

Chapter 13 She Leaned In And Kissed Ethan

Lianne's POV:

The second I saw Ethan, I recoiled like I'd been burned, instinctively slipping out of Frank's warm hold.

Maybe that was the curse of fated mates. Even with my heart already breaking apart, I still carried that raw, instinctive fear of him getting the wrong idea.

I pulled myself together, awkwardly patting down my messy hair before lifting my eyes toward the black Rolls-Royce parked not far away.

But when I looked back at Ethan, Ivy was already beside him like she had appeared out of nowhere.

Soft and shamelessly attached, she draped nearly half her body against his fitted suit, her arm looped around his in a way that was far too familiar.

Ethan bent toward her and murmured something, and those eyes of his, so often hard and frigid, softened at once.

Ivy let out a bright little laugh, her eyes curving into crescents, the sound crisp and piercing as it scratched through the stillness of the deserted parking garage.

Then Ethan moved around to the other side of the car. Smooth and polished as ever, he pulled the door open for her.

He even lifted a hand to guard the top of the frame, making sure she wouldn't hit her head as she slipped into the seat.

He used to do that for me. Now he was looking after another woman.

Only after the car drifted off did it finally sink in—he hadn't come to

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question me at all. He had only stopped there to pick Ivy up from work.

All that panic, all that frantic scrambling on my part—it was probably nothing more than a pathetic joke to him.

A surge of sharp bitterness climbed straight into my throat.

"Was that Ethan Voss?" Frank asked, his eyes following the disappearing taillights. "My manager's been trying to land me a role in a huge production. I heard Voss Group threw an insane amount of money into it, and Ivy's already been confirmed as the female lead. They're saying Ethan gave it to his future mate. That's one hell of a gift."

Future mate.

I forced out a smile that felt more twisted than real.

To everyone else, Ivy was the woman meant to stand beside Ethan.

And I, the one who was truly bound to him, was nothing more than a shadow, too insignificant for my name to even be mentioned.

I forced down the knot in my throat. "Let's drop it. Didn't you say we were going to eat? Let's go."

Frank gave a nod and took me to a nearby restaurant.

With his level of fame, we picked a private room to keep away from paparazzi and any unnecessary eyes.

"You should eat more. You're skin and bones," Frank said, sliding a plate of sliced lamb chops toward me. Worry was plain in his eyes. "You almost passed out in the parking lot earlier. If you keep neglecting yourself like this, I'm afraid you'll drop in your office one day."

"Thank you," I said softly, making myself smile as I reached for my knife and fork.

The restaurant lighting was low and warm, and the air was soaked with the aroma of red wine and truffles.

Frank was thoughtful in every way. He brought up amusing stories from our time at Pack Academy, clearly trying to cheer me up.

Halfway through dinner, he suddenly stopped, his gaze softening as it settled near the corner of my lips.

"Don't move. You've got a little sauce there."

Without thinking he reached for a napkin and leaned closer to wipe it away for me.

I went rigid. My body moved before my mind could catch up, and I jerked back to avoid his hand.

The mood in the room stiffened immediately.

"Sorry. I'll do it myself," I blurted out, grabbing the napkin and dabbing at my mouth in a clumsy rush, letting out an awkward laugh.

Even knowing Ethan was with another woman right then, even knowing the bond between us was almost over, I still couldn't bear that kind of closeness from any man but him.

This cursed, biological tether of the mate bond made me nauseous.

Frank pulled his hand back. A flash of disappointment crossed his face, but he quickly covered it with his usual mildness. "It's fine. Lianne, since we've met again, let's stay in contact."

I nodded silently.

When we stepped out of the private room and made it halfway down the corridor, I suddenly remembered I had left my coat behind.

"Frank, go on and get the car. I left my coat in there, so I'll just go back and get it."

"Alright. I'll wait for you at the entrance."

I turned around and headed back the way I came. When I pushed the door open, I expected the room to be empty.

Instead, it felt like lightning struck me where I stood, my feet nailed to the floor.

The room was not empty.

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Ethan was sitting at the table. He had already taken off his suit jacket, leaving only a white shirt with the top buttons undone, looking effortlessly dangerous in a way that made him impossible to ignore. And Ivy was perched on his lap.

Ethan had his head tipped slightly toward her, his expression soft and attentive as he listened to her whisper into his ear.

Ivy's arms were looped around his neck, their bodies pressed so closely together they looked almost fused.

The next second, she leaned in and kissed Ethan on the cheek.



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