

The
Humiliated
Wife



A H u s b a n d ' s

Betrayal & Grovel

ELISE CAMDEN

The Humiliated Wife

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For Stephen

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CHAPTER 1

Fiona

HER HUSBAND WAS *HOT*.

Fiona leaned against the doorframe, fully indulging. The towel sat low on his hips, water still dripping from his hair, steam curling out of the bathroom. He ran a hand through his damp hair, slow and casual.

He caught sight of her in the doorway—sleep-mussed, bare-legged, cradling two mugs—and his smile was instinctive, like it always was when she was the first thing he saw in the morning.

Sometimes she didn't understand how she'd managed to attract the attention of a man like Dean. He was so much more than her—more sophisticated, more cosmopolitan, more *everything*.

And yet, every time his eyes found her like that—like she was the only thing in the room that mattered—something in her lit up, disbelieving and grateful. This was the man she loved. This was the man she was going to live the rest of her life with.

Not bad for a girl from Sweetwater.

“Good morning, beautiful,” he said, that low gravel-voice just for her.

Her smile softened, and she lifted the mugs she was holding. “I brought coffee.”

Dean took the mug from her hand, brushed her fingers as he did. “Perfect,” he said, taking a sip and then setting it down.

She perched on the edge of the bed, still in her pajama shirt, toes curled in her strawberry-printed socks. He was moving around the room now—draping himself in his day. Shirt, watch, cufflinks. Every motion crisp, automatic, a man stepping into his armor.

And still, between each layer, he kept returning to the mug—stealing little sips in between cufflinks and collar stays. Fiona watched him with quiet, wifely satisfaction, her heart catching a little each time he reached for the coffee she’d made.

Like some small part of her was helping carry him into the day. Like she belonged in his rhythm.

“Why are you getting dressed?” she said lightly. “Stay home and let me ravish you.”

Dean laughed, adjusting his cuff. “Tempting.”

She tilted her head. “No client meeting’s gonna love you like I do.”

He shot her a grin over his shoulder. “You’d be surprised. Branding decks are very affectionate.”

She watched as he buttoned his shirt, skin disappearing beneath crisp cotton, and felt a quiet ache behind her ribs.

Soon he'd grab the keys to the sleek car he drove. Another day, another meeting, another layer of polish she never had to think about in her own world.

Dean's whole world revolved around packaging things perfectly—ideas, products, himself. At school, she could wear soft cardigans and sensible shoes and no one cared as long as she knew how to defuse a classroom full of fifth graders on a sugar high.

She loved seeing him like this—focused, successful, making his mark in the world. She'd never get tired of watching him chase big dreams.

But this morning she also wanted him to stay. To drink too-hot coffee and leave the shirt on the hanger and curl back into bed with her instead of heading out into the sleek, sharp world of client lunches, and glass elevators.

"I wish I could kidnap you away from your job today," she said with a sigh, "and we could just stay here."

Success came with strings: dinners with colleagues, office politics, the careful dance of small talk and subtle power plays. She didn't resent it—this was part of who he was—but sometimes she missed the version of him that was just hers.

Dean glanced over his shoulder, adjusting the expensive watch on his wrist. She'd never gotten used to seeing him wear something that cost more than her monthly salary. "That's the kind of kidnapping I could get behind," he told her with a soft smile.

She settled cross-legged on the bed, sipping her own cup. He joined her a moment later, pressing a kiss to her temple.

She smiled up at him, her chin resting on her knees. “You know,” she said thoughtfully, “if I ever got kidnapped, I’d probably spill all my secrets immediately. Like, in the first five minutes. ‘Here’s my bank passwords! Also, I once lied in sixth grade and said I met the president at a gas station.’ Just—bam. No torture required.”

Dean choked on his coffee. It always surprised her, how easy it was to say things to him—things she wouldn’t admit to anyone else. With Dean, all the quiet parts of her felt like they had permission to speak.

“I *panicked!*” she explained, laughing. “Everyone else was telling these amazing celebrity stories, and I just... lied. I’ve been haunted ever since.”

He looked at her with that familiar amusement—like he couldn’t believe she was real. “You are the most honest liar I’ve ever met.”

She leaned over to boop his nose with her finger. “You’re not allowed to tell anyone. That’s classified intel.”

He reached out and tucked a strand of her hair behind her ear. “Who would I tell?”

He kissed her—lightly, like a promise—and she let herself melt into it.

She loved the city. But when it was too fast and sharp around the edges, her husband was her special place in the noise, her still point. Even when she felt small and unsure in the shadow of tall buildings and busy streets, she always felt like she belonged here. With him.



FIONA FELT SO out of place.

The gallery echoed with voices as the rest of the crowd networked. She stood awkwardly near a painting that looked like something one of her students might've made—if only the school could afford canvases.

Her outfit—the one that had looked so polished in her bedroom mirror—now seemed frumpy and obvious next to the architectural black ensembles surrounding her. The women here moved with an effortless confidence she'd never mastered.

Fiona tugged at her dress, hyperaware of how it sat on her—too tight in some places, loose in others. She felt like a middle schooler who'd raided her mother's closet—playing dress-up in a world that required sophistication.

Even her shoes felt wrong now, sensible flats among stilettos. She felt like the girl from the small town trying to pass in the big city, and it showed in every awkward gesture, every uncertain smile, every moment she opened her mouth and revealed just how little she belonged.

"The brushwork is so deliberately naive," a woman with geometric earrings was saying to the small cluster nearby. "It's almost aggressive in its refusal to engage with post-conceptual frameworks."

Fiona had no idea what post-conceptual meant. She wondered if it was like pre-algebra.

A couple nearby was posing for photos, the man dutifully snapping shots of his girlfriend against the white gallery wall. She adjusted her pose, hand on her hip, chin tilted just so.

Dean appeared at her elbow with fresh drinks, looking effortlessly at home in his charcoal suit. He leaned toward Fiona. "I'm glad that's not me." He handed her her drink. "I love you, but there's a limit."

Fiona took a large sip.

"How are you holding up?" he murmured, close to her ear.

"Great," she said, too quickly. "I love... art."

He smiled at her, soft and private, but before he could respond, a tall man with silver hair approached—someone Dean had pointed out to her earlier as a senior partner at his agency.

"Dean, there you are. And this must be the wife. You're a teacher, I believe?"

"That's right." She felt a blush stain her cheeks. Dean must talk about her at work. The realization wrapped around her like a warm embrace.

"How refreshing. We don't get many educators in our circle." He said it like she was an exotic bird that had wandered into the wrong habitat. "And what do you make of the artist's latest work?"

Fiona glanced at the painting behind them. "It's... very blue," she said.

The man's smile became sharper. "Yes. The cerulean palette is quite striking."

Cerulean. Of course it wasn't just blue. It was cerulean.

"What Fiona means," Dean injected smoothly, "is that the monochromatic scheme creates an emotional intensity that's almost overwhelming."

The man turned his attention toward Dean. "Exactly. The visceral response is immediate."

Fiona felt heat creep up her neck as they talked.

"If you'll excuse me," she said, "I'm going to get some air."

She made her way through the crowd, past conversations about emerging markets and art fairs in Basel, past women who looked like they'd stepped out of magazines and men who gestured with their wine glasses like conductors.

The bathroom was mercifully quiet.

She stared at herself in the mirror—a person who could command a classroom full of ten-year-olds but apparently couldn't hold her own at a gallery opening. Her lipstick had worn off, leaving her looking even more ordinary than before.

When she emerged, Dean was waiting in the hallway.

"Hey," he said gently. "You okay?"

"I'm fine." She tried to smile. "Just needed a minute."

"Richard can be a bit much. He talks like that to everyone."

"It's not Richard." She looked down at her hands. "It's just... this isn't really my world, you know?"

Dean stepped closer. "What do you mean?"

"I mean I called a million-dollar painting 'very blue,' Dean. These people are talking about frameworks and palettes and I'm standing there like..." She gestured helplessly. "Like I just learned what crayons are."

"That's not true."

She didn't answer right away.

Then, quietly: "It felt like they were all laughing at me."

Dean was quiet for a beat too long.

"They weren't laughing *at* you," he said. "They just... aren't used to someone who's not constantly trying to show off."

She gave a small, tired shrug. "It still felt like I didn't belong."

Dean pulled her into a hug, strong and certain, his arms wrapped around her like armor. She let herself lean into it. Her husband.



"OKAY, Fiona, you *have* to settle this," Emma said, her face too close to the camera. "If your boyfriend is watching a nature documentary, and you tell him you finally got a second interview for a job you've been freaking out about for weeks, and he goes, 'Mmhmm'—does that or does that not count as grounds for minor assault?"

From somewhere off-screen came a low, distracted grunt. Milo, presumably.

The screen focus was on her younger sister Emma, their cousin Marcy, and a partial view of their mom's lemon-patterned curtains instantly familiar.

Fiona smiled sympathetically. "I mean... depends on whether he looked up afterward."

"He didn't." Emma flopped back dramatically. "He just nodded and rewound the video like *that* was the important part."

Marcy chimed in with a sigh. "Travis does that sort of shit all the time."

Behind her, Travis sat on the couch, slack-jawed and glued to a football game. He didn't even seem to notice he was being discussed. Marcy gave the video call a pointedly raised eyebrow.

Fiona laughed, full and bright. "You guys need a 'focus' jar. Like a swear jar, but for emotional neglect."

"Easy for you to say," Emma muttered. "Dean actually listens when you talk."

Fiona ducked her head, trying to hide the smile curling across her mouth. But it was impossible. It stretched, quiet and certain, into her whole face.

She knew she didn't fit into his world, but she also knew that Dean didn't mind. That he saw her worth even if she didn't know the latest trends.

"He does," she said.

Marcy leaned closer to the screen. "Ugh, say more. I need to believe in men again."

Last week, Dean had come home after a long day at the office. He'd dropped his keys in the bowl, walked straight into the kitchen, and handed her a small white box.

And when she'd finished kissing him, she'd seen that he'd brought home lemon shortbread from her favorite bakery.

Fiona tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. "It's like he catches the parts of me I don't even realize I'm giving away." She glanced down, almost embarrassed. "I mentioned I missed the shortbread from that bakery near school. Just once. Casually. He showed up after work with a box of them and pretended it was no big deal."

Emma groaned. "Disgusting."

"You married well," Marcy said quietly, smiling.

"I did," Fiona said, with something like wonder in her voice. "I really did."

She thought about when they were first married and he'd surprised her with tickets to see a boyband. She'd been too embarrassed to tell him how much she'd wanted to go—a grown woman getting excited about a band she'd loved in high school. But Dean had guessed anyway. He'd even worn the merch t-shirt she'd bought him. He'd never once made her feel silly for loving something so uncool.

She really had married well.

She might not fit seamlessly into Dean's world of gallery openings and industry friends, but she was proud to show up on his arm anyway.

CHAPTER 2

Dean

SHE HADN'T EVEN TAKEN off her shoes. Just dropped her bag, reached up, and kissed him like she'd been thinking about it the whole way home. Dean, still barefoot and holding a coffee mug, was caught off guard—but only for half a second.

Then he kissed her back.

Her fingers slipped into his hair, tugging lightly, and he smiled against her mouth.

“Well, hi,” he murmured.

“Hi,” she said, breathless. “I missed you.”

He kissed her again, deeper this time, coffee cup abandoned. She was cold from outside, cheeks flushed, still wearing that oversized cardigan she always claimed was hideous but never stopped wearing.

They didn't make it far—just down the hallway, to the bedroom, where the light came in soft and slanted across the sheets.