

A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding a simple metal ring. The hand is positioned over a cluster of bright red holly berries with green leaves. The background is dark and textured, possibly a wooden surface. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the hand and the berries.

Unhidden Secrets

Author's Name



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Chapter One

"So, where were you last night?" Aria struggled to keep her tone neutral. Afraid to meet his gaze, she pretended to stir sugar into her coffee. She could feel his eyes on her, studying her carefully. She knew that slightest expression could throw him into a violent rage and that was the last thing she wanted. She was determined to have a proper, adult conversation with her husband. Lord knew how long it had been since the last time they had one without going for each other's throat.

"Just out with the guys." He was careful to match his tone with hers as though saying if you want to play this game, count me in.

She breathed in deeply. That's two strikes in just one sentence. Still, she couldn't help but wonder if it was all a misunderstanding. She fumbled with the wedding ring on her finger. For some reason, it felt heavier now more than ever.

"Just out with the guys? Where did you go?"

She kept her eyes fixed on him and didn't notice so much as a flinch before uttering his next lie, "You know, the usual. Stayed in. Played video games."

"As expected. When will you start being a little original, Adam? You should've known I would catch up with you some time. Took me long enough but I'm finally here and I'm ready to call you out on your bullshit."



“At Antonio’s place?” Aria questioned softly.

“Yeah, of course. Where else?”

“You just said ‘out’”.

He met her gaze and for a brief second. She remembered the Adam who looked deeply into her eyes while saying his vows. Was he just lying then, too? She hated the thought and pushed it to the back of her mind immediately. That couldn’t have been a lie. The past year couldn’t have been a lie. Was he pretending back then too? Where did it all go wrong?

“Did I? My bad. It’s been a crazy day at work.”

Aria stifled a sob. He had left her no choice. There was only one way she could go from here. The last place she wanted to take this conversation but, she needed answers.

“That’s funny,” she started. “Tina invited me over last night.” She saw him searching her face, trying to decipher if she was lying to catch him in the act. “Isn’t that funny? You’d think we would’ve seen each other or...”

He cut her off, “Yeah, yeah, we were in the basement.” How could someone lie so blatantly?

“You mean the basement where their kids were having a sleepover?”

He looked up slowly as though someone had just punched him in the gut. Eyes bloodshot, he fumbled around for words. “Plus,” she continued, “remember last week? When you took that weekend trip with “the boys”? Sara seemed to have a very difficult time remembering any such trip. You’d think she’d remember her husband being gone for two whole days.”



Bullseye. Try wiggling your way out of this one, she thought. Things were about to get real ugly. She could sense it. "I'm asking you one last time, Adam. What – or should I say who – is so important that you have to take sneaky getaway trips when your wife is sitting at home all alone?"

"Are you spying on me? He went for the defense, as usual. If you already knew where I was yesterday, why did you bother asking?"

"The same reason you had to lie to me, I suppose. Or maybe I was hoping you'd tell me the truth for once. But for some reason, you just don't get tired of being this unfaithful loser."

Silence.

She heard the tick, tick, tick of the kitchen clock notify them of each passing second. Staring at her husband, she tried to read the look he had plastered to his face this time. Was that guilt? Shame? No, that wasn't possible. She knew this man well enough to confidently say that he couldn't feel guilt. Not anymore. In his mind, he could do no wrong. In his mind, he was a god. A narcissist in the purest definition of the word.



No, the only thing he felt at that moment was anger for being caught red-handed. He clearly thought he could get away with it for a longer time and this hiccup, in the form of a wife that was on to his infidelity, was unacceptable.



With the actions that followed, she rested assured that even now, she knew him better than anyone else, no matter how much he tried to deny it.\

Smash! "I'm tired of these constant accusations!"

He was screaming. The vein in his forehead stuck out like a sore thumb, giving him a scarier look but Aria wasn't afraid. All she could think at that moment was that this definitely isn't the man



she had married a year ago. This wasn't the man who spent months trying to prove to her that he had changed. She looked at the broken china on the floor. When did he start getting so violent? Is this the same person who claimed he couldn't stand loud noises? Did that person even ever exist?

"You want me to sit quietly while you spend night after night at the club with your bitches?" She felt her voice rising now, and her tone becoming hateful. If he could be angry, so could she. Especially when she had done nothing wrong. She hated the person he had forced her to become. Always upset. Always angry. Always doubtful. Always full of regret.

"Every single week it's the same drama! Over and over again. Am I not allowed to have a life? If I'd known marrying you meant I could never go out again I never would've proposed!" yelled Adam.



“You think I want to keep fighting with you? You think I enjoy this?” she was huffing now. Ignoring his scoff she continued, “Every night, you take random women out and expect me to be okay with it?”

“Here come the accusations again!” He was louder now and Aria couldn’t help but think back to what her mother would say – “Only a liar raises their voice to get you to believe what they say.”

“Am I supposed to believe you just because you’re screaming?” Aria stated firmly. She felt his stare pierce into her. Was he going to hit me? Was he capable of that? At this point, she thought there’s nothing this man can’t do.

“You know what I think, Aria?”

“Enlighten me.”

Though the sarcasm in her tone enraged him further, he pushed his feelings aside. Right now, he was focused on hurting her, and he knew just how to do it. “I think you’re projecting.”

“Excuse me?” She hadn’t seen that coming.

“What happened to that smart mouth now, huh? No longer good with words?”

“What do you mean by ‘you’re projecting’?” She signed quotation marks in the air. Her words dripped with sarcasm.

“You know exactly what I mean, but because you need me to spell it out for you, I think you’re the one having an affair or maybe even multiple affairs. That’s why you keep thinking I’m cheating on you.”

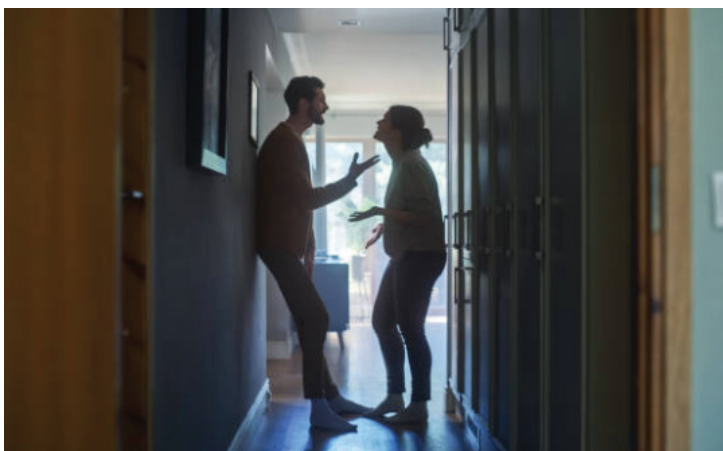


She stared at him in disbelief. Will this man stop at nothing? Is there anything he won't do to keep his name in the clear? How can someone even stoop so low?

"What's the matter? Cat got your tongue? Hah, typical."

"I won't stoop down to your level, Adam." She saw him ball up his hands as the words left her mouth.

The clock chimed 5 o'clock, informing the spiteful duo that they had been going at it for over an hour. Annoyed and clearly searching for an avenue to take out his anger, she witnessed him march up to the clock, as though on a mission, and punched it repeatedly until its broken pieces resigned to the floor. She wondered if he was picturing her face instead of the clock. The thought sent a chill down her spine, and she stirred as he inched closer to her.



"You should know that I blame me as much as I blame you for our failed marriage."

He scoffed.

Unperturbed, she continued. "I should have known. Once a cheater, always a cheater. I should never have forgiven you. You thought of me as just your trophy, and now that you have me, you've left me to rot inside your stupid house."

For a swift moment, she thought she was next. She saw herself on the floor, defeated, just as her precious clock lay there. Instead, what she heard was another Smash!. Louder this time. As though an entire china cabinet had toppled over.



She opened her eyes to see the destruction he had caused. She couldn't spot an inch of her kitchen floor that wasn't covered in broken shards of glass.

"I'm the one you're angry with – even if you're angry for all the wrong reasons – so take it out on me, not my china."

"So, you can take me to court with your bruises? Get my ass thrown into jail? Nice try, Aria, but I'm not that dumb."

She felt a tear escape, slowly trickling down her cheek. This is what he thought of her.

"All you've been trying to do for the past couple of months is getting me to end things. You keep trying to make me look like the bad guy. And you go to incredible lengths to get what you want! Why are you such a spiteful person, Aria? What did I ever do to you?"

Here came his manipulative side. There went another tear.

"If I continue living under this roof with you, you're going to drive me insane! I have to spend my days and nights elsewhere just because of this bullshit I have to deal with at home!"

"Are you seriously blaming all of this on me?" The anger was back. She said a silent prayer for not falling into his trap.

She stood up and walked over to him, standing an inch away from this face. Her words were firm and determined, "The only reason we're in this position is that you're a disgusting, cheating, and manipulative person. I have put up with your bullshit for months now, and I've had enough."



She could see that her words hit him where it counted but he wasn't one to give in that easily.

"Because of me?" he screamed. "You know what, this is ridiculous. I've already wasted hours arguing with you. I'm getting late. Don't wait up."

"Of course! You can leave me alone at home for hours but can't keep the bitch waiting more than a few minutes. What's next? You'd rather bring her home with a bottle of wine and kick me out?"

The next thing she knew, he was picking up his keys and exiting through the door, leaving her behind to deal with the mess that he created. She fell back into the chair, staring at the kitchen that bore witness to the chaos that ensued within it. All she could do at that moment was rest her head on the table and let her mind drift back to better and simpler times.

