

# **HIS LAST MISTRESS**

THE DELETED SCENE

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Casey Cort

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“Are you just going to ignore me?” Justin came into the living room, wiping his hands on a towel. He’d been in the backyard scraping the grill and cleaning up the picnic tables. Everyone else—the people who’d taken down former Cuyahoga County prosecutor Lori Pope—had gone home.

I should’ve left too, but I was in that tricky window: too late to leave without risking Simon falling asleep in the car, too early to wake him from his nap. Mess up his schedule and my two year old would be up all night. Being a single mom was hard. Being a sleep deprived single mom was unbearable.

“I’m not ignoring you, Justin.” I sighed as Simon shifted

from half-asleep to half-awake in my lap. “I’m right here at your house.”

“I think you came here to talk to Nicole Long—not for any other reason. You two seemed deep in conversation.”

Part of me had known that showing up at Justin’s house on a Sunday night—the day we used to meet, the day Simon was probably conceived—was asking for trouble.

“I’m a defense lawyer,” I said, keeping my voice casual. “She’s a prosecutor. Sometimes our paths cross.”

“In what case?” he pressed. He knew too much about my practice. “You’re not working right now, right?”

“There’s something called attorney-client privilege. If I were working, I couldn’t tell you.” I was bluffing.

“Casey. We were never like this.”

“Justin. I don’t know what we were like.”

We’d gone from colleagues to friends to something more. Now we were nothing that had a name.

“Yes, you do,” he said quietly. “What changed?”

Simon squirmed in my lap. My eyes followed Justin’s, then settled on the boy between us.

“What are we doing?” he asked.

“Living life.” I didn’t have the energy for marathon parenting, let alone an emotional reckoning.

“I bought this house from my parents.” He spread out in the flowered chair, knees wide.

“I bought the house on Ludlow.” It was small, on the poor side of Shaker Heights, but it was mine. Paid off, quiet, safe.

“What I’m saying is—we need to figure this out. Simon’s getting older. The uncertainty isn’t good for him.”

The kangaroo pocket of my tie-dye overalls vibrated. Women’s clothes never had enough pockets. Since becoming

a mom, I hunted for them like treasure. different places to store pacifiers and teething rings and keys and snacks. The spiral rainbow hiding stains was a bonus.

"You gonna get that?" Justin nodded toward my chest.

He was right. I wasn't working, but that didn't mean I could ignore every call. I shifted Simon into Justin's lap and checked the screen. Lulu Mueller.

It rang once. Twice. Three times. I watched it go to voicemail.

"Not an emergency?" Justin asked.

"It was Lulu."

"You didn't answer."

"Maybe I'm still mad."

"It's been almost three years, Casey." He leaned forward, meeting my eyes. We were both thinking of the same night. Dinner. A celebration after our big win. Me, Justin, Lulu—and Richard Sinclair. He'd revealed my pregnancy before I was ready.

"The cat's well and truly out of the bag," he said, stating the obvious. Simon squirmed free to go chase the dog.

"She's still with the man who betrayed me."

"Sinclair." Justin didn't need the reminder. He'd heard me rail about the man more than once.

"A married man."

"She's your best friend."

"I have to have boundaries. Just because I'm a defense attorney doesn't mean I don't have a moral compass."

"I wasn't suggesting that. I've defended my fair share of the guilty, but it doesn't mean I abandon people in need."

My face crumpled. I'd gotten worse at hiding my feelings since Simon was born.

"I'm sorry," Justin said quickly. "I put my foot in it again."

"It's not you." I inhaled deeply. "You're right. I didn't come here for you or for Simon. I came to ask Nicole for a favor."

"You needed something you couldn't ask me for? You haven't done anything, have you?" I almost laughed. He and his former guests had been the ones skirting the law for the last few months.

"No. Of course not. It's Lulu."

"What does she need?" He nodded at the phone.

"To be free of Richard Sinclair."

"She wants to leave him? She can just kick him out."

"It's more complicated."

"Landlord-tenant? Unlawful detainer?" Justin shifted into legal mode.

"You can't tell anyone." I lowered my voice. Simon was letting the dog lick his mouth. Gross. But also not the worst thing he'd done today.

"Tell me."

"I think... he's hurting her."

"What are you saying?"

"He hit her. Once."

"When?"

"The night before the Juliana Clarke trial."

"That was two years ago. Why didn't you say anything?"

"I'm not Lulu. It wasn't my secret to tell."

"What's changed?"

"I think she wants out. I think he won't let her go."

"And Nicole can help?"

"I'm not implicating you in a conspiracy."

"Conspiracy?"

"I'm not saying more."

"Is Lulu okay? Don't you think you should call her back?"

“I’ll call her later. It’s just...it’s taking me time to come back around.”

“Do you think you and Lulu will ever be close again?” he asked. “She’d make a great auntie.”

I pressed my lips together. Simon looked between the dog, Justin, and me. If he sensed I was upset, he’d start crying in a minute.

“I’m the rare Catholic with no siblings.”

“Takes a village.”

“Maybe one day.”

“Don’t wait too long. Some silences become permanent.”

“I’ve got to get Simon home.” Time for the routine—dinner, bath, bed, survival.

“What about us?” Justin asked softly.

I stood and scooped up my toddler—who smelled like dog spit, barbecue, and Cheerios.

I shouldered the diaper bag, avoided his gaze. “We’ll talk later,” I said over my shoulder.

“Don’t leave me waiting too long either...” he called after me.

She didn’t call Lulu back that night. Or the next. Some silences stretched until they became habit—and some became goodbye.

