

Chapter 43

Chapter 43 begins with Don's unexpected apology as he sits down to meet Evelyn. She had already ordered her iced tea and taken a few bites of a sour pickle, thinking that his apology was merely for being late, something that didn't seem necessary.

However, when Don's apology comes with a weight that feels different, it catches her off guard. He is noticeably thinner than before, his pale face showing the marks of a man who has seen better days. Time had not been kind to Don, and the years apart had taken a toll, both physically and emotionally. His once charming appearance, which had always been striking, now had a worn quality, yet there was still something magnetic about him. Even now, his presence seemed to draw attention in a way that only someone with his particular brand of charisma could.

Don begins by telling Evelyn that he's been sober for 256 days, a statement that hits harder than he perhaps anticipated. His confession isn't just about his past mistakes but is a genuine admission of self-awareness. Evelyn, though caught off guard by the depth of his apology, still feels a need to remind him of all the pain he caused her and others. His history of being a cheater, his unkindness, and the emotional toll he took on her—she couldn't let those things be erased by a mere apology. Don takes full responsibility for these actions, acknowledging that he failed her and that he cannot take back what was done. This apology feels genuine, but it's also overwhelming because Evelyn came to him for a professional matter—wanting to discuss working together on a movie, not to revisit the wounds of their past.

The waitress arrives to take their orders, and Evelyn chooses a Reuben sandwich, recognizing that if she's going to engage in a meaningful conversation about Don's apology and what comes next, she needs something substantial to eat. Don orders the same, and as they speak, it becomes clear that the waitress knows exactly who they are. There's a subtle recognition in the way she holds back a smile, trying to remain

professional in front of the famous duo. Once the waitress leaves, Don continues, saying that his apology can't erase the past, but that he's working every day to be a better man, hoping that it brings Evelyn some sense of comfort. But Evelyn, ever practical, responds by saying that being a better man now doesn't make up for the pain he caused. His transformation, though commendable, comes too late to undo the emotional damage, and she is steadfast in her belief that an apology alone doesn't heal the scars.

Don, however, insists that he is committed to changing and not repeating the mistakes of his past. He promises he will never hurt anyone the way he hurt her, or Ruby, again. His words, though earnest, begin to soften Evelyn's hard exterior, if only briefly. Still, she isn't ready to forgive him just yet, and she makes it clear that actions speak louder than words. She reminds him that if things had gone differently in his life—if his career hadn't crashed and burned, if Ari Sullivan hadn't dropped him the way he had orchestrated for her—he might still be living a reckless, unrepentant life. The fact that he was here, apologizing, was the direct result of his fall from grace, and Evelyn was under no illusion about that. He had only come to this place because life had forced him to, not because he had made an effort to change on his own.

Don, sensing her skepticism, shares a deeply personal reflection: that he loved her from the moment he met her. He confesses that his love for her was intense, almost consuming, and that he ruined it by becoming someone he could no longer recognize. The guilt of his actions haunts him, and he wishes he could go back to their wedding day and make things right. This longing for redemption, for a second chance, is something he knows is impossible. But, in this moment, he offers Evelyn the one thing he has left: a sincere apology, delivered from the bottom of his heart. He wants her to know how incredible he believes she is, how great they were together, and how deeply he regrets the way he treated her.

Evelyn listens to him, her emotions conflicted. Part of her is touched by his vulnerability, but another part of her feels a sense of distance. She cannot simply let go of the past and allow this new version of Don to take away the pain that still lingers.

His words, though heartfelt, are not enough to erase the years of hurt, of betrayal, and of abandonment. Still, there is something deeply human in Don's confession, something that makes Evelyn wonder if she is capable of forgiveness. However, she remains guarded, unwilling to trust that the man sitting across from her is truly the man he claims to be now. He is asking for redemption, but it is clear to her that redemption is a long road, and it doesn't come easily.

As the conversation winds down, Evelyn is left with a mixture of emotions. She recognizes that Don has changed, at least on some level, but she also understands that change isn't always enough to undo the past. The journey toward healing is a personal one, and while Don's apology is a step in the right direction, Evelyn knows that it will take more than words to heal the wounds he left behind. She stands firm in her conviction that no matter how much he regrets his actions, the damage cannot be undone by a simple apology. Nonetheless, Evelyn begins to feel a shift within herself, wondering if it's possible to find peace with the past, or if some wounds are simply too deep to ever fully heal.