

CHAPTER 2

JAMES

I deliberately avoided heading home for two days, wanting to steer clear of Clara for now but then I need fresh clothes. I never wanted her to discover the truth like this.

Pulling into the driveway, I entered the house and found her in the kitchen. Ignoring her presence, I made my way to our bedroom, where I quickly showered and changed into something more comfortable.

When I emerged and joined her in the dining room, I took a seat and waited for her to serve me dinner, but she remained silent, focused on her meal. Frowning, I nally spoke up. "Where's my food?" I asked, growing impatient with her lack of attention.

Slowly, she lifted her head and xed me with a cold glare. "Your mistress didn't feed you?" she retorted atly before returning her gaze to her plate, leaving me stunned by her sharp words.

I rolled my eyes dismissively. "Don't be so dramatic."

Clara scoffed, the noise of her fork dropping against the plate echoing in the tense silence. She lifted her head to meet my gaze, her eyes burning with resentment. "You think I'm being dramatic?" she spat, her voice laced with anger. "You had an affair, humiliated me in front of your mistress, and now you waltz back home after two days, expecting me to serve you food?"

Sighing heavily, I licked my lips nervously. "Clara, about what you saw in my oce, I can explain," I began, my voice faltering under her intense scrutiny.

Clara raised an eyebrow incredulously. "Oh, really?" she muttered sarcastically, her tone dripping with bitterness. "Alright, let's hear what you have to say."

"My business is struggling, Clara," I explained hastily, hoping she would understand. But her stare remained empty, her expression cold and unforgiving. "Veronica has the means to take my business to heights we've never imagined. We could nally have the life we've both desperately wanted."

"You mean the life you desperately want?" she retorted, her voice tinged with bitterness. Tilting her head, her gaze narrowed. "You sound defensive James." She pointed out atly, "which makes me to believe that you have no intentions of ending it with that woman and if you do not have that intention, you are simply suggesting that you want to continue this affair with that woman?"

Nodding reluctantly, I tried to justify my actions. "She'll grow tired of me eventually. All you have to do is turn a blind eye," I reasoned, reaching out to her, only to have my hand rebuffed.

Clara let out a humorless chuckle, shaking her head in disbelief. "This is madness," she muttered quietly. "You have no shame, James."

I bristled at her accusation, feeling my pride wounded. "I am not shameless!" I snapped defensively. "You may be content with poverty, Clara, but I refuse to settle for mediocrity."

"Why didn't you conde in me?" Clara's voice softened, her eyes searching mine for answers.

Confusion clouded my thoughts as I furrowed my brow. "Conde in you about what?"

"That your business was struggling?" she claried her earlier question. "You came home every day, treating me like the enemy, hurling hurtful words at me, nding faults in all I do, instead of simply conding in me about your business troubles?"

I felt a surge of frustration rising within me. Why couldn't she just accept the situation as it was? It's not as if Veronica was pressuring me to divorce Clara and marry her. "What could you have done?" I retorted defensively. "You earn less than I do at the gym, and you wouldn't have resorted to sleeping with wealthy clients, would you? So, I fail to see the importance of disclosing my business struggles to you."

Her expression hardened, and for a moment, I thought she might drop the subject altogether. But then, in a quiet voice, she asked, "Would you have wanted that? Would you have wanted me to sleep with wealthy clients to raise funds for your business?"

I bit my lower lip nervously, unable to meet her gaze. "As long as there are no strings attached," I mumbled, my voice barely audible.

She drew in a sharp breath, her disappointment evident in her expression. "That says a lot about our marriage James," she remarked, her tone heavy with resignation. Before I could offer any explanation, she raised her hand, silencing me. "How long have you been cheating on me with Veronica?" she demanded, her voice laced with anger.

"Does it really matter?" I replied dismissively, attempting to downplay the severity of the situation.

Her glare intensified, and she warned, "Don't push me, James, or I'll end up throwing this pasta in your face. How long have you been involved with Veronica?"

Letting out a frustrated sigh, I reluctantly confessed, "Six months."

She blinked rapidly, her lashes uttering as she stared down at her plate. "Do you regret it?" she asked quietly, her voice lled with vulnerability I didn't expect to hear.

With all the things she promised me and the bills she helped me sort out? Hell no. I couldn't bring myself to admit any regret. "James!" she yelled when I hesitated to answer. "Do you regret it?!"

With frustration boiling over, I threw my hands in the air and rose abruptly from my seat. "What do you want me to say? That I regret it? Well, news ash, Clara! I don't!" I snapped, my voice turning defensive.

"You spineless, two-faced globin slipper-like bastard!" she cursed at me.

"What?" I shot back, my own anger rising to match hers. "When I met you, I thought you were going to make something meaningful out of your business degree. But here you are, working at the gym, preaching about tness to men and women, when your own life is a mess!"

Clara sprang to her feet, her eyes blazing with fury as she jabbed accusatory ngers in my direction. "You're the one who told me not to bother with a career! You said you wanted to be the breadwinner! I only took the job at the gym because it was close to home and less stressful than the corporate world!"

"Well, I take that back!" I yelled, my frustration reaching a boiling point. "Once my business takes off, I can't have my wife working as a gym instructor! Are you kidding me, Clara? You'd be a disgrace, and I won't stand for it!"

Her eyes shimmered with unshed tears. "I... Clara Jones, a disgrace?" she whispered, her voice trembling with hurt.

I scoffed, trying to calm my anger. "Why are you using your maiden name?" I shot back. She has always been a dramatic woman.

"You must be out of your mind to think I'll continue this marriage with you," she spat, her eyes blazing. "It ended the moment you chose that plastic b***h over me."

I couldn't help but feel a surge of condence. She couldn't possibly leave me. Despite our current rift, Clara loved me too much to walk away. "Don't be ridiculous," I dismissed her threat, convinced that she would come crawling back to me within a week, begging for forgiveness and reconciliation.

"Do I appear to be joking?" she spat, her tone dripping with venom. "Do I look like someone who would tolerate such an insult?" With a swift motion, she reached for something beside her seat and slammed a brown envelope onto the table.

I glared at it suspiciously. "What's this?" I demanded.

"What do you think it is?" she shot back atly.

Reluctantly, I picked up the envelope and pulled out its contents. My initial reaction was one of disbelief, followed by a bitter chuckle. "Divorce papers? Seriously?" I scoffed, my disbelief turning to indignation.

"I intended to have them delivered to your oce today since you refused to come home," she explained calmly, pointing to the document. "But it seems you've saved me the trouble. I've already signed, and I suggest you do the same. Lyra will be coming to collect them."

I always knew having Lyra as a lawyer wouldn't work in my favor. "Don't make decisions you'll regret, Clara," I warned, taking a step closer to her.

"I've already made a bad decision, James, and that decision was choosing you, agreeing to marry you," she shot back. "I shouldn't have taken you serious when you acted all sweet towards me back in college, I should have just ignored your insignificant self."

Her response stung, but I refused to let her see it. "If I sign these papers and you come crawling back, don't expect me to welcome you with open arms," I warned, trying to assert some semblance of control over the situation.

"The warning should be for you," she countered. "When you sign that paper, remove my name from your life and your dealings. If I ever discover my name associated with yours again, and it's your doing, I won't hesitate to take legal action against you for defamation. Consider yourself warned."

"So, you're really asking me to sign this?" I questioned one last time, a glimmer of hope ickering within me, hoping she'd reconsider. "Think about it, Clara. You have nothing in your name. Remember, you're an orphan with an aunt who couldn't care less about you. Your name has been removed from the damn family register."

"Just sign the damn thing," she replied coldly, her eyes devoid of any emotion. "I've already moved all my belongings here. As I said, Lyra will collect the divorce papers once you're done signing it. Enjoy your miserable life, James." With those nal words, she turned on her heels and marched out of the house, slamming the door behind her with a resounding bang.