

before
the storm

1

There was a stranger on the beach. He was standing in front of my house, staring at it like he was casing it to rob.

Sometimes fate sneaks up on you. But Aidan Callahan didn't sneak up on me. He was brazen. He stood there in the middle of the sand, staring up at my brand-spanking-new beachfront house, looking like he was up to no good. I saw him clearly as I looked through the wall of windows, over the infinity-edge pool, to the ocean beyond. Yes, he was gorgeous. But I was a married woman of twenty years' standing who loved her husband, and I barely noticed that. What I noticed was that this guy looked strong. Dangerously so. And he dressed like a townie. Baggy athletic shorts, tank top, the glint of a gold chain at his neck. People like him resented people like me, and sometimes, they robbed them. There had been a string of robberies recently, of some of the big houses. The summer people thought the local cops were dragging their feet about solving them, maybe because the culprits were local boys. When I saw Aidan standing there, those

robberies were the first thing that leapt to mind, and a chill went down my spine.

I'll tell you everything that happened, starting from the beginning. My first impression of Aidan was that he was a potential thief. If only I'd listened to my instincts, I would've turned and run in the opposite direction. But that's not what I did. I walked toward him. And I will always blame myself for what came after.

2

It was a hot, sultry day, two weeks past Labor Day, and the bluff had cleared out. The summer people were all back in the city, leaving only me, and my next-door neighbor, old Mrs. Eberhardt. She lives in a saltbox shack on a wide lot that's coveted by every real estate developer in the East End. I live in the type of place that people build after they tear down houses like hers. She has a yappy little dog that wakes me up at five thirty every morning. As you can imagine, we didn't have much to say to one another, so basically, I was at the beach alone.

I'd been waiting around all day for the technician from the burglar alarm company to show up for the installation. The house had that fresh-paint smell. Details were still being attended to, and the alarm was one of the last items on the punch list. The company gave me a window from ten to two for installation, which I said was fine, because I had work to do preparing for the huge housewarming party I would be throwing in a matter of days. Finalizing guest lists, working out catering menus, scheduling the delivery of the

tent, negotiating with the valet parking company, angling to get a photographer from *Avenue* magazine to show up and take pictures for the society column. On and on. Hours passed, and the alarm guy still hadn't showed. At four, I called to complain, and they told me the technician was overbooked, and they'd have to reschedule for next week. *Typical*. I thought about reaching for the bottle of gin in the cabinet and mixing myself a nice strong cocktail to ease my frustration. But it was hours till sunset, and I decided to be good. I'd go for a run on the beach instead.

As I laced up my sneakers, I got the urge to text my daughter. Hannah had just left for college, and I was having trouble letting go. I gave the hair elastic on my wrist a good snap to feel the clarifying sting. My sister had taught me that trick. Aversion therapy. She'd used it to quit smoking, and now I was using it so I wouldn't be a helicopter mom. It worked. The urge passed. I walked through the French doors onto the terrace and took a deep breath of the salty air. The ocean was visible beyond the bluff, the crash of the waves audible from here. The surf was rough today, yet it never failed to calm me.

And I needed calming. Hannah's departure had set me adrift, leaving me all too conscious of how alone I felt in my life. My husband, Jason, traveled constantly for business. He'd never actually spent a single night at the beach house, despite the fact that we were pouring all our money into it. The house was a big source of stress between us. It was my dream, not his. We'd stretched to buy the land, which was postage-stamp-sized but in a primo location. We'd stretched even more to build the perfect house on it. Things weren't right between me and Jason, but in all honesty, I didn't fully know that yet. It was just a nagging feeling lurking

in my heart, making me antsy and discontented. But I fought it. I told myself, *He works a lot. He's a good provider. A good father. And hey, somebody's got to pay for the house, right? I shouldn't complain.*

I picked up the pace, fighting the pull of the sugary sand against the bottom of my sneakers, legs working, oxygen pumping through my veins. A shaft of light broke through the clouds, illuminating the water to a sparkling green. I lived on the part of the bluff closer in to the main road, where land was “affordable” at a million-plus an acre. (I won't say how much beyond a million.) The route I liked to run took me down the beach away from the road, toward the point, where the true mansions were. There was a house out there that last traded at forty million. You couldn't see it, though, because of the tall, perfectly groomed hedge that its famous owners installed for privacy. I'd never met those people, and I guessed I never would. Jason and I didn't rate. He was an investment banker, but not one of the famous ones who hung out with celebrities and owned a fleet of jets. I was an interior designer, but not the type with a million Instagram followers and houses featured in *Architectural Digest*. I'd stopped working when Hannah was born and had only recently gone back, trying to get my business off the ground, but facing headwinds. Jason and I moved in well-to-do circles, but we weren't at the top of the heap. The thing about being rich is, there's always someone richer.

I ran a mile-plus down the beach, not letting myself stop till I was out at the point. Then I doubled over, panting and holding my sides till I caught my breath. I'd be forty-three in November, and I liked to think I still looked good. But lately there were hints of middle age coming on. Fine lines in the mirror that I covered with

makeup, gray hairs peeking through that I masked with highlights. But you can't fake exercise. I needed to get back to Pilates class, or hire a trainer. Getting the house finished had taken too much time and energy. With Hannah gone, I should focus on *myself*.

The clouds were rolling in over the water, turning the sky black. I could smell the rain coming. I hadn't checked the forecast before I left, but generally they were saying to expect a stormy fall and a bad hurricane season. My superstitious mother had left me with a fear of electrical storms, to the point that I wouldn't turn on a faucet if it was lightning out. So, when the first peal of thunder sounded, I turned around and headed back.

Ten minutes later, I was back on my stretch of the bluff, with a clear line of sight to my house. A huge thunderclap sounded, and a vivid bolt of lightning split the sky. And there he was again, like some demon who'd materialized from thin air. The stranger I'd seen an hour earlier from my kitchen window. Staring again. The sight of him stopped me short. I could tell he was a townie, that he didn't belong in my neighborhood. Maybe that sounds snobbish. But I don't come from money, and I didn't mean it that way. As a matter of fact, Aidan that day reminded me of my own people. My brothers and their friends, playing street hockey back in the day on hot afternoons in front of our house. I loved those guys, but they were no angels. I know what I'm talking about. I know casing when I see it, and when I saw Aidan, I knew exactly what he was doing.

I'm not a shrinking violet, and I can take care of myself. I walked toward him, determined to say something.

"Hey! Hey, can I help you?" I yelled.

The wind took my words away. But somehow he heard, and turned and smiled at me. The smile, I definitely noticed. It was

like the sun breaking through the clouds, and all my suspicions melted away. He fooled me. Anybody can get fooled.

“That’s your house?”

He spoke as if he already knew the answer. I should have noticed that, and realized it was odd. But I didn’t see it. I only saw him.

“Yes,” I said.

“She’s a beauty.”

“Thank you.”

“I’m Aidan,” he said, and held out his hand. I took it.

“Caroline.”

“Caroline. Pretty name.”

“Thank you.”

His hand was warm. His eyes were very blue. He looked at me searchingly. I felt tongue-tied. He had to be ten or fifteen years younger than me. He seemed like he was about to say something more. But then the skies opened, and it started pouring.

“You should get inside before you get soaked,” he said.

“Yes.”

That was it, our whole conversation. He gave me a little wave and turned and hurried off. He was so casual about it, so nonchalant, that I forgot all about the idea that he might be a burglar. The beach where he’d been standing was public. He had a right to be there, and I figured he was just a guy who stopped to look at a beautiful house. Twice. Okay. But that’s not a crime. I went inside and tried to put him out of my mind, but I didn’t entirely succeed. My interest had been piqued. My guard had been lowered. My life was not in order. The combination of those things would prove to be my downfall.

3

The night after I first saw Aidan on the beach, my twenty-year marriage fell apart. I swear to God, one thing had nothing to do with the other. It was a total freaking coincidence, the worst coincidence of my life.

I was sitting barefoot on the big L-shaped couch in the great room, going over my guest list for the housewarming and feeling pretty good about life, when Jason called to say he wasn't coming to the party. And that's not even the bad part.

"Honey, I'm sorry. I can't make your housewarming thing" was how he put it.

"My housewarming? Last time I checked, this house belonged to both of us."

"You know what I mean."

"Seriously, Jason? That's not okay. You have to come. It's not just a housewarming. It's for your birthday, too."

"My birthday isn't until next month."

“But I put it on the invitation. I ordered an expensive cake. I invited people from your firm and your golf club.”

“I didn’t ask you to do that.”

“Well, they’re coming. And you know who else is coming? People I need to impress for the design business.”

I’d been a successful interior designer once. I could be again, with my beautiful new house as my calling card. Did he not get that?

“You want me to start making money, right?” I said.

“Of course I do.”

“The party is important to that, Jason. Magazine people are coming, and decorators and architects. I need you there.”

“I’m sorry, hon. I would if I could, but I’m stuck in Cleveland on this deal.”

Cleveland? What the hell? He’d told me he was going to Denver.

And that’s when it hit me. He was lying.

I cradled the phone against my neck and picked up my iPad from the coffee table. With our family plan, I can track everybody’s devices. I’d done it a few times with Hannah, when she was out late, and I was worried she’d been kidnapped by the Uber driver. But I’d never checked up on Jason before—I was that oblivious. Now I hit FIND MY IPHONE, and waited for the map to load showing his location. My heart was in my throat. I could feel that something bad was coming. And boy, was I right.

That little dot loaded like a punch to the stomach. Jason wasn’t in Cleveland, or in Denver. He was in the city, a three-hour drive from me. But not at our apartment. At an address near Times Square. At ten thirty at night. I zoomed in on the map.

That address—it was the Marriott Marquis. He was in a freaking *hotel* in Manhattan.

Why would a man go to a hotel at that hour, in a city where he owns a perfectly lovely apartment?

To cheat on his wife, obviously.

What an idiot I was. Jason was never home, and yet I never suspected. He was secretive, and hard to reach, and had been for a while now. He'd get a call late at night and walk out of the room to answer. Or rush to close a text or email when I walked up behind him. When he was away on business, it was impossible to get him to call me back. But somehow, I never saw it coming. I was way too trusting. No, wait, I'm letting myself off the hook too easily. The truth, warts and all. It's not just that I'm trusting. I'm too damn full of myself. It never occurred to me that a man would cheat on me—at least, that *Jason* would. I was a cheerleader in high school and student body president in college. I got every guy and every job I ever wanted. Jason always said I was his dream girl. I never doubted him, because I never doubted myself. But I was wrong. His feelings had changed. When had that happened? How long had this been going on?

I was floored.

“Caroline? Are you there?”

I took a deep breath. I wasn't going to cry. I would be calm, and dignified, but call him on his bullshit, because I wasn't a doormat. I would make him tell me the truth.

“What aren't you telling me, Jason?”

“What? Nothing.”

“I don't believe you. You're hiding something.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Are you cheating on me?”

“Of course not. Don’t be ridiculous,” he said.

But I had proof. At least, I had proof that he was in a hotel in Times Square right this minute, when he claimed to be in Cleveland. I couldn’t tell him that, though. If I confronted him with the evidence, he’d know I was tracking his phone, and I wanted to be able to keep doing it.

Jason sighed, like I was the one causing trouble. “Enough drama, babe. It’s late. I’ll do my best to get to your party, okay? But no promises. You need to cut me some slack. Things are complicated at work right now.”

He was lying to me, and I knew it, but he refused to own up to it. What more could I do?

“Caroline?”

“I have to go,” I said, and hung up on him.

I sat there on the sofa, too stunned to cry. It was like I aged twenty years in the space of that one phone call. I hadn’t realized until right that minute that I wasn’t little Caroline Logan anymore, with my high ponytail, my cute figure, my cheerleader outfit. I was middle-aged Caroline Stark, semi-unemployed housewife, empty nester. And my husband was cheating on me.

4

At seven sharp the band began to play. They were set up in a tent on the lawn, to one side of the swimming pool. The music floated on the ocean breeze as the waiters dashed in and out in white jackets, passing trays of chili-lime shrimp and glasses of rosé. I grabbed a glass off a tray and thought, *I ought to be enjoying myself. This is my big night. I can't let Jason ruin it for me.* Easier said than done. He hadn't shown up yet, and I couldn't stop watching the door.

In the living room, I took up position in front of the sweeping wall of windows that looked out over the ocean. I wore a white dress to match the décor. I could turn in one direction and watch the waves crash. Or turn in the other for a view across the double-height living room to the front door, where guests were arriving, stepping out of their shiny cars and tossing their keys to the valet. I'd been a little worried that nobody would come, that they wouldn't drive out from the city this late in September. But

they were showing up in droves. Everybody but the person I was waiting for.

Each time the front door opened, I looked up and plastered a smile on my face so big I felt like my cheeks would crack. And each time, when it wasn't my husband, I had to take a deep breath to fight off the panic. I made excuses about Jason's absence to the guests as we hugged and air-kissed. Important deal, flight delay, missed connection, on his way, yada yada yada. I hate to lie, but I do believe in putting on a good face for company. I couldn't bring myself to tell the world that I didn't know where my own husband was. All I knew was that, with every second that passed, I got angrier, and more insecure, and more hurt.

The guests were too polite to comment on Jason's absence, until my sister Lynn walked in with her husband, Joe. God love her, Lynn's a loudmouth, like all the Logans, but she's not mean. Just oblivious. She's the one sibling I'm close with now. Among the living, that is. It's a long story, but let's say we've had our troubles as a family. Out of three boys and three girls, I was the youngest. Two of the boys died young—one on a motorcycle, the other with a needle in his arm. My parents were hard livers, and they passed it down. Then we fell out over Dad's will. It was ugly. Me and Lynn on one side, Erin and Pat Junior on the other. Mom was dead by then, thank God, she didn't have to see it. That fight brought me closer with Lynn. She's the one person I truly trust in this world other than my daughter. She doesn't fit in with my uptown crowd, with her spray tan and her tight clothes. But like I always tell her, you do you, babe. I love Lynn to death, and I wouldn't've dreamed of throwing a party without her.

"Where's that handsome husband of yours?" Lynn asked, in

a booming voice that made the other guests turn to look. She still talked with that old Lawn Guyland brogue, too, that I'd worked hard to get rid of, and that was nails-on-a-blackboard to everybody else in that room.

"Flight delay."

"Yeah, right. Too good to show up for his own party is more like it."

"Somebody has to pay for the house."

"Ah right, I'll zip it. But when I see him, I'm giving him a piece of my mind. Now, which way is the bar?"

Lynn started a trend by asking about Jason. The next guy through the door was Peter Mertz, Jason's boss at the hedge fund, and instead of nodding politely when I said Jason was running late, he started probing. Why wasn't Jason in New York? Why was he stuck in Cleveland? When I said he was there on a deal, Peter raised an eyebrow and said, *Really? Really?*—like he didn't believe me. He basically implied that Jason was lying, or else I was. And yes, okay, it so happened that we both were lying. But that didn't make it any less rude of Peter to call me on it in front of my guests.

After that, I couldn't stand there watching the door any longer. I made an excuse and went out to the tent. Fresh air, fresh alcohol. But I couldn't get that encounter out of my mind. Was Peter trying to tell me something by calling me out like that? Did he know something I didn't, or more precisely, something I suspected but was praying was not true? In other words, did he know my husband was having an affair? Did *everyone* know but me? My cheeks were burning at this point. I felt humiliated. But little did I know, the festivities were just getting started.

I'm an experienced hostess, and I normally wouldn't drink at my own party. But as time went by, and Jason still didn't show, I guess I had a few more than I intended. By the way, I was drinking the signature cocktail of the night, a Moscow mule, which the caterer offered on trays. So, when the waiters walked by, I'd grab one. What I'm saying is, I don't recall going up to the bar in the tent that night. Not once. Aidan tended bar at my party. I found that out later, but I didn't know it at the time. I never saw him there, and I certainly didn't hire him myself. Caterers bring their own staff. Everybody knows that.

Anyway, Jason.

I was talking, probably too loudly, to this woman who was a contributing writer for *Dwell* magazine, when Lynn walked up and snatched the drink right out of my hand.

"Hey!"

"Excuse us," Lynn said to the woman, and yanked me away.

"What the hell. I was networking."

"You're not doing yourself any favors, getting sloppy at your own party. But at least now I know why."

"What are you talking about?"

"Jason's here, and he's with a woman. A real piece a' work, too."

The room went dark. I had to grab Lynn's arm to steady myself. Everything had been so normal until two nights ago. And now my life was in smoldering ruins around me.

"Where?" I asked.

"Inside, in the living room."

"Since when?"

"A few minutes. Why didn't you tell me he's having an affair? You know I'd go after that son of a bitch."

“He actually brought someone *here*? To my house, to my party? I can’t believe he’d do that to me.”

“I’ll have Joe deck him if you want. Or I’ll do it myself.”

“No. You stay here. Distract people. They can’t know about this.”

“It’s too late, hon. Nobody could miss this chick.”

I walked away in a daze, heading for the living room. I had to find Jason, but I had no idea what I’d do when I did. Yell, scream, kick him out? Cry, beg? This didn’t feel real. It didn’t feel like *us*. Meanwhile, the guests were all watching me. I’d dreamed of throwing a party they’d talk about for years. And now they would, but for all the wrong reasons.

5

Heading for the house was the longest walk of my life. I was thinking, *This can't be happening. We're not those people. We're teammates, best friends. We're inseparable.* But then I thought, *We're not inseparable. We used to be, but not anymore.* This had been a long time coming, actually. Hannah was a preemie, high-strung, not popular in school. I sweated parenting her. Maybe—I'll be honest—maybe I loved her more than I loved my husband. Anyway, she sucked up all the attention. My life revolved around her. Volunteering at her school. Homework and dance lessons and her social life. Her clothes and her hairstyles and whether she'd go to summer camp. Her college applications. On top of that, yes—the house, the apartment, my Pilates class, my nutty sister who had plenty of drama of her own. None of it was about him. Maybe he felt slighted, or ignored, and so he did what men do. He looked elsewhere.

But then I thought, *Hell no. This isn't my fault. I don't deserve this. I made that man.* Jason was nobody when he met me.

Meeting him now, you'd think he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth, the way he dresses and talks and carries himself. Well, I've got news for you—that was all me. That was Caroline, telling Jason what to do, and how to behave, over a period of twenty years. It was hard work, too. When I met him, he was working two jobs, scraping by, struggling to pay for school. He had those dark, chiseled good looks, and he was smart. I saw the potential. But he was rough around the edges. I was the one with the drive, the vision, and, yes, the cold hard cash. I put Jason through business school, or he never would be the tycoon he is today. I used the money Dad left me to do it, blood money, that I lost siblings over. Everything Jason Stark has, every penny, is because of my sacrifice. And yet, he goes and cheats, right when our daughter left, when I'm so alone.

That bastard.

That's how I was feeling as I walked back to the house. I was furious. I admit that.

Inside, I looked around the living room, but there was no sign of him. It was late, and the crowd was starting to thin out. I walked up to my friend Stacey Allen, whose daughter Grace went to high school with my Hannah, and whose lawyer husband, Josh, represents Jason's firm. And I didn't have to say a word. Stacey already knew. She knew who I was looking for, and she pointed at the door.

"He went outside a few minutes ago, with a *woman*. Caroline, what the hell's going on?"

Stacey has one of those very expressive faces—wide-eyed, with big features—and it brimmed with pity for me, mixed with excitement, and a subtle touch of *schadenfreude*. People thought

I had such a perfect life. To have something like this befall me would naturally be titillating, and Stacey could spread gossip like wildfire. By tomorrow morning, my entire social circle would know about Jason's affair, whether I'd invited them to the party or not. As the realization sunk in, my head literally went hot, as if steam was coming out of it, like in the cartoons. *I'll kill that asshole*, I thought. Stacey's eyebrows shot up into her carefully trimmed bangs, and I realized I'd said that out loud. Well, screw her and her ladylike shock. I have the Logan temper. We say things.

"It's a figure of speech," I said.

"Of course."

"Who is she? Do we know her?" I asked, because that was the biggest thing on my mind at that moment. Was Jason doing it with somebody I knew? That would make it so much worse.

Stacey shook her head. "I doubt you'd know her, and you definitely didn't invite her. She crashed."

"How could you tell?"

"Jason showed up first, alone. I tried to say hi, but he was on his phone, and he looked distracted. Less than five minutes later, the front door flies open, and *she* comes in. *Rushes* in. Almost like she'd chased him here. He basically dragged her out the door to get her away from people, but it was too late. Everybody saw. They're probably still out there, it's only been a few minutes," Stacey said, nodding toward the front door.

"Don't tell anybody about this," I said.

"Caroline, they already know."

I turned and rushed out to the driveway. Jason was still there, talking to her. Her back was to me. The first thing I saw was, she

had dark hair. It made no sense. Jason likes blondes, or at least he used to. Like me (though I get a little help with the color). But he had her by the arms, like she was trying to run away, and he wanted to stop her. The intimacy of it made me sick.

I marched right up to them. “What the hell is going on?”

They turned in unison, and Jason jumped away from the woman, like he’d been caught. Goddamn right he had, and with a tramp, by the looks of her. And the *smell*. The woman reeked of this cheap gardenia perfume. I nearly gagged on it. I started thinking, *Maybe she’s a prostitute. This is who he’s cheating with?* She wasn’t young, wasn’t beautiful. She had one of those faces that’s almost catlike from too much plastic surgery. I’m sorry, but she was a big step down from me.

Then she opened her mouth, and it got worse.

“Who is this?” she says to Jason, and she’s looking me up and down like I’m dirt. In my own house. But it came out like—*who is zis?* She was Russian, or maybe Czech. Flashy, hard-looking, heavy eyeliner, a tight leather skirt and fuck-me pumps. A younger, more beautiful woman, okay. Or a more educated, a smarter woman, a woman who was powerful in her own right? I’d get that. But to get betrayed for this, this *whore?* I was devastated.

“I’m his *wife*, who the hell are you?” I said.

My hands were twitching, I wanted to slap her so bad. But there were guests within earshot, just inside the door. And I wasn’t about to give them more to gossip about than they already had.

Instead of answering my question, she made this contemptuous little noise—the sound of air escaping between gritted teeth. Like I wasn’t worth her consideration. A car drove up, a brand-

new cobalt-blue Audi coupe that looked like it cost real money. The valet stepped out and handed her the keys. She made another impatient sound at Jason and slid into the front seat.

“I go,” she said.

“Galina, wait,” Jason said.

“You need to decide,” she said. Then she pulled the door closed and took off with a spray of gravel.

My jaw was on the ground.

“Decide what? What is she talking about?” I said.

“I don’t know.”

“You don’t know? Bullshit. You bring another woman to my house, to my party, and let her talk to me that way, and refuse to explain?”

Jason turned to me like he hadn’t even noticed I was there till that minute. He was so caught up with this Galina woman that *I* didn’t even register. And he got this appalled expression on his face and started sputtering.

“Wait, no, it’s not what you’re thinking. We work together. There’s a problem, a work problem, and she followed me here to discuss it, that’s all.”

“I know the people at your firm. That woman doesn’t work there. They wouldn’t even let her through the door.” Which was one hundred percent true.

“I didn’t say she worked there.”

“Yes, you did. You just did. Stop *lying*.” I was about to burst into tears. I mean, people were watching.

“Caroline. You’ve got this all wrong.”

“Then explain it to me.”

“I told you, she’s a business associate.”

“And I told *you* that I don’t believe you.”

“After twenty years of marriage, you need to give me the benefit of the doubt,” he said.

“I don’t have to do a goddamn thing.”

“You’re jumping to conclusions. But I can’t fix that right now. I have a crisis situation on my hands. I need to go into the city.”

“What?”

“I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

“If you leave this party to go after her, don’t bother coming back.”

I regret saying that. I certainly regret saying it *in front of* people. My threat didn’t work anyway. He went after her. And I’m thinking, *Screw him, I’ll get the best divorce lawyer in New York and take everything. The beach house, the apartment, the cars, the jewelry. I’ll take custody of Hannah, or—since she’s too old for custody—I’ll make her hate him. Hate his guts. He’ll never see her on holidays. He won’t be invited to her wedding. No walking her down the aisle, I’ll do that. He gets shit. He can die alone and see how he likes it.*

I thought all those things. Anybody would, if their husband brought another woman to their big party, and then left to run after her. But never once did I actually think, *I’m gonna go buy a gun and shoot my husband dead.* Okay, well, maybe I *thought* it. But I didn’t *do* it.

Swear to God.

6

Jason never came back to the beach house on the night of the party, or on the day or night after that. I must've called his phone twenty times. Finally, he texted me with some lame excuse about a work crisis, but since I was tracking his phone, I could see the lie in real time. His office was in Midtown, but his dot was way the hell out in Brighton Beach. Brighton goddamn Beach, also known as *Little Odessa*. Jason was with the Russian woman.

That night, I turned off my phone and drank myself senseless. Obviously, that's a wrong way to handle stress, but it's also an old family tradition. I learned to drink at Daddy's knee. Pat Logan, Sr.—man, that guy could put away the booze, and he was none too pleasant when he did it, either. And Theresa, my mother—straight gin, I'm not kidding. Is it any wonder that, when my life fell to pieces, I reached for the bottle? I'm not making excuses. I saw what it did to them, and I should have known better. I *had* known better, when my little girl was home. We like to think our children behave for us, but it's really the

other way around. I controlled my drinking around Hannah, to set a better example than my parents set for me. But she wasn't here now, and I swigged blood-colored wine until the empty bottle fell from my hands and I passed out.

On Sunday afternoon, I woke up to the smell of the Russian woman's cheap perfume. I thought I was dreaming, but then I opened my eyes and Jason was standing over me, looking as bad as I felt. Which was very, very bad. He knelt down by the bed, and I could see tears in his eyes. At that point, I would've accepted an apology. Hell, I was praying for one.

"I can smell her on you," I said, and my eyes filled with tears, too. "You can't see her anymore, love. Please. I'm begging you."

"I wish it was as simple as that, Car," he said quietly. "It's worse."

I sat up. The room was spinning, and I had to swallow hard to keep from vomiting.

"Worse, how? Please, don't tell me she's pregnant."

"I never meant to hurt you. Things got out of hand. It's beyond my control now."

"What are you talking about? Stop being so mysterious." I dug my fingers into my temples. My head felt like it would split apart.

"I can't tell you any more without—" He stopped.

"Without what?"

"I can't say."

"Jesus, what am I supposed to make of that, Jason? What am I supposed to do?"

"Honestly? I hate to say this. But you need to find a good divorce lawyer. It's the only plan I have right now."

“Does she have some kind of hold on you?”

From the look on his face, I’d hit the nail on the head.

“Jason, answer me, is she pregnant?”

He pressed his lips together, ignoring my question.

“We have to get a divorce,” he said. “I won’t contest anything. You take everything. The apartment, the beach house, all the money. I want you to.”

Divorce. Maybe at the party I was imagining getting a lawyer and taking him for everything he had. But that was not the outcome I wanted for my marriage. Even after everything that had happened in the past forty-eight hours, I still loved him. We’d been together twenty years. We had Hannah. And the apartment, and the house, and a life we’d built up from nothing, together. We were happy. Strike that, we were content. Okay, maybe we were treading water, but it was possible that with counseling and effort, we could’ve been happy again. But he had to go and bring that woman home and completely blindside me.

“Twenty years, and this is how you end it?” I was choking on my tears.

Jason’s face was pale, and his eyes burned dark. He made a choking noise in his throat, like he couldn’t get the words out.

“It’s the only plan I have.”

“You don’t have to do this.”

He grabbed my hands. “Yes, I do. But please know, I love you, and I’m truly sorry.”

Then he leapt up and walked out of the room. I heard his car start outside, and he was gone.

I staggered around the house, going from room to room, so dazed with shock that I could barely see what was in front of me.

Maybe I cried, but I was too numb to notice. I had no clue how to get through the next hours, the next days—the rest of my life—without him. Or without the stability and continuity he represented. I walked out onto the lawn and listened to the waves crashing on the beach. And I thought, I could go down there and—and what? End it? No. That wasn't me. I wasn't a quitter. And screw him, that would make things too easy for him. I knew I had to get a grip on myself. I ran back inside and called Lynn's cell.

"Jason left me," I blurted, the second Lynn picked up.

Silence.

"Lynn?"

"I can't believe he's that big of an idiot."

"He is. He did. Not five minutes ago. He told me to find a divorce lawyer."

Lynn paused. "Stay there. I'm coming."

"You're coming—?"

"I'm coming out there. Pour yourself a drink, turn on the TV, zone out. I'll be there in an hour, unless the cops get me."

"Thank you, sis. I love you so much."

"Love you, too, babe. You're not going through this alone."

Lynn lived in the same house in Massapequa where we grew up, which was a solid hour and a half away, but she had a fast car and a lead foot. Fifty minutes later, she walked in the front door, carrying a bottle of bourbon and a big glass bowl of spaghetti and meatballs, which she shoved into the microwave. I grabbed the bottle and poured myself a good slug, but the thought of eating was beyond me.

"I can't eat that. I feel sick," I said, as Lynn set a plate on the kitchen table.

“Just the spaghetti. It’ll settle your stomach. We have work to do. I have calls in to friends of mine who know all the good attorneys. We’re gonna get you squared away.”

Lynn stayed the night, slept in my bed with me, stroked my head when I cried. Before she left the next morning, she forced me to make an appointment with one of the divorce lawyers, who came highly recommended by a friend of hers who’d cleaned up in her divorce settlement. I wanted Lynn to come to the appointment with me. God, I wish she had, because then I would’ve kept it. But she had to leave. Lynn and Joe own a bunch of condos down in Florida that they rent out. The condos got hit with this big storm, and she had to go down to oversee repairs. I understand, it’s their livelihood. And I’m a big girl. But damn. I can’t help thinking about how different things would be if she’d stayed in the Hamptons with me for those few days. I never would have gone to that bar. I never would have met Aidan again.