

Chapter 12 I'll Make Sure This Project Is Completed

Lianne's POV:

Ethan's shadowed gaze blazed with disappointment.

"Lianne, I expect you to maintain a good working relationship with Ivy." His tone was glacial, devoid of even a trace of softness. "The Sparkle series means everything to Voss Group. I will not put up with any further issues."

I pressed my teeth into my lower lip until it ached, then forced a polished smile into place.

"You can rest easy, Alpha." I met his eyes, fighting back the burn of tears that refused to fall. "I'll make sure this project is completed. And please, have Miss Brooks do her part."

I was not standing here and choking down my dignity because I still held on to Ethan. I was here because of the vow I had given Harold.

Sparkle was my heart—a jewelry line I had raised from the ground up. I needed to make sure everything reached the finish line exactly as it should.

No matter how deeply Ethan had failed me, I still owed my work that much.

Ivy, tucked neatly inside Ethan's embrace, threw me a smug little smile. "I'll cooperate, Lianne. I'm looking forward to working with you."

I pulled in an unsteady breath, forcing down the sickness twisting in my stomach. "Then I'll see you at the studio tomorrow at nine. Don't be late."

Without sparing those two another look, I turned on my heel and left.

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By the following day, the shoot was underway.

Ivy, made bolder by Ethan's blatant favoritism, started acting more and more demanding on set.

"Lianne, this latte isn't hot enough. Go get me a fresh one."

"Lianne, the sunlight is unbearable today. Can you put some sunscreen on me? The assistants are far too clumsy, and I don't like them touching me."

Her nonstop commands had the crew trading looks.

Everybody knew I was the project lead, not her personal maid.

But with Ethan hovering over Ivy the way he did, all they could do was bow their heads and act occupied.

I put up with Ivy's absurd requests through gritted patience, carrying them out one after another like a machine.

As long as the project turned out well, what did one little disgrace matter?

We pushed on until dusk, when the director finally announced, "That's a wrap!"

A deep breath slipped out of me in relief as the exhaustion slammed into me all at once.

I rolled my shoulders, but a sudden spell of lightheadedness turned everything hazy.

I braced myself against a table, telling myself it was probably low blood sugar or plain exhaustion.

With my keys in hand, I hauled my drained body toward the open-air parking area.

The evening wind was mild, giving me the smallest bit of relief after the punishing heat of the day.

"Lianne?" A crisp, familiar voice rang across the quiet lot.

I turned around, and the gloom hanging over me lifted at once. "Frank! It's really you! It's been so long!"

Frank Mill used to be the person I was closest to back at Pack Academy.

His hair was trimmed short and tidy, and his bright smile carried a warmth that stood in total contrast to Ethan's cold distance.

"What are you doing here? Are you filming something?" I hurried toward him.

Frank looked me over with an easy smile. "So it really is you. I've been shooting a magazine cover at the studio next door for the last two days. Just finished. What about you? Why are you still here so late? You don't look well."

"I'm filming a commercial. Things have been hectic lately," I answered, smiling anyway despite the bitterness stirring in my chest.

"Since we've run into each other, how about grabbing dinner?" Frank offered. "It's been years. You owe me a proper catch-up, busy bee."

The thought of that cold, lifeless villa waiting for me—and of Ethan and Ivy showing off their closeness in front of me—made my answer immediate. "Sure. If you're paying then I'm absolutely coming."

I reached for the handle of my car door, but the dizziness hit again, crashing over me like a wave.

My knees buckled, and I pitched backward.

"Watch out!"

Instead of striking the hard pavement, I dropped into a firm, warm hold.

Frank reacted as fast as ever and caught me around the waist, drawing me straight against him.

His chest was broad and warm, carrying a clean, woody scent.

"Lianne? Are you alright?" He lowered his eyes to mine, worry written all over his face, his arms holding me tighter.

I stayed in his grasp, breathing hard, my head still spinning. "I'm fine. Maybe it's just low blood sugar."

All at once, an icy shiver shot down my spine.

It struck like something solid—the crushing airless presence of the Alpha. Even the atmosphere seemed to harden, as a threatening pressure rolled over us from behind.

On instinct, I snapped my head around.

A short distance away, a familiar black Rolls-Royce waited with its engine running.

Ethan got out, outlined by the dying light and wrapped in shadow. His cold, hunting gaze was fixed on Frank's hand where it rested at my waist.

Even from several meters away, his presence felt suffocating.