listening to Ghost too?"*

It was one of those casual, passing messages, the kind that people usually send to share their thoughts or connect over a mutual interest. But when I clicked on the notification, I didn't know that this one simple message would change everything.

The person who had sent it was Nicholas. His username wasn't anything special, but his words were different from anyone else I had talked to before. There was something about how he wrote, how he immediately jumped into a conversation about music and interests, the way he didn't ask anything personal but still made me feel like he understood me.

Our conversations began innocently. We would talk about the things we were listening to and random memes that kept us both up too late laughing. But it didn't take long before we started sharing things I didn't think I would share with anyone. I told him about the thoughts I kept buried in my head, the ones I never told my friends or my family. I found myself opening up in ways that surprised me.

He was kind, funny, and thoughtful. He made me feel like I was important, like I mattered. He didn't just listen; he saw me in a way I had never experienced. And for once, I felt like I wasn't invisible.

But there was something else, something I couldn't ignore. He had a girlfriend.

Margaret.

I knew about her the entire time. He had told me early on, and at first, I didn't think much of it. After all, we were just friends, right? But as time passed, I couldn't shake the feeling that there was something more between us. And as his words grew more intimate, so did mine. It was like we were building a world together, a world just for us, separate from everything else. But I had no idea how dangerous this connection was going to be. I should have known, but instead, I let myself *fall*.

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## Chapter -2

*— Nicholas —*

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I wasn't supposed to feel this way. I had Margaret.

It was a simple fact. Margaret and I had been together for a month now, and she was steady. She was reliable. She was the kind of girlfriend that made sense on paper - beautiful, kind, and intelligent. We had our routines, our late-night conversations, our inside jokes. In many ways, she was everything I thought I wanted.

But everything changed when Diana entered my life.

The first message, simple as it was, was a portal to something I never expected. I didn't even know how we ended up talking about music in the first place - one second we were sharing songs, and the next, we were talking about everything under the sun.

I told myself it was just a harmless distraction, a new friendship with someone who liked the same weird music I did. I didn't think much of it at first. But the more we talked, the more I realized something was off. It wasn't just the music, or the memes we both loved. It was the way she made me feel, the way her words made everything else fade away.

Diana wasn't like anyone I had met before. She was different.

I remember the first time she really made me laugh. It was something so small, so ridiculous, but I lost it. I was sitting at my desk, chuckling like an idiot, barely able to catch my breath. I tried to play it cool, tried to pretend it wasn't that funny, but inside, I felt something shift.

With Margaret, things were comfortable. Predictable. There was no spark, no real surprises. But with Diana, it was like every conversation was a new discovery. She challenged me in ways I didn't know I needed to be challenged. She made me feel *alive*.

And that was the moment I realized I was in trouble.

I hated myself for it. For laughing too much, for letting her into my head, for enjoying every second of it when I should've been focused on my girlfriend. I wasn't a bad person. I wasn't. But this...this was different.

Diana and I stayed up late texting for hours, our conversations growing deeper, more personal. It wasn't just small talk anymore. We talked about our dreams, our regrets, the things we kept hidden away in the darkest corners of our minds.

I couldn't help myself.

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## Chapter -3

— Diana —

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By late September, it became impossible to ignore the truth. Nicholas and I had crossed some invisible line, and neither of us seemed able to pull back. Our conversations were no longer just playful; they had grown intimate, raw, even desperate at times. It felt like we were hanging on by a thread.

I remember the first time I thought about how deeply I felt for him. It wasn't just his words anymore, or the way he understood me in a way no one else did. It was everything. The way he made me laugh, the way he made me feel safe even in the middle of my own chaotic thoughts, the way his messages lit up my phone every night and made me feel like someone was there, *really* there, for me.

I never meant for it to get this far. I had tried to ignore the pull between us, telling myself that it was just a friendship, that it didn't mean anything. But it did. It meant everything.

And so, on the night of September 24th, I made the decision to tell him how I felt. But it was too late since this message appeared on my phone:

*I love talking to you, I never feel like stopping. I like the way you smile. Your loving, caring, and funny vibes... they're amazing. Your sympathizing nature. Our matching interests. Your intellect, the way you easily understand me. Your gorgeous and cute face. I feel incomplete without you. I just love staying with you Diana. That's all I gotta say... after this one... Oh boy here we go again I think I'm... in... uh idk how to say this I think I'm in love with you. And I can't help it. Think about it. I don't want you to be unhappy."*

I stared at the message, my heart thumping in my chest, the words blurring before my eyes.

I couldn't breathe.

I hadn't expected it. I hadn't even known how to prepare for it. But in that moment, I realized that I felt the same. I loved him.

It wasn't the way I had imagined love to be. It wasn't perfect or smooth or easy. It was messy and raw, full of uncertainty and confusion. But it was real.

I didn't have to say anything at first. The silence between us was thick with understanding, and when I finally responded, my heart was in my throat. *"I love you too."*

It felt dangerous to say, to acknowledge. But the truth was undeniable. I had fallen for him. And there was no turning back.

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## Chapter -4

*— Nicholas —*

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The moment I told Diana how I felt was the most terrifying one of my life. I had been carrying that secret for weeks, each day becoming heavier than the last, until I couldn't bear it anymore.

The truth was simple. I was in love with her. And I couldn't keep pretending I wasn't.

But telling Margaret was anything but simple.

She had been my girlfriend for a month, and breaking her heart was something I never thought I'd have to do. I had never imagined that I would choose someone else. I had never imagined that someone like Diana would even exist.

But she did. And I couldn't ignore it.

I told Margaret the truth. I told her that I was falling for someone else, and I could see the shock in her eyes, the hurt, the disbelief. She asked me why, but I couldn't give her an answer that wouldn't make everything worse. How could I explain to her that I was in love with someone else? That someone else made me feel *alive* in a way she never could?

It was painful. And as I watched her cry, I hated myself for it.

But even in the middle of the heartache, there was a flicker of something else - a relief, a quiet sense of freedom. When I saw Diana for the first time in person, standing there with her shy smile and sparkling eyes, I knew I had made the right choice.

Her presence made everything else fade away. The awkwardness between us melted within minutes, replaced by something effortless, something natural. It was as if we had known each other forever, as if we were always meant to be together.

And for the first time in my life, I felt like I was exactly where I was supposed to be.

But even as I held her hand, as I looked into her eyes, I knew things would never be simple again.

Falling in love with Diana felt like stepping into a dream I didn't want to wake up from.

But with every beautiful moment we shared, there was a whisper of something heavier - guilt, doubt, and the nagging feeling that we were hurtling toward something we couldn't control.

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## Chapter -5

– Diana –

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When Nicholas told me he'd broken up with Margaret, I didn't know how to feel. Relief? Guilt? Joy? It was a mixture of emotions, all tangled up in a knot I couldn't untangle.

He called me that evening,, his voice soft but tinged with something heavier - regret, maybe, or exhaustion. "It's done," he said.

I didn't ask for details. I didn't need to. Instead, I just whispered, "Are you okay?"

There was a pause on the other end of the line, and then a sigh. "I think so. I mean...I don't know. It was the right thing to do, but it still sucks, you know?"

I nodded, even though he couldn't see me. "Yeah. I know."

And I did. I knew what it was like to make a choice that felt right but still left you aching inside.

After that, something shifted between us. It wasn't just words on a screen anymore, or late-night calls that left us both groggy in the morning. It was real. Tangible.

The first time we met in person at school, it felt like stepping into a dream, his hair was messier, his smile even brighter. We were both shy at first, unsure how to bridge the gap between the digital world we'd shared and the reality of standing face-to-face.

But as the day went on, that awkwardness melted away, replaced by something warm and familiar. He held my hand for the first time that day, his fingers threading through mine like it was the most natural thing in the world.

And at that moment, I thought maybe we could be happy. Maybe we could make this work.

But nothing is ever that simple, is it?

There were cracks in our perfect world - cracks I refused to see at first. I didn't want to see them. I didn't want to acknowledge the shadows creeping in at the edges of our happiness. One of those shadows was Neal.

Neal had been my best friend for months. The kind of friend who knows all your secrets, who remembers the small, silly things you thought you'd forgotten. He was overly protective, always looking out for me, always ready to call out anyone who hurt me. And he hated Nicholas.

They would never admit it outright, but the tension between them was thick enough to choke on. Neal didn't trust Nicholas, and Nicholas resented Neal for being such a constant presence in my life. The two of them were like fire and gasoline, always one spark away from an explosion.

The arguments started small - mocking remarks, barely covered insults disguised as jokes. But it didn't take long for things to escalate. Nicholas accused Neal of being intrusive, of trying to sabotage our relationship. Neal, in turn, warned me about Nicholas, telling me he wasn't as perfect as he seemed. I hated being caught in the middle, hated the way they both looked at me like I was supposed to choose.

And then, one day, Neal was gone.

He didn't give me much warning. He had decided to move to Abu Dhabi. He said it was an opportunity they couldn't pass up, that it was for the best. But I could see the sadness in his eyes, the way his voice hesitated when he said goodbye.

Neal leaving felt like losing a part of myself, like a chapter of my life had been torn away. But it also brought a strange sense of relief. Without Neal around, I thought maybe Nicholas and I could finally move past the tension, the arguments, the doubts.

But Neal's absence didn't fix things. If anything, it made them worse.

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## Chapter -6

*- Diana -*

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Love can feel like drowning. That's what I realized when the fights started. We were in a cycle, each day feeling like it was meant to be better than the last, but nothing ever seemed to fix the cracks that had formed between us. The small misunderstandings would always snowball, until they became these massive arguments that neither of us knew how to stop.

At first, I could make excuses for him - he was stressed, tired, distracted by things I couldn't understand. And I'd forgive him. He would apologize, tell me he was sorry for snapping, for saying things he didn't mean, and I'd melt because that's what I wanted to believe - that he was still the person who adored me and made me feel like I was his world.

But then the apologies started to feel like empty promises. Like someone trying to fill a bottomless pit with sand. Words no longer held the same weight they once did, and I could feel the distance between us growing.

It was during one of those nights - one of those awkward silences that stretched on far too long - that I could sense something changing. Nicholas had been acting distant for days. No messages, no funny memes, no late-night calls. Just an emptiness that seemed to grow with each passing hour.

I wanted to reach out, but part of me didn't know how to. How do you fix something when both of you are standing at opposite ends, too proud, too hurt to reach out first?

And then it happened. He was sitting in his room, the soft hum of his computer the only sound between us. He was switching his tabs, not looking at me, and I felt the words rise in my throat, the ones I had been holding back for days.

"Why are you acting like this?" I asked, trying to keep my voice steady. But even as the question left my lips, the hurt that I wasn't brave enough to admit.

He looked up at me, his face twisted with frustration. "I can't do this anymore, Diana." His voice was cold, like something inside him had snapped. "I swear, I never want to see you again."

Those words hit me like a punch to the gut. It wasn't the first time we'd fought, but it was the first time the fight felt final. His eyes were hard - no apology, no warmth. Just raw, unfiltered anger. I wanted to scream, to ask him why, to beg him to take it back.

"I never want to see you again." He repeated it, almost like a command, and I knew, in that moment, that it was over.

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## Chapter -7

*– Diana –*

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The days after that were unbearable. I told myself I hated him, told myself I was better off without him. I had to believe it, didn't I? I couldn't let myself go back to him, not after everything we'd been through. Not after he'd so easily discarded me.

But then, I'd see him.

I'd see him walking down the hallways at school, laughing with friends, his eyes alive in a way I couldn't quite explain. And the familiar ache would spread through my chest, reminding me that he wasn't some distant memory I could easily forget. He was right there, so close, yet so far away. It was like I could still feel his presence, like he was somehow tied to me even though I had no idea what we were anymore.

I hated myself for it. I hated that, despite everything, I couldn't move on.

Every time I saw him, that voice in my head would scream at me to stop. To just let go. I had to be strong, had to remind myself that this was for the best. But my heart wouldn't listen. It couldn't. How do you let go of someone who's buried themselves so deeply in you that you can't tell where they end and you begin?

We were tangled in a web of hurt and unspoken words. I wanted to hate him, but I couldn't. I wanted to walk away, but I didn't know how.

And then, it was like everything around me started to break down too. Friends turned into strangers. I started pulling away from the world, hiding behind the walls I'd built up around myself. The silence between Nicholas and I wasn't just in our conversations - it was in everything. It was in the way I'd avoid his gaze in the hallway, the way I walked away whenever he talked to my friends, even though I longed to hear his voice again.

But every time I picked up the phone to text him, I would stop myself. I couldn't be the one to reach out. I couldn't be the one to make the first move.

I was angry. Angry at him, angry at myself. How do you fix something that isn't broken, just...lost?

The answer was never clear, not even when I saw him again. That's when I realized - what we had wasn't something you could fix. It wasn't something you could just snap back together. It wasn't something that could be saved. It was just gone.

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## Chapter -8

*— Nicholas —*

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It was strange how everything shifted so suddenly. One moment, Diana and I were two people in love, tangled up in each other's worlds, finding comfort in the smallest gestures - a text message at the end of a long day, the shared music playlists, the inside jokes only we understood. And then...it all started to untangle. I should've seen it coming, should've known that we were drifting, but I didn't. I couldn't.

At first, it was the little things. A word here, a glance there. Nothing serious, nothing that made me pause long enough to realize something was wrong. I kept telling myself that it was just a rough patch, that this was what love was - ups and downs, moments where you weren't as in sync as before.

But then the fights began. At first, they were just stupid disagreements - about how we were spending our time, about silly misunderstandings that shouldn't have mattered. We'd talk it out, apologize, and move on. But then...the arguments started to feel different. More intense. More pointed.

Diana was still the same - beautiful, funny, the one who made me feel like everything mattered. But she wasn't the same, not really. I saw the change in her eyes, the way she withdrew little by little. At times, she seemed like she was standing just out of reach, like I could never fully catch her. And I didn't know how to fix it.

I couldn't understand why I was pushing her away. Maybe I was scared. Maybe I was terrified that the person I'd put so much of myself into was slipping through my fingers, and I didn't know how to stop it. I told myself that I was just stressed - school, the pressure to be perfect, to be everything everyone expected of me. But when Diana looked at me, her face full of worry, I knew it wasn't just that.

I was losing her.

And I hated myself for it.

I tried to fix it, tried to do all the right things. I wrote her poems, tried to be there for her in the way I knew she needed, but somehow it was never enough. The more I tried, the more I felt like I was losing her bit by bit. Her smile didn't reach her eyes the way it used to. Her laugh sounded forced, not as genuine as it once was.

I knew I was breaking her, even if she never said it.

And then came the night we couldn't ignore it anymore.

I remember the words we said to each other - words I never thought I'd say. I didn't mean them. I couldn't have. But they spilled out of me, a mix of frustration, anger, and the overwhelming fear of losing her.

"I swear, Diana," I snapped, my voice too harsh, too cold. "I never want to see you again."

The silence that followed was deafening. It wasn't the silence that came after a normal fight. It wasn't the kind where you needed a moment to breathe and then came back together. No, this silence felt final. It felt like something had broken that couldn't be fixed.

She sat there, her face pale, eyes wide with shock, and I saw the moment she knew. I was no longer the person who made her feel safe, the one she could trust. I was just another person who had let her down.

I saw her go silent. Her lips trembled, and I could almost hear her thoughts in the stillness of the room. She wanted to say something. I wanted to beg her to stay. But the words wouldn't come.

And then, she left.

The anger that had burned up in me disappeared in an instant, replaced by something colder. Something darker - Regret.

It came crashing over me, suffocating me in ways I wasn't prepared for. I thought I could handle losing her. I thought that maybe this was what we both needed. Space. Time apart.

But nothing in the world had prepared me for the weight of her absence.

And I knew, deep down, that it was my fault.

I had pushed her to the edge, made her feel like I wasn't the person she thought I was, and now she was gone.

It was the worst thing I had ever done.

But the worst part wasn't even the loss. It wasn't even that I had hurt her. It was that I didn't know how to fix it.

I couldn't take back what I'd said. I couldn't erase the damage I had caused. And now, all I had was the memory of her smile, the warmth of her touch, and the deep ache of knowing I had destroyed it all.

I could try to move on, try to convince myself that everything would be okay, but I knew the truth. There was no moving on from Diana. There was no moving on from what we had.

And the worst part was - she probably wasn't even thinking about me anymore.

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## Chapter -9

*– Nicholas –*

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I thought I'd be relieved after everything. After the fight. After the words I said, the things I couldn't take back. But the truth was, I wasn't. Not really. Relief wasn't what came next. It was an aching emptiness that settled deep in my chest, a weight I couldn't shake.

I should've known the moment Diana left that things would never be the same. Her eyes, filled with pain, her face twisted in a way that shattered me more than I wanted to admit. But I couldn't stop. I couldn't undo what I'd said. And I couldn't stop myself from watching her walk out the door, knowing that, for once, I had pushed her away.

For days, I tried to ignore it. That the fight had been inevitable - that we had reached a point where neither of us could keep pretending everything was fine. But every time I closed my eyes, I saw her face, saw the hurt I'd caused her, and I wanted to scream.

There were moments when I thought I'd done the right thing. I had to move on, right? I couldn't just keep going in circles with her, couldn't keep letting her be the one thing I was holding onto when I knew deep down that we were drowning in something neither of us could fix. We were broken.

I tried to convince myself that I was better off. That I was saving us both from the inevitable heartbreak. But I couldn't fool myself. There was no relief in leaving her behind. I didn't feel free, I didn't feel strong. I just felt lost.

I saw her a few days later. She was sitting alone in her class, her face a little softer than I remembered. She was laughing with a few friends, her smile didn't look the same, but there was a distance in her eyes that made my stomach turn. She wasn't the same, and neither was I.

I wanted to walk over to her, to tell her everything I hadn't been able to say when she left. But I didn't. I couldn't. There was too much pride, too much hurt, too much history between us. We'd gone too far for me to just undo it all with a few words.

So I watched from a distance.

The silence between us stretched on. It wasn't just the space between us in the halls; it was in every room, every conversation, every moment when I caught myself looking at her and wondering what it would be like if I just...let go of the anger, the pride, the things I told myself mattered more than her.

But every time I saw her, that feeling in my chest only grew worse. The anger I thought I felt toward her wasn't real. It was just my own guilt and confusion, wrapped up in a layer of self-doubt.

I couldn't deny the truth anymore. I was wrong. I was the one who had screwed things up. I was the one who had pushed her away, even when all I wanted was to pull her closer.

Every night, I lay in bed, staring at the ceiling, wondering if she was thinking about me too. I didn't know if she was hurting the way I was or if she had already moved on. I didn't even know if she ever wanted to see me again.

But I couldn't let go of her. Not really.

I told myself I hated her. I told myself I was fine, that it didn't matter anymore. But every time I saw her in the hall, or heard her laugh in the distance, I felt that tug, that ache I couldn't get rid of. And I hated myself for it. I hated that I had ruined something that had once felt so simple, so beautiful.

I had made her a part of me, and now that she was gone, I didn't know who I was anymore.

I tried to focus on everything else. School. Friends. Studies. Anything that could fill the empty space she had left in me. But nothing worked. Nothing mattered.

I couldn't fix it. I couldn't fix us. But I couldn't let her go either.

And as much as I tried to ignore it, I knew. I knew I had made a mistake.

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## Chapter -10

*— Nicholas —*

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The music blasted through the speakers, an endless loop of songs no one cared about, just background noise to fill the void of a room full of people who would rather be anywhere else. I hated these parties. They were always the same - forced smiles, awkward small talk, and that whisper of tension in the air, like everyone was just waiting for the day to end.

I wasn't sure why I came today. Maybe it was because it was a school party, and it felt like I should be there, or maybe it was because part of me was hoping to see Diana - the one person who always made the world feel a little bit lighter. Even if things between us had been...off, lately.

I walked into the usual crowd there - half of them looking bored, the other half pretending to care. I could already tell who was pretending. The classmates laughed a little too loudly, trying to get attention. It was all so fake. And the boys were busy playing with the balloons. It was all so boring, it just didn't feel like it.

But then I saw her.

She was standing near the music table, her back slightly turned, talking to some friend who seemed to be talking about their latest crush. Diana. Even from across the room, I could spot her in a crowd. She had that way of standing, like she was always just a little bit lost in her own world. She didn't belong here. She never had.

My heart did that stupid thing where it flipped in my chest, like it had been holding its breath, and now it was exhaling in relief. But relief wasn't the right word for it. There was something else - something heavy, something more complicated.

She caught sight of me, and for a split second, the world stopped. Her gaze locked onto mine, and I saw that familiar mix of emotions flicker in her eyes - surprise, uncertainty, maybe even a little bit of hope. But there was something else there too. Something guarded, something that wasn't there before.

I stood frozen for a second, trying to work out what to do next. Should I walk over to her? Should I say something? The distance between us felt like miles, even though we were standing only a few feet apart. And at that moment, I couldn't tell if I wanted to bridge the gap or keep the space between us.

Before I knew it, I was moving toward her, drawn like a magnet despite myself. I knew it wasn't a good idea. I knew things had been strained between us for weeks now, and yet, every step I took brought me closer to her.

When I finally reached her, I noticed how stiff she was, like she was holding her breath too. Her smile, the one she used to give me without thinking, was now a little too careful, a little too rehearsed. It didn't quite reach her eyes. It felt...wrong.

We exchanged the usual pleasantries. "How's school? How's family?" Questions that used to be full of meaning, full of warmth, but now, they were just words to fill the empty space between us.

"So... anything exciting going on in life?" I asked, trying to break the silence, trying to pretend like I didn't feel the tension between us. I meant to sound casual, but my voice betrayed me. The words came out with a thin layer of desperation. Like I was hoping she'd say something—*anything*—to make things feel normal again.

Her laugh was short, hollow. "Not really," she said with a shrug. "It's mediocre, and you?"

I didn't miss the way her eyes flicked away from mine when she said it. Mediocre. That was how she saw her life now. The way she saw us, maybe. I hated it. Hated the fact that I couldn't fix it, couldn't make it right again.

I tried to smile, but it didn't feel real. "Yeah, same here. Mediocre. Just... same old."

There was a pause, a heavy, uncomfortable silence that neither of us knew how to fill. We were standing side by side, but it felt like we were oceans apart. I could feel the weight of the words we hadn't said, the things that had been left unspoken between us for weeks. And with every second that ticked by, I could feel the space between us growing.

Her smile faded again as she glanced over at me, as if she knew exactly what I was thinking. She looked down at her phone, her fingers absently tapping at the screen, anything to avoid the weight of the silence between us. And I hated that. I hated how everything had become this... awkward game of avoidance, of pretending things were okay when they weren't.

I wanted to reach out. I wanted to tell her everything - tell her how much I missed her, how I was drowning in regret, how I didn't know how to fix what we had broken. But I couldn't. The words felt like they were stuck in my throat, tangled in the mess of my own feelings.

But neither of us knew how to fix it. We were too scared to take the first step. And so we stayed there, two people who had once been everything to each other, now standing in a room full of people, but completely alone.

The party was dragging on, the music a blur of songs that no one really cared about. The kind of night where everyone's body was present, but their minds were elsewhere, scrolling through their phones, engaging in pointless chatter, as though we were all just waiting for something, anything, to make the day memorable.

I stood near the music table, pretending to listen to a friend rambling about her latest crush, but my mind wasn't in the conversation. It couldn't be. It was still caught in the web of what had happened between me and Nicholas. Between the silence, the words unsaid, and the things that kept growing between us like an ever-present shadow.

And then, I saw him.

My heart stopped for just a moment as I turned my head and locked eyes with him across the room. It wasn't like before - the easy smile, the knowing glance that used to pass between us. No. This was different. This was a look that was full of... something I couldn't quite place. Hurt? Longing? Maybe both. It made my stomach twist in ways I hadn't expected.

His gaze held mine for a beat too long, and I felt the familiar pull in my chest. I wanted to go to him, to close the distance, to talk, to figure out what had happened to us. But there was something in the air, something unsaid between us that kept me rooted to the spot. A wall neither of us was willing to tear down.

He started walking toward me, and every step felt like it was dragging me closer to something I wasn't sure I was ready for. By the time he stood in front of me, I could feel the weight of the entire room around us. It was like we were the only two people in the world, and everything else had faded into the background.

We exchanged small talk. The kind of questions people ask when they don't know what else to say. "How's school? How's family?" The words were empty, hollow, and yet we said them anyway, as if somehow, they could patch up the distance that had formed between us.

"So... anything exciting going on in life?" Nicholas asked, his voice low, but I could hear the desperation in it. I tried to ignore it, tried to sound casual, to convince myself that I was okay.

"Not really," I answered with a shrug, even though I knew it was a lie. My life wasn't the same anymore. It wasn't the way it used to be when I could count on him, when everything felt easy. Now, everything felt fractured, like pieces of me were falling apart and I didn't know how to stop it. "It's mediocre, and you?" I asked, my voice distant. I didn't want him to know how much I was struggling, how much I missed him.

But even as I said it, I realized how much we had changed. I wasn't just telling him that my life was boring; I was admitting that without him, everything felt empty. My heart felt like it had a hole in it, a hole that only he had ever been able to fill.

Nicholas's smile, the one he used to flash at me without hesitation, was now gone. It was like he didn't know how to smile around me anymore. He nodded, but I could see the weariness in his eyes. "Yeah, same here. Mediocre. Just... same old."

We fell into silence, standing side by side, but we were a world apart. I could feel the air between us, thick with all the words we hadn't said, with the emotions we hadn't expressed. I didn't know how to fill the space. I didn't know how to make everything feel right again.

I looked at him, really looked at him, and felt my chest tighten. It was strange, the way everything felt so wrong, and yet I could still feel the pull, the connection between us. But it was different now. It was tangled, broken in ways I didn't know how to fix.

I wanted to reach out to him, wanted to tell him that I missed him. That I hated this - hated the silence, hated the distance between us. But the words caught in my throat, trapped behind the walls I had built around myself. I wasn't sure if he felt the same way anymore. How could he? After everything we'd been through, after all the arguments, the hurt?

So I did nothing. I stayed still, pretending that I was okay, pretending that I didn't care. But every time I glanced at him, I saw the same ache reflected in his eyes. I knew he was feeling it too.

The distance between us didn't feel right. Nothing felt right. Nothing felt real anymore. The world, even with all its bright moments, felt dimmer without him by my side. Without us. And as we stood there in that crowded room, surrounded by people who couldn't possibly understand what was going on between us, I realized just how much I had lost.

But I didn't know how to get it back.

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In the end, we became strangers. Not in the way you'd think, though. It wasn't as simple as just walking away from each other. No, we were still connected in a way that was almost haunting, like two people who had once shared everything but now barely knew how to talk to each other. We knew each other's deepest secrets, the kind of things you'd never share with anyone else, and yet, it was as if none of that mattered anymore.

We had built something together - a world where we were the center, where everything revolved around us. And now, looking at what remained, all I saw were the ruins of what could have been. What should have been.

There were times, in the silence between us, when I thought maybe we could fix things. Maybe we could go back to how we were before. But deep down, I knew that wasn't possible. We'd crossed a line that couldn't be uncrossed. We'd said things to each other that couldn't be unsaid. The love we once had, the one that felt unbreakable, had turned brittle over time, splintered into pieces neither of us knew how to put together again.

I kept telling myself that I didn't want her back - that what we had was gone, that I was better off without her. But it was a lie, one I told myself over and over until I almost believed it. Because, even now, I could still feel her. Her absence gnawed at me like a phantom pain, an ache I couldn't shake no matter how hard I tried. It wasn't about missing her in the way you miss someone who's gone; it was the way you miss something that was once your whole world and then suddenly isn't anymore.

Watching her across the room today, her smile lighting up her face as she laughed with someone else, it hit me harder than I'd expected. I wasn't prepared for it. I wasn't prepared for the jealousy that rushed through me or the bitterness that crawled into my chest, settling there like a poison I couldn't rid myself of.

It felt wrong. Selfish, even. If I had truly moved on, I wouldn't care. I wouldn't feel like my chest was collapsing every time she looked at someone else the way she used to look at me. I had no right to feel this way, and yet, there it was. That haunting ache that said everything I had convinced myself was true wasn't.

She was moving on. That was the hardest part to swallow. Seeing her talk and laugh with someone else, watching her live her life without me in it, was harder than I thought it would be. I had convinced myself that I was the one she couldn't forget, that no one else could leave a mark on her like I had. But tonight, seeing her so effortlessly happy with someone else, I had to confront the reality I'd been avoiding: she was learning to live without me. And that was something I wasn't prepared for.

I had tried to convince myself that I was done - that we were done. But seeing her like that, so free, so unburdened, it made everything feel... final. And I wasn't ready for that. I wasn't ready to

accept that the person I once thought would always be by my side was now living a life I no longer had a part in.

I watched her, unable to look away, as she moved through the crowd, laughing, carefree. And I couldn't help but feel like I was standing on the outside of something I used to belong to. It was like watching a dream slip further and further away, something I could no longer reach, no matter how much I wanted to.

We'd had it all, once. A love that seemed endless. But somewhere along the way, it slipped through our fingers, and now all I had were memories - fragments of a life that was no longer mine.

And as much as I hated it, I couldn't escape the truth: I would never be the same again. Neither of us would.

So, as I stood there, watching her smile at someone else, I realized something I wasn't ready to admit: I didn't want it to be over. Not really. I didn't want her to move on, to find someone else who could make her laugh the way I once did. But I also knew I had no right to stop her, no right to demand a place in her life that I had lost the right to occupy.

The truth is, I couldn't bear the thought of her forgetting me. But maybe, in some twisted way, that was exactly what she needed to do. She had to move forward. And me? I had to let her go.

I turned away, swallowing the lump in my throat, but the truth kept echoing in my mind: Diana was gone. And I was left with nothing but the memories of a love that had once burned bright, now fading into the past.

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— Diana —

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In the end, we were nothing more than ghosts to each other. We had once been everything, two souls intertwined in a way that *felt* destined, but now? Now we were strangers who knew each other's deepest fears and desires, each other's flaws and secrets, but it no longer mattered. Our love had become a distant memory, something too painful to revisit, but too precious to forget.

I don't think I realized how much I had let Nicholas into my life until he was gone. Until the weight of him, the force of him, no longer anchored me. When we were together, I thought nothing could break us. He was my safe place, my constant. But then everything changed. The fights, the distance, the silence. I thought I was strong enough to live without him.

I was wrong.

It's strange, isn't it? How something that once felt so real, so invincible, can crumble so easily. Like a sandcastle built on a shore, destined to be washed away by the tide. I had told myself over and over that I was better off without him. That we were both better off. But now, standing here, watching him across the room, I wasn't so sure.

He looked different. It wasn't just the way he stood, his posture a little off, or the way his eyes seemed duller than I remembered. It was more than that - it was the way he looked at me. That emptiness in his gaze, that ache in his eyes. He was pretending, like I was. Like neither of us knew the truth.

When I saw him walk in, I had to stop myself from running over to him, from collapsing into his arms like I used to. I wanted to. I wanted to just forget everything - the fights, the words we'd exchanged, the way we'd hurt each other. I wanted to close my eyes and pretend that everything was how it used to be.

But I couldn't. Because I knew that wasn't the truth anymore.

Instead, we stood there, across the room from each other, pretending we didn't feel the pull, pretending that we didn't still care. It was like we were trapped in some kind of cruel joke. I could see it in the way he was looking at me, the way his eyes would flicker with something - something that felt like pain. And I knew I was doing the same thing.

He had always been so easy to talk to, so easy to fall into. But now, every word felt strained, rehearsed. We both knew there was so much more we wanted to say, but neither of us knew how to say it. How to bridge the gap between who we had been and who we were now.

We were both lying. The truth was that without him, everything felt mediocre. The laughs I shared with other people didn't reach my eyes. The accomplishments I was so proud of felt hollow without his approval, his smile.

It wasn't just him - it was everything we had been. And I wasn't sure who I was without that.

But even as we spoke in that cold, detached way, I could feel it - the ache in my chest. The part of me that still wanted him. The part of me that still loved him, despite everything. That was the hardest part. I had spent months telling myself I was better off, that I was moving on, that I was free. But standing there with him, feeling the space between us stretch, I knew it was a lie.

I missed him. I missed him in a way that was too deep to explain, too raw to admit. But I also knew that I couldn't go back. Not after everything that had happened.

And that was the hardest part of all.

Watching him with someone else, laughing, living, moving on - it was like a knife to my chest. A quiet, painful reminder that I had lost him. That he was learning to live without me. I had always imagined that if I ever saw him with someone else, I would feel angry, betrayed even. But the truth was, I felt empty. Like a part of me had been ripped away and no amount of time could fill the hole.

I kept telling myself it was for the best. That we were both better off apart. But deep down, I knew the truth. He was still a part of me. A part of my past that I could never erase, no matter how hard I tried.

We had built something beautiful, something that felt like it could last forever. But forever had an expiration date, and I hadn't been prepared for it to end.

The worst part? He had moved on. And I was left standing there, trying to figure out who I was without him. The funny thing about love is that it makes you feel like you can conquer the world. But when it's gone? It leaves you with nothing but the echoes of what once was.

I watched him disappear into the crowd, trying to lose myself in the noise and the people. But no matter where I went, I couldn't escape him. I couldn't escape the memory of us, the way we had been, and the way we would never be again.

We were both ghosts now.

And the worst part? We would always haunt each other, even if we never spoke again.

— Diana —

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I didn't turn around when I heard his voice. I couldn't.

It wasn't just the sound of Nicholas calling my name that stopped me. It wasn't even the desperation in his voice, the pleading and breaking that dripped from every word. No, it was the sheer familiarity of it—the way his voice used to be everything to me. The way his words once wrapped around me like a warm blanket, soothing me, holding me. I used to believe that no matter what happened, nothing in the world could hurt us if we were together. That's how strong their bond had been—or how I had believed it to be.

But now? Now, his voice was a weapon. A blade sharp enough to slice through the illusion of their love, and every time he spoke, it was a reminder of how much he had shattered me. It was like hearing a song you once loved, but now felt tainted—every note filled with pain instead of comfort. His voice no longer reassured me; it dragged up every broken promise, every lie, every time he had betrayed my trust and expected me to forgive him as if it was nothing. It was always just “one more chance,” wasn't it? Always “just a misunderstanding.” But no. Not this time. Not anymore.

I could feel the pull, the weight of his presence behind me, but I couldn't bring herself to turn around. I wouldn't.

Each step I took away from him was an act of resistance. A silent protest against the way he had once held my heart and slowly torn it apart. I had given him every piece of myself—every ounce of love, every ounce of trust—and he had crushed it. Bit by bit. It wasn't a sudden explosion that broke me; it was a slow, agonizing erosion of the person I had been before him, and before the pieces of my soul had been scattered across the jagged edges of their relationship.

Each breath I took now, away from him, was an act of defiance against everything he had made her believe. Against the lies. Against the way he had manipulated her emotions. Love shouldn't hurt like this. It shouldn't leave you feeling hollow and empty, not like this.

But when I started to walk away, when the first steps took her further from him, I felt it. That familiar ache. That gnawing emptiness that had always been there, waiting to creep back in whenever he wasn't around. It was the weight in my chest, the heaviness that only he had ever been able to fill. And now, without him, it was just... unbearable.

The days after that moment, after I had walked away, felt like she was moving through a fog. Each one blended into the next. I went through the motions, as if on autopilot, pretending that the world hadn't just shattered beneath her feet. Pretending that she wasn't hollow inside.

I sat through her classes, nodded when people spoke to her, and responded in ways that felt automatic. But none of it mattered. My mind was always somewhere else, always back to that one moment when I had stood before him. When she had trusted him more than anyone else. When she had believed he was the one person who could never hurt her.

And yet, he had.

The words he had spoken replayed in her head like a broken record.

“I regret the day I talked to you.”

“Stay away from me.”

“I don’t give a fuck about you anymore.”

Each time I heard them in her mind, they cut deeper, suffocating me, drowning her in the truth I didn’t want to face. These were the final words. The ones that sealed the door on whatever fragile hope I had been clinging to. But the worst part wasn’t the words themselves. No, it was that I had once believed in them, in *him*, and now she couldn’t even remember what it was that had made her love him in the first place.

There was no room left for hope. There was no room for anything but the silence between the words he had left me with.

Everything was gray now. The world, my life, everything. It all felt distant, like I was watching it all from a place so far away that it no longer mattered. I didn’t care about the people around her, not the way she used to. It was all a blur. Even her friends—Katherine, Matthew, Neal—they could see it. They could see the emptiness in her eyes, the way her smile never quite reached her lips anymore, the way her laughter didn’t have that spark. They knew something was wrong. But they didn’t know how to fix it.

No one could.

Diana knew this truth all too well. No one could fill the hole he had left inside her. Not Katherine, not Matthew, not Neal. Not anyone.

No one had ever made her feel the way he had. No one had ever been able to break her the way he had either. And as much as it hurt, as much as she wanted to scream at him for what he had done, there was a part of her that still wished he’d come back. Still wished he’d hold her again, even if only for a moment, to remind her of what they had been. But that was the cruelest part of it all: she knew he couldn’t fix what had been broken.

Not anymore.

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## Chapter -15

*— Nicholas —*

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I knew what I had done. Every word that came out of my mouth that day, every accusation, was a knife to her heart, and I had driven it in so easily. I didn't want to be that person, but I had become him. The man who tore her apart. The one who, in his selfishness, destroyed something so beautiful.

When I had called out to her, I expected something. Maybe a glance. Maybe a moment of hesitation, some flicker of the person she used to be when she looked at me. But all I got was her back. And that's when I knew. I had lost her for good.

She didn't turn around. She didn't have to. Her silence was more final than any words I could have said.

I didn't deserve her to look at me. After everything I had done, the lies I had told, the promises I had broken—it wasn't my place to ask for anything. But still, the part of me that loved her, the part that used to think that maybe, just maybe, we could fix it all, wanted to believe there was a chance. A moment where we could go back to the way things were. Where we could forgive each other, even after everything.

But no, she walked away.

I watched her take step after step, the distance between us growing with each one. Each step she took away from me felt like a reminder of how far I had fallen. How far I had pushed her away. She was strong—stronger than I had ever given her credit for. She had made it clear that she was done. She wouldn't let me destroy her anymore.

And yet, as I watched her leave, my chest tightened with a feeling I couldn't name. Regret. Guilt. Loss. It all hit me like a tidal wave, but none of it would bring her back. None of it could undo what I had done.

The truth was, I had known from the moment I pushed her away that there would be no turning back.

I don't know how long it's been since that night. The days blur together now, the moments spent counting the seconds until something—anything—could fill the space that Diana had left in my life. But nothing came. Nothing could.

I tried to focus on everything else: school, my friends, hanging out with people who didn't care about the wreckage I was living in. But it didn't matter. My mind always returned to her. Her face.

Her smile. The way she would laugh at something so simple, her eyes sparkling like she had a secret that made everything feel worth it.

But that was gone now. And I was left with this aching void, this emptiness where she used to be. The silence in my life was deafening. The silence between us was unbearable.

Every time I tried to focus on something, her words would echo in my mind.

The worst part wasn't the cruelty in them, though. It wasn't the sharpness that pierced my chest. It was the truth behind them. I *had* broken her. I *had* been the one to make her feel so small, to make her feel worthless. She had trusted me with everything, and I had crushed it all.

And now, there was no fixing it.

And then one day, I saw her again. It wasn't planned, it wasn't anything I expected. I caught a glimpse of her, standing across the room, talking to someone else, laughing.

That laugh.

It was like a punch to the gut.

I thought I had moved on. I thought I was ready to see her, to face the reality of everything we had lost. But when I saw her standing there, so alive, so *happy*—with someone else—it felt like my heart had been ripped from my chest all over again.

I couldn't stop staring at her. How was she able to move on so easily? How could she look at someone else the way she once looked at me? The anger in me was replaced by this strange, suffocating emptiness. It made me sick to my stomach, but I couldn't look away.

She was happy. And part of me hated it. Hated that someone else could make her smile the way I used to. But a bigger part of me, the part I hated most, knew she deserved that. She deserves someone who wouldn't break her. Someone who wouldn't make her feel like she was less than everything.

But I wasn't that person. I never had been.

The truth, the brutal truth, was that Diana was moving on without me. And somehow, that was worse than anything I had ever faced. It was the hardest thing I would ever have to accept.

So, I stood there, watching from a distance, unable to move, unable to speak. Because I knew that no matter how much I wanted to fix things, no matter how badly I wished to take it all back, I couldn't. I had lost her, and that was something I could never change.

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## Chapter -16

— Diana —

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The days after Nicholas and I had gone our separate ways felt like a strange limbo. I went through the motions, pretending like everything was fine, but inside, I was a mess. Every single thing I did—every step I took—felt empty without him. But I had to protect myself. I couldn't just run back to him, to that love that had torn me apart. I couldn't let myself be vulnerable like that again.

But the universe, or maybe fate, had different plans for me.

It was a Thursday afternoon when I got the text. It was from Neal. He had sent me a screenshot of a conversation between him and Nicholas. It wasn't something I had expected.

Nicholas was asking about me, asking how I was doing.

It wasn't like Nicholas to go through Neal to reach out to me. He had always been direct, never hiding behind anyone. But I could see it now, how much he regretted everything. How much he wanted to reach out, but something in him—his pride, his guilt—kept him from doing it. He had sent Neal as an intermediary.

I stared at the message for what felt like hours. A part of me wanted to respond, to tell him that I was still here, still feeling everything he had left me with. But another part of me wanted to slam my phone down and block out the entire world. I wasn't sure what I wanted anymore.

Finally, after agonizing over it, I made my decision. I couldn't keep running from him. I couldn't pretend like the pieces of us didn't matter.

I slipped my phone into my pocket, grabbed my bag, and walked to the basketball court after school. I had no idea what I was doing, or if it would make anything better. I just knew I needed to see him. Needed to know if there was anything left between us.

When I saw him standing there—alone, waiting, hesitant—I took a deep breath and walked up to him.

"Hi," I said, the word coming out too softly, too nervously.

And then, just like that, he smiled.

It wasn't the smile I had expected. It wasn't the smile that had once made me feel like I was the most important person in his world. But it was something. It was enough. It was the first real smile I had seen from him in what felt like years. And it did something to my heart that I wasn't ready for.

We stood there, both of us unsure of what to say, as if all the words that had once come so easily between us were now locked away. We talked about school. We talked about random things. But there was no goal, no clarity. It was just two broken people trying to fill the silence that had settled between them.

But then Matthew showed up. Of course. He always seemed to know when we needed him the most. He wanted us to talk. He wanted the trio of us back. I could see the hope in his eyes, the belief that if we could just have a conversation, it would all be okay again.

Neither of us said much at first, but Matthew's presence felt like a gentle push, a reminder of the bond we had once shared. He said something about the "good old days" when we used to spend hours just hanging out, laughing, and talking without a care in the world.

I think we both wanted to laugh at that. Wanted to believe that we could go back to that. But the weight of everything we had lost hung in the air, too heavy for us to ignore.

As we stood there, talking in circles, I could feel the pull between Nicholas and me, the connection that had never truly died. But something was stopping us. Something was holding us back.

For me, it were the lies. The lies I had told myself to protect my heart. The lies I had told to get through the days without him. I had convinced myself that moving on was the only way. But seeing him there, feeling his presence next to me, made me realize that I hadn't moved on. I hadn't let go.

But for him, it was the insecurity. I could see it in his eyes, the way he looked at me when Matthew mentioned some guy I was talking to in passing. I could see the doubt in his gaze, the fear that I had already found someone else. I wanted to tell him that I hadn't, that no one could replace him. But I didn't. Not yet.

So, we stood there, caught in this endless loop of what could be, but never was. We almost reunited, but something kept us from crossing that line.

We weren't ready. We were too broken, too scared. And somehow, that made everything more painful.

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## Chapter -17

*— Nicholas —*

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I watched as Diana approached me, my heart pounding in my chest. I hadn't expected her to make the first move, but there she was, standing in front of me, her eyes filled with uncertainty. She said "Hi," so quietly that I almost didn't hear it.

But I did hear it. And when she said it, I realized something: I had missed her. More than I could ever put into words.

I smiled, not because everything was okay, but because at that moment, I couldn't help myself. I had missed the way she looked at me, the way we used to talk like we were the only two people in the world.

But then the conversation came. It was awkward. We both danced around the elephant in the room, never really addressing the years of history we had shared. It was like we were strangers who had once been close, and now we were trying to find our way back to each other but didn't know how.

Just when I thought it couldn't get more awkward, Matthew appeared. I could see the relief in his eyes, the way he wanted to fix everything, to get us back to what we had before. I knew he wanted to believe that all it would take was a conversation, that the three of us could go back to our old ways. But I knew better. It wasn't that simple.

I wanted to tell Diana how I still felt. I wanted to reach for her, to tell her that I hadn't moved on, that I was still here, still willing to fight for us. But I couldn't.

I saw the way her eyes flickered when Matthew mentioned that guy she had been hanging out with lately. The way she quickly deflected, the way she acted like it didn't matter, but I saw the way it affected her. I saw the way it affected me.

I wanted to trust her. I wanted to believe that she hadn't found someone else, that she hadn't let me go. But I couldn't shake the fear that she had.

And so, there we were—two people standing in front of each other, wanting more than anything to fix everything, but holding back. Something between us was preventing us from letting go of the past, from giving into the future.

I wanted to reach for her. I wanted to tell her that it could still be us. But I couldn't.

Not yet.

The words were there, but I couldn't speak them.

Neither of us was ready.

And so, we walked away. Almost reunited. Almost whole again.

But not quite.

And I wasn't sure if we ever would be.

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## Chapter -14

*— Diana —*

It was a quiet afternoon when I returned back from school and received an e-mail from a familiar account - I saw his name, a wave of emotion surged through me, and I couldn't stop myself from opening it.

*Subject: Luv U*

Diana,

I've always loved you, but I just wanted to let you know once more. All that has happened in the past three months was unplanned and shouldn't have happened but I just can't imagine living without seeing you everyday. Let's stay in contact. Once again, I love you.

- Nicholas

Diana read the email over and over, trying to process the weight of his words. They brought back a flood of memories—some good, some painful. She thought about the times they shared, the way they had once been inseparable, and how quickly everything had unraveled. But then, she remembered the emptiness in her chest, the pain that had followed his departure, and how it had taken months for her to feel even remotely whole again.

Her heart still thudded painfully when she thought of him, but the sharp edges of the pain had dulled. She had moved forward, in ways she hadn't thought possible. Her friends had been there for her, supporting her through the toughest parts, and slowly, she had rebuilt herself.

But now, this email. It had left her at a crossroads. Diana had no illusions about the past, and she certainly didn't expect him to fix what had been broken. But something in his message, in the vulnerability he showed, made her pause. Was it enough to rekindle what they once had? Or was she merely holding onto the ghost of what could've been?

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