



Eight Years, No Us

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Category: Fantasy, Historical Fiction

Description: My spouse was a lawyer, and I had been married to him for eight years. He never once called me his wife in public during that time. He wouldn't even let our daughter call him "Dad."

He missed out on her youth over and over again because of the girl he loved when he was a kid. He forgave her even after she damaged our daughter. I was tired and empty. I made the choice to depart. I grabbed our daughter and disappeared from his life.

But he didn't want to get a divorce. He started looking for us like a crazy person, turning the whole world upside down. This time, though, neither my daughter nor I will look back.

Total Pages (Source): 7

Page 1

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:20 am

“Thank you for all the help you’ve given me over the years, Nolan. I’ll never forget it.”

I gave them my letter of resignation.

My boss, Nolan Simon, received it, looked down, and then looked up at me in shock. “You’re leaving?”

I nodded, and my face was serene. “I’m quitting my job as a legal assistant. I don’t want to do that anymore. Also, my baby’s father is in another country, and I’m going to find him.”

Nolan was quiet for a moment, then he said, “I thought your baby’s father was dead...”

He caught himself right away, and an uneasy laugh came out. “Sorry, that was a mistake.”

Then his face relaxed, and a look of reluctance came over it. “That’s too bad. You’re so good at what you do. Why not stay?” I shook my head and smiled a little.

The truth was that my baby’s father might as well be dead. And even though I was good at what I did, I was still simply an assistant. After a few more polite conversations, he consented to the resignation, and I started giving my work to my coworkers. I saw Albert with Tania, his boyhood sweetheart, in the break room. They were talking quietly, like if they were close. This law firm was started by Albert. He was in charge of me. He was also the father of my daughter.

I started working for the company eight years ago, right after I graduated from school, and became his assistant. We drank too much at a corporate party and ended up spending the night together. I got pregnant.

That made him marry me, but it was a secret.

He never liked me. He didn't like our daughter either because of that. He told her she couldn't call him "Dad."

Tania, on the other hand, has always been one of a kind. They were childhood pals who were quite close.

They were so close that they looked like they were stuck together. Her hand was wrapped around his arm, and her body was pressing against his.

He smiled softly as he glanced down at her. From where I was, it appeared like he was going to kiss her on the forehead. They were so brazen and free, doing this in the office as if no one else was there.

I couldn't stop myself. I went over. I softly said his name. "Albert..."

He looked up, his eyes chilly and full of questions. "Do you need something, Ivan?"

His tone was stiff and aloof, as if he wanted me to remember that I was only his assistant.

I pushed my feelings down and bowed my head a little. "No, sir. I was just getting some water. I saw you and thought I'd say hi."

He answered quickly, but then he seemed to recollect something. He looked serious.

“Okay. Give Tania the financial law case you’ve been working on.”

I stopped moving. I couldn’t stop my tone from slipping. “But I’m almost done. We’re going to sign the paper soon.”

He frowned. He obviously didn’t like that. “Give it to her,” I responded. “Why are you talking back?”

Then he got up and left without letting me say anything.

“I’ll take care of it. Thank you for all your hard work, Ivan.” Tania smiled at me and followed him closely.

I grinned with no warmth.

What a nice little scenario.

Once the contract was signed, that case would pay a lot of money in commissions. When Albert gave it to Tania, he also gave her the bonus.

How many times had this happened?

I had lost track.

He didn’t care how hard I worked or what I did. He would gladly take the credit away from me and give it to someone else just to get Tania to smile.

Sad.

That night, my daughter held on to me and asked, “Mommy... will Daddy come to the sports day tomorrow? And my birthday?”

I didn't know what to say.

I called Albert. I even sent him a text.

He didn't answer.

But I spotted him sitting next to Tania at the movies on her social media.

There were a lot of hearts and kind things said in the comments.

[You two look great together!]

You two should be married this year!]

I pushed the bitterness down and waited for him to respond. He didn't come home all night, though. Not a single word came from him.

I drank too much by myself. I still believed this lie, even though I knew his heart was never with me or the child.

How dumb.

Why hold on if there's no love?

I'm letting you go, Albert.

The next day, I went to my daughter's sports day by myself.

She started to cry when she couldn't find her father in the crowd. She wailed softly and wouldn't stop.

Albert had never been there for her milestones or any other parent-child event since the day she was born.

Even though I stayed with her during the tournament and she got first place, it didn't make her happy.

A child who doesn't have a father feels that they don't have a father's affection.

"Mommy, does Daddy not like me?" and "Mommy, will Daddy come home tonight for my birthday?" she continued asking me on the way home.

I didn't know what to say.

I didn't want her to get her hopes up and then be let down again, so I kept messaging Albert. I sent him messages over and over. Finally, he said, "I'll come to the birthday."

I was really happy when I saw that.

I smiled at my daughter. "Yes, Daddy is coming."

She screamed with joy, jumped up and down, and was almost shaking with excitement.

I took a gentle breath.

This would be the first time Albert had consented to celebrate our daughter's birthday as a father since we got married.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:20 am

That night, my daughter and I sat at the table and waited for him.

There were a lot of dishes on the table that Albert enjoyed. She knew everything of her secret CEO father's likes and dislikes by heart, even though she couldn't call him "Daddy."

She stood at the entrance and waited. Then they sat. Then they waited again.

At 11:50 p.m., she finally came over. Her eyes were dark, and her small body looked flat.

I called Albert over and over again. I sent texts until my fingertips hurt.

No answer.

I knew he wasn't going to come.

"Mommy," she murmured softly, trying to seem grown up, "Daddy must be really busy. Let's not wait any longer."

She was trying to be understanding, but she was still really disappointed.

I held her close and forced back my anguish. "How about we wait a little longer?"

She shook her head. She was done waiting.

I kissed her cheek for a long time.

I'd give her all of my affection if she couldn't feel her father's.

So I spent her birthday alone with her.

She bowed her head in the candlelight and made a wish.

I didn't enquire what it was. But I knew she wanted her father to love her.

We didn't talk about Albert again that night.

I pulled up my phone and looked through Instagram, which I do all the time.

There it was, Tania's latest post.

[It's my birthday today. I got the best present.

The picture featured a man on one knee with flowers and a ring in his hand.

I couldn't see all of his face, but I knew it was Albert.

And the band... He had made it in France as a custom piece. I had told him I liked it before and asked if I could have it. He said no.

He had given it to the woman he loved. A proposition, for sure.

Tania was his real wife.

His daughter and Tania were born on the same day. He still opted to stay with the lady he loved, though, leaving his daughter behind.

At that point, all of my optimism for him was gone.

Pain stabbed me in the chest over and over.

I pushed my fists tight on my heart to attempt to calm it down and breathe.

That agony took a long time to go away.

I took Tania out of my contacts.

The sound of the front door awakened me up the next morning.

I took the divorce papers I had made and went downstairs.

Albert was standing by the dining table, looking at the leftover cake.

My heart felt tranquil, but not in a normal way.

He looked up as he heard my footsteps. "I forgot because I worked too late last night."

I laughed in a cold, empty way.

I had called him. Sent him a lot of texts. He didn't hear? Didn't see?

No. He was just too busy with another woman. You could ignore everything else.

I turned the divorce papers over to the last page, lay them flat on the table and pointed to the line where the signature should go. "Put your name on it."

Albert was going to read the document when his phone rang.

Tania's voice, which was full of panic, came through the speaker. "Albert, my

stomach hurts. Can you please come get me? I'm really scared."

He said right away, "I'll be right there."

He calmed her down, didn't look back at the page, grabbed up the pen, quickly signed his name, and then left without saying anything further.

I watched him go away and laughed quietly and coldly.

"Well, this is how it ends." This family, this house, are finally gone.

Albert sent a message that afternoon. He had a courier bring our daughter's birthday gift.

I froze as I opened the box. It was a doll of Barbie.

I took our daughter with me to a work retreat last year.

Tania took her inside a spooky house without my knowing. She cried hysterically because actors disguised as creepy Barbie dolls had scared her so much.

Tania, who was angry, left her there alone in the dark for an hour.

Before we eventually found her, we searched the whole place. She had passed out because she was so scared.

When she woke up, she told us with shaking lips that Tania had deserted her on purpose.

Tania said no right away. Albert, of course, was there next to her, telling our daughter to "Don't imagine things."

Since then, just seeing a Barbie gave her bad dreams.

And now he sends her this for her birthday.

How silly. What a silly reason to be a dad.

I thought about secretly changing the gift, but my daughter had already seen it, so it was too late.

Albert announced out of the blue one night when he got home, “I’m going to have Tania move in for a while.”

He spoke in a casual way, as if it were the most normal thing in the world.

“We’re still keeping our marriage a secret. I don’t want her to know about us. You and the kid should move out for a while and stay away from each other.”

I asked, “So you’re kicking us out just so you can play house with her?”

Albert frowned, which was an obvious sign that he was angry. “Don’t twist what I said. This is only for a short time. We can’t make this marriage public because you don’t have the status for that.”

I didn’t say anything; I just laughed softly, without any joy.

That’s how he saw us, my kid and myself. A secret shame. A weight.

The rage I felt didn’t even let me argue.

I was just exhausted. So sleepy.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:20 am

Okay. Whatever.

He saw the look on my face and instantly spoke more softly. “I’ll bring you two back in a few days. I’ll make it up to you.”

I nodded and went upstairs without saying a word.

It didn’t matter anymore. The result would be the same no matter when I left. The damage was already done. No matter what he felt he could “make up,” I didn’t need it.

I packed quickly and silently, then took my daughter’s hand.

The door opened as we got there.

Tania walked in, pulling a bag behind her.

Albert ran up to her right away to take it from her. “Don’t wear yourself out. I told you I’d come get you. That’s too much to carry.”

But in the middle of the statement, he seemed to get it. He looked at me, nervous and on edge.

Tania noticed me and stopped, clearly shocked. “Ivan? What are you doing at Albert’s?”

Albert interrupted me before I could say anything. “She and her kid didn’t have

anywhere to go, so I let them stay for a while.”

Did you feel bad?

He used to say that we were related in some way. Now we were charity cases who were homeless.

By now, I thought I was used to all of his excuses. But somehow, everyone still managed to stab a little deeper.

Then my daughter said, “Hello, Uncle Albert.” Her voice was pleasant and clear.

When she called him “Uncle,” Albert stopped.

“What... what did she just say?”

“Uncle Albert, thank you for looking after us these last few days.”

I couldn’t believe what my daughter was saying. She was proud of herself, even if her eyes were full of tears. She wouldn’t let them fall.

A marriage that was kept secret for eight years. Albert had never officially acknowledged our relationship.

I had stood by him, helped him develop his career from the bottom up, fought with him in court, and given birth to his child. He kept saying that he had to keep our marriage a secret for the sake of his job, though.

But what about our little girl? His own blood and flesh? He wouldn’t even let her call him “Dad.” He always told her to call him “Uncle.” But now she was finally calling him what he wanted.

“Mom, let’s stop bothering him.”

She pulled on my arm and attempted to drag me away.

I nodded, following her lead. We were planning to leave at some point. It didn’t matter that I left now. I had already given up on him.

We turned to walk, and I grasped her hand.

At that point, Albert unexpectedly came after us and blocked our way.

“You didn’t take your bags,” he remarked.

I didn’t even glance at him. “We don’t need it.”

There were too many memories in those bags. I let go of everything we used to be by leaving them behind.

“But shouldn’t Ginny at least take her things?” he questioned, looking at our daughter.

Without saying a word, she buried her head and huddled behind me.

I said in a chilly voice, “This is between me and my daughter. Don’t you think you’re getting too involved?”

He opened his lips to say something, but then he stopped. There was something illegible in his gaze. After a while, he produced a bank card out of his coat and gave it to our daughter. “Hey Ginny, if you’re staying somewhere else and need something, just buy it. Your birthday is the PIN.”

Then he turned to Tania, took a box of chocolates from her arms, and gave them to my daughter.

He said, “This is your favourite flavour.” “I wasn’t there for your birthday yesterday, so this is to make it up to you.”

He pushed the box into her hands before she could say no.

I noticed the small spark of happiness in her eyes. At that moment, I felt like I couldn’t do anything. She was only a kid. It didn’t take much to make her smile. She didn’t get why the adults were fighting. I couldn’t hold that against her.

She opened the box and quickly unwrapped a piece, putting it in her lips.

I smelt something I knew and hated: matcha.

The panic came right away.

“Spit it out! You can’t eat that!” I said, my voice full of horror.

Her smile stopped in the middle of a bite. I ran up to her and opened her lips, trying to get the chocolate out with my fingers.

Albert’s face got darker. “Ivan, what the hell are you doing?”

I was so angry that I scowled at him. “Matcha makes her break out in rashes all over her body!

His face changed right away, worry turning into remorse.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t know.”

My daughter finally realised what she had eaten and spit out the rest, crying the whole time. Her expression was blank now, and the glimmer of hope was gone.

She muttered something way too grown-up for her age when she looked at Albert. “It’s fine. You’re never around, so you wouldn’t know.”

She held my hand strongly. “Mommy, let’s go.”

I bent down and picked her up, my heart hurting.

She put her head on my chest and wouldn’t look at him again.

I took her in my arms and walked away.

I could feel Albert’s heavy, confused, and guilty gaze on me from behind.

But this time, neither of us turned around.

I quit the legal company after filling out the paperwork to resign.

I didn’t want to see Albert. I didn’t want to say goodbye. So I sent the divorce papers by mail. It would all be over once he viewed them and signed his name.

“Goodbye, Albert.” I hope you and the person you love are happy for the rest of your lives.

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:20 am

I was getting ready to take Ginny on a trip. I was still worried that she would be angry with me for the choice, so I gently told her, “Sweetheart, Mommy and Daddy are separating.” I’m going to take you to live in another country. Will you be angry?
”

She shook her head and kissed me on the cheek, showing that she understood.

“Mommy, I’m alright as long as I have you. I want to be with you for the rest of my life. “I only want you to be happy.”

That broke me.

I cried, but for that moment, all the pain went away.

I felt like I had the whole world with my daughter.

Men? They’re like clouds that come and go.

I let go of everything from the past.

We moved to a tiny farm in another country and started a new life together. The days were calm and simple.

I used to be close with a coworker at the business. We would have lunch together every day and talk about work and other things like clockwork. Even after I left, she kept sending me voice messages and videos with all the latest news.

She emailed me a video about Tania one day.

Albert's pale, drawn face filled the screen as soon as I opened it. He seemed confused and distracted, as if something was bothering him.

He had a letter of resignation in his hand. Just as he was about to turn to the second page, Tania came up behind him, grabbed it, and threw it away.

"Albert, here's the proposal you wanted," she said, moving in close and handing him a piece of paper. Her cheek brushed his and she took his hand.

He quietly drew his hand back and didn't say anything.

He was clearly angry since he didn't look at her.

He picked up the paper and started to read. A few pages in, he frowned significantly.

He replied, "There's nothing here that makes sense." "It doesn't say what our lawyers should do when they become corporate counsel." And there isn't a clause that protects against liability.

He sat up straight in his chair and spoke more firmly. "You even got the name of the law firm wrong." That's easy. These kinds of details show how careful a lawyer is. How could you make such a simple mistake? "

As he read further, his face grew darker. Finally, he threw the document on the desk.

"Who made this? It's a bunch of junk.

Tania's face became white right away. She looked down and whispered, "I... I did.

Albert froze. The rage on the tip of his tongue got lodged in his throat, and he had to gulp it down, making it clear that he was trying to be calm.

He looked at Tania, who was about to cry, and he seemed to be in a profound, tired state of frustration.

“Tania,” he replied, his voice calm but heavy, “you graduated from a top school.” You should be able to write a good proposal. But this? It really isn’t presentable.

He spoke in a way that was planned and careful. He brought me up almost without thinking.

“Look at Ivan. She taught herself the law even though she doesn’t have a degree. Her ideas are always well-organised, focused, and easy to understand. You might learn a lot from how hard she works. For years, I’ve trusted you with important tasks. But you haven’t gotten better. You still need support every time. This can’t keep happening.

Tania didn’t handle it well. Instead of thinking about it, she started crying and her voice shook.

“Albert, I truly did try! I didn’t think I would make so many mistakes.

Then she yelled at him in a shaky, angry voice.

“Just hire someone else if you don’t think I’m smart enough!” And please quit comparing myself to Ivan all the time! She doesn’t even have a degree from college! She probably employed AI to write such suggestions. She couldn’t have done these herself! ”

With that, she got angry and stormed off.

The door to the office was wide open. Everyone had seen what happened, but no one said anything. The room was quite quiet.

Albert looked sad. He didn't go after her. Instead, he sat heavily on the couch and wiped his forehead, showing that he was tired.

He was the boss of the company. Tania, who worked for him, had let her feelings get in the way of her work and had acted disrespectfully towards him. Of course, he was angry.

My old coworker, the one who often told me gossip, sent me this video solely to complain about Tania's lack of skill. "She relies too much on connections," she added, "and is always looking for ways to get around things."

She even wagered on how long Albert could stand Tania.

I didn't say anything. I just replied back a smiley face emoji and left it at that.

Albert used to yell at me all the time back then. But I realised he was just trying to help me get better, so I listened to him, took his advice, and worked hard to become better.

My parents died when I was in high school. I didn't have a degree, so I had to accept any job I could find, primarily cleaning work, just to stay alive.

But I wasn't afraid of hard times. I wanted a better life, so I started learning the law on my own. I followed Albert around like a shadow, begging him to educate me.

He despised it at first and kept saying no to me. But I kept asking nonetheless, even though I was embarrassed.

I read books all day and all night, and I wouldn't stop.

A year later, I had finally made some progress. I could find a method to fix any legal difficulty he came my way.

He once told me I was smart. That one nice thing made me happy all night, and I couldn't sleep.

I stayed up for nights on end to get my work done faster, and I pushed myself so hard that I got stomach problems. In the end, I became his best assistant.

I stayed quietly by his side and helped him convert a law firm that no one had ever heard of into a well-known one.

I kept providing even when no one noticed what I could do.

But a night of drinking at a banquet broke up everything we had established, our partnership, and that peaceful understanding.

He thought I got drunk on purpose and climbed into bed with him to get him to sleep with me.

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:20 am

He accused me for trying to become his wife even though he didn't remember anything the next morning.

People who praised him turned against him.

He hated me more and more as time went on.

He married me for the sake of the child, but he didn't love me. He kept me at arm's length, distant, and frigid.

He had always loved Tania. That's the love he chose to go after.

Albert had been calling me every day, which he had never done before.

It was my turn not to answer the phone.

Every month, his company conducted a public welfare livestream. I used to be his co-host on every one of these. After I left, it was clear who his new co-host would be: Tania.

I logged onto the livestream with a second account since I was curious.

He was still sharp, still gorgeous, and naturally charming. Everything he said made people adore him.

And yeah, Tania was standing next to him.

They looked like the perfect couple because they were wearing the same clothes.

Someone asked a query about the laws about self-defence and murder.

Tania suddenly spoke up to give her views.

She said that killing someone in self-defence was still planned murder and shouldn't be seen as self-defence at all. It should be penalised by death.

People quickly pushed back. They thought she was arrogant and that her argument wasn't fair.

But instead of giving up, she took it personally and said the viewers were being rude to her. Then she proceeded to argue with them.

Albert continued looking at her and telling her to stop with his eyes. He even tried to grab her arm and pull it gently to get her to remain silent.

But she didn't listen to him and kept chatting.

The talk on the livestream went out of hand and was full of obscenities. It became so nasty that the platform sent out a warning for breaking the rules.

Albert finally lost it when the comments got worse.

“Stop!” ” he yelled.

He put his hand over her mouth and tried to pull her away from the camera.

But she was so angry that she pushed him away.

“Albert, they’re all coming after me. You should be standing up for me! ”

Albert let out a hopeless sigh and tried to talk to Tania.

“The people watching weren’t making fun of you. They were merely making comments.

“They said I was stupid, impulsive, shallow, and selfish. How does it not hurt my feelings? Tania shot back, her voice shaking. “I was just defending myself.” Why won’t you stand up for me? ”

She cried as she broke down, throwing a fit like a child who wasn’t getting enough attention.

Albert looked tired. His expression, which was normally calm, now showed a hint of open scorn.

He couldn’t get angry here, not in front of people. Even though he was angry, he had to hold it back and swallow every syllable like shattered glass.

“Okay.” “I messed up.”

He stopped the livestream without saying anything else.

I couldn’t help it. I laughed.

A perfectly excellent stream was ruined by Tania and turned into pandemonium. Albert, the calm and collected professional lawyer, was completely embarrassed. There was no way to avoid the fallout from this tragedy.

And sure enough, it came quickly.

People on the internet were very critical of Tania, saying she was unprofessional and lacked poise.

Some people even remarked they missed me and that the broadcasts were better when I was his co-host because I was bright, principled, and able to speak clearly.

People who watched Albert's show sent him a lot of emails requesting him to invite me back.

But Albert? He didn't say anything. No comment, no PR spin, nothing.

Then a coworker sent me a clip of Tania flinging herself into Albert's arms and crying violently after the webcast stopped.

I saw Albert push her away, and his eyes were full of disappointment. He said only one thing.

"I thought you were smart." But you're simply an idiot. No awareness, no tact. "You're getting harder to deal with every day."

And with that, he left her behind, almost running away from the scene.

I was shocked. Was he finally done with her? Had the charm of his so-called love and dedication worn off?

It didn't matter to me anymore how he treated Tania.

I looked at my phone and saw that it was still connected to the home security system. I opened it one last time to clear the memory and get ready to remove the program.

I downloaded the old movies of our daughter that were kept in the cloud before I did

that. I wanted to keep them.

The real-time feed flickered on by accident while I was scrolling.

Albert was back home.

He was inebriated and wobbling, and his steps were shaky.

“Ivan,” he shouted, and his voice echoed through the empty home. “My stomach hurts.” “Please make me some soup.”

He yelled my name again, this time louder. But I didn’t answer.

He strolled through the home, room by room. There was no one there.

And then it appeared to hit him: we were gone. I had grabbed our daughter and fled.

He walked to the dining room table and poured himself a glass of water. Then he stopped.

He reached out and grabbed a cup with a cartoon on it that I used to drink from.

He looked at it for a long time, and then, curiously, he smiled. It was a soft, indulgent smile, like a reflex from a good memory.

I frowned. Was he losing it with that smile?

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:20 am

Then he took out his phone and called me.

I didn't answer.

A message came through a little later.

He believed I was still mad, so he spoke softly and sweetly.

[Where are you and our daughter staying? I'll come see you both tomorrow and bring your favourite dish.]

I blocked him.

I could see his face go darker on the screen.

Break!

The cup fell to the floor and broke into sharp fragments.

He must have realised that I had blocked him and taken him off my contact list.

Then, as if he suddenly understood, he called Nolan and put it on speaker.

When the call went through, he enquired right away, "Why didn't Ivan join the last livestream?" "

Nolan was visibly sleepy; he'd already been asleep. When he woke up suddenly, his

voice was slow and unclear. “Speak,” Albert yelled, raising his voice.

Nolan woke up this time. “She quit. She gave her notice a while ago.”

Albert’s eyes became wide with shock.

“She quit?”

Nolan sighed and said, “Yeah. I tried to get her to stay, but she was determined. She said she was going to find her husband, and I had no reason to stop her.”

Albert’s face turned dark, like spilt ink, and his eyes were full of wrath. The veins on the back of the hand that was holding his phone were very clear.

Then he laughed in a chilly way.

“Oh? And when did she get married to someone else?”

Nolan couldn’t say anything.

“How could you let her quit?” Albert said, his voice getting louder. “I am the boss, and I need to sign off on resignations.”

A lovely, clear child’s voice came over the line before he could finish.

“Who are you talking to, Daddy? Why aren’t you in bed?”

Albert stopped moving.

Nolan said softly, “I’m almost done. Be good and go to sleep.” His tone was very different. There was a faint sound of him stroking his child’s back in the background.

Albert stood there, shocked.

He slowly hung up the phone after a few seconds. Then, as if a light had turned on inside him, he said to himself, “I had a family too... but I guess I let it slip through my fingers.”

He sat on the floor that night without saying a word. His face was hard to decipher since it was weighed down by more than just regret. There was confusion, strife, and something deep inside that wouldn't come to the surface.

He didn't move till the sun came up.

He finally got up and saw a parcel on the shoe cabinet. He stopped.

He opened it because he was curious.

His face changed slowly, going from blank to pained.

It was the papers for the divorce that I had mailed him.

He got the package days ago and threw it away like it wasn't important. He had my resignation letter the other day, but Tania interrupted him and he never read it.

The folder fell out of his hands and onto the floor.

The words “Divorce Agreement” were big and plain in front of him. There were our autographs right there.

He slipped down the wall, like if it was too much for him to handle. Before the tears could flow, his eyes went red.

He muttered, "Ivan, you really... you're really leaving me."

I was astonished to see him like that. He must have stopped loving me a long time ago. Why did he look like he was gutted from the inside now of all times?

Maybe... He never thought I'd really go.

He might have imagined I'd always be there. Like an echo, like a shadow. Like real estate.

He didn't know how to live without me now that I was gone.

Of course. I had been with him for years. He didn't notice me anymore; I had become part of the background.

At that moment, the front door opened. Tania went inside.

She ran over in a panic when she spotted Albert sitting on the ground and tried to help him up.

"What's wrong, Albert?"

He pushed her away and stared her in the eye.

He said firmly, "Tania, I don't like you anymore."

She looked at him in shock. There was anguish all over her face.

"You're kidding, right? I know you're mad at me," she said, her voice breaking as she cried. "I shouldn't have gotten angry during the storm. I know I was wrong. I've been thinking about it a lot."

“Last night I stayed up talking to a friend,” she said, sounding frantic. “They told me I crossed the line. I get it now. I do.” But Albert only shook his head.

He took a big breath.

“I’ve been dreaming about her and our daughter walking away ever since Ivan left. That image...” He stopped.

“It hurts like hell, and I regret it so much. These last few days, I’ve been thinking about her face a lot—when she was unhappy, when she was happy, and when she was sure of herself.

“Every single thing you do, every tiny habit. And now I know that I love her. My wife is her. We have a daughter named Ginny. We were just keeping it to ourselves. Over the years, we’ve all changed. You have. And so have I.

He was standing there, ready to go.

But Tania got in front of him and blocked his way. She was crying so hard that she couldn’t stop. “Don’t go!” Please tell me you’re lying! Please tell me this isn’t real!
”

Albert’s face was stern, and his eyes were keen and frigid enough to lock her in place. He pronounced each syllable like it was the last one.

“I’m not lying to you.” I love her. “I’m going to look for her.”

He pushed her aside and left after that.

I turned off the monitoring feed. My whole body seemed numb and locked in place, but then I unexpectedly let out a faint, surprised laugh.

It's true that feelings are odd.

I never would have thought that the one who couldn't let go of me was him.

He was the one going to another nation. He was the one who came to locate me.

He didn't value me when I was there. It wasn't until I left that he realised what he had lost.

But what good does that do now?

I was already in Norway.

As usual, I dropped Ginny off at school one morning and then went home to take care of the flowers and veggies in my garden.

I really should thank Albert for being so kind with money. Because of that, I now have enough money saved up to retire early and live well without having to work again.

A towering guy suddenly appeared in front of me while I was watering the plants.

My body stiffened. I didn't even have to look up to see who it was.

"Ivan."

The way he pronounced my name in a familiar, personal way made my whole body shake.

Albert was there.

I turned back and stared at him. He looked tired. His hair had some grey in it, and his beard was messy and covered his chin.

Page 7

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A lawyer at the firm who liked to gossip told me that once I left, he went half-crazy looking for me. When he couldn't find me at home, he went to other countries, one after the other, looking for me.

Yes, he looked rough, but he was still good-looking.

That face was what tricked me before.

No one knew that the only reason I wanted that job was so I could see him every day.

They fell in love right away.

But I didn't have any looks, a degree, or a family name. All I had was a heart that beat for him.

I chased after him with all I had. It hurt and was often embarrassing, but I put up with it all simply to be close to him.

I became his most trusted aide, the one who was always there for him, just by willpower.

But he ruined everything in one night, pushed me down to the bottom, and left me there to freeze for eight long years.

I've been through disappointment and suffering, but now I've discovered serenity.

I smiled a little and pointed to a bench nearby.

“Sit down.”

His eyes brightened up, and he came over and sat next to me.

I made him a cup of tea and gave it to him.

He seized it with both hands, never taking his eyes from mine. His voice was low and rough.

“I thought you would never talk to me again.”

I raised an eyebrow and spoke softly.

“Why not? You are still the father of my child. “I have to give you some dignity.”

Then I looked him right in the eye and spoke in a forceful tone, as if I were back in court negotiating conditions. “You’ve read the divorce papers. I don’t want your cash. All I want is to be the guardian of our daughter.

His face got darker and his voice got colder.

“I won’t divorce you, Ivan.”

I anticipated it would happen. I already understood why he arrived.

“That’s okay. We’ll go through the law. Remember that I used to be your legal assistant? I’ve worked on a lot of divorce cases.

He slammed the teacup down with a loud bang. The power of it broke the porcelain, and tea spilt all over the table.

We both got up at the same moment.

“Ivan, please don’t go. I realise I made a mistake. I figured it out too late. Please let me adore you. “Let me fix things.”

But I stayed still and didn’t move.

“It’s too late. “I’m tired.”

As he got closer, his eyebrows furrowed.

“Eight years ago, you crawled into bed with me, got pregnant, and married me. And now you want to leave? Is this a game of push and pull? ”

I couldn’t believe what he said.

I thought he finally got it.

But he still saw me in a selfish way.

“So, in your eyes, I’ve always been a scheming woman,” I murmured softly.

But I wasn’t let down. In fact, I could see through it all.

He was so haughty that he could never really lower his head for a woman.

“Albert, did you ever think that I was the one who got harmed that night? ”

He moved closer, and I moved back gently till I couldn’t go any more.

I stopped leaning against the wall. He also stopped, staring at me with a puzzled look.

“What do you mean?”

I didn’t say anything. My thoughts went back to that night.

I helped Albert get to his room while he was inebriated and I steadied him.

I pulled off his clothing, tucked him in, and then I left.

But as I was about to go, he grabbed my arm, pushed me onto the bed, and lunged at me.

His eyes were glazed over and his face was red with passion. I knew right once that he had been drugged.

I fought with all my strength to get away, but it didn't work.

What chance did a woman's strength have against a man's?

He ripped off my clothing and, because of the narcotics in his system, took me.

Even though I loved him, I never wanted to be with him like that in such situations.

It happened, and I had to accept it after that.

He didn't remember anything. When he woke up and saw me naked next to him, he tossed me out of bed and called me shameless.

I convinced myself he didn't mean to do it and that he had just forgotten.

But the silence, the coldness, and the ignoring for eight years were all on purpose.

"Say something."

He pushed me while I didn't say anything.

"Go look for the truth yourself if you want to know it."

All of a sudden, I didn't want to find it anymore.

"It's over, Albert." Please don't come back and mess up my life.

With that, I pushed past his heavy gaze and went to the bedroom.

Albert went away.

He stopped at the door before he left and said, "I won't agree to the divorce even if you take me to court." And I'll find out the truth from eight years ago.

I didn't care if he really did or not.

He was gone, and I felt better.

I stayed in Norway and focused on my life and my daughter. I kept filing for divorce, even though my requests were turned down over and over again.

Over time, my feelings for him evened out. He became simply a small part of my life.

When he told Ginny not to call him "Dad" in the ninth year, she didn't care anymore. She forgot how angry he made her and made a lot of new friends in Norway while learning a lot.

I had people who wanted to date me, and I liked feeling adored.

But I said no when someone asked me to marry them.

I didn't want to walk into marriage lightly since it felt like a cage.

Albert would come to Norway every now and again to see our daughter.

I knew he wanted to make things right with her, and since she wasn't against it, I didn't say anything.

They were family, so it made sense to leave things as they were.

Later, Albert seemed to find out the truth. He called me many times to say he was sorry and even sent me a lot of money.

I didn't pay attention to him, save for the child support.

I kept dating, though, looking for someone I could marry again and who could really be my love.