

Chapter 2

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The others seated at the table hurriedly tried to smooth things over.

"You know what Gretchen is like, Melinda. She runs her mouth when she's drunk," someone said.

"It's Shirley's big day today, so you and Gretchen shouldn't argue. It'll give others something to talk about," another added.

I snarled, "Gretchen has to apologize to me right now if she doesn't want me to cause a scene. I want her to tell everyone that she was only making things up earlier, or I'll call the cops and take her to court for libel!"

Gretchen glared at me. "Who do you think you are, Melinda Dashner? No daughter-in-law would dare demand an apology from her mother-in-law!"

I roared, "Are there mothers-in-law who falsely accuse their daughters-in-law of being loose and having STDs? Aren't you afraid of going to hell because of these rumors you've spread?"

Everyone in the banquet hall turned to look at me when they heard my shouts. Gretchen's face turned red with rage. "Keep your voice down! Or do you think you haven't shamed yourself enough?"

Things were starting to get out of hand, and Shirley looked like she was about to cry. "Mom, please stop talking! Do it for my sake!"

Jacob was at another table. He hurried over when he heard the ruckus. "What are you and Mel arguing about, Mom? I heard you guys from way over there."

I grabbed his arm, looking aggrieved as I said, "Your mother is going around spreading lies about me. She says I've cheated on you and contracted an STD."

No man could accept being suspected of having been cuckolded, especially with so many people around. Jacob's expression darkened, and he snapped, "How can you spout such nonsense, Mom? I know what Mel is like—there's no way she could've done something like that!"

The guests started to speak up for me after Jacob defended me.

"Everyone says mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law are natural enemies, but Gretchen is particularly ruthless, don't you think? She cursed her son with being cuckolded just so she could make Melinda look bad."

"Some people are just naturally nasty with their words. It's like they can't live if they don't make up rumors about others."

"I would rip her to shreds if I were her daughter-in-law!"

Gretchen immediately yelled, "She's hoodwinked you, Jake! I wouldn't go around talking about this if I didn't have proof, would I?"

I looked at her. "I'll kill you if you can't produce your so-called proof right here and now!"

I had a clear conscience, so I wasn't afraid of her. Since marrying Jacob, I was sure I'd done everything required of me as a wife and daughter-in-law. I loved Jacob and cared for Gretchen; I hadn't done wrong by them at all. I wanted to see what sort of proof she could produce!

Gretchen whipped out a piece of paper from her bag and handed it to Jacob. "Take a look at this, Jake!"

He took it from her, and his expression turned even uglier. I was about to see what it was when he slapped me and threw the paper in my face. "To think I had so much faith in you, Melinda! How could you have done this to me?"

I had no time to consider my stinging cheek. I grabbed the paper and saw what it was. It was a diagnosis for syphilis—my name and identification were clearly indicated on it.

I was stunned. What was going on?