

CHAPTER 11

CLARA

Lyra leaned casually against the locker, her gaze xed on me as I peeled off my gym instructor attire. "You'll be at my birthday bash, right?" she queried, a hopeful lilt in her voice. When my response didn't come as swiftly as she hoped, she leaned in closer, her expression expectant. "You're coming, aren't you?"

With a regretful shake of my head, I turned to face her, offering an apologetic smile. "I'm really sorry, Lyra, but I've got to whip up dinner and take it to James at the oce," I explained. Lyra's brow furrowed in disappointment. "You know how much he dislikes eating out, and he's been pulling all-nighters lately."

"Why do you revolve your entire life around your husband?" Lyra's tone brimmed with irritation. "You don't hang out with friends, you steer clear of forming friendships with other men just to avoid upsetting him, and you're constantly trying to please him while he doesn't seem to reciprocate any effort."

"He does make an effort," I countered, offering a reassuring smile.

"You mean he used to?" Lyra's eyes rolled skyward, a hint of skepticism coloring her words, and I couldn't help but chuckle.

Indeed, James had once been the epitome of sweetness, but lately, his attention seemed consumed by his business. I understood the demands of entrepreneurship, though; it required immense dedication and time. Surely, once he found his footing, he'd return to his former self.

Together, we strolled towards her car. "Since he won't be home tonight, what if I tag along? We can whip up dinner together, drop it off at his oce, and then head over to prep for the party," Lyra proposed.

"I've had quite a day, Lyra, and I'm not sure..." I began, but before I could nish, she grasped my hand, her eyes pleading.

"Please, Clara. How can I possibly celebrate my birthday without my best friend by my side?"

I let out a resigned sigh. "Okay, ne," I relented.

Lyra erupted into a joyful dance before hopping into the car. Together, we made our way home, where she swiftly pitched in to help prepare dinner. With the meal ready, she whisked me off to James's oce.

Just as we pulled into the parking lot, my phone buzzed insistently. I rummaged through my bag and answered the call upon seeing James's name ashing on the screen. "Hey, I was just about to..."

Before I could nish, he interjected sharply. "Don't bother bringing me food tonight," his voice crackled through the line. "I'm getting ready for an important meeting in the next thirty minutes and I can't afford any distractions, not even from you."

"You have a meeting in thirty minutes?" I veried, to which he grunted in armaton. "Alright." With a resigned click, I ended the call and turned to Lyra. "Looks like I won't be staying in there for long."

It had taken me hours to prepare that meal, and since I was already there, I might as well deliver it. Stepping into James's small real estate oce, I briskly passed by his few employees and made my way towards his oce.

His secretary practically jumped out of her seat when she spotted me, her eyes darting nervously. "Mrs. Sterling?" she stammered, rising from her chair and hurrying around the desk. "Does Mr. Sterling know you're here?"

Ignoring her, I pushed open the door, only to be met with a scene that I wasn't expecting at all. There sat James, comfortably in his oce chair, with another woman perched on his lap, their lips locked in a passionate kiss.

My ngers which were holding onto the bag which held the take-out container clenched tightly on it. For a moment, I thought I was dreaming; I had hoped I was dreaming. Closing my eyes, I took deep breaths before opening them but the scene before me did not disappear. "what the f**k is going on here?!" I yelled at them, my throat dry from too much effort to keep myself from crying right now.

Startled, James jerked back, putting some distance between himself and the woman, but she remained seated on his thigh, unfazed by my presence. With a glare, I addressed her directly. "Are you going to get off his lap, or do I need to remove you myself?" so this was the meeting he talked about? Entertaining another woman?

With an exaggerated eye roll, the woman nally slid off James's lap, revealing her disheveled appearance, her shirt carelessly unbuttoned. "I thought we had the night to ourselves," she remarked casually to James, her tone dripping with nonchalance.

Refusing to be distracted by her audacity, I focused my attention squarely on James. "Is this really what you've been up to?" I demanded. "I thought your meeting wasn't until thirty minutes from now!" I seethed at them. After all the sacrices I had made for him, this was the betrayal I faced?

James attempted to defuse the situation, his ngers fumbling to button up his shirt. "Let's discuss this at home," he suggested weakly, a hint of guilt ickering across his features.

My glare intensified. "f**k you, James," I spat out, my words lled with venom.

Taken aback by my outburst, James's frown deepened, his gaze meeting mine. "Just leave, Clara. Don't make a scene. We'll talk about this when I get home."

"You f****g cheated on me with this b***h, and I'm the one who has to leave?" I yelled, my voice trembling.

Tears rolled down my cheeks.

How can he not see that he literally just stabbed me straight in the heart? "How...how could..." I stammered, unable to form a coherent sentence. It seems my brain is still in denial and my heart too hurt.

"Just go home Clara." James instructed me with sigh, as though I am the one being unreasonable at the moment.

Unable to contain my rage any longer, I hurled the take-out container at him, its lid ying open and its contents splattering across his shirt.

"Are you going to do something about her or not?" the other woman hissed at me, her tone dripping with disdain. "All this yelling is giving me a headache. Either she goes, or I do."

With my hands folded and my hips thrust out deantly, I gave James the chance to decide. And to my dismay, he chose her. I stood there, my eyes wide with shock, as he motioned for his secretary to escort me out of the building.

Scong with disbelief, I wiped my tears roughly off my face. "what have I been doing with you all these years?" that question wasn't meant for him.

I don't know what pained the most, the fact that he cheated, the fact that he isn't showing any sign of remorse, or the fact that he literally chose her over me.

"Are you deaf?!" he snapped at his secretary who hurried to my side.

But I wasn't about to let him have the satisfaction of seeing me escorted like some common nuisance. "That won't be necessary," I retorted icily before storming out of his oce. It was hard to believe I had sacriced so much for his worthless self.

As I stepped out of the oce building, Lyra, ever perceptive, sensed that something was amiss. She quickly emerged from the car and hurried towards me, meeting me halfway. "What happened, Clara?"

Words failed me and my knees failed me too. Falling to the oor, I cried ugly loud tears, grabbing my chest, hoping to lessen the intensity of the pain I was feeling.

Lyra, shocked and confused by my action and tears, enveloped me in a comforting embrace. "What's happening, Clara? You're scaring me," she murmured softly.

"James... he's cheating on me," I sobbed into her shoulder, my tears staining her blouse. "He had the nerve to walk me out of his oce while she was still in there."

Lyra's body tensed with anger, but she composed herself for my sake. "I always had a feeling something wasn't right about that loser," she muttered, her hand gently stroking my hair in a soothing gesture. "How about we go out and have some fun? Maybe it'll help you forget, even if just for one night."

Party? "How can I possibly lift in my mood to a partying spirit right now Lyra?"

She lifted me back up to my feet and wiped my tears with her thumb. "That bastard shouldn't have control over your feelings anymore, not after what he did."

That's right. I shouldn't give him that kind of privilege anymore.

Even if I knew I wasn't going to enjoy the party, but I am going to force myself to. "That sounds like a plan," I agreed, determined not to spend the night alone in that house, drowning in tears while he carries on who knows what with that woman inside his oce.

With a rm nod, I pulled away from the hug, wiped my tears, and climbed into the car, slamming the door shut behind me.

Two hours into the party, I found myself unable to fully immerse in the festivities. Despite my attempts to put on a brave front, my thoughts kept drifting back to the painful scene at James's oce.

The betrayal cut deep.

We had only been married for two years, and already he was cheating on me? He had promised to be faithful forever, yet here we were, just two years in, and he was betraying that vow, shoving his d**k in another woman's v****a.

Letting out a weary sigh, I set down the cup of whatever concoction Lyra had mixed for me and made my way over to her. "I'm going to crash in your room tonight," I announced, my voice heavy with exhaustion.

She looked at me with sympathy and concern. "Are you okay?" she asked, her voice laced with empathy. "No, scratch that. You shouldn't be. Finding out that someone you love is cheating on you is never easy."

"Can you hook me up with some sleeping pills?" I requested, knowing that sleep would likely be far from me tonight.

She nodded solemnly. "Check the drawer near my bed. You should nd a white pill container."

"Thanks, Lyra," I muttered before making my way to her room. "Goodnight."

I trudged upstairs, paying no heed to the frivolous advances of the men who kept pestering me for a drink. Despite the urge to snap at them, I managed to reach Lyra's room without incident. Hastily retrieving the pill container from the drawer, I grabbed two pills and made my way to the bathroom. With a gulp, I swallowed them down, hoping they would grant me some much-needed rest. Returning to the bedroom, I crawled into bed, eager to put an end to this night of heartache and call it a day.