

## WEAK AND BROKEN

(Penny's POV)

The first thing I did was hurl the million-dollar bottle of champagne at their traitorous bodies as I screamed out my rage. Luckily for them, they ducked out of the bed just in time, and so only the furious spray of the drink that had been meant for my celebration with my best friend rained down on them.

"How could you? How could you do this to me?!" I screamed the words over and over until my throat was sore... until I couldn't take it anymore, until the words decrescendoeo into a mere whisper, like a once powerful re slowly ickering into nothingness.

I collapsed to the ground in a heap, the many layers of my ball gown-like evening dress cushioning my fall. I wanted nothing more than to get out of there, to never see their traitorous faces again, but my chest—no, my heart—it hurt... it f\*\*\*\*\*g hurt so much.

Why?

Why would they do this to me?

I had been nothing but a good wife... a good friend.

I didn't deserve this?

Kira took advantage of my comparatively calm state to nally open her mouth, "Penny, look, I... I can explain."

I looked up at her in disbelief and curiosity as the tears streamed down my face, "There's... there's an explanation?" I asked incredulously even as I clutched painfully at my chest. "Let's hear it then. Let's hear this wonderful explanation that is going to miraculously make everything alright and make this betrayal totally acceptable."

It was hard to be sarcastic with all the many tears and the snies, but I think I did a pretty good job if you ask me.

Kira couldn't meet my gaze as she struggled to nd the right words, her eyes lled with guilt and shame and what strangely looked like relief. "Penny, I didn't want to hurt you... I didn't mean to. I was just... I was just trying to keep you both happy."

I looked at her in surprise, my tears momentarily freezing in the face of this new information. "Keep us both happy? By helping my husband cheat on me? f\*\*\*\*\*g make it make sense, Kira!"

Why was I still on the ground when I needed to be attacking her, tearing her f\*\*\*\*\*g hair out of her head?

Fabian stood up in that moment, rushing to me confrontationally as he adjusted the sheets around his nakedness, a serious look on his face, not one iota of regret or guilt in sight.

Whatever guilt I had seen when I rst barged in on them, it was all gone now for sure.

"Do you think you don't have a hand in this yourself, Penny?" He accused me, "You pushed me to do this!" He spluttered angrily as he started to pace.

I slowly made it to my feet even as I said the uncertain words, "I—I did?"

How was this my fault?

"Penny, you know I've always been supportive of your career, I always have... but you took that support for granted. You were always away on your f\*\*\*\*\*g business trips, and then when you got back, all you wanted to do was talk some more about work. You never wanted to discuss me! You know how tense I become when my brother is in town, and yet you left me all to myself to deal with it countless times. I felt so f\*\*\*\*\*g neglected." His eyes hardened. "And so I dealt with it the only way I knew how."

"By f\*\*\*\*\*g my best friend?" The tears resumed from their little break, streaming down my face.

"Well, Kira was there for me when you weren't. She understands me. She made me feel alive again."

I couldn't believe what I was hearing.

The pain that had been gnawing at my heart now turned into a blazing anger. "So, you turned to her? Instead of talking to me, instead of working things out?"

"You don't understand, Pen..." He shouted in my face, "This goes beyond all of that. I... I can barely recognize you!"

"What...what are you even talking about, Fabian?"

"Just take a look at yourself." His eyes ran over me from head to toe, for the first time revealing what he actually thought of me...

Pure, unbridled disgust.

"You've let yourself go, Penny. You look nothing like the slender, vibrant woman I fell in love with. Of course, I needed something more, someone better? Who can sleep with you when you look like this? You're a whole f\*\*\*\*\*g whale."

His bitter words cut me deeply like a well-sharpened knife, and I felt a wave of self-consciousness wash over me.

The beautiful dress I was wearing now felt like a mockery, like one I didn't even deserve to be in, and I wrapped my arms around my body as though to shield myself from his cruelty.

Was that why he had been avoiding every move I made towards him recently?

Why he cited tiredness as an excuse whenever I wanted us to make love?

Fuck, I was so foolish.

For all along, I thought that these things... that this distance happened as couples grew older. Unbeknownst to me, my husband just had a whole other agenda in mind.

God, it f\*\*\*\*\*g hurt.

But Fabian wasn't done with me. "You know, I'm actually happy you found out about this, because I can nally be honest. I want to be with Kira, Penny. I love her, and I've been holding back for too long. I'm done pretending."

No, no, no...

This couldn't be happening to me.

We could work this out.

We really could.

Fuck we had to, because I was nothing without them... I was nothing without my husband, without my best friend.

Their betrayal had hurt like hell, but I knew we could get past this.

I fell to my knees, throwing myself at my husband's feet, completely ne with putting my pride and my power on the line like that if it meant preserving the fragments of my rapidly shattering perfect world, my voice quivering with desperation. "Please, Fabian, don't leave me. I can change, I—I can quit my job... work on myself... be the woman you want me to be, I promise. Just please, don't leave me."

But my once-loving husband roughly threw his leg, warding me off of him as though I was some annoying dog pestering her master... and through it all, my so-called best friend stood by, watching as Fabian violently pulled me up to my feet, his face red with anger and irritation as he glared down at me, "You're just being pathetic at this point, Pen... why don't you just go home like the understanding wife I know you are and then I'll come over in the morning, so we can talk this through?"

I couldn't bring myself to look at Kira, the girl whom I once regarded as a sister. If I was being honest with myself, I really didn't even want to see her again, but my f\*\*\*\*\*g fear of being alone was the only thing holding me back.

It was the only thing encouraging me to extend olive branches when what I really needed to do was burn bridges and never look back.

But I'm weak.

We had already established that, hadn't we?

With time, perhaps things could go back to the way they were before, but that day was certainly not today, and so with a slight nod at Fabian, I silently turned away and walked out of the apartment without looking back.

I held it all together until I was out of the lobby, and then the tears attacked me again as I made my way over to my car, the sight of it plunging the knife of betrayal even deeper into my chest.

So how long had this been going on?

I hadn't even asked.

Were they seeing each other even as he gave me all of these perfect gifts, professing his love for me for the entire world to hear?

My head threatened to burst from all the overthinking, and in that moment, one thing became clear to me,

There was no way I could bring myself to sit in my car.

And so I took to the streets.

The streets of Somerville were surprisingly lively as I walked, tears still streaming down my face, my high heels in one hand as I walked barefoot, one foot in front of the other.

Everyone was totally oblivious to my pain, caught in the delirium of midnight and their interesting conversations with their associates. Hell, even the city's many lights seemed to burn brighter, totally indifferent to my pain. I was just a lost soul, wandering aimlessly through the night, a soul who had only been grounded with the help of the two people who had now so callously betrayed her.

What was left now?

To oat away into the beyond?

My tears worsened whenever I chanced on a couple, that little voice of reason in my head begging me to tell them that they were only wasting their time, that deep down, one of them was lying to the other, promising a lifetime of happiness when they knew very well that betrayal and heartbreak was just lurking in the corner.

I wasn't even sure they'd believe me though.

No one who believed himself or herself in love seldom did in these situations.

No.

They'd rather prefer to hold on to the belief that their powerful love was being tested, and that they were going to emerge on the other side of all the trials and tribulations, victorious.

Oh, how stupid we all were.

As I stumbled along the surprisingly packed sidewalk, the bright sign of a nearby bar caught my eye.

Its inviting glow promised refuge from the surge of emotions coursing through me...

It promised to help me forget it all, at least for the rest of the night.

And so, I made my way towards it, trembling slightly as I took in the shady nature of it all.

I was surprised that such a place had called out to me... because with my wealth and status, this was a place that the normal me would turn her nose up at in disgust.

But I wanted to forget, and what good would it do me if I stepped foot in a place where Fabian normally frequented?

This place... this Seraphina's...

It was just perfect.

The clinking of glasses, joyous chatter and the smell of booze and sweat and cigarettes greeted me almost as soon as I got in, and the sheer shock of it was enough to instantly sober me up, killing my rather spontaneous idea of wanting to forget.

I made my way over to the exit, and I almost would have gotten out too if it weren't for an excited bridal party barging in, sweeping me along with them until the door was completely far away.

Perhaps this was a sign?

Now that I was inside, I realised that the place wasn't as bad as I'd initially thought.

The place was buzzing with activity, and the upbeat techno that currently lled the room was so loud that it had become my new heartbeat.

I made my way to an empty barstool, the cold leather cooling the warmth in ways I in my cheeks from walking so close to all those people in skimpy dresses, dancing in rison I could only dream of.

I ordered a drink, choosing something really strong to numb the pain that throbbled in my chest.

The bartender slid the glass containing my order in front of me, and I wrapped my trembling ngers around it, closed my eyes, and then downed it all in one painful gulp.

"Woah... hey ma'am, maybe you should slow down a bit, the stuff I'm giving you is really strong." The bartender tried to warn me, but I rolled my eyes, "Just shut up and pour me another."

This time though, when he did pour for me, I took my sweet time downing it, and the memories took advantage of that to sneak in, reminding me again just how weak and gullible I had allowed myself to be in front of those two cheating bastards.

Alcohol really was a f\*\*\*\*\*g eye-opener indeed.

Because holy f\*\*k! To think that I'd gotten down on my knees to beg Fabian to take me back, as though I were the one who had wronged him...

He was right, I really was pathetic.

But no more of that.

Fuck him.

Fuck Kira.

I totally did not need them to live my life.

I was so deep in my thoughts and my drink, but then I suddenly felt a weird chill and this tingle at the back of my neck. I turned and my gaze met with the deepest green pair of eyes I had ever seen.

As I locked eyes with the stranger, the dimly lit bar faded into the background. His emerald eyes seemed to pierce through the haze of my numerous thoughts and my heartbreak. He was ruggedly handsome, with a hint of a mischievous smile playing on his lips.

We stared at each other for what seemed like ages, and then he nally broke the silence with the perfect pickup line he could have thought to come up with, his voice smooth and rich like aged whiskey.

"A penny for your thoughts?"