

When I reached Forth bridge it was jammed like always, so I took the time to do my makeup. I pulled my makeup bag out of my purse and opened it in my lap. When I looked back up the traffic was moving and a gap started forming in front of me so I stepped on it, causing my makeup, brushes, and bag to go toppling to the floorboard.

*Great.*

Traffic was at a standstill again, so I took the opportunity to quickly duck down and grab the fallen bag and makeup. The person behind me honked their horn and I bolted up hitting my head on the steering wheel as I did. I rubbed the back of my head as the traffic started to lift.

I turned off West Granton Road and into the carpark of the academy. I checked the time which read 8:18. Damn it! Okay, calm down. It's okay. It's only a few minutes past.

I quickly applied eyeshadow, mascara, under eye, and lip-gloss before stuffing my makeup bag in the center console. I grabbed my purse and umbrella and rushed through the entrance, past the receptionist and down the tiled hall where my heels echoed off the walls. I stumbled to a halt in front of Mrs. McHarts classroom door and caught my breath before silently opening the door and unsuccessfully snuck along the wall.

All eyes both little and big turned to me. I gave a small wave to the kids who giggled at my failed entrance. A little boy named Edwin gave me a sweeping wave from the other side of the room, and I suppressed a grin. I turned to Mrs. McHarts with an apologetic smile, and she returned it with an understanding nod. She continued with her maths lesson as I got myself settled in the back of the room with my pad and pen.

After twenty minutes of writing and assisting Mrs. McHarts with group activities for the children a sturdy knock came at the door before it opened to reveal Mr. Percy, the headteacher of the school.

My face fell as he surveyed the room and had his eyes settle on me. He pointed at me and motioned for me to join him in the hall. As I walked out, I could feel the eyes of the students on my back. Once we were in the hallway alone, I tried to explain myself.

“I’m so sorry I’m late. I got up on time. I thought I had enough time, but traffic was a beast on the Forth, but I was only a few minutes late. I was still able to make it to class.” I smiled pleadingly at him, but when Mr. Percy’s expression didn’t change, my smile dropped.

He looked down at his ridiculously old watch, then around the hall as if waiting for something. He had a stern face and was a stickler for the rules. I’ve witnessed people get fired over leaving weeks old food in the fridge.

“You were only twenty minutes late Mrs. McFort, nothing to fuss over.” He said sternly.

I think I should have been relieved but I wasn’t. *If it’s not me being late that called me out of class, then what is?* I loved this job and didn’t want to lose it.

He clasped his hand on his round chest, “However, that is not why I wanted to talk to you. I’m sorry to say that at the last budget meeting it was brought to my attention that we are losing more money than we are making and therefore have to make some cuts.”

I gulped, hoping that what was coming wasn’t coming.

“We have a lot of good teachers and staff here and would hate to lose anyone, but the cuts had to come from somewhere and we decided that teacher assistances—like yourself—and substitutes would have to be let go. I’m sorry Lorelei.” He cast his head down in shame.

I stood there for a bit staring at him in shocked silence.

He let his arms drop to his sides and said to me in a lowered voice, “Lorelei, I think you should pack your things and leave. I’m sorry it has to be this way.”

He turned to leave, and I stood there stunned and in disbelief. I've had this job for almost two years now. I chased after him, "Sir, I am one of only two teaching assistant for this entire academy, losing me would not save the budget. The teachers appreciate all that I do for them and need my help on a regular basis. Please Sir, I love teaching, this is all I know. I want to work here because this is where I went to school, this is where I fell in love with teaching. Please, Sir, just give me one more chance. You know me. I'm not one to be late or t-to not pull my weight around here."

I grabbed him hand and he stopped, looking back and jerking his hand out of my grasp.

His face was grim, "I'm sorry Lorelei, this kind of thing is out of my control. Please, just grab your belongings and leave." With that, he turns headed to his office as the dell rang and the empty hallway was flooded with children.

I held back my tears as I made my way back to the classroom to collect my few belongings.

Not even enough to warrant a box.

When I turned to leave Edwin was standing there in his navy vest over white shirt and slacks. I could see tiny tears rimming the edges of his eyes, but he didn't let them fall. Instead he dashed over to hug me.

"I had fun learnin with you, Ed. Don't miss me too much." I forced a smile to my face.

He looked up at me with his freckled face, "Goodbye Mrs. McFort."

"Goodbye Ed." I patted him on the back.

He released me and I exited the classroom. As I walked the empty hallway, I could hear the echoes of little footsteps in the distance. I interacted with no one else as I walked through the entrance which was now my exist from the best job I ever had.

The rain had paused for the moment, giving me just enough time to put my things in the backseat and get in the car before it resumed. As I sat there, I noticed the little blotches of tears that Ed has left on my pants.

*What am I going to do now?*

*Oh god, how am I going to tell Alister?*

I pulled out my phone, ready to call him then decided against it.

*I'll tell him tonight.*

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I headed home, ready to spend time with the pups, Loch and Finley. Loch was the older of the two by just a year as was a white West Highland Terrier. Fin was my girl: fun, loving, and full of energy—which is to be expected from a grizzle tan Border Terrier.

It was nice having a relaxing day all to myself, even if it is because I had just lost my job. I gave each dog a bath in the big basin housed in the mudroom and dried them off with towels then with a hairdryer. Loch wasn't having it, so I just rolled him up in a clean towel and sat with him on the couch.

I rubbed Finley's back as she sat beside my feet and pet Loch when my phone rang. Finley lifted her head and looked at me with curious eyes.

"Who could that be Fin? Huh?" I tried reaching for my phone on the coffee table, but Loch was getting in the way, so I placed him on the carpet. The white carpet that Alister loved so much and caused so much grief when you have dogs who love to run around in mud.

Loch looked up at me as if I had just abandoned him. "I need to get to my phone, Buddy." I was able to get to my phone before it went to voicemail and answered a call from Mum.

*Oh god, how am I going to tell her I just lost my job?*

I take a breath and answer the phone, “Hi Mummy—um Mum, um how’s it goin? Is everythin okay?”

Finley jumps down from the coach and starts to chew on the towel that Loch is wrapped up in. I tried to shoo her away, but she didn’t listen, and the two of them started to play a game of keep-a-way with the towel. I smiled at them and rolled my eyes.

“Oh, everything’s fine Sweetheart, sorry to disturb you at work, but your father and I have somethin we need to tell you.”

“Hi Poppit!” Da yells through the phone, “How are our grandchildren doin? Oh, no, I mean dog-children?”

I smiled “Hi Da. Your dog-children are doin just fine. They are playin tug-of-war as we speak.”

“Oh, that’s—wait how can you tell what they are doin?”

I froze for a moment and stammered out “Oh, um, it’s, I got a—it’s a smart camera, yeah um Alister and I upgraded our security system to get a video camera that we can place inside the house so we can keep an eye on the dogs while we’re at work.”

*Yeah, that sounds believable right?*

“Oh, you youngsters and your tech.”

I rolled my eyes “Da, you work in tech. Tech is second nature to you, and we’ve had this conversation before Alister and I even got married: we’re not interested in having kids. We’ll have all the dogs in the world for you to dote on though.”

“Ah, you’re right. Okay, okay. I know, I’ve accepted that there won’t be any two-legged babies runnin around any time soon.”

“No, not ‘soon.’ Ever, like never ever.”

Even though Alister and I decided long ago that we weren’t going to have kids he still got a house with a swing set in the back and a room that is clearly supposed to be a nursery. He told me before we signed for the house that he’d take down the swing and renovate the nursery into a second bedroom. That was six years ago, and both are still standing.

Mum took back control of the phone, “Anyway, we have somethin to tell you. We wanted you to hear it from us and not your brothers or some other.”

Finely barked at Loch from across the towel with now had holes in it. Loch tried wagging in little tail and barked back. I shushed them with a hand and joined them on the carpet to pet them.

“My brothers? What would they be callin to tell me?”

I heard a sigh come from the other end of the phone, “Your father and I are gettin a divorce.”

I jumped to my feet and rambled into the phone, “You’re what? But you’re the picture of a perfect marriage. Why-why is this happening now? Oh god, now you just made it more likely for your children to get divorced! Why are you doin this? What’s wrong? Can’t you just think about this for a moment before jumpin to the worst option?”

My mind started to spin, and my reality started to crumble. Everything I knew to be true was now a lie. Anything could be possible. I started to breath heaver. Finely came up to me and licked my chin while Loch played with the towel by himself.

I could hear Mum and Da talking over each other through the phone.

“Why do you have to get a divorce? Did you try couples counselin first?”

“We have tried Poppit. It’s just time.” Da said, sadness in his voice.

“W—we—why not—can’t you just spend some time apart first? Separate?”

I tried reasoning with them, but it appeared that they had done everything there was to do before they came to the conclusion that divorce was the best route. I refused to submit.

“You know what, no. We’re goin to figure this out together.” I stood up and went to put my shoes on, grabbed my coat, purse and keys. “I’m comin over there right now and we’ll figure this out together.” Finley and Loch saw what I was doing and started to get excited, spinning in circles thinking they were going for a ride.

Mum was trying to convince me not to come. “No, no it’s okay, you don’t need to come. We’ve made our decision.”

My shoulders slumped, my purse falling to the floor where Finley and Loch sniff it aggressively. I shook my head and changed my attention to the fact that I was just not hearing about this.

“Why—how did my older brothers hear about this before me? Da, I thought I was your favorite, why is this the first I’m hearin about this?”

Da spoke slowly, “Well we know how anxious you can get when things change.”

I scoffed “I—I’m not anxious, what would make you think I’m anxious?” My voice rose an octave and I coughed to cover up my anxiety riddled voice.

Mum took over the phone, “We didn’t want this to negatively affect you. Especially since you are strugglin with your job.”

I whirled around, my back to the front door, “What? What—who told you I’m strugglin? I’m not strugglin.”

I could hear Da in the background whisperin somethin to Mum about Alister.

“Alister? Alister?! Well at least I know he listens to me when he gets home from work instead of tunin me out.” I let out a sigh of frustration. I couldn’t believe Alister had a closer relationship with my parents than I did. I was their only daughter and—I thought—my Da’s favorite. We were so close my entire life. Because I was the youngest of three and the other two were boys, I got along with my parents differently. I could have a spa day with Mum or go on secret adventures with Da.

There was a long moment of silence where none of us spoke.

I broke it first, “How long have you been this way, unhappy in your marriage?”

There was a pause before Mum said, “Five years, give or take.”

I balked “You’ve been hidin this for half a decade; through family gatherins and celebrations?”

“Well Noah and James have known for a few months now.” Da mumbled.

“Oh yeah, can’t forget to mention that my brother’s knew before me.” I said snarkly, momentarily reverting to a teenager before I regained my composure. “I think I just need some time to myself now.”

“Are you sure you’re, okay?” Da’s voice was tinged with worry and guilt.

I smiled, hoping it would come through in my voice, “Yeah. You have tried everythin and none of it worked. This is the last resort. And I don’t want you to stay together if it makes you unhappy. I’d rather you be happy single than married and miserable.”

“Okay. Well, you know that you can always call or drop by whenever you like.” Mum said.

“We love you, Lorelei!” Da yelled from somewhere in the distance.

“I love you too. Both of you, so much.” With that, they ended the call.



I picked up my purse, setting it and my keys on the dining room table before shuffling back to the living room and flopping onto the couch. Finley and Loch could tell something was wrong and came to sit by my legs on the floor. I smile down at them as they console me with their presence.

I couldn't believe that Mum and Da were getting a divorce. They'd been together for 42 years. They'd watch all of us kids graduate secondary school and university. They were there for all our weddings and big moments as couples. I just couldn't believe that all that time they were secretly struggling as a couple. For five years!

I decided that I couldn't just lay there, alone with my thoughts. I propped myself up and looked down at Loch and Finley, "Who wants to go ridin?"

Their heads tilted simultaneously before they both stood up and started wagging their tails in excitement.

"Okay." I went to the mudroom to grab their harnesses and leashes. When I turned around, they were right there waiting for me. I put on their harnesses and walked back through the house to the front door, grabbing my purse and keys on the way.

As soon as I opened the door the leashes went taught as both Finley and Loch ran outside and pulled against their restraints. "Calm down." They looked back at me expectantly.

I locked the door, then turned around "Okay, now we can go." They practically dragged me to the car where I opened the passenger door and Finley jumped right in. Loch needed some help getting his tiny body inside. Once they were securely in the seat or on the floorboard, I jugged around to the driver side and strapped myself in.

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After driving around for a while, we decided to go to Sighthill Public Park which was to Edinburgh Napier University where Alister worked as a professor. When lunch time rolled around, we walked across campus to Greggs for some sandwiches to surprise Alister with.

Finley and Loch behaved well as we walked into the building that Alister's office was housed. Dogs are not really allowed in the building unless they are service animals, but I thought it would be a delightful surprise for Alister. Even still, I tried to be discreet about it, making sure we caught an elevator with no one else and waiting for hallways to clear before walking down them. When I came to Alister's office his blinds were shut and a sign on the door read DO NOT DISTURB. I figured he was in with a student and gave a quick knock before opening the door.

What I found was not a student, but Alister with one hand on the bare back of some redhead and the other way past her naked hips. I dropped the sandwiches and the leashes as I stared in horror at my cheating husband. Loch ran up to Alister who saw me and stood up so abruptly that the redhead fell from his naked lap and scurried under the desk. Finley started nibbling at one of the dropped sandwiches.

"Lor, it's not what it looks like." He quickly put his dress shirt back on and pulled up his boxers and slacks trying to explain the situation away as he did so. "Lorelei please, let me explain. I'm sorry."

I grabbed the leashes and dragged Fin and Loch behind me as I ran down the hallway not caring who saw the dogs. Alister called out to me from down the hall, but I didn't listen.

"Lorelei! Please wait. Let me explain!"

I kept running till I made it to the elevator bank and hit the down button. I controlled myself as much as I could until I got on the elevator. I started crying before the doors even

closed on Alister's arm as he slipped in with me. His shirt was rumpled and untucked and he was still in the process of putting on his shoes, one was still in his hand.

"Lorelei, I'm so sorry you had to see that."

I clenched the leashes in my fist and looked Alister in the eyes, "You're sorry? You're sorry you cheated on me with the Bitch? Or are you sorry you were caught? God Alister! How long has this been going on?" I wished that I had been served with divorce papers instead of having to see Alister cheat on me.

"Am I not enough for you? Has our life not been fulfilling enough, exciting enough? What does she give you that I don't?"

The elevator dinged and the doors opened on the third floor to a pair waiting to get on. I hit the button to close the doors on them "Occupied." Before turning back to the cheater standing before me.

"Our life has been amazin. You're amazin! But there's somethin that A—"

"Do not say that bitch's name, don't you dare!"

Alister conceded and rolled his eyes in annoyance.

Did he just roll his eyes at me? He knows he's the one in trouble here, right? But I don't say these thoughts out loud. Instead, I give him time to dig his hole a little deeper.

"I have loved these past ten years of marriage with you Lorelei, I really have, and I was all for not havin kids, until I met... her."

I had no response to that. How could I? We had decided long before we ever became a serious couple that we were not the child-bearing type. By not having kids and instead, having flexible schedules we've been able to travel anywhere at any time. Kids would have made this life impossible, which is why we went with dogs instead. Four years into our marriage we got

Loch, then a year later we got Finley. Now, after ten years of marriage the bastard decides to change his mind.

I stayed silent; my lips pursed into a thin line. The elevator doors opened, and I walked out, Finley and Loch on my heels.

“There’s one more thing.” The cheater called out.

I stopped in my tracks but didn’t turn around.

“When we get the divorce—”

I whirled around and stared daggers at him “Oh we sure as hell are gettin a divorce. Maybe I should ask my parents for advice on the best divorce lawyer seein as they just told me they are gettin a divorce too.”

Alister stepped out of the elevator and stretched his auburn curls.

My face softened. *I’m going to miss running my hands through those curls at night and cuddling up close to him when it’s cold. Kissing those lips and staring into those green eyes I know so well.*

*Snap out of it Lorelei!* I shook my head of what was and focused on what is: Alister, my adoring Alister cheated on me with some bitch!

He continued, “That’s not all. I’ll be askin for the house, too.”

I clenched and unclenched my fists, my palms imprinted by the dog’s leather leashes. “Fine, whatever, I hated that house anyway.”

I mumbled “Never did renovate that nursery or take down the ridiculous swing.” Flung my hair over my shoulder and I crossed my arms, “It that it?” *Cheater*, I thought to myself.

Alister touched his splayed fingertips together in thought and cast his eyes down in shame.

*Good, you better feel shame, and embarrassment and awful and heartbroken and doaty and like a bampot!*

“No, that is all.”

I shook my head firmly and walked out the building without another word.

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I packed everything I owned into bags and even stole some of the appliances from around the house that I had personally bought when we moved in.

That damned house, with its damned swing set and obscene nursery and the pristine white carpet. My mind stopped at that: *Pristine white carpet*. I smiled as a wicked idea started to form in my mind. I walked throughout the house and opened every door before letting muddy and wet Loch and Finley free-range of the house.

They took the invitation eagerly and started running through the halls and jumping on furniture. I watched as Finley did laps in the living room; first running on the carpet then jumping onto and off the couch, not letting it impede her laps. Loch made little paw print trails all throughout the house. When they were all out of energy I brought them out to the car and secures them in the passage seat. No need to wipe their feet, all the mud was left in the house.