

Chapter 10

That night, Marian did not go home.

She stayed with Katherine—her oldest friend, her safe place—until the following Monday. The city outside Katherine’s apartment window pulsed with its usual rhythm, headlights streaking like distant stars, but Marian barely noticed any of it. The walls of that guest room became her refuge and her prison all at once.

She couldn’t go home.

Not after what she saw at the restaurant.

Every time she closed her eyes, the image replayed with cruel precision: Daniel’s face illuminated by soft, golden light, his parents smiling warmly across the table, and her—Elise—sitting beside him, laughter spilling like honey. The sound was sweet, effortless, intimate. It was the laughter Marian once believed belonged to her.

Now, every heartbeat was an echo of betrayal.

Her phone lay face down on the nightstand, vibrating endlessly—calls from Daniel, from Bryan, from Katie. Each ring felt like a nail hammering deeper into her chest. When Katherine nally lost patience, she snatched the phone, answered Daniel’s call, and said in a voice as sharp as glass,

“She’s with me. She’s staying with me. Give her space.”

Then she hung up and switched the phone off. The silence that followed was both relief and sorrow.

Katherine had mentioned divorce that night, her voice cautious but practical. Marian didn’t answer. She wasn’t ready—or maybe she was just too afraid to say the word out loud. Divorce meant it was real. It meant there was no going back, no waking up from this nightmare.

So she cried.

That weekend was a blur of tears, wine, and long hours lying on the couch, staring at the ceiling as daylight turned to dusk and back again. Katherine tried to coax her to eat, to shower, to talk—but Marian was adrift in a fog she could not shake. She just needed to forget, even if only until Monday. Then she could hide behind her work again, the one place where control and order still existed.

When Monday came, Marian woke with a pounding headache and eyes swollen from crying. She dragged herself to work, late. The oce greeted her with its usual buzz—phones ringing, printers whirring—but it all sounded far away, muted by the dull roar inside her mind.

The moment she stepped through her door, her assistant rose quickly from her desk.

“Ma’am... someone’s waiting for you in your oce.”

Marian frowned, confusion ickering brievely through her exhaustion. She pushed the door open—and froze.

There, sitting neatly across from her desk, were Katie and Elise.

The world tilted.

Her voice came out low, measured, though she could feel her pulse hammering. “What are you doing here?”

“Marian, we just want to talk,” Katie said softly, her hands clasped tightly in front of her.

“This is my workplace,” Marian replied, her tone sharpening. “You have no right to invade my workplace.”

“You’re not giving us any choice,” Katie pleaded. “I’ve been calling you. We just want to explain what happened at the restaurant. Daniel didn’t want to go—he only drove us to Elise’s appointment. She’s... she’s with child, and the pregnancy is delicate. Please, we need you to understand. Daniel made a mistake, yes, but don’t be cruel to him. He loves you. We love you like our own daughter.”

Marian let out a small, incredulous laugh, though there was no humor in it. “Love me? Like your daughter?”

She took a step forward, eyes blazing, voice trembling but steady.

“Would you let your daughter be humiliated like this? Betrayed like this? Would you stand beside the woman who destroyed her marriage and ask her to understand?”

Katie’s lips trembled.

“Would you let your daughter go home every night wondering if the love she built her life around was even real?” Marian continued, her hands shaking. “If that’s how you treat your daughter, then I don’t need that kind of love. Please—get out of my oce. I don’t want to see you or that homewrecker who now lives under your roof.”

Elise, who had been silent until then, nally spoke, her voice gentle but edged with defensiveness.

“I am not a homewrecker. Yes, we made mistakes. If my pregnancy wasn’t so fragile, if I hadn’t lost my job, I wouldn’t be here. My love for my child is bigger than my pride. Bryan and Katie only wanted to help me. But this... this isn’t about me or Daniel. It’s about our child. Our child is innocent.”

Marian’s breath caught. Then her expression hardened.

“Not a homewrecker?” she whispered. “Then what would you call a woman who sleeps with a married man? Who drinks with him, laughs with him, knowing he belongs to someone else? Decent women don’t destroy families and then hide behind their pregnancies.”

She turned to the door.

“Get out. Now.”

Katie rose slowly, tears in her eyes. “I’m sorry, Marian. I understand that you’re hurting. Daniel is hurting too. We all are. Even if you don’t believe it, we love you. Please, nd it in your heart to forgive him.”

Marian said nothing. The door closed behind them, and silence swept through the oce like a storm’s aftermath.

Her knees almost gave out.

With trembling ngers, she pulled out her phone and dialed Katherine.

“Katherine,” she said, her voice raw, “send me the number of the divorce attorney. I can’t do this anymore.”

There was a pause on the line, then Katherine’s calm, steady voice. “I’ll send it to you right now.”

When the call ended, Marian dialed another number—one she knew by heart.

Daniel answered on the rst ring, his voice eager, hopeful. “Hello, love?”

Marian closed her eyes. For a moment, she almost couldn’t speak. Then her words came out sharp, clear, and nal.

“Tell your mother and your mistress to never come to my workplace again.”

Before he could respond, she ended the call.

Then she stood there, in the middle of her oce, surrounded by the ghosts of a life she no longer recognized.

There was so much to do—call the attorney, write her resignation, start over somewhere far away.

Seeing Daniel’s mistress standing in her oce had been the last push she needed.

Enough was enough.

For her to heal, she had to leave. For her to nd herself again, she had to burn the bridge completely.

And this time, she wouldn’t look back.