

Chapter 9

The weekend used to be Marian's favorite time of the week.

Two whole days where the world slowed down — where she could stay tangled in Daniel's arms, laughing, dreaming, talking about their next adventure. They would spend lazy mornings in bed, whispering plans about the future: the house they'd build, the trips they'd take, the kind of parents they might someday be.

Now, weekends were her prison.

Without work to hide behind, the hours stretched endlessly. The walls of their home, once warm and safe, felt like they were closing in. Silence pressed against her chest until she could barely breathe.

Lying in bed no longer brought comfort. Every corner of the room whispered memories — the dent in the pillow where Daniel used to rest his head, the faint scent of his cologne on the sheets, the framed photo of them smiling at the beach.

She used to stay under the covers until noon. But now, she couldn't stand being there.

The moment morning light slipped through the curtains, Marian threw off the blanket and rose, desperate to escape her own thoughts.

Steam lled the bathroom as she stepped into the shower, letting the hot water wash over her like it could somehow rinse away the ache lodged deep in her chest. Today, she told herself, she wouldn't drown. She had made plans with Katherine — a day to breathe, to shop, to pretend her life hadn't shattered.

A day to be normal again.

By the time she went downstairs, the house was already awake. Daniel was in the foyer, keys in hand, dressed to leave.

He looked up the moment he heard her footsteps. His face was drawn, pale, the faint dark circles under his eyes betraying another sleepless night. For a brief second, his gaze softened — the way it used to when he saw her in the morning — and Marian's chest clenched painfully.

"Marian," he said quietly, his voice careful. "I'll be going to Mom and Dad's. Elise has a doctor's appointment today."

Marian froze mid-step. The name hit her like ice water. Elise.

Her brows furrowed. "She's... staying with your parents?"

Daniel sighed, as though bracing himself. "I told you — she lost her job, and the pregnancy is high-risk. She needed help, Marian. Mom and Dad agreed to let her stay with them until she delivers." He met her eyes, pleading. "I can't abandon my child."

For a moment, the world went completely still.

Marian felt the ground tilt beneath her. His child. Those words echoed in her mind like a cruel reminder.

She forced a small, bitter smile that didn't reach her eyes.

Bryan and Katie Williams — Daniel's parents — had always treated her like family. His mother would call her daughter, his father would toast to "the perfect couple." They had embraced her completely.

And now this.

A sharp pain twisted through her chest — not just betrayal, but humiliation.

Marian looked at Daniel, her eyes shining with disbelief, heartbreak, and something colder. Daniel held her gaze for a moment, then looked away, as if he couldn't bear to face what he saw in her expression.

Without a word, Marian turned and walked past him.

Katherine's reaction came like re.

"What?!" she almost shouted in the middle of the café where they had stopped for breakfast. "They let her stay in the same house? With Daniel visiting? What kind of family does that?"

Marian tried to smile, but it came out weak, trembling. "He said it's only because her pregnancy is high-risk. That she needs support. That his parents agreed."

Katherine's eyes ached. "That's not support, that's shameless. Even if she needed help, they could've put her up somewhere else — anywhere else. How can they do this to you?"

Marian stirred her coffee slowly, watching the spoon swirl. "I don't know, Kat. I really don't. I thought... I thought they loved me. That I was part of their family." Her voice broke. "But maybe I was only welcome until she came along."

Katherine reached across the table and squeezed her hand. "No, Marian. Don't you dare blame yourself. You've done nothing wrong. They're the ones who should be ashamed."

By mid-afternoon, the two of them had gone for massages, trying to wash away the tension that clung to Marian's shoulders like a second skin. Afterward, they wandered the mall, pretending for a while that life could go back to normal. The air smelled faintly of coffee and new clothes. People laughed around them — families, couples, children tugging at their parents' hands.

Marian's heart ached watching them.

They were heading toward their favorite Italian restaurant when she stopped suddenly. Her gaze had caught something — someone — through the wide glass window.

Inside, seated at a corner table, was Daniel.

And across from him sat her.

Elise.

Bryan and Katie were there too, smiling, passing plates across the table. Katie leaned in toward Elise, saying something that made her laugh — a soft, genuine laugh that turned Marian's stomach inside out.

Daniel looked relaxed. He smiled at something his father said, his hand resting on the table too close to Elise's.

The world fell away.

Marian felt her throat close, her knees weaken. Her heart hammered painfully against her ribs. It was as if someone had reached inside her chest and twisted.

Katherine turned to her sharply. "Marian? What is it—" Then she followed her gaze. Her expression darkened immediately. "Oh, for god's sake."

"Kat..." Marian whispered, her voice breaking. "Why here? Why now?"

Before Katherine could pull her away, Daniel looked up — and froze. His eyes widened, face paling as he realized she had seen them.

"Marian!" he called, standing so abruptly his chair scraped the oor. The entire restaurant turned to look.

Katherine grabbed Marian's arm, trying to lead her away, but Daniel was already rushing toward the door.

"Stop, Daniel." Katherine's voice was sharp as steel when he reached them. "Just stop. Haven't you done enough?"

"Please." Daniel begged, his voice shaking. "Marian, it's not what you think. Please just listen to me. I told you — she had a doctor's appointment, and Mom and Dad wanted to have lunch afterward. That's all. Please, love, it's not what it looks like."

People had started to stare. The buzz of conversation dimmed. Bryan and Katie appeared behind him, their expressions uneasy.

Marian looked at them — these people she once called family — and saw only strangers.

Her voice came out quiet, trembling, but every word cut through the air like glass.

"How can you keep hurting me like this, Daniel?" she whispered. "No... the question is, why do I keep letting you?"

"Marian, please," he said, reaching for her hand. "Let's talk somewhere else. Please, let's go. We can x this—"

She stepped back. Her tears nally fell, silent and steady. "No, Daniel. I'm done. Please... just let me go."

Her voice was barely a whisper, but the pain in it made even Daniel inch.

She turned away before he could speak again. Katherine immediately moved between them, stopping Daniel's desperate attempt to follow.

When Marian stepped out of the restaurant, the cold air hit her face — and everything she'd been holding back broke free.

She stopped walking, leaned against the wall, and let out a sob that seemed to come from somewhere deep inside, somewhere she didn't even know existed.

Katherine pulled her close, holding her as she cried.

Around them, the world went on — cars passing, people laughing, music from a nearby store playing softly.

But for Marian, everything had stopped.

Because the life she had built — the love she had believed in — was gone.

And no matter how much she tried to breathe, all she could feel was the pain of what could never be repaired.