

Chapter 28 Marks That Don't Fade

ELLIE

With every step I took, the muscles between my legs protested, reminding me of last night.

Hell. As if all the marks he left on my body weren't enough. *No low-cut tops for a while, Ellie.*

Something told me he had done this on purpose. The bastard wanted me to remember.

"Ellie? I'm talking to you." Anna grabbed my arm, making me stop.

We were leaving the lab to go to lunch.

"Sorry. What did you say?"

"Did something happen?" She studied me. "What are you hiding?"

I still hadn't decided if I would tell her everything that had happened between me and Ethan. But I wouldn't be able to keep it a secret for long.

"Todd sent me flowers yesterday."

Maybe if I told her one truth, she wouldn't notice.

"He really won't give up, huh? You're not thinking about forgiving him, are you?"

"No!"

Honestly, I hadn't had time to think about Todd in the past few hours.

"I know it might be hard. I mean, the guy is literally an Italian Adonis, but don't forget what you went through because of him."

"Don't worry." I held her arm and started walking toward the exit again.

"How can I not? I know you loved him, and now he's back and living right next door. I don't want to see you hurting again."

"There's not a chance in hell I'd ever go back to him."

"You don't have to lie to me."

"Can we stop talking about this?"

"Fine. Then let's talk about Morgan."

Lately, nothing irritated me more than thinking about Todd. But thinking about Ethan wasn't much better.

"I hope you mean Bennett. Otherwise, I'd rather keep talking about Todd."

"You have no reason to hate him so much."

"I'm trying to pretend he doesn't exist, so help me out."

That was going to be difficult after last night. When all the memories kept coming back—his mouth, his hands, his words.

Who was I kidding? It wouldn't be difficult—it would be impossible to forget the best sex of my life.



But it wasn't like I had another choice. My night with Ethan Morgan would be just that—a memory I'd have to try to forget.

When I decided to do it, I knew it would be a one-time thing. After all, he had made it clear he wasn't the kind of guy who calls the next day.

But getting involved with Ethan didn't seem like a good idea for plenty of other reasons too.

At least he had been honest with me, so I didn't have to worry about expecting anything from him.

But all those questions he asked me last night made no sense. I knew I had been a little mean to him, but I just wanted to make it clear that there was a line I wasn't willing to cross.

He must have understood that perfectly, since he didn't even bother to get out of bed while I got dressed to leave—like a true bastard.

✱

As if spending the entire afternoon at work turned on—reliving every moment of last night—wasn't enough, I also couldn't sleep. But I refused to touch myself thinking about him.

My panties were soaked, my breathing uneven, and my body so hot that it was impossible to close my eyes and sleep. The need to feel him inside me was going to drive me insane.

I got up, frustrated with myself. Damn it! It was past midnight, and I had to work in the morning. Maybe a movie would help me sleep.

I left my room and sat on the couch after grabbing a tub of chocolate ice cream from the fridge.

Fuck Morgan and his huge cock.

At some point, I dozed off, and when I woke up to the sound of knocking at my door, the credits of *The Notebook* were rolling on the TV screen.

Was I dreaming, or had someone actually knocked on my door in the middle of the night?

I realized it wasn't a dream when I heard the knocking again. My heart sped up. Who would be here at this hour?

I got up and went to the door, opening it just enough to see who it was.

What the hell was Todd thinking?

"You've got to be kidding me," I said, opening the door wider.

"Hey... El," he slurred, dragging out his words.

Was he drunk?

"I can't believe you're knocking on my door drunk."

"I..." He braced his arm against the wall beside the door. "I'm sorry, El... I wish I'd never let you go," he said, his expression weary and his gaze distant.

Shit. I couldn't deal with this right now.

"Don't do this."

"Only now do I see how much of an idiot I was... I had everything I want most right now, and I didn't appreciate it enough." His voice faltered, and I panicked when I realized he was about to cry right in front of me.

"It's okay." I stroked his arm, trying to console him. "Just let it go."

"I wish I could go back in time and do everything differently."

"It's okay. You just had a little too much to drink. You'll feel better in the morning."

"I won't." He turned, leaning his back against the wall, then slid down until he was sitting on the floor, resting his arms on his knees. "I've been trying to deal with this for a long time, even before I came back."

I hated the way my chest tightened at seeing his pain. I shouldn't feel bad for him.

"Where are your keys? Let me help you get into your apartment." I tried to ignore the heaviness in my chest.

He buried his face in his hands.

"I'm sorry... I know I'm being a pain in the ass."

I sighed, closing my door before crouching down beside him and squeezing his shoulder.

"It's okay."

I wanted to be cold, unshaken, and not let seeing him like this affect me in any way. But I wasn't like that.

Deep down, I knew I had a tender heart. I didn't want anyone to go through what I did—not even the one who made me suffer.

I still remember the pain. A crushing pain that no remedy could cure except time.

I had learned early on that pain was the risk we took when we fell in love. It was like handing someone a gun pointed at your heart, trusting they wouldn't pull the trigger.

It required trust—and I had learned the hard way that almost no one deserved that much trust.

"You know, I ask myself every day if there's anything I could do to make you forgive me," he said.

I knew that watching him bring up our past wouldn't do me any good.

"You need to rest."

"I don't want to lie in my bed alone, knowing you're just one wall away. So close, yet so far."

"There's not much I can do about that—other than help you get to your bed." I tried to lighten the moment. "Come on. Lean on me."

I helped him up, draping his arm around my shoulder, inhaling his familiar scent. He was a little unsteady. I tried to keep him walking straight until we reached his door.

"Where are your keys?"

"Wait..." He patted his front pockets, then his back ones—but found nothing.

"You didn't lose them, did you?"

"Well, I... Maybe I left them in the car."

"Or they could've fallen anywhere. Unbelievable," I sighed. "Were you driving like this?"

"Please don't fight with me."

Hearing him say that brought back a hundred memories.

"So what now?"

"I'll go downstairs to get them."

"You can barely stand. I'm surprised you even made it up here. Give me the keys—I'll go."

"That's not necessary."

"Would you rather sleep on my couch?"

"Would you mind?"

"I wasn't serious. But you know what? It's late, and I have work tomorrow. I don't mind. Let's go."

I led him back inside my apartment and helped him onto the couch.

"I'll get a blanket. Be right back."

By the time I returned, he was already dozing off. His eyes opened as I hesitated to approach and cover him.

"Here." I handed him the blanket. "You should take off your shoes."

He nodded, sitting up.

"Thanks. Good night, El."

Every time I heard him call me that, my chest tightened.

"Good night." I turned, but he grabbed my hand, making me stop.



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