

>CHAPTER 15

Matthew returned from the Manhattan alliance announcement in high spirits. He bounded in from the garage entrance with his garment bag and briefcase in tow. He dropped both just inside the door and warmly greeted his wife, who was sitting down to a lunch of fruit salad and cottage cheese.

That she didn't return the greeting with the same enthusiasm went by unnoticed. Their housekeeper, Dolores, said hello as she passed by with a load of laundry, and Matthew stopped her with an uncharacteristic hug and kissed her cheek.

Dolores pulled back in astonishment at her boss's behavior.

"Lucky you, Dolores," Greta said dryly. "He stopped treating me like that years ago."

Matthew let go of the housekeeper and gave Greta a look. "Oh yeah?" He came over to her and planted a kiss on her cheek. Dolores vanished out the same door

Matthew had just come through as Greta groaned and waved him off.

He went into the kitchen and poured himself a glass of juice and drank it down in one gulp. Peeling the wrapper from a blueberry muffin, he fished through the newspapers Greta had put down the moment she'd heard his car pulling into the garage.

She'd gone over what she wanted to say in her head all night. However, now that he was home, she didn't know how to begin.

He hummed a little tune to himself as he flipped through the *Times*, the *Chronicle*, and the *Wall Street Journal*.

She cleared her throat and said his name.

He didn't look up from the papers. "Hmm?"

"There's something we need to discuss."

"Sure," he said, tossing aside one section of the paper and picking up another. "Hey, do we have yesterday's *Examiner* somewhere?"

She was momentarily thrown off by his question. "Over there, next to the sofa."

He got up and moved across the room, dropped down onto the sofa and started pushing apart the papers on the floor. "What were you saying, Greta? Ah, here it is. Wow, that's quite a shot they put in."

He turned the front page of the business section around for her to see the large color photo of him standing at the podium at Lincoln Center with the huge Via and ICP logos looming over his head. "Pretty big, huh?"

"Enormous," Greta said.

Seeing him like this, behaving as usual, half aware of her presence no matter what the situation, had an interesting effect on her. Any feelings of guilt that had seeped in turned once more to anger, frustration. In some ways it was fascinating, to see such a successful man act so giddy over his own photograph in the paper. And it was sad too, the way he beamed at the picture as though it

were a wedding engagement announcement rather than his own earnest face. And that, she reminded herself, was the crux of it—his marriage to his work, versus the life they lived under the same roof.

She tried to get his attention again, and he once more acknowledged her with a sound but didn't bother to look up from the papers. She uttered a disbelieving laugh and stood up, picked up her plate and glass, and on her way into the kitchen casually said, "I'd like a divorce."

Now he was listening. Before she even reached the sink he was calling her back. She set the things on the countertop and strolled to the recreation room. He was standing with his hands in his pockets, the newspapers fallen all around him. He looked hurt, but she knew him so well. He wasn't hurt by what she'd said. No, he was hurt that she could upset his sunny, self-satisfied mood.

"What do you mean a divorce?"

"Shall I get you a dictionary?"

"Don't, Greta. Don't drop a line like that, then fuck with me."

She looked at him with genuine surprise. "Fuck with you? Darling, if that were the case I don't think I'd be asking you for this. One day in New York and you come back speaking the language. Charming."

"You're jealous, is that it? About all this." He picked up one of the newspapers with his picture and shook it at her. "You're actually jealous."

"My, the papers are right. You are a smart one. Yes, Matthew. How nice of you to finally notice. Yes, I'm jealous. I have been for years. But not because I have a choice. Because it's true. You know it's true. You care more about your work than me, or anything else in the world. And I'm sick of it."

"You're sick of it? You're sick of Tiffany and Chanel and Mercedes?"

"For God's sake, you sound like you're talking about children. But Lord knows you wouldn't even give me

those. I'm sick of all of it. What good is any of it without what matters most?"

"Let me guess—true love."

"Always the cynic." Her voice was on the rise.

"Greta, for crying out loud, we go through this what, at least once a year?"

"You're wrong. I've never asked you for a divorce."

"Yeah, well you'll never get one, so you can stop asking."

"Won't I?"

He dismissed her with an annoyed wave.

She charged closer and poked him with her left index finger. "Don't you wave me off anymore. I said I want a divorce, and I mean it."

He gave her a warning look. Though he had never struck her, he looked awfully capable of it now. "Don't push it, Gret. I've given you every fucking thing you've ever asked for."

"And you're going to be giving a lot more before I'm through with you."

"Don't count on it."

"If you don't believe me just call your lawyer and ask him."

He suddenly spun on her, his fists clenching at his sides. "You called Mitchell? You called my goddamn lawyer and said we wanted a divorce?"

She stood up to him. "Go ahead, Matthew. Lay one on me. I'll get you for that, too."

He was unable to speak, struggling to keep himself from grabbing her and shaking her. He looked up at the ceiling and forced himself to count to ten.

She held her breath, and when he looked at her again the violent flash in his eyes was gone. In its place, his analytical look. He scrutinized her from head to toe, shrugged his shoulders, carefully stepped around her, and began pacing the room.

"You're serious about this, then?"

"Dead serious."

"Please, Greta, don't tease. That would be too perfect."

"Fuck you, Matthew."

He clucked his tongue. "Now who's the vulgar one."

"I know what you're thinking."

"Do you?"

"Oh yes. You don't live with someone like you this long and not know what's going on in that calculating head."

"And?"

"Look at you. I see the way you're looking at everything, rolling through the numbers. The formula is easy. Just divide by two. That's right, darling. Half. Half of everything. California law."

He quit pacing and glared at her from across the room. "This is bullshit, Greta. You're pissed off. Look, I'm not happy either. But a divorce isn't the answer. We both just need to take a break and think things through."

"Too late. I've thought about it plenty. There's no thinking about it. No fixing things. We're through already. I've known it for years, and so have you."

His patience was beginning to falter. He tried another approach. "Don't challenge me on this, Greta."

"I've made up my mind."

"You're crazy."

At this she cackled. "Now we're getting somewhere. Why, yes, darling. That's exactly what I am. Crazy. Driven mad by Mr. Chips. And that's just what I'll tell the court if I decide I'd like more than half. And don't think they won't take my side. In fact, I think I may even be feeling a wee bit suicidal again, Matthew. All the stress I've been under ever since this happened." She waggled her four-fingered left hand in his face.

He shoved it aside with a grimace. "I'll fight you on this."

"Go ahead and try. You'll only make matters worse for yourself." She kicked at the pile of newspapers on

the floor. "It doesn't matter what they might say about me in the papers. But you? Oh, the stories I could tell, Matthew. That's right. So you better think twice before you make your next move, sweetheart."

What she said was true, and he knew it. The press could turn this sort of thing into a circus. The publicity would be horrible for Via, and after yesterday's change of heart he couldn't afford the risk. Her wish for a divorce was completely unexpected, and he needed time to consider his options, figure out how to minimize his vulnerability. If he could get her to hold off, even if only for a little while, he could investigate ways to make certain assets disappear, hide them in offshore accounts or wherever it was people hid money they didn't want anyone to find.

He knew it was possible, but he knew nothing of the details. Let her think of the house as hers, the cars, the things that didn't really matter to him. All of it could be replaced. His eventual fortune in Via stock options couldn't, however. His vesting schedule, which stated when and how many of his options he could sell at specific intervals, was spread out over the next eight years. If they divorced she would continue to get half of that until the very last option was sold. No, there had to be another way.

"All right, Greta. I'm not going to fight with you anymore. But you have to give me a little time to come to grips with this. A trial period, and then we'll work out a settlement that we can both agree on. You're right about me and my work. I doubt you care, but yesterday I pulled the plug on the deal with William. There won't be a merger."

With this concession, her temper fizzled away almost immediately. No matter how much she despised him now, she still loved Matthew. Seeing him defeated like this gave her none of the satisfaction she had anticipated and hoped for.

"You're right, Matthew. It is of no interest to me.

That's what's been wrong all along. You've never been able to separate the two. And so we must."

He raised his palms in a helpless gesture. "I'm sorry, Gret. I really mean it. If there were some way to change it I would. I just don't want us to do anything rash. We're adults, and we'll deal with this as such. In the meantime, I'll leave you alone. And as always, you may have whatever you like. If you want to travel while we sort this out, I'll understand. Just please give me some breathing room to get through this rough spot with Via; then we'll take care of everything nice and neat."

Greta nodded her silent agreement and started out of the room.

"And Gret?"

She turned around to look at him, her heart playing some unjust trick on her, making her feel pity for the way he stood there, a little slouched, looking genuinely dismayed by the whole ordeal.

"No matter how much I may have let you down, I've loved you the best I can."

She said nothing as he picked up his briefcase and left the same way he'd come in. The door closed, and he was on his way back to work again. It was as though nothing and everything had changed at the same time. At least the worst was finally over.

She turned and ran upstairs, desperate to rendezvous