

Chapter 11. I Love You

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Before I know what I'm doing, I close the distance between us, my breath hitching as our bodies near. I lean in, my heart pounding in my chest, and press my lips against his. Liam's eyes widen, a icker of surprise ashing through them as he backs away slightly. For a moment, panic seizes me—I fear I've made a mistake. But it's just a momentary shock. His eyes soften, and he stiffens brie y before his arms wrap around my waist, pulling me closer with a sense of urgency. He kisses me rst, and I melt into him.

The moment his lips touch mine, a dizzying sensation washes over me. This is so familiar, and I've missed it more than I realised. Why did I ever want to stop this?

His hand weaves into my hair, ngers tangling in the strands as the kiss deepens. My knees grow weak, and I clutch at his shirt, trying to steady myself. His other hand slides beneath my top, sending shivers up my spine. A moan escapes from the back of my throat. In response, his lips leave mine, trailing hot kisses along my jaw before nibbling at my earlobe.

I love the way his hands feel on my body. We stumble toward the kitchen counter, bumping along the way. Liam lifts me onto the counter, and I instinctively wrap my legs around his waist, pulling him closer.

“Cass,” he whispers, his voice husky and breathless. The sound sends shivers down my spine as I cradle the back of his neck, pulling his lips back to mine. “Wow,” he murmurs against my mouth, his warm breath mingling with mine as I slide my tongue into his mouth. He throws his head back, exhaling loudly before he captures my lips again—slowly with such intensity that it drives me crazy.

With a ick of his thumb, he unbuttons my jeans, and I hold my breath for what comes next. His eyes icker to me for approval and I desperately nod. “Yes,” I mumble, gripping his hair between my ngers to drag him back to my lips. “I want you.”

When he kisses me again, the force of it sends me reeling backward, almost hitting my head against the wall. But Liam is quick; his hand shoots out to cushion the blow, and he winces in pain, muttering, “Ow,” before refocusing on what he started. He pulls the zipper down, and I tighten my grip around his neck, my breath hitching. His eyes never leave mine as his hand slips inside, discovering the wetness there. I'm almost dripping, I realise.

“f**k,” he says, his eyes widening in excitement. “You're ready.”

Suddenly, I feel too shy to maintain eye contact. I bury my face in his neck, pulling him closer. “Please, just...” I beg, biting my lip as he teases me, his thumb drawing slow, torturous circles. “Please, Liam.”

I slowly trail my hand down the front of his shirt until I reach the bulge in his pants. He realises what I'm about to do and holds his breaths as his nger slides inside me easily. I gasp, tightening my hand around his neck and with the other grabbing his hard-on.

“f**k, Cassie,” he mumbles, quickening the rhythm he has set with every second that passes. I move my hand slowly though, measuring every movement, while I hold back moans from the intense pleasure he's giving me.

Minutes later, we're on my bed, our clothes forgotten on the oor. His thrusts are slow and teasing, and his lips only leave mine when they close around my n****s.

I've missed this. I've missed him. My body has missed him and now that we're doing this again, it is clearly happy.

When Liam nishes a little too soon, I feel disappointed. Yet, when he slumps down on me, breathing hard—his brain likely imploding within his head—I wrap my arms around him and press my lips against his sweaty cheek. But what he says next, without even realising it, shocks me.

“Cass,” he whispers in my ears. “I love you.”

Everything comes rushing right back to me. And I realise what a f*****g i**** I am to allow this to happen again. I knew he liked me. I knew he wanted more than just to f**k me. He wanted me emotionally, and tonight, by making the rst move, I've stupidly encouraged it.

When Liam rolls off me seconds later, I stay frozen, too shocked to move, too tongue-tied to respond. I wait until his breathing slows before sliding off the bed and into the bathroom.

As the water from the showerhead washes down on me, I curse myself for ever letting him inside the house. I should've told my mom subtly to let him go. I thought I'd control myself but I'd lost it tonight. I'd let my hormones win over me.

How do I face Liam tomorrow? I'm also certain he'll be expecting more from me now. And what was I expecting to come out of this midnight adventure? Was it just to quench my thirst?

Stupid, Cassie. f*****g i****. Always complicating things for herself when life does it enough on its own.

I let my eyes brie y linger on Liam's sleeping gure as I change into fresh clothes and grab a pillow from the bed. I throw a blanket over him on the way out. I can't sleep on this bed with him. I can't.

As I fall back onto the couch in the sleeping room, my mind drifts back to my mother's health. To Evie. They need me. I need to be fully focused on them. I can't have anyone distracting me. Not unless I can avoid it.

Rhys is someone I can't avoid. He will not stop now that he knows about Evie. I'm still not sure what exactly he wants to talk about, and I'm trying hard not to think about it. All I do before I drift off to sleep is type in a short and direct text to him.

Me: Shift at the diner ends at 5pm. Meet me then.