

## Chapter 12. Slamming Doors

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The next morning, the sun peeks through the window in my living room, casting a golden glow over the room. I wake up on the couch, my neck sore and my thoughts still muddled from last night. It's 7 am. I check up on my mother in the downstairs bedroom and nd her sleeping soundly. Over the night, I heard her coughing loudly and roughly, struggling to sleep.

When I open the knob to my bedroom, Liam is still asleep in my bed, looking peaceful, completely unaware of the turmoil inside me. My mind keeps replaying his words, "I love you." I can't shake the feeling of guilt. I don't know how to address it, and part of me doesn't want to. Liam stirs as I'm about to leave, his sleepy eyes nding mine.

"Hey," he says, his voice groggy. "Where are you going?"

"It's morning. I thought you'd be up," I tell him, turning my eyes away from his naked body.

Liam shifts in the bed, yawning. "I did wake up in the middle of the night and found you gone."

"I had some chores," I lie. It's not a convincing one, and I can tell he sees right through it from the way his lips curl in a frown. "I have to go to work," I continue softly. "After I send Evie to school and prep something for lunch. I have things to do. Umm, Liam, I'd prefer if she doesn't see you sleeping in my bed. She likes asking questions."

He shakes his head, sitting up. "What time is it?"

"7 am."

"When does your shift begin?"

"10 am," I respond hesitantly, nding his tone unusual.

"When does it end?" he continues.

"5 pm," I answer, no longer liking this stream of questions.

He gets to his feet and puts his legs through his jeans. "I can get Evie back home from school. Serve lunch to them."

I gape at him, my throat tight. "No, it's okay. The diner is ve minutes away from the school. I'm sure Tim, my manager, won't mind a fteen-minute break. I got it covered," I tell him, my voice determined.

"Are you sure?" he still has the nerve to ask as he slips his shirt back on.

I nod my head. "Absolutely. You should go."

He looks like he wants to protest but then nods. "Okay, Cass. About last night..."

I force a smile. "Let's pretend it didn't happen." Because I'm stupid, and I couldn't get a hold of myself, and forgot that your feelings were at stake.

Another part of me argues: But I did warn you to stay away.

He blinks, visibly hurt. "I should've expected that," he replies, a chilling calmness to his voice.

"I'm sorry, Liam," I say, digging my ngers in my hair, cursing myself for complicating this.

"Are you?" he snaps, before he storms out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

The slam makes me inch. The house feels eerily quiet after he leaves, and I remain standing in the spot for a while until I hear Evie's voice call me from the other side. Opening the door, I pick her up in my arms. "Did that wake you up, baby? I'm so sorry."

"I thought an elephant came to our house!" she murmurs, her voice sleepy. She locks her hands around my neck and closes her eyes again.

"I told him Evie was asleep so he went away," I tell her, but she's already dozing again.

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After Evie is off to school and Trish has assured me seventeen times that she'll check up on my mother, I nally get to the diner. The day stretches ahead of me, lled with the tasks of greeting customers while I dread the end of my shift, when I'll be facing Rhys again. When Mila joins for the day, she does her best to take my mind off the thoughts plaguing it, but it is intent on focusing on the horrible ones.

The hours drag by at the diner. I go through the motions, taking orders, serving food, and smiling at customers. The break that I get from Tim, is given to me with a look of scrutiny. It seems like he hates me. And he probably does. But when Evie is safely home and I've served them lunch, I drive back to the diner quickly.

I keep checking my phone, expecting a message from Rhys, but there's nothing. I should be relieved, but instead, I feel a strange sense of anticipation.

Finally, my shift ends. I change quickly and wait, leaning against the counter.

"He'll come?" Mila asks, as she charges a card and returns it to the customer. "Thanks! Hope you had a good time. Please visit again!"

I frown. "No texts."

"What about Liam?" she says, disappearing brievely into the kitchen and returning with plates of burgers and fries. "Did he say anything?"

I shake my head. "I wanted to end it on a good note, you know? And I thought I did. I almost did. But maybe he never accepted it? I don't know. He visited everyday, saying it's for a selsh reason. But you can tell when someone is just a lot into you, right?"

"And what is the problem with that?" she counters, raising an eyebrow suggestively.

I scowl at her. "Seriously, Mills? With Rhys and my mother and everything else...? I really can't."

"You can't or you don't want to?" she asks.

"I don't want to," I answer easily. "It's a waste of time. Love. and I don't feel that way about Liam so it's unfair to keep going. Because a part of me knows, I'll never feel that way about him."

Mila nods but doesn't say anything. The way she presses her lips together, I know that she's holding a lot back. Any other day I would've made her blurt it all out, but today I'm not in the state to hear anything.

I check the clock hanging on the wall and nd its half past ve. "I should go home. He probably isn't coming."

Mila only hums in response and I frown but still say goodbye to her before I step outside the diner.

My heart nearly stops when I see Rhys leaning against his car, waiting for me. He looks up as I approach, his expression unreadable.

"Hey," I say, my voice trembling slightly.

"Get in," he demands, his voice cold and hard as he opens the back door.

Gulping, I get in without protesting.

He walks around the back, and gets in through the other door before he growls, "Victor, drive."