

CHAPTER 6

CLAIRE

Here's my dilemma:

I have to pee. Urgently. I'm worried one violent sneeze might result in a tragedy.

Except we are less than one hour into our journey, so how can I ask Noah to stop to use the bathroom? He's going to say, "I told you so." And he's not going to say it in a teasing way. He's going to say it in a mean, patronizing way in front of four of my friends. And he will hold it over my head for the next several hours, if not for the rest of our lives.

I look at the gas gauge. It's hovering a little below half. Maybe I can spin this.

"I think we should get some gas," I announce.

Noah looks down at the gauge in astonishment. "What are you talking about? We have plenty of gas. The tank is half full."

"Well, it's half *empty*." I cough. "And the minivan goes through gas really quickly. You don't know, Noah. This is *my* car."

He narrows his eyes at me. "You need to use the bathroom, don't you?"

I let out a huff. "I don't know what you're talking about. Why are you so obsessed with me needing the bathroom?"

"Because..." His knuckles whiten on the steering wheel. "We've barely gotten on the highway and now we're already going to have to stop. I *told* you to use the bathroom before we left. You *always* do this."

"But I don't need the bathroom. I think we should get some gas, that's all."

"We can get gas in an hour or two when we stop for lunch."

An hour or two? My bladder will have exploded by then. Why did I drink so much water with breakfast? "We don't want to run out of gas on the highway." I point to a sign on the road. "There's a rest stop coming up. Let's just get the gas."

"So if I stop and get gas," he says, "you're going to stay with the car and not use the bathroom? Is that what you're telling me?"

"Well..." I can't lie and pretend I'm not going to use the bathroom. Because he will absolutely watch me and make sure I don't go. He will drive this point home, just out of spite. "I might use it if we stop."

"You are so full of shit, Claire."

Even though Rihanna is singing on the radio, the rest of the car is silent. Everyone is listening to this embarrassing argument. If we weren't traveling at seventy miles per hour, I would open the door and jump out of this car right now.

"Actually," Lindsay speaks up in a small voice, "I need to use the bathroom. Could we stop?"

At least Lindsay has my back. Noah glances over his shoulder, then grumbles, "Fine." Then he proceeds to cut across three lanes on the highway all at once, resulting in one near collision and a slew of angry horns. Apparently, Noah is trying to get us all killed during this trip.

I let Lindsay use the bathroom first, just to keep up the pretense of not actually needing the bathroom, even though I've got my legs crossed as I'm waiting outside the Porta-John behind the gas station. The whole time, I'm fuming at Noah. We're barely an hour into the drive, and he's already making things miserable for everyone. This was a mistake—I should never have agreed to this trip. But thank God we have separate rooms. Even though he seems angry about it, I've never been happier about that decision.

When I get out of the bathroom, Jack is waiting outside. He's typing something on his phone, and he brushes a strand of his shaggy dark hair out of his eyes. He's got a five-o'clock shadow, and it suits him—I always liked the way he looked with a little stubble. When he sees me, he lifts his puppy-dog brown eyes.

"Hey," he says.

"Hey," I say.

He shoves his phone into the pocket of his jeans. "Are you okay, Claire?"

I drop my eyes. "Yeah."

He glances around. The Porta-John is behind the gas station convenience store, hidden from the view of the gas pumps. My minivan is nowhere in sight. Everyone is probably back in the car by now. Or maybe buying snacks for the trip.

"He was being a real jerk to you," Jack says.

"Yeah," I agree. Even though Lindsay shot me a sympathetic look, it's good to hear somebody else say it out loud. Sometimes I wonder if I'm partially at fault for the way Noah behaves. But no. I didn't provoke what he did in the car. He was being a jerk to me for no reason.

"I'm sorry you have to deal with that," he says. "Noah didn't used to be like that. He's changed."

I nod. Jack knows my husband almost as well as I do. After all, they lived together before I lived with him. When we were in our twenties, Noah didn't have a friend closer than Jack. But in the last few years, they've grown apart. Hell, we've only had dinner with Jack and Michelle a dozen or so times since Emma was born.

"You don't deserve to be treated that way," he says.

My breath catches in my throat as he takes a step toward me. "Well, what can I do?"

He shakes his head. "I wish it could be different."

"Me too." My voice is shaking. "You have no idea."

He takes another step toward me, and this time, he lowers his lips onto mine. I melt into him, allowing him to press me against the jagged brick wall of the convenience store.

"Did you get the separate room?" he breathes in my ear.

"I sure did."

"Perfect." He grins at me, his eyes crinkling. "This is going to be a fantastic week. I'm going to make you forget all about him."

And even though everyone is waiting for us back at the car, I let him kiss me again.

CHAPTER 7

CLAIRE

Now you think I'm a terrible person.

I think I'm a terrible person too. What kind of decent human being does something like this? Not only am I cheating on my husband, but I'm doing it with his best friend. It's not just awful, it's cartoon villainy awful.

The best I could say is neither of us meant it to happen. It was just one of those things.

It all started back in February. Jack runs his own contracting business, and we were having our kitchen redone. Jack, being one of our oldest friends, gave us the friends-and-family price. He was supposed to be done by the time my school's winter break started, but he was still working by then. Both the kids were at a winter vacation camp, and I was stuck at home while the construction was ongoing.

I was just trying to be friendly—I swear. I would offer him some water or coffee. And then we would chat while he worked. I got to talking about me and Noah and about how things had gotten so bad lately. I'd always thought Jack

and Michelle had a storybook marriage, but he revealed that wasn't the reality. He said she had become cold and distant lately, and she worked practically all the time. She made it very clear to him that work was her first priority. He was a distant second.

On the last day of winter break, Jack kissed me.

Nobody but Noah had touched me like that since I was twenty years old. And Noah himself hadn't touched me like that in a long time. I had started to think I was dead inside, but that kiss showed me I was wrong.

I wasn't dead. But Noah was killing me.

So for the last four months, we've been sneaking off together. Jack has flexible hours, so he can pop over at the end of the school day, when the kids are at their after-school activities. His house is always empty since Michelle barely leaves the office. They've made it almost too easy for us.

I'm falling in love with Jack. And I think he feels the same way about me. But there's nothing we can do about it. If I left Noah under these circumstances, it would be a horrible, messy divorce. I don't want to do that to the kids. And if Jack left his divorce-lawyer wife under *any* circumstances, she would destroy him.

So we live for these little moments we have together. And we know it can't go on forever, so we're just trying to enjoy it while it lasts.

I allow Jack to kiss me for about fifteen seconds, then I gently push him away. "We have to get back to the car."

"Yeah." He lifts an eyebrow suggestively. "I can't wait to get you alone."

"Me too." A fantasy fills my head. What if Jack and I grabbed an Uber and just took off together right now

and didn't look back? Well, I'd obviously come back to get my kids, but we could at least disappear for the week. I would give anything to get out of this toxic car ride. But obviously, that's not possible. "We better go."

I go out first so it doesn't look suspicious. Noah is standing beside the minivan, and he looks up sharply when he sees me. He has an unreadable expression on his face, and for a moment, my stomach turns to ice. Does he suspect?

I don't want Noah to know. It's entirely possible he's cheating on me too, and that idea doesn't even bother me. But the fact that this is happening with Jack... That's the part I think would kill him. His best friend. One of his *only* friends. Men have been driven to the brink over lesser betrayals.

"You done using the bathroom?" he asks.

"You done getting gas?" I retort.

"Yep."

Jack emerges from the back of the convenience store, whistling a little tune to himself. It's time to get back on the road. I brace myself and climb inside.

The car is stifling. I slide the window open, and I want to stick out my face. It's only the end of June, but it's really hot today. If it doesn't cool down, we're not going to be able to do much outdoors during this trip.

"Close the window," Noah says.

"It's stuffy in here."

"I turned on the air conditioner."

"Well, I don't feel it yet. When it starts up, I'll close the window."

"The car is never going to get cool if you've got the window wide open. I'm not sure why I need to explain that to you."

I feel a lump in my throat. I don't think I realized quite how bad things were between me and Noah until this trip. I want to reach out with my bare hands and strangle him right now.

"Hey, listen." Warner's baritone interrupts my murderous thoughts. "I just wanted to let you know I printed out some paper maps to help us find the place."

Lindsay beams at him. "You're always so prepared!"

Noah glances over his shoulder, then taps the navigation screen on the dashboard of the minivan. "No need. I plugged it into the GPS."

"Yeah, but we might lose the signal when we get closer. It's sort of in the middle of nowhere."

For the first time during this trip, Noah looks uncomfortable. I remember from back in our college days, before we had GPS navigation, how frustrated he would get if we ever got lost. "You think we're going to lose our signal?" he asks.

"I need to be able to access the internet!" Michelle speaks up. She sounds slightly hysterical. "I've got a lot of work to do! I can't be cut off from the world."

"The inn has Wi-Fi," Warner assures her, never losing composure in his perfect features. "But around that area, the signal is spotty. I just thought it was safer to print out some maps."

"It'll be fine, Noah," Jack says. "I'm great at map navigation. I've even got a compass in my bag. It's one of the things I learned when I was—"

"A Boy Scout," Noah finishes. "Right. I remember."

Warner's prediction about losing our internet signal makes me anxious though. I don't want to lose access to my phone. What if Penny calls about the kids? Emma is

already not coping well, and I hate the idea of her not being able to reach us. I quickly shoot off a text to Penny:

Just a heads up we may lose phone access when we get close to the hotel. Will call you tonight.

I take a deep breath and try to relax. There's nothing we can do. It won't be long before we're at the inn. I just have to hang in there.