

Chapter 20: Just Ask

ELLIE

My heart raced. The hand he'd raised to knock on the door dropped to his side. His eyes shifted between Todd and me, inspecting.

Mr. Morgan was completely drenched. Did he walk here in the rain?

Todd brushed past me, frustrated, and Ethan stepped out of his way. His eyes followed Todd down the hallway until he closed the door, going into his apartment—or at least that's what I thought I heard.

Then his attention turned back to me.

"You're quick," he said sarcastically, looking me over from head to toe before turning away, shaking his head.

What was he thinking? Did he actually think I'd slept with Todd? That's probably exactly what it looked like. I stepped out of my apartment, following him.

"Hey! I know how this looks, but it's not what you think," I said, making him stop. "And why the hell are you soaking wet?" I let out a small laugh, covering my mouth with my hand.

"You think this is funny?" He turned around. "At least someone's having fun at my expense."

"Don't be so dramatic!"

"Miss Brown, to me, this is exactly what it looks like."

"Oh, really? And what does it look like?" I challenged.

He stepped closer—too close—intentionally invading my space. I tried to keep my legs steady and not think about last night.

Without my heels, he seemed so much taller, making me feel small. It annoyed me that I had to tilt my head up to look at him.

"That you're nothing but a hypocrite who used me to make your little ex-boyfriend jealous," he said, his gaze locked on mine.

I tried not to focus on how tempting his lips looked or how seeing him irritated made me want to yank off his wet beanie to run my fingers through his hair.

Thinking about that wasn't helping, Ellie.

"No wonder you'd think so little of me after last night. It wasn't something I'm proud of. I'm sorry."

"You're apologizing?" he asked, skeptical.

"That's what we do when we make a mistake, right?"

"So I'm a mistake?"

"No. My mistake was..." I trailed off as my gaze drifted toward Todd's door down the hall.

Could he be listening to us?

"Can we go inside?" I suggested. "We're standing in the middle of the

hall, you're soaked, and I'm in a nightgown. Do you really want to talk here?"

Without waiting for an answer, I turned, hoping he'd follow. But when I stopped at my apartment door and looked back, he was still standing in the same spot.

I stared at him, waiting until he finally relented and stepped inside.

It didn't seem like a great idea to be alone with him in my apartment, but what choice did I have?

"Did you sleep with your ex-boyfriend?" he asked as soon as I closed the door and faced him.

"Oh my God! No! But that's none of your business."

Why did he care? It wasn't as if we had anything between us.

"Isn't it?"

"Why would it be?"

"Are you kidding me? I deserve at least an explanation after what you did."

His soaking wet clothes were impossible to ignore. He was wearing a heavy dark sweatshirt, and he was going to catch a cold. On top of that, he was soaking my hardwood floor.

"Why are you drenched? You'll catch a cold, and you're getting water all over my floor. Take those wet clothes off, and then we can talk."

"For someone who didn't want me to touch you, trying to get me naked is quite a step forward," he teased.

"Don't be an ass."

"What's your plan, then? Have me wear one of your nightgowns?" he mocked, his eyes drifting over my body.

"Funny. I should kick you out for that. Use my bathroom, and I'll put your clothes in the dryer. You can thank me for it later."

"I'm fine," he said, making me sigh in frustration.

What a stubborn man!

"Yes, but my floor won't be fine, and you'll have to pay for it. The bathroom is over there. Use a robe; it should fit," I pointed toward the bathroom door off the living room.

"You know that doing this doesn't make us even, right?"

"Don't push your luck, Morgan."

He sighed, giving in, and headed toward the bathroom.

My nerves were on edge. I went to the kitchen and poured myself a glass of ice-cold water, trying not to imagine him naked in my bathroom.

God! This was a terrible idea.

A few minutes later, I walked up to the bathroom door.

"So..." I cleared my throat. "Could you hand me your clothes so I can put

them in the dryer?"

He suddenly opened the door, startling me. He was wearing one of my white robes, and his hair was now tousled, without the beanie.

The robe was slightly open, revealing a hint of his muscular chest.

I tried to keep my eyes on his face, ignoring the indecent thoughts that started creeping into my mind.

"Is this going to take long?" he asked, handing me his wet clothes.

"Thirty minutes, at least. Are you going to tell me how this happened?"

I looked at the wet clothes in my hands; they felt heavy.

"I was running."

"In a storm?" I raised an eyebrow, wondering how he'd ended up here.

"Weren't you going to apologize for something?" he asked, frowning impatiently, crossing his arms over his broad chest.

"You ran here from your place?"

"No, I was out for a run and decided to stop by."

I nodded. Why would he come here?

"All right. I'll be right back. Make yourself comfortable," I said, turning to leave but stopped, glancing back. "But not too comfortable," I added, narrowing my eyes.

He just shook his head, ignoring me.

After taking his clothes to my little laundry room and putting them in the dryer, I returned to the living room.

He was standing by one of my floor-to-ceiling windows, watching the rain still pouring outside.

I cleared my throat to get his attention.

"Before I go on with my apologies... Why did you come here?" I stopped near the couch.

"Isn't it obvious? You owe me an explanation."

"I thought it was clear. I figured Todd would back off if he saw me with you."

"And somehow, it had the exact opposite effect? Do you really expect me to believe that?"

"You don't have to believe it if you don't want to. But it's the truth. So I'm sorry. I acted without thinking. It was a mistake."

"You're unbelievable. I spent the whole night trying to get closer to you, and at the last minute, you decided it'd be interesting to use me and then slam the door in my face?" He moved closer, making me instinctively cross my arms over my chest, my usual defensive stance.

"What do you want me to do? I already apologized and admitted it was a mistake."

"You keep saying that. Do you think it helps, calling what happened a mistake?"

He was only a step away now, putting my body on high alert.

"When I say mistake, I mean my behavior."

"Did it ever cross your mind that I wouldn't have been as upset if you'd invited me in?"

"What?"

Of course he wanted me to have invited him in. And as much as I hated to admit it, part of me had wanted that too.

"If you wanted to use me, you could've done it right," he teased.

"I told you I acted without thinking. I didn't plan anything. I was just irritated because he texted me during our dinner."

"So that's why you started acting like a jerk in the middle of the night?"

"It had nothing to do with you. I'm sorry, okay?"

"You should apologize by finishing what you started. Do you think it was easy to sleep after the way you left me?" His eyes roamed over my body, making me feel as if I were naked, wearing only my black satin pajamas.

The thought that he might have touched himself thinking of me, just as I had thinking of him, didn't help.

"I already apologized..."

I struggled to form a coherent thought as my breathing grew heavier.

"Stop apologizing. It only makes me more irritated. And you lost the bet, anyway."

"What? You can't use that..."

"Do you always answer the door dressed like that?" he interrupted, closing the distance between us, his eyes fixed on my breasts.

Then, he extended an arm, making me hold my breath and freeze.

"I can see your nipples," he whispered, his fingers brushing over one of them through the satin fabric.

I closed my eyes, feeling my whole body shiver. What was he doing?

"No," I managed to say, even as my body begged for more.

I tried to steady my breathing as my heart pounded violently.

"The way your body reacts says the exact opposite," he murmured.

I opened my eyes, feeling his breath on my face. His lips were only inches from mine.

My whole body felt pulled toward him. I just wanted to grab his hair and kiss him, hard.

"Just ask," he whispered.

If I didn't pull away soon, I knew exactly how this would end. I searched for the shred of reason still buried beneath all that desire.

"Say it," he demanded.



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