The Offer

Chapter 20

The next morning, Alan surfaced from a deep, restless sleep, his mind still clouded by the haze of a night cut far too short.

Sunlight seeped weakly through the half-closed blinds in his room, casting dusty streaks across the floor littered with scattered clothes and forgotten textbooks.

He groaned as he stretched, his muscles aching like he'd been dragged through a brutal workout, and fumbled blindly on his nightstand for his phone. The screen lit up with a harsh glare that stung his eyes, showing the time: barely seven.



Another day of classes loomed ahead, packed with math equations and droning professors who seemed to suck the life out of everything.

He unlocked it with a lazy thumb swipe, scrolling past the usual notifications—a lab reminder, a group chat from his buddies about some upcoming party—until his eyes snagged on an unexpected name: Rebecah.

What the fuck, Rebecah? he thought immediately, his brow furrowing deep.

And then, like a floodgate bursting open, it all crashed back in a raw, almost tangible rush. The previous evening, which had felt so distant upon waking—like a nightmare shoved to the back of his mind—hit him with chilling clarity.

Her in his apartment, that surreal invasion, the threat lurking like a vicious shadow, the video—fuck, the video. His gut twisted sharply, a sour bile rising in his throat, forcing him to bolt upright on the edge of the bed.

He'd almost forgotten, or at least buried it in some dark recess to get through the night, but now, right at dawn, it all surged again: the blackmail, the manipulation, that clammy betrayal clinging to his skin like chilled sweat.

The messages popped up when he tapped the notification, and he read them with mounting dread, the words etching into his brain like sharp edges: "Come on, a little reminder so you don't forget: reconcile with your sister, and make sure she feels plenty guilty. She needs to realize you're a victim too, and that her own sister didn't back her up when it mattered. The goal is for her to tell you it's not your fault, got it? Once she says that, we move to the next step. "

And the next one, like a final blow: "Oh, and you've got a week max, or the video goes out to everyone. Kisses! "

Alan froze on the screen, his heart thudding heavily in his chest, those mocking emojis hitting like a smug slap.

A week. Fuck, just one week.

He set the phone down on the bed like it scorched him, stood up on autopilot, his legs shaky, and headed to the tiny bathroom in his apartment. As he got ready—mechanical toothbrushing, clothes pulled on without a thought—his mind looped on one thing: that fucking video. Him coming, that raw vulnerability captured in full, laid bare like an open wound. Panic gripped him hard, a deep unease knotting his insides: what if Mom and Dad saw it?

The mere thought drilled into his head, a gut-wrenching revulsion mixed with shame that had him sweating despite the cool morning air. Their disappointed stares, their

unspoken questions, the family bond he'd already cracked without meaning to—all for what? For this lunatic pulling strings like a sadistic puppeteer. Under the shower, hot water pouring over his skin, he tried to pull himself together, drawing in deep breaths to push back the nausea, exhaling slow to quiet the storm in his head.



He ran through his options one by one, like a desperate checklist: tell someone? No fucking way—Rebecah had forbidden it outright, threatening to send the video if he breathed a word, whether to Madison or anyone else. Report this psycho? How? The cops? Hell no—not even worth considering; one wrong move, and it all blew up, the video spreading mercilessly. He kept thinking, soap stinging his eyes without him noticing, hunting for a loophole, an out, but nothing came.

Zero. Just emptiness, and this creeping resignation seeping in like slow poison: fine, he had to find a way to get her forgiveness. Fuck, Madi… what kind of shit have you gotten us into…

The morning lecture blurred by like a haze of static, a jumble of droning voices and slides flickering across the massive auditorium screen. Alan slumped at the back, his spine curved against the unforgiving seat, his pen frozen between his fingers, staring at a blank spot on his empty notebook.

He wasn't absorbing a single thing—not a word about differential equations or the circuit diagrams scrolling past—his mind churning in some distant storm, locked in a relentless cycle: how to earn her forgiveness without it reeking of bullshit, without the whole thing screaming manipulation from a mile away? At the same time, the chill between them gnawed at him deep inside, a nagging itch twisting his guts, like an emptiness swelling with every silent hour.



He wanted things to get better, genuinely—not just for Rebecah and her twisted blackmail, but for them, for that sibling bond that had always been rock-solid before everything spun out of control. Hell, he figured he'd just be straight with her; after all, Madison knew him inside out, she'd see right through any game, she'd get it… or at least, he hoped so, that sharp edge of dread clamping his throat.

He made up his mind to catch her right before her swim practice—that was the sweet spot. He bailed from the lecture hall early, shoving his stuff into his bag with a rough jerk, blowing off the quizzical stare from the guy next to him who muttered, "Hey, dude, don't even think about hitting me up for notes, alright?" without getting a peep back. Madi had her training slot from noon to two; if he didn't want to miss her, he'd better hustle straight over, cutting across campus with hurried strides, the midday sun pounding his neck, cranking up the anxious sweat already dotting his skin.

Outside the campus pool entrance, he waited, leaning against a chipped wall, almost awkward as people streamed by—students in workout gear, rushed professors, bursts of laughter he couldn't join.



He felt raw, exposed, like every passing glance could peel back the chaos in his head. Finally, he spotted Madi, half-dressed for the water, her one-piece suit hugging her toned athletic build under loose shorts, a towel slung around her neck like a makeshift scarf.

She saw him and froze hard—dead in her tracks, her cheeks flooding with a deep crimson that crept up to her ears, her mouth parting but no sound escaping, like the words had jammed right there in her windpipe.

It was Alan who broke the ice, stepping closer with a voice thick and raw that gave away his discomfort, hands jammed in his pockets to hide the shake.

"Madi, listen… I'm sorry, really. I've been wrecked since the other night, fuck, I didn't want us fighting like this, didn't want to embarrass you or… I don't know, screw everything up."



He pushed out a smile, a brittle flicker that never touched his eyes, and dropped his voice lower: “I just want my big sister back, you know? Like before.”

Madison stared at him for a beat, her brows knitting together, a mix of confusion and embarrassment flashing across her flushed face, before she mumbled a curt “Later,” barely audible, and bolted toward the pool without a backward glance, her hurried steps echoing off the concrete like an escape.

Alan stood there, a bit stunned, arms dangling limp, a spike of irritation squeezing his chest—she just blew me off? Fuck, for real?

Later that evening, Alan shoved open the door to the campus gym, hit by that familiar tang of sweat and scorched rubber wrapping around him like a twisted comfort. The fluorescent lights hummed overhead, casting a harsh glow on the rows of dumbbells and the steady drone of treadmills in the background—a mechanical pulse clashing with the storm raging in his skull. Sean was already there, loading up a bar for squats, his soaked T-shirt clinging to his ripped chest, a smirk cracking his face when he spotted Alan heading over.



“Hey, man, you look like the walking dead. Ready to blow off some steam?”

Alan nodded half-heartedly, grabbing a pair of dumbbells to warm up, but he dove in hard right away—fast reps, heavy weights, as if each lift could purge the crap piling up in his brain. Maybe it would clear his head, drown out that nagging frustration eating at him since Madison’s brush-off at the pool.

His muscles were already on fire, a sharp burn that dulled the deeper ache, but a buzz in his pocket yanked him out of it. He dropped the weights with a heavy thud, fished out his phone, and his gut clenched hard: Rebecah. Her again.

The message was straightforward, vicious in its casual cruelty: “So, run into your sister today? ”

He didn’t reply, shoving the thing back with a furious flick, but it was too late—the floodgates had burst. Now it looped endlessly: Madi obviously dodging any real talk, that “later” tossed out like a slammed door.

It pissed him off a little—no, a lot—the way she'd left him hanging, as if he was the only one to blame in this mess. Then, inevitably, his mind circled back to the deadline, that hanging blade: a week… fuck, just a week!

Doubt slammed into him raw, a chill seeping through his veins despite the sweat dripping down his brow. If she kept sulking like this—her usual stubborn streak that could drag on for days, even weeks—he was screwed. Totally.

How the hell was he supposed to make her feel guilty if she wouldn't even hear him out? Sean, who'd clocked his foul mood for a while, set down his bar with a grunt and came over, wiping his forehead with the back of his arm.

"What's eating you up like that? You look ready to smash the equipment."

Alan paused for a beat, then spilled it straight, honest because Sean was the kind of buddy who didn't pry too deep: "It's Madi. She's avoiding me big time, still pissed about… our 'fight.'"



Sean shrugged, a short laugh slipping out.

"Ah… For real, man, I could give you tips on winning back a heart—like flowers, teary apologies, the whole kit for an ex. But for a sister? No clue, fuck. Maybe just… lay it out straight? Or wait it out?"

Alan forced a grin, but the seed took root anyway—not Sean's idea, but something darker, slithering in like poison: rope in someone else, tip the scales without pushing too hard. The thought hit him sharp and scheming, leaving him feeling even dirtier, but he tucked it away for later, powering through the rest of the workout on autopilot, muscles quivering, his head already miles away.

Back at his place, the apartment sunk in a dull gray haze broken only by the fridge's open glow slicing through the dimness, Alan dropped onto the worn couch, phone clutched in his grip. He stalled for ages, thumb hovering over the contacts icon, before finally tapping "Mom."

The ringtone hummed, and when she picked up, her warm voice—laced with surprise, since he rarely called mid-week without some agenda—hit him like a gut punch of everything he stood to lose.

"Alan? Sweetheart, everything okay? You don't usually ring during the week..."

He dialed up a touch of melancholy, forced but believable—starting with small talk: classes dragging him down, a bullshit story about a botched lab, the crap weather on campus. She chuckled softly, tossing back the usual questions, but she was the one who cracked first, picking up on the undercurrent: "Okay, Alan, spill it: is everything really alright? You sound... I don't know, a little down."



He let out a heavy breath, like it weighed on him, and dropped it: "Yeah, well... I got into it with Madi over some stupid shit, and it's eating at me. For real. It's not the end of the world, but... we argued, and now it's total radio silence. I can't shake it."

She jumped right in with sympathy, just like he'd figured—soothing words, mom-advice about family sticking together through the rough patches. He knew calling her would carry weight; she'd mention it to Madison, slip it in casually, and it'd sow that seed of guilt without him lifting a finger. Then hung up after swapping "I love you"s, a twist of shame gnawing at him for dragging his mom into this warped mess, like a pawn on

Rebecah's twisted board. But he didn't have the luxury of time—a week, fuck, and the days were already draining away like blood from a fresh cut.

Three days dragged on like an endless grind, a slow-burning torment chewing away at Alan from the inside, turning every moment into a suffocating wait where time bloated and clung like chilled sweat that wouldn't evaporate.

That first day, a dreary, rain-soaked Tuesday, he wandered the campus like a shadow, staking out Madison at their usual spots—the packed cafeteria at lunch, where he sat alone at their regular table, staring at the door for nothing; she didn't show, clearly skipping group meals, maybe scarfing a quick sandwich in her room or some tucked-away library corner.

His texts hung unanswered, blue bubbles floating in limbo: a "Madi, can we talk?" fired off that morning, chased by a "Please, it's important" in the afternoon, all ghosted, ramping up this insane tightness in his chest, a sour knot rising with every phantom ping.



Usually, when she sulked over some dumb shit, it was standard, almost routine—a couple days of quiet, then a thaw. But this… fuck, this felt different, deeper, like she'd thrown up an unbreakable barrier, and the thought devoured him alive, leaving him wide-eyed that night, staring at the cracked ceiling in his apartment.

The next day, Wednesday, cranked the strain higher; he spotted her from afar in a hallway between classes, bag slung over her shoulder, hustling along with Bella chattering beside her. He picked up speed, heart slamming, but she clocked him and spun sharp, dragging her friend the other way without a glance, such an obvious dodge that it left him rooted there, fists clenched, a scorching irritation twisting his guts.

Still no replies to his messages, not even a read receipt—maybe she was checking them in airplane mode, or deleting them outright, who the hell knew?

The weight built, nasty and unrelenting, killing his appetite at dinner, which he picked at alone in front of a show he barely registered, replaying that call to Mom that hadn't shifted a damn thing, or at least not yet.

He panicked hard that night, a raw dread drilling into his temples, picturing the video leaked, the judging stares, that deadline ticking like a live wire: five days left, but the air already felt thicker, smothering.

Thursday piled on more agony—a sunny day that mocked the mess churning inside Alan, who slogged through lectures absorbing zilch, jotting equations he forgot instantly.

He tried cornering her after her econ class, lounging against a wall like some creep, but she slipped out a side door, dodging the main crowd, and when he shot off one last text—"Madi, please, just answer me"—the radio silence roared on, an emptiness that amplified everything: distant laughs from friends, weekend invites he brushed off vaguely. The strain was brutal now, a crushing load bearing down, making him question it all—what if Mom hadn't called? What if Madison didn't give a shit?

He freaked out for real, an anxiety knotting his stomach nonstop, draining him without effort. He toyed with dropping by her place that evening, a Friday where campus buzzed with weekend vibes, students streaming toward bars and parties like a brutal reminder of his isolation.

He knew she wouldn't hit the scene with the crew—Bella had group-texted about a night out, and Madison bowed out without a word, sealing it all. But he might slam into a wall, a door in his face, or worse, an accusing glare that hurled him back to that hotel night. Alone in his place after classes wrapped, the weekend looming like a void, with just two days ticking down…

Alan called Rebecah on impulse, wired and unthinking, fingers shaking over the screen, heart pounding like he was crossing some forbidden threshold. She picked up after three rings, her voice distracted, almost irritated, with background noise—muffled laughs, upscale music, like she was mid-swanky gathering.

“Rebecah, listen, a week’s impossible, fuck! She won’t hear a word, she’s dodging me like I’m toxic, I’ve tried talking to her, but she—”

Beca barely tuned in, cutting in with half-assed “Mmmh”s that pissed Alan off without recourse—that lopsided power play, him the beggar, the puppet, her the untouchable queen.

He wrapped his plea in a voice spiking with desperation: “I can’t do more, give me time, or tell me how—”

She shut him down cold, her tone flat and careless: “I gave you instructions, Alan. I’m not saying more. Oh, and if you lie—like claiming she forgave you when she didn’t—I’ll know. And I’ll send the video.”

Then she hung up sharp, the click echoing in the apartment’s hush like a verdict.



Alan paced his cramped living room, heavy steps grinding the worn rug, panic crashing over him for real now—a icy surge stealing his breath, the nightmare of that video blasted to everyone, to Madison, his buddies, his parents, a stain that’d haunt him forever.

One last idea hit him, twisted and desperate, freezing him mid-stride: he wavered, thought fuck… no way… oh screw it! He yanked out his phone, started typing, fingers faltering on the screen, crafting a short but loaded message laced with dark undertones to rattle her, force a reaction at last.

“Madi, I’m so sorry for everything that’s happened, I hate myself more than you can imagine. I’m at rock bottom, not sleeping, not eating, obsessing over it day and night… I don’t even deserve to breathe after what I

did. Everything I wrecked between us is unforgivable, and I don't know how to go on with it. Take care of yourself, okay? That's all I've got left to say."

He hit send, chest tight, and thought fuck, I'm such a piece of shit… a sticky guilt swallowing him like a shadow, knowing he'd toed the edge, hinting at that ultimate despair without spelling it out, a veiled farewell screaming urgency for something final, pushing her to break.

A quarter-hour later, frantic pounding echoed at his door, a desperate hammering that jolted Alan despite everything.

He wasn't truly shocked—deep down, he'd expected it, that twisted message engineered to shatter her walls and force a response—but he felt wired, a knot lodged in his throat, his pulse thumping like a dire warning.

He knew exactly who it was; no one else would knock with that raw urgency.

He wouldn't get a second shot, fuck—he had to nail this, play the part full throttle without cracking, twist this manipulation into something that passed for genuine reconciliation.

First, he held off opening, staying dead silent, letting the quiet stretch like an extra layer of torment, his back pressed to the narrow hallway wall, heart slamming wild.

Then, quick as a flash, Madison's voice pierced the wood, screaming, frantic: "Alan! Open up, fuck! Open this door or I'll kick it in!"

He lingered a bit longer, drawing a deep breath to slap on a worn-out, sorrowful mask, before twisting the knob slow.

Madison stood there on his doorstep, tears streaming, her face wrecked by a storm of terror and fury, eyes puffy and bloodshot, hair a wild mess like she'd sprinted straight from her place.

Alan swallowed hard at the sight—that stripped-bare fragility, those sobs wracking her like a lost kid—but he stuck to the script, keeping his expression drained and downcast, shoulders slumped under some unseen crush.



She lunged at him wordless, a furious punch landing on his chest—not hard, but loaded with raw feeling that made him stagger—followed by a frantic hug; she wrapped him tight, crushing against him with a grip that screamed her panic, sobbing into his shirt while cursing him out, words tumbling between gasps: “You asshole! You’re a fucking idiot, Alan! How could you… shit, you’re a bastard!”

Alan didn’t flinch, didn’t fire back, stayed stone-faced, arms dangling loose for a beat before closing around her weakly, letting her tears soak his tee. Hell, he even pulled back a touch, gentle but firm, murmuring low and ragged: “Madi, you’re right… I’m a monster, fuck. I wrecked everything, I—”

It all spiraled fast then; Madison crumpled, her knees buckling, dropping to the threshold on all fours, bawling like an infant, shoulders heaving with jagged sobs, wailing his name in a shattered voice: “Alan! Fuck, Alan…”



He nearly broke character, gutted by the scene—his tough, self-reliant sister reduced to this because of him, because of that vicious text he’d lobbed like an emotional bomb.

Guilt hit him like a gut punch, real this time, not staged, twisting his insides so hard he had to fight not to shatter.

She looked up at him, tears carving paths down her flushed cheeks, and stammered between hitches: “I’m sorry, Alan… Fuck, I’m so sorry. It’s not your fault, none of it—it’s all on me… I started this whole mess, shit.”

Alan shook his head, staying in role, voice quivering: “No, it’s mine, I—” She cut him off sharp, her voice spiking into a hoarse yell, breathless and shaky, words blasting out like she was banishing her own shadows: “We both got played by that witch, Alan. By Rebecah. She’s the one who trapped us in this, manipulated everything with her money and those creepy smiles. You and me, we were just… suckers in her web.”

Madison staggered up unsteady, legs wobbling for a second before hurling herself at Alan again, arms looping around his neck with desperate strength, her body molding to his in a impulsive surge, her breasts pressing soft against his chest through the thin fabric.



“I’m really sorry… Truly,” she whispered into his shoulder, voice muffled by lingering sobs, hot tears still spilling onto his skin.

“I thought you were taking advantage, that you were… in on it or something, but that was stupid. When Mom called and said you sounded rough, I didn’t want to believe it… I was such a jerk, forgive me.”

Alan tightened his hold on instinct, hands sliding down her back, brushing her spine—a reflexive stroke that cranked the underlying unease without her noticing, her scent flooding the space between them.

She eased back a fraction, locking eyes with him, hers glistening with tears, her ragged breaths grazing his lips.

“But don’t you dare hurt yourself, got it? You’re an asshole if you even think about it!”



Alan tried to speak, backing toward the couch for some breathing room, but she clung on, matching his step with a fluid leap. She ended up straddling his lap, thighs spread wide over his, her weight settling against him, a damp heat seeping through their clothes without her registering it. She told him then, voice cracking: “I’m sorry… I acted like I was the only victim, like you were the villain here. But that’s bullshit, fuck. We’re both in this.”

Alan reeled, not just from her words, but from this too-intimate setup, her hips flush with his, face inches away. He finally managed: “Okay, okay! Easy, Madi…”

She sobbed on his lap, hands hiding her face, cries shaking her, Alan trying to soothe with a tentative hand in her hair, whispering

“Shh, it’s alright” that rang hollow in this disturbing closeness, where every breath ramped up the tension without her realizing.

