

The unexpected meeting

(Olivia)

The next morning, I arrived at the oce feeling lighter than I had in days. Yesterday with Derek at the diner had been exactly what I needed, a break from the constant pressure I had been facing.

I replayed our conversation in my head as I walked into the building, the memory of his laugh still making me smile. Things were nally starting to look up.

But as soon as I settled at my desk, I noticed the tension in the air. People were whispering around me, stealing glances in my direction.

I brushed it off, thinking it had nothing to do with me, and focused on starting my day.

Just as I was about to dive into the latest project, my phone buzzed with a message from my boss's assistant, Tracy.

"Olivia, can you come to Ms. Callahan's oce? She needs to speak with you." My stomach twisted when I heard that, and at that moment, I wanted to vomit.

It wasn't often that I got called in to see Ms. Callahan without a scheduled meeting. But I pushed the unease aside, telling myself it was probably something routine, a new assignment, maybe.

I made my way down the hall, each step echoing in the quiet space. Tracy's eyes were glued to her screen when I arrived, and she didn't say a word as I knocked on the door and stepped inside.

Ms. Callahan was seated behind her desk, her expression unreadable. There was no warmth in her eyes as she glanced up from her computer. She gestured for me to sit, and I hesitated for a second before doing as she asked.

"Olivia," she began, her voice void of the usual warmth that she used to show me.

"I'm afraid we need to have a serious conversation." My heart skipped a beat. This wasn't about a new project. Something was wrong.

"There's been an issue with last quarter's nancial reports," she continued, folding her hands on the desk.

"A signicant error was traced back to your work." I blinked, completely caught off guard.

An error? I'd been thorough with every report I handled, especially the last quarters. I made sure everything was triple-checked before submitting it.

"I'm not sure if I understand," I said, trying to keep my voice steady.

"I reviewed those reports multiple times. There shouldn't have been any mistakes." Ms. Callahan's expression remained cold as if my explanation didn't matter.

"The mistake cost the company a substantial amount of money. We conducted an internal review, and the error points to you." I shook my head, trying to grasp what she was saying. There was no way this could be true. I knew my work inside and out.

"There has to be some kind of misunderstanding," I said, my voice faltering slightly.

"That part of the report wasn't even in my section. I'm sure if we go over it again..." She cut me off, her tone sharp and nal.

"The decision has already been made, Olivia." My mouth went dry. Not believing that this was happening to me. Why? I don't even understand myself.

"What decision?" I whispered, though I already knew the answer.

"We're terminating your employment, effective immediately." The words hit me like a punch to the gut. I stared at her, thinking about what she had just said.

This couldn't be happening. I'd given so much to this job, worked late nights, and pushed myself to the limit, and now, unexpectedly, they were letting me go.

"But..." I started, but she raised her hand to silence me.

"There's nothing more to discuss. We've reviewed the evidence, and it stands. Tracy will handle the paperwork, and you'll be escorted out once everything is signed." I sat there, frozen, the weight of what was happening crashing down on me.

This was more than just a mistake. There was something else going on, something beneath the surface that I couldn't quite place.

My boss had always treated me well, or so I thought. She never questioned my work, and I'd never given her a reason to doubt me. But now, as I looked into her eyes, I saw something that chilled me to the bone.

This wasn't about a simple error.

It was personal.

The cold indifference in her gaze reminded me of someone else. Someone who'd always found ways to tear me down to sabotage any progress I made.

My adopted family.

It all started to make sense. The sudden change in Ms. Callahan's attitude and the way things had slowly shifted at work over the past few months. They had never been subtle in their attempts to control my life, and it seemed that their inuence had found its way into my career, too.

I swallowed hard, ghing back the tears that threatened to spill. I wouldn't give Ms. Callahan or my family the satisfaction of seeing me break down.

Instead, I straightened in my chair, my voice calm but rm.

"I understand," I replied. Ms. Callahan gave a brief nod as if she expected nothing less.

"Good. Tracy will nalize everything." I stood up, my legs feeling like they were made of lead.

As I walked out of her oce, I could feel the stares of my coworkers on me, their whispers following me down the hall, but I didn't care.

By the time I reached my desk, Tracy was already there, holding a folder lled with termination paperwork. I signed it, barely registering the words on the page. My mind was elsewhere, racing with thoughts of how my life had been ripped out from under me in a matter of minutes.

With the papers signed, Tracy escorted me to the elevator. I didn't look back as the doors closed behind me. I couldn't. Everything I'd worked for was gone.

By the time I reached the street, I was numb. The city buzzed around me, indifferent to the chaos in my world.

I pulled out my phone, hesitating for a moment before dialing Derek's number.