

Chapter 5

The rain didn't stop.

It pressed against the windows like a whisper that wouldn't fade — a thousand soft hands tapping, reminding her that the world outside was still turning, even as hers stood still. Each drop lled the silence between heartbeats, a quiet percussion echoing in the hollow places of the room.

Marian sat motionless on the edge of the bed, her hands resting on the sheets — on their sheets — ngers trembling over the faint warmth that no longer existed. The lamp from the hallway cast a thin blade of light through the half-open door, cutting across the oor in a pale stripe. Dust motes oated lazily through it, suspended in the still air, as if even time had forgotten how to move.

She tried to breathe, but every inhale scraped her lungs like glass.

A sound escaped her — part laugh, part sob — the kind that made her press her palms to her face to keep from unraveling. Behind her closed eyes, colors pulsed and bled — gold, red, black — anything to drown out the image of Daniel's face when he said those words.

"I got someone pregnant."

The sentence replayed on an endless loop, each repetition cutting deeper.

She stood abruptly, the motion jerky, desperate. The air shifted. Her bare feet brushed against the rug, the soft bers grounding her for only a heartbeat before the weight of the truth dragged her back down.

The clock glowed faintly on the nightstand — 10:42.

Time meant nothing now.

Her gaze drifted to the framed photo beside it: the two of them on the pier last summer. Daniel's arm wrapped around her shoulders, their faces lit by sunlight, eyes squinting into the wind. They looked so alive. So sure.

That version of them felt like a lifetime ago — strangers wearing their faces.

Her hand trembled as she reached for the frame. For one second, she almost placed it back gently. But something inside her cracked — a small, sharp sound she could almost hear.

The photo slipped.

The glass shattered on the hardwood oor, splintering into a hundred glittering fragments.

The sound was too loud, too nal.

Marian stared at the broken pieces scattered at her feet — their smiles fractured, refracted into cruel little shards that reected the light like tiny knives.

Her breath hitched. Then came the sob — deep, raw, ripped from the center of her chest. She sank to her knees, clutching the edge of the bed as if it might hold her up. But it couldn't. Nothing could.

Outside, thunder rolled across the sky, distant but growing closer.

She could hear Daniel moving downstairs — the slow creak of the oorboards, the muted rustle of fabric. He wasn't gone yet. Maybe he didn't know how to leave. Maybe he thought she'd call him back.

She wouldn't.

Not tonight.

Marian crawled onto the bed, curling into herself. The sound of the storm seeped into her bones. Her ngers brushed against the empty pillow beside her — his pillow — still carrying the faint scent of cedar and his cologne. She turned her face into it and wept until the distinction between her tears and the rain outside no longer existed.

At some point, exhaustion took her — heavy, merciful, black.

The screen fades to black.

Morning.

Soft gray light ltered through the curtains. The rain had stopped, but the world still looked washed out, pale — as if the color had drained from everything.

Marian woke slowly, her body heavy, her eyes swollen. Her throat felt raw, her heartbeat dull and sluggish in her chest. For a long time, she didn't move. The silence felt unnatural — thick, suspended, waiting.

She sat up, glancing toward the door. The house was still.

Downstairs, the mug was gone from the coffee table. His jacket, too. The faint indentation on the couch cushion was all that remained — a ghost of where he'd sat.

And there, in the center of the table, lay a folded piece of paper.

Her breath caught.

She didn't move at rst. Just stared at it — that small, harmless thing that carried the weight of an ending.

Finally, with trembling ngers, she reached for it.

Marian,

I know there are no words that can make this right. I'm not asking for forgiveness — I don't deserve it. I just want you to know that I loved you. But I can't undo what I've done. I'm so sorry.

— Daniel

For a long moment, she just stared at it — no tears left to give, no words left to say. Then she closed her hand around it, holding it tight, as if she could press the memory of what they were back into her skin.

Outside, the rain began again — softer this time. Almost gentle.

And somewhere between the sound of the falling water and the silence of the house, Marian nally exhaled.

Not forgiveness.

Not peace.

Just breath — the rst one she'd taken without him.

The silence broke when her phone rang — shrill, intrusive, alive.

It came from the bedroom upstairs. Marian moved through the hall like she was underwater, her body heavy, her mind hazy. She found it glowing faintly on the nightstand — Katherine.

She answered without thinking.

"Girl!!!" Katherine's voice burst through the speaker, bright and chaotic, cutting through the quiet. "How was last night? You didn't call me! Did Daniel give you a birthday you'll never forget?"

That last question hit like a blade.

Marian couldn't answer. Her lips parted, but the air caught in her throat. Then the sob came — sudden, uncontrollable. A sound too human, too broken. It tore through her before she could stop it.

"Marian?" Katherine's voice shifted instantly — alarm replacing laughter. "Hey... hey, what happened? What's wrong?"

But Marian couldn't form words. Every time she tried, her mouth opened and only a cry came out — deep and guttural, pulled from the very core of her grief. She clutched the phone to her chest, her knuckles white. Her knees buckled, and she sank onto the oor again, her cries mued by the sound of the renewed rain outside.

Through the static of the line, she could hear Katherine's voice, shaky now. "Don't move. I'm coming. I'll be right there, okay? Just hold on."

But Marian barely heard her. The world was nothing but the sound of her own heartbeat — too loud, too painful — and the rain, steady and endless, like the sky itself was weeping for her.

How could this happen?

How could he do this to me?

God... how do I live through this kind of pain?

Her voice broke on a whisper no one could hear.

The storm outside roared on, a relentless chorus to her heartbreak — and for the rst time, Marian wasn't sure she'd ever see sunlight the same way again.