

CHAPTER 6

JAMES

"You actually left your wife for me?" Veronica's question caught me off guard, causing me to lift my gaze from the plate of salad before me.

With a slow blink, I met her eyes, feeling a pang of discomfort at the condescending tone in her question. "Why phrase it in such a manner?" I asked, my tone betraying my unease. "Just to clarify, she was the one who initiated the divorce proceedings, not me."

"But you still put your signature on the papers," she pointed out, a small smile dancing on her lips.

While I still harbored affection for my wife, the idea of nancial stability outweighed my emotional attachment to Clara. Therefore, I decided to continue being the man I am right now until I achieved my desired nancial security. "What's with the cheerful demeanor?" I inquired, unable to comprehend her apparent excitement.

Veronica merely shrugged nonchalantly. "It means I get to have you all to myself now."

As I considered my options, a devious idea crept into my mind. Why not sweep her off her feet, get what I want from her, and then divorce her? With a irtatiuous smile, I dropped my fork and leaned forward, meeting her gaze.

"If you wanted that so badly, why didn't you tell me?" I asked, my tone laced with faux innocence.

"Would you have agreed to it?" she countered, her fake lashes uttering seductively. "I was skeptical that I would ruin everything if I asked for that."

Not when you pay all the bills and promise for more deals in the future, I thought to myself, but opted to keep that part to myself for now. "I was only with Clara because she didn't have any other family,"

Her brows shot up in surprise. "Really? Is she an orphan?"

I nodded, playing the role of the caring husband. "She had only her aunt, but severed every relationship with her after we got married. I was worried that if I left her, she wouldn't have anywhere else to go."

Veronica nodded slowly, her expression thoughtful. "Where is she now? I want to compensate her for her loss." She stated

I shrugged nonchalantly, not particularly interested in Clara's whereabouts at the moment. "I'm not sure, and I honestly don't care to know right now," I admitted bluntly. "But I can bet my ass that she's staying with Lyra at the moment. It's not like she can afford to stay in a hotel for long, nor can she afford to pay for rent."

"The money for compensation, you can give it to me. I'll make sure it gets to her," I offered, already envisioning what I could do with the money.

"Sure." Veronica reached into her purse, retrieved her checkbook, and swiftly wrote out a check for Clara before handing it to me.

"Thank you for her good heart," I acknowledged, inwardly calculating how this windfall could benet me.

"It's ne. I mean, I can now publicly date you without my conscience attempting to judge me," Veronica quipped with a smirk, her words catching me off guard.

It took every ounce of self-restraint not to scoff at Veronica's sudden display of conscience. She had no qualms about dating me when I was still married, yet now that I was legally single, she seemed to have developed a conscience overnight. But who cared? As long as I had checks like the one she had just given me, her newfound morality was of little consequence.

Clearing my throat, I casually shoved the check into my pocket. "You promised to help me secure a meeting with your brother so he could assist me in closing a major deal. When can we expect that to happen?" I inquired, my tone laced with impatience.

Taking a sip of her wine, Veronica maintained her composure. "Things like this take time, James. I'm sure you don't understand because you've never been in such a situation," she retorted, her words dripping with condescension.

I frowned deeply at her thinly veiled insult. "You didn't have to undermine me before answering my question," I admonished, my irritation evident in my tone.

Veronica chuckled mockingly, setting down her glass and picking up her fork. "That wasn't an insult, James. I was simply stating facts," she countered, her gaze piercing as she locked eyes with me. "An insult would be calling you stupid for not guring out that you can't just wake up one morning and meet my brother."

My jaw clenched at her audacity. "Isn't that why we're dating?" I challenged, unable to suppress my frustration.

"For my money?" she retorted sarcastically, her tone dripping with disdain. "Are you calling yourself a gold digger? Are you nally admitting to it?"

I felt my left hand clench involuntarily on my thigh as I struggled to maintain my composure. "You're upset, and I apologize for causing that," I forced myself to remain calm, reminding myself to play it cool until I got what I wanted from her. "I understand that you and your brother are very busy, I just wanted to remind you."

"I didn't forget," Veronica deadpanned, cutting off any attempts on my part to remind her of our arrangement. "So don't make an unwarranted effort of trying to remind me."

We nished the rest of the lunch in silence until her phone chimed, prompting her to pick it up.

"My brother is having his birthday party this weekend," she mused aloud, and I leaned forward eagerly, sensing an opportunity.

"Do you think it's the best time to discuss business with him?" I asked, already strategizing on how to persuade him to invest in my company.

Veronica regarded me with a mixture of disbelief and exasperation. "Of course not!" she retorted rmlly. "This is the best time to befriend him. If you establish a friendship with him, it'll be much easier to get him to help you sign a contract."

Why was Veronica talking as if it wasn't within her power to arrange a meeting with her brother? When she made that promise, she led me to believe it would be a simple matter. "Sure," I replied, masking my frustration.

Later, after lunch, I made a stop at Lyra's oce to conrm that Clara was indeed with her. Walking into her small law rm, I couldn't help but wonder if her abrasive personality was affecting her client base. "I'm here to see Ms. Lyra Kath," I announced to her secretary.

The secretary regarded me with a neutral expression. "Do you have an appointment?" she inquired politely.

Who needed an appointment to see Lyra? It's not like she was a big shot in the legal industry. "I'm someone close to her," I replied, hoping that my previous marriage to Clara would serve as sicient reason for a visit.

"I'm sorry, sir, but you'll need an appointment before you'll be able to meet..." the secretary began, but her words trailed off as Lyra emerged from the nearby door.

"Please inform Mr. Ga—" Lyra started, but her voice caught in her throat as she locked eyes with me. "What are you doing here, James?" she spat out, her disdain obvious.

Suppressing the urge to roll my eyes, I maintained my composure. "I want to talk," I stated rmlly, ignoring the hostility in her tone.

She scrutinized me from head to toe, her expression unreadable. "Let me guess, you regret what you did to Clara and you want her back," she speculated, her tone dripping with sarcasm.

I shook my head incredulously. "That's far from it," I retorted, wondering where she got such wild ideas. "I'm here to talk about Clara, but not because I want her back."

"Then I think you're in the wrong place," she replied bluntly, her dismissal clear in her tone.

"And what is that supposed to mean?" I snapped, my patience wearing thin. I could tolerate Veronica's attitude for the sake of her wealth, but I had no reason to tolerate Lyra's.

"I simply meant that this isn't where you're supposed to be, and I'm not the one you should be talking to," Lyra stated matter-of-factly as she walked out of her oce, closing the door behind her. Folding her arms, she leveled a stern gaze at me. "You should be in the psycho ward, talking to a psychiatrist, because you've clearly lost your mind if you think I'll engage in a conversation with you about Clara."

My jaw clenched at her biting words. "Just tell me where she is. Is she staying with you?" I demanded, my frustration mounting.

Lyra remained silent, her expression unreadable.

"I asked you a question, Lyra," I pressed, my tone sharper now.

"Well, I'm thinking," she retorted sarcastically, her deance evident.

"Of what? Where she is?" I pressed, my frustration mounting with each passing moment.

"I'm thinking of whether I should kick you in the balls where it hurts so much and if I have enough money to pay for the nes if you decide to sue," Lyra shot back, her eyes ashing with hostility.

I clenched my sts, struggling to maintain my composure in the face of her infuriating demeanor. "Just answer my question!" I snapped, my patience wearing thin.

"You will have to shove your hand down my throat and get it," she retorted deantly.

Turning to her secretary, Lyra continued with a dismissive wave of her hand. "Please inform Mr. Gregory that I can now meet him."

With a nal glare in my direction, Lyra retreated back into her oce, slamming the door shut behind her. Feeling utterly frustrated and humiliated, I stormed away, not without catching the secretary's stied snicker.