



Chapter 11: The Past Comes Knocking

ELLIE

"God! Why would you do that?"

"Because only a blind person wouldn't see the sparks between you two when you're in the same place."

"Maybe what you're seeing are sparks of hatred."

"Don't try it; you're forgetting that I went through the same thing."

I looked at Anna, hoping for some help.

"You know I agree with her," she said, making me exhale in frustration.

"What it sounds like is that I'm saying one thing, and you're hearing the exact opposite. Is Bennett the only one who sees this?"

If I told them what happened yesterday and how I felt, they would only see it as another reason to convince me to go out with him.

"Bennett's just worried that you two will hurt each other, and now that it involves work, things get even more complicated. We both know that all too well," Zoe explained.

"I'm not going out with him. So I hope you stop whatever it is you're doing. You both know exactly what happened last time and yet you want to throw me into bed with another bastard."

"Wow! You really think Ethan is that bad?" Zoe asked, frowning.

"I'm sorry; I know he's your family. But we all know the kind of guy he is."

"You're also my family, Ellie, and if I thought he was a monster, I would never want to push you into his arms."

"I don't want anything to do with him. Please understand that I'm not going to give myself to someone who doesn't value me."

"You at least need to try getting to know someone for that to happen. And why not Ethan?"

"Stop it, Zoe. We both know exactly what he wants. He made that very clear five minutes after meeting me."

The waiter approached our table, interrupting us to take our orders.

I needed to remember why I hated Ethan and why I shouldn't get close to him, not dwell on how he made me feel. I should remember what I went through last time; that would bring my my reason back.

At twenty-seven, I had already had my share of detestable men. And my ex—if I could even call him that—that dishonest bastard managed to shatter my heart.

I promised myself that would be the last time. I'd rather spend the rest of my life alone than go through that again.

I always wondered if I was too stupid not to see the signs, but with so many



mixed signals, the blame couldn't be entirely mine.

Men had that problem. The bastards couldn't be honest. They preferred to toy with a woman's feelings to get what they wanted and kept doing it to maintain the sex.

As if we were some kind of spare tire, to be used when needed. Thinking about it made me want to cut that bastard's dick off, and it still made my chest ache.

Todd Lockhart got exactly what he wanted—used me and discarded me as if I meant nothing in his life, even though he had become an important part of mine.

I hated that part of me was still in love with him when all I wanted was to erase every memory of him.

"Ellie?" Anna called my attention, pulling me out of my thoughts. "Do you agree?"

She and Zoe were staring at me.

"Of course," I agreed, having no idea what they were talking about.

The two of them started laughing.

"Good to know you think it's a good idea for Zoe to try to find out more about Ethan."

"Stop pestering me about this."



They weren't going to give up anytime soon.

"What I was saying is that we don't know much about his past, only that he's a workaholic. So I'll try to pry something out of Bennett," Zoe said.

"I don't care. I'm not interested. I'll tell you the same thing I told Anna. If I want to have sex, I can find someone less of a bastard."

"Yes, of course you can. We can see that just by looking at you. But that's not the point. It's about what you two might experience with all that tension."

"It must be mind-blowing sex!" Anna said, making me laugh.

As much as they were annoying me, I knew they genuinely cared.

"If he's even a little bit like his brother, you'll thank me," Zoe winked at me.

"That's enough! I get it, I'm not going to convince you otherwise. So I'll throw the rest of the shit on the fan."

"What are you hiding from us?" Zoe arched a perfectly shaped eyebrow.

"Well, it wasn't intentional... I was just trying to keep us from being seen."

The two of them straightened up, leaning closer to the table to listen.

"Accidentally, I ended up shoving us into a tight closet at the lab."

"Oh my God!" Zoe put her hand over her mouth. "You naughty girl! What did you two do?"



"Nothing much happened. Just... well, I think he got aroused since my ass was pressed against... you know."

"Did you feel his cock?" Zoe asked eagerly, almost euphoric.

"God! Keep your voice down!" I whispered, laughing and looking around to make sure the people at the nearby tables hadn't heard.

"So? What did you think?" Anna asked finally, curiosity gleaming in her eyes.

"Not that it matters..." I shrugged. "I think he has reasons to be that arrogant, after all."

They exchanged glances before sly smiles spread across their faces.

"Sure, and you weren't affected by that at all," Zoe took a sip of her fruity cocktail, giving me a scrutinizing look.

"What do you want? I won't say I don't find him attractive. I'd be lying."

"Oh, Ellie... you should have taken advantage of it. No one would have known. That's the point. You're both adults. You could have enjoyed that body and really found out if he has reasons to be arrogant. You can't live forever afraid that men will use you. Maybe you should start using them."

"Zoe may have just said something that goes against all the principles of what I consider healthy feminism, but she might be a little right," Anna laughed.

"Did he try anything?" Zoe continued.

"What? No! Did you hear when I said we were in the lab? And I would certainly have kicked him in the balls if he had dared to move a muscle," I lied.

I had said enough. I wasn't going to admit that I wished he had moved a lot more than just one muscle.

"Anyway, I don't know where I'll bury my face when I see him next time. I ran out of there, it was extremely embarrassing."

"Oh... I know exactly where Ethan would like you to bury your face," Zoe said, making an obscene gesture with her closed fist, making us laugh.

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The next morning, I was leaving the gym, with another workday ahead of me. I opened my car door before hearing a familiar voice.

"Ellie?"

I felt my stomach churn and my body shudder before forcing myself to turn around. *Yes, it was him.*

"Todd?"

What the hell was he doing here? I thought he was in Italy or hell, didn't matter, I thought I'd never see him again, and I was happy about that.

"It's been a while, hasn't it? You look... great." His dark brown eyes roamed



over my body, making my heart race.

Traitorous body. It took me a moment to notice his new look. His dark brown hair had grown and was now slicked back in a bun. His body looked more toned and fully tanned, dressed in workout clothes.

I tried to push away the memories of his naked body. The bastard was still just as sexy, but the new haircut made him even more charming.

He raised a thick eyebrow, making me notice the mole above it, his trademark. I wanted to punch his perfectly square jaw when he smiled.

"Thanks. You..." I forced a smile. "You look great, too."

You sneaky son of a bitch. I cleared my throat.

"I thought I'd never see you in New York again. What brings you here?"

In truth, I wanted to ask when he was leaving, but I held back.

"Well, I didn't think I'd come back so soon, either. But here I am. And so are you."

What was he trying to say? He was gravely mistaken if he thought he could just come back, and I'd welcome him with open arms.

"Well, I hope you have a great stay." I spun on my heels, ready to get in my car and disappear from there.

"Ellie..." he said, making me inhale and force another smile before turning back around.

"Yes?"

"I hope to see you again. Maybe we can talk. Do you still have the same number?"

I didn't know what to say. I just wanted to tell him to go to hell.

"Yeah. Maybe," I said, feeling my blood boil and my vision blur with anger.

"You must have work to do. I'll let you go. Expect a message from me." He said with a thick Italian accent.

I wasn't going to wait for any fucking thing; I was never going to expect anything from him again. In fact, I was tempted to change my number.

"Goodbye!" I got into my car before he could say anything else.

I took several deep breaths, trying to calm down, gripping the steering wheel until my fingers turned white.

Son of a bitch. Seeing him again made me feel like a fool and brought all those memories rushing back.

If the bastard thought he could waltz back into my life after just abandoning me, he was dead wrong.

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