

Chapter 17 I Hate You

Lianne's POV:

By the time I opened my eyes the next morning the other side of the bed was already vacant.

Sometime in the middle of the night, Ethan had gone.

It almost felt like having him there with me in the dark had only been some cruel trick of my mind.

A faint, bitter smile tugged at my lips.

The mate bond really was a disgusting kind of biological compulsion. Even after the way he had shamed me and mistrusted me the night before, the second he wrapped me in his arms in the darkness, my determination to walk away had shamefully begun to falter.

I had even caught myself thinking that if I told him I was pregnant, maybe he would finally spare me a glance for the sake of our baby.

But I smothered that ridiculous thought almost at once.

I spent the morning at the office sorting through a mountain of pending paperwork, then headed straight to the photography studio that afternoon.

The session went surprisingly well.

Maybe because she had spent last night with Ethan, Ivy was in an unusually good mood today.

Beneath the studio lights, her makeup looked immaculate, and every look she gave off carried a dazzling confidence that bordered on arrogance.

During a break, the photographer, May Blake, came over with her camera, scrolling through the photos with obvious excitement. "Lianne, look at this. Ivy's range in front of the camera is incredible. Our new line is going to be a huge success."

I had to admit that, as the face of Sparkle, Ivy truly was flawless.

"Reset the stage! Get ready for the last set!" the director shouted.

Filming started again. The lighting team repositioned the huge reflectors and the weighty light stands.

I was standing beside the monitor, scribbling down figures, when sudden noise broke out near the entrance.

"Ivy, look who's here!" someone called.

I lifted my head without thinking and saw Ethan walking into the studio.

He had changed into a dark charcoal suit, which made him look even colder and more commanding.

Ivy's eyes brightened at once. She gathered up her skirt and drifted toward him. "Ethan!"

And that was the exact moment everything went wrong.

Maybe because of all the movement around it, a heavy light stand nearby lost its balance. It pitched forward, falling straight toward Ivy.

And I was standing between Ivy and the equipment crashing down.

"Watch out!" Ethan yelled.

My body reacted before my mind did; I reached out, trying to drag Ivy out of danger.

But in the very next second, a much stronger force crashed into my shoulder.

It was Ethan.

To save the woman he cared about, he had put all his strength into shoving me—his so-called obstruction—ruthlessly aside.

The giant light stand slammed into the concrete floor with a thunderous crash that made my ears ache.

I hit the solid floor hard. A sharp snap came from my ankle, and unbearable pain instantly shot through my whole body.

But I hardly felt it. All I could see was Ethan clutching Ivy tightly in his arms.

He was down on one knee, shielding the frightened woman against his chest, asking in a frantic voice, "Ivy? Are you hurt? Don't be scared. I'm here. I've got you..."

At that instant, it felt like all the blood in my body had frozen solid.

The cruelest part was not that he favored Ivy.

It was that, in the face of life and death, Ethan's first instinct was not to protect his fated mate. Instead, to keep another woman safe, he had shoved me into danger. ❌

If that light stand had fallen just a little differently, I would have been the one lying there in a pool of blood.

"Ugh..." A sudden rush of warmth spilled from my lower belly, followed by wrenching cramps.

My face lost all color in an instant. Cold sweat dotted my forehead.

I clutched May's hand hard, my voice shaking. "May... help me. Get me to the hospital. Hurry..."

Only then did Ethan seem to remember that I existed at all.

He looked up, and the moment he saw the state I was in, his eyes narrowed sharply. "Lianne?"

He let go of Ivy and rushed at me in alarm, trying to lift me into his arms.

"Don't touch me..." I shoved at him weakly. "Ethan... I hate you."

He paid no mind to my resistance, gathered me up by force, and ran toward the garage like a man who had lost his mind.

Pressed against his wide chest, I could feel his heart hammering wildly. That heartbeat, which had once made me feel safe, now seemed nothing less than a bitter joke.

My awareness started slipping away. One thought alone stayed in my head. "Baby, please don't leave me. You're the only family I have left in this world."

In the hospital's emergency room, the harsh surgical lights were too blinding for me to handle.

Using the last scrap of strength I had, I seized the attending doctor's white coat.

"Doctor... save my baby..." My voice came out rough and broken. "Please..."

The doctor stilled for half a beat, then gave a grave nod.

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 +120 Points at most

I drew a shaky breath. "Don't tell that man outside about my pregnancy. Not one word. Don't let it slip."

Since he had made his choice and chosen Ivy, this child would never have anything to do with him again.



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