

Love Arrives Too Late

Chapter 1

My fiancé, a doctor, left our engagement party after a phone call.

Thinking it was an emergency surgery, I didn't blame him. I stayed to apologize to every guest on my own.

When I finally dragged myself home, I saw a picture posted by his beloved crush on Twitter.

Under fireworks by the sea, Bennett Webster's profile was clear—and he was smiling in a way I had never seen before.

So I left.

I thought I'd never see him again.

But then, in a hospital hallway in Berlin, I

looked up...and there he was.

The same man I once loved—disheveled,
desperate, whispering,

"Maddie, please come home with me."

I had never known he could look so gentle.

Five years ago, when I first met him, he
was my father's attending physician.

He told me Dad's heart condition was
severe and that he might not make it
through the month.

I broke down crying right there, but
Bennett didn't offer any comfort—not even
a tissue.

Back then, I thought he was cold and

unfeeling.

But later, I realized I was wrong.

When I went out for food, Bennett would peel fruit and get water for my dad.

During night shifts, he'd check on my father every twenty minutes from the hallway.

He even noticed my wrist tendonitis and left ointment for me without a word.

After we got together, he stayed just as thoughtful.

He didn't talk much, but he cared in his own quiet way.

He remembered what I couldn't eat, knew my cycle, and surprised me with tickets to my favorite musicals.

So when my best friend questioned whether he loved me, I defended him without hesitation.

"Bennett just doesn't show emotion easily. He might not smile, but he cares about me."

My friend shook her head, not convinced.

"Madeline, when someone loves you, you see it in their eyes. But Bennett's eyes are empty when he looks at you."

I brushed her words aside—until I saw that photo today.

Only then did I finally understand what it meant to see love in someone's gaze.

It turned out love really could be measured.

In the picture, Bennett was still wearing the coat I'd draped over him when he hurried away from our party.

I turned off my phone, breathing deeply, trying to ease the heavy ache in my chest.

Bennett didn't come back until dawn.

When he saw me sitting on the couch, empty and dazed, he froze.

"You've been sitting here all night? Why didn't you change or go to bed?"

I looked up, weary. "You left without a word. No calls, nothing. How was I supposed to sleep?"

Six months ago, a mudslide hit a village in a neighboring city.

Bennett was suddenly dispatched to assist. He left so abruptly that I didn't receive

even one message from him.

For an entire week, he was out of contact, and I barely slept until he finally called to say he was safe.

After that, he promised he'd always tell me where he was going.

Now, he looked away.

"There was an emergency surgery. I didn't have time to call."

His clumsy lie made my heart sink.

But I didn't call him out. I just nodded.

"Okay. As long as you're okay."

I headed toward the stairs.

But the moment I walked past him, a strong scent of freesia hit me.

Commented [Ma1]: