

He Left Me at Forty-Eight—Then Wanted Me Back

Chapter 5

My husband took my house key.

My children watched me drive away.

An hour later, I realized I had nowhere to go.

I drove without a destination.

Past the marina.

Past restaurants where families sat beneath warm lights.

Past grocery stores where women pushed carts toward homes that still expected them.

My banking app showed an amount that would barely cover two months of cheap rent if I became extremely creative about food.

I checked into a motel that did not smell quite bad enough to scare me.

The air conditioner rattled.

The floral bedspread looked older than my marriage.

I sat on the edge of the mattress with two suitcases beside me.

Twenty-five years reduced to luggage.

I lasted twelve minutes before I cried.

Not graceful tears.

The kind that folded me in half.

I cried for the house because I had poured so much of myself into it that I did not know what was left outside its walls.

When the crying stopped, the silence was worse.

So I washed my face.

Changed my shirt.

Put my wedding ring back on after almost removing it.

Then drove toward the water.

There was a coastal bar I had passed a hundred times and never entered alone.

Wives like me went home.

Tonight that category had expired.

I parked badly and walked in.

Salt air followed me through the door.

Blues music played under conversations.
I took the last empty stool and ordered bourbon.
The bartender looked at my face, my ring, and my shaking hand.
He poured without comment.
The first swallow burned.
Good.
Burning was simple.
I stared into the mirror behind the bar.
Forty-eight.
Mascara scrubbed away.
Mouth bare.
A woman who looked as if someone had removed the walls around her
and left her standing.
A quiet laugh escaped me.
"What's funny?"
The voice came from two stools away.
A woman sat there in a black jumpsuit and red lipstick.
Dark hair swept up.
Sharp eyes.
Beautiful in a way that did not ask permission.
"Nothing."
She glanced at my bourbon.
"That's a lie."
I should have told her to mind her business.
Instead I said:
"I think my life ended before dessert."
Her eyes moved to the ring.
"Husband?"
"Apparently former husband. He hasn't completed the paperwork
yet."
"Cheating?"
"He brought her to my birthday dinner."
One eyebrow lifted.
"That is aggressive."

"My children knew."

Her expression changed.

Not pity.

Something harder.

"Ah."

That tiny sound found the real wound.

I took another drink.

"I left today."

"Good."

I turned on her.

"Good?"

"You heard me."

"I lost my house."

"Did you?"

The question irritated me.

"I raised three children there. I spent twenty-five years there."

"That isn't what I asked."

I stared.

She took a sip of her drink.

"I'm Camila."

"Evelyn."

"Still wearing the ring, Evelyn?"

I curled my fingers.

"I forgot."

"No, you didn't."

"You do this with strangers often?"

"Only the ones with murder in their eyes."

Despite myself, I laughed.

It felt rusty.

Camila smiled slightly.

"There she is."

"Who?"

"The person under all that shock."

I looked down at my glass.

"You don't know me."

"True."

"Then why are you talking to me like you do?"

"Because women repeat patterns with different furniture."

That shut me up.

She tapped the bar once.

"My fiancé slept with a twenty-two-year-old event hostess six weeks before our wedding."

I looked at her.

"Half the guest list knew first," she continued. "My mother told me to forgive him. His mother asked if I'd been emotionally unavailable."

"What did you do?"

"Canceled the wedding. Sold the ring. Used the money to help launch my company."

"You make that sound easy."

"It was terrible."

Camila held my eyes.

"Hard and impossible are not synonyms."

Something shifted inside me.

Tiny.

Unwelcome.

Hope, maybe.

Then she asked:

"Where are you sleeping tonight?"

I looked toward the door.

"Motel."

"For how long?"

"I don't know."

"And tomorrow?"

The answer embarrassed me.

"I don't know that either."

Camila reached into her bag.

For one second I thought she was giving me a business card.

Instead she took out her phone.

"Then tomorrow starts with an address