

Chapter 11

The moment Marian hung up, the silence hit her like a wave.

It was heavy, absolute—an echo that swallowed every other sound in the room. Her hand trembled as she lowered the phone onto the desk, the faint click louder than it should’ve been. For a long moment, she just stood there, unmoving, her reaction faintly mirrored in the glass wall behind her.

Beyond that glass, Los Angeles shimmered in the distance—an endless constellation of lights blinking indifferently against the dusk. The city hadn’t changed. Cars still crawled along the streets like veins pulsing with life. Somewhere out there, people were laughing, living, beginning again.

But for Marian, everything had stopped.

The air in the oce felt thinner now, heavier somehow. Her chest rose and fell unevenly as if even breathing took effort. She gripped the edge of her desk, grounding herself against the vertigo of her own heartbreak. Then slowly—painfully—clarity began to seep through the fog.

This was it.

No more pretending.

No more salvaging something already shattered beyond repair.

She reached for her leather-bound planner, the one Daniel had given her on their third anniversary. The touch stung. She ipped to a clean page, the pen trembling in her hand, and began to write in her small, deliberate script:

- Call divorce attorney.
- Draft resignation letter.
- Check ights to Seattle..

Her hand froze after the last line.

Seattle.

Katherine’s cousin had offered her a spare apartment there—a quiet place by the bay, weeks ago, back when everything rst began to fall apart. Marian had brushed off the offer then, thinking she’d never need it. But now... it felt less like a choice and more like destiny tugging her away from the ruins of her life.

By noon, her resignation letter was printed, signed, and delivered. Her boss called her into his oce almost immediately. The man’s usual warmth softened further when he heard her reason.

“I’m ling for divorce,” she said simply, her voice calm but hollow.

He studied her face in silence for a long moment before nodding. “You don’t need to explain more. Take time, Marian. Work from home if you must—wherever you go. You’ve earned that much.”

She nodded, her gratitude silent but deep. This company had given her stability when her marriage no longer could.

By ve o’clock, her phone buzzed with a message from the attorney conrming her rst consultation. She stared at the screen for a moment, the words blurring slightly. Every step hurt, but each one also freed her. Inch by inch. Breath by breath.

When she nally returned to the house that night, the air inside was still. Too still.

Daniel was waiting in the foyer. He was seated on the edge of the bench, elbows on his knees, his eyes red-rimmed and weary. The light from the hallway carved deep shadows across his face. When he saw her, he stood as if pulled by instinct—hope ickering, desperate and frail.

“Marian,” he breathed, his voice cracking. “Please... I just need to talk to you. Five minutes. That’s all I’m asking.”

She stopped in the doorway. Her pulse quickened. The house felt foreign now—each framed photograph, each piece of furniture, each scent a ghost of the life she’d lost. It wasn’t home anymore. Just walls lled with echoes.

“Five minutes,” she said coldly, crossing her arms. “No more.”

He nodded, swallowing hard. “Thank you.”

They sat on the couch. Between them lay the weight of a thousand memories—their rst kiss, their rst ght, their rst night in this house. Now, all of it seemed far away, belonging to people who no longer existed.

“I never meant for any of this to happen,” Daniel said, voice trembling. “That night with Elise—it was one mistake. I swear, it meant nothing. When she told me about the baby, I didn’t know what to do. I didn’t want you to nd out that way.”

Marian stared ahead, her expression unreadable. “But I did. You were the one who said it, Daniel. On my birthday.”

He winced, the memory twisting like a knife.

“I love you,” he whispered. “You have to believe that.”

She turned to face him then. Her eyes—once soft, once full of adoration—were sharp and calm now, like glass under moonlight.

“I used to believe that,” she said. “I used to believe in us—in our vows, in every plan we made. But now, every time I look at you, I see her. I see the woman carrying your child. And no amount of ‘I’m sorry’ will make that go away.”

Daniel’s hands tightened into sts on his knees. “I just want to x this.”

“You can’t,” she said, quiet but rm. “You broke something you can’t unbreak. And now I have to nd a way to live without you.”

He looked up, his voice breaking. “Are you... leaving me?”

“Yes.” Her tone was steady, stripped of emotion. “I’ve spoken to a lawyer. I’m ling for divorce. I settled things with work—I’ll be working remotely from now on. I can’t stay here anymore. This house... this isn’t home. Not after what happened that night.”

Daniel’s face collapsed under the weight of her words. “Marian, please—don’t do this. Don’t throw us away.”

“You already did,” she whispered. “You threw it away for a night you barely remember.”

“I was drunk, Marian. I made a mistake. Please, just listen to me.”

Her eyes hardened. “Daniel, the point is you chose to be drunk. You chose to go out with another woman. There are boundaries in love, and you crossed them before the alcohol ever did. You were in your right mind when you decided to go out with her. To get drunk with her—that’s why I can’t forgive you.”

The words hung in the air like shards of glass—fragile, glinting, nal.

He reached for her hand, his touch trembling, but she pulled away before his ngers could graze hers. The contact felt unbearable now, like the residue of a lie.

“I hope,” she said quietly, standing up, “that you’ll be a good father. Because that’s all that’s left of this. Be a better man for that child than you were for me.”

Her voice broke slightly at the end, but she didn’t let it show.

Then she turned and walked down the hallway toward their bedroom. The oor creaked softly beneath her feet, each step an echo of endings. Behind her, Daniel sat motionless, a single, strangled sob escaping into the stillness.

Inside the bedroom, Marian stood by the doorway and looked around. Every detail of the room whispered memories—the faint scent of his cologne, the framed photo on the dresser from their honeymoon, the indentation on the pillow where he used to sleep.

“So much love,” she whispered to herself. “So much pain.”

She closed her eyes. “It’s done.”

That night, she packed in silence. The city murmured faintly beyond the window, but its rhythm no longer reached her. For the rst time in weeks, she didn’t cry herself to sleep.

Because beneath all the wreckage, something fragile stirred within her—a icker of peace.

And for Marian Gutierrez Williams, peace was the rst breath of freedom.