

Color Her Red: Chapter 1

By : Crystal Shaw

This is the first chapter of Color Her Red. Emma has been granted a life of love and happiness, but in an unfortunate change of fate, her husband's wicked past returns, forcing her to question everything she knows and loves. Her passive nature is torn away when the news of an affair corrupts her life. A brewing mix of anger and passion leads Emma on a path that will prove life can be cruel and wicked.



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I hear my mother's voice, *Emma dear; a little wine goes a long way*. I shake the thought, *not now Mom*. One more glass down and finally I don't care anymore. Or, at least for a moment, I don't want to care. *Should I grab another?* That's the only question on my mind. And if I am able to ask the question, then I already know the answer. I'm vaguely aware that I will feel the stingy throbbing ache that is a hangover tomorrow morning but that physical pain is worth the emotional numbness that I desperately seek tonight.

Maybe I should try to pull myself together; I might find relief with a pool of cool water on my face. No, I should look like a wreck and I should feel like a wreck. That's what I am right now, a seven-car pileup on the interstate with an overturned tractor-trailer. *You're a wreck; deal with it*. I come to terms with this fairly easily, maybe because of the wine, or maybe I'm just not ready to look at myself in the mirror. I imagine the cars wrecking, as though that's what actually happened. My eyes wince and my body sinks deeper into the sofa.

Kate is with me. Her eyes are red-rimmed and her face is tear-stained. Even with the pained look and ill-kept appearance she still looks stunning. How the hell is that even possible? *I bet she's wearing waterproof mascara*. For a second I consider asking her. It would be a nice change in conversation. Knowing Kate, it might make her laugh a bit. My eyes brighten for a moment at the thought of a happy exchange of words, and then they dim again with disappointment. Not tonight, maybe another time.

We've been curled up on her sofa draped in a chenille blanket, drowning ourselves, our thoughts really, in Cabernet Sauvignon. I think that we've been like this for hours now, even though it feels as though it's been days. I look at the clock, 8:43 PM. Almost four hours of her desperately and hopelessly trying to console me. No resolve has been found. Not that I know what I want the resolve to be. *It doesn't really matter what you want any way. He's going to get what he wants, he always does*.

I don't know how many times she has told me it's alright and everything's going to be fine. It's not what I want to hear.

What do you want to hear?

I don't know. The thought makes my heart dig deeper into my chest and the hollowness fills my insides. I don't know what I want.

We haven't really been speaking in the eternity that has passed, just crying. Whenever I start to talk, I can't, words fail to escape my lips. I am unable to utter a sentence without morphing into a sobbing lunatic, my words cut off by hysteric gasps for air. She has been so patient. Trying to talk me through it, trying to get me passed this desolate stage. She's been unsuccessful, but I appreciate her efforts. I don't think anything or anyone in the world could help me right now. I have to face the inevitable. I shudder. *Good God, what will I feel like then?* I imagine a bridge crumbling to pieces in the center causing dozens of cars to plummet thousands of feet before crashing into the water, slowly sinking, being consumed by the dark unforgiving water.

I thought we would be chatting over a combination of bridal shows and catty reality television. That's what these nights usually deliver. We escape to her sofa with Chinese food and a bottle of wine, confiding in

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each other about the details of her latest beau or family drama. Itâs our usual routine, ever since we graduated from college and moved to the big city, at least once a month for the last four years. But tonight is so much different, so much darker and so quiet. The room is full of silence; the only exception is the antique clock on her wall, keeping track of my tragedy with simple *tick, tick, ticks*. The ticks are getting louder, mocking me.

I see Kate move, adjusting the small throw pillow under her arm, she is staring at the ceiling with her knotted fingers resting on her chest. Watching her, I can see she is exhausted. She closes her eyes and breathes in deep. Iâm sure her eyes are burning too. She has cried just as much as me. She been stronger than me, but she cried every time with me. Unfortunately for her, she saw the seven-car pile up happen in slow motion. She shouldnât have to deal with this catastrophe. I wish I could rewind. I wish I could have prevented her from experiencing this heartbreak. I probably would have called her though, as soon as I saw the photos. My body braces at the thought. I know I would have called her. I wouldnât have known whom else to call or what else to do.

She has always been there for me, making everything better when my world starts falling to pieces. Weâve been best friends attached at the hip since before I can remember. I admire her large green eyes, tanned skin and perfectly blonde hair. Kate is absolutely gorgeous and poised, with the world at her feet. She goes through men like I go through wine. Maybe thatâs why I was so shocked that Thomas wanted me and not her. How could he be interested in just a simple, average brunette, not the hot blonde bombshell standing next to me?

âOh my God Emma!â I remember her screeching, looking back to make sure he was out of earshot.
âHe is totally into you. You lucky Bitch! I would kill for someone like him to look at me like that.â
She playfully grabbed me by the waist making us chaotically sway on the sidewalk. Leaning into me she grinned, âGood God, he is so hot. Did you see his shoulders? I bet he has a perfectly photo-shopped abs under that shirt.â

I just giggled at her ridiculousness.

âI would grab that ass and ride him raw.â She said confidently, practically drooling. I remember her comment all too well. She caused me to convulse into frenzied laughter.

She went on and on completely uncensored as we continued to stride down the concrete sidewalk. All I could think was that she must be crazy and that I should be more careful not to bump into people when my hands are full of shopping bags and a cup of thank-God-itâs-not-scalding-but-still-hot coffee.

She was right though. He just kept looking at me with his perfectly handsome wide smile while promising, âItâs fine, really.â His impeccable blue eyes never left me, even as he haphazardly tried to wipe his shirt dry.

I closed my eyes and fantasized that he really hadnât taken his eyes off me and that the gorgeous man was in fact flirting with me. He was in a crisp white button down shirt with a tie and a leather jacket looking like the perfect combination of serious CEO and sex god. The thought sent pure bliss through my body, everywhere. One area in particular was a little more blissful than usual.

Not five minutes after parting ways he was beside us outside of a coffee shop. When I turned to see him standing there, I was utterly speechless and, for the first time ever, so was Kate. Her lower jaw even dropped a bit. She humorously moved her hand up to close it and let out an asymmetric grin.

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For a moment I thought, *â Fuck, he heard her.â* Kate didn't seem to think he could have possibly heard her obscene gabbling or if he had, she didn't care. She just stood there trying to contain her grin and staring first at me, then him, and then back at me. I could imagine her with pompoms routing, *â Go Emma, go Emma,â* doing high kicks in the air.

Before I could apologize for Kate's uncensored blubbling, he smiled wide and just the site of his gorgeous face handicapped my ability to speak. He was unbelievably attractive. Those soft blue eyes, perfect white smile, exceptional jaw line, and just a bit of stubble making him look casual but so fucking hot.

â I'm sorry to bother you,â he said calmly, relaxing his breathing. *â I just thought maybe you would let me take you out to dinner.â* His blue eyes penetrated me. *A date? This unbelievably handsome sex god wants to date me?*

The pompom version of Kate did a split and threw her hands up releasing the pompoms, *â Score!â* The real version tightened her now wide smile and her eyes lit up, she continued to stare at me. I wanted so badly for her to speak for me. She cleared her throat and for a moment I thought she would, but instead her wide eyes just looked at the ground as she moved from side to side. I'm not sure what was more embarrassing my lack of an aptitude to speak or Kate's schoolgirl behavior. If she had a pen and piece of paper on her she probably would have written a note:

Do you like Emma? Circle One

Yes

No

I could hardly comprehend that this picture-perfect hunk of a man, who I had just spilled coffee on, ran down the sidewalk passed hundreds of people to ask me out on a date. *How did he even find me?* Next time I need a date; apparently all I need to do is dump a hot beverage on a good-looking gentleman and poof, he'll ask me.

I parted my mouth in disbelief and tried to return a response. My hesitation was obvious. I just stood there, staring at him. My face felt like it was on fire and my mind was racing. *Say something you idiot; don't blow it!*

â I mean, I think you at least owe me one date. You did stain my shirt,â he said smoothly with a smirk on his gorgeous face. He made me blush and saved me from myself. I couldn't help but to smile.

I knew he was exceptionally handsome and that he looked familiar, but I had no idea who he actually was when I agreed to let him take me to dinner. In fact, it wasn't until after our first date when I searched his name online that I realized I had just given a multibillionaire a singular kiss after taking me out to have probably one of the most amazing meals I'd ever eaten.

The first thing that came to my mind was, *â Thank God I didn't invite him back to my apartment.â* I was sure he had maids to keep everything tidy and elegant artwork hanging on walls and spacious rooms with cathedral ceilings. What would he think of my cramped apartment with Ikea furniture littered with manuscripts and crumpled pieces of paper thrown about? Before I could even worry that I had blown my

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chance with him by only allowing a single lonely kiss, he sent me a text.

Thank you so much for a lovely evening.

X Thomas

Was that single â xâ poking fun at the fact I only let him have one peck? Well, it was way more than a peck, but still. I waited a full two agonizing minutes to text him back. I didnâ t want to seem desperate, as if waiting two minutes could help me escape that image.

Thank you Thomas, I had a great time.

XX Emma

I thought I would be cheeky and give him another kiss. No hug though, I didnâ t want to be too lovey-dovey. He immediately sent a message back. He didnâ t seem to care whether or not he appeared desperate. *Why should he?*

Iâ d like to see you again. Would you join me Saturday? I have a corporate dinner to attend. We can go out for a drink afterwards.

I still remember the overwhelming joy running through my body. I jumped up and down holding in my screaming delight. Pounding my fists through the air in triumph. It may have been a bit obnoxious to my neighbors. Mrs. Jones from below my apartment started banging on the ceiling, yelling at me to knock it off. So I sat on my desk chair just hugging myself and then of course I called Kate to inform her how glorious my date was. I smiled so much that night my cheeks hurt all week.

THAT WAS THE BEGINNING, a little over two years ago, a year before our wedding. Just thinking of it makes my heart collapse and my stomach feel hollow.

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Maybe we got married too soon, we should have taken things slower. We weren't that young though, mid twenties. I could have tried harder to be a better wife. I should've tried harder to get pregnant. I should've taken those hormone shots like the doctor said. It's my fault we can't get pregnant, not his. *No! No! This is NOT my fault!* My rage chimes in overshadowing my melancholy, screaming at me for blaming myself. Apparently the wine wasn't enough to completely anesthetize me or the effects are already starting to wear off. Either way I creep to the edge of the sofa, trying to gather enough strength to stand and sulk to the kitchen.

Kate raises her head to look at me. Her hand moves to her face, gently rubbing residual tears from her cheeks before resting her head on the arm of the sofa.

“Where are you going?” she asks warily, her voice strained. She wrestles with the blanket trying to release her legs. I can tell she is still concerned for me. My heart drops to my stomach as I wish I could tell her I am fine and not to worry. I think about saying those words, but I can't. I'm not fine, and she knows that all too well. I settle on the truth.

“Just to grab another bottle,” I manage a small pathetic curl to my lips as I respond and grab the empty glass from the table.

Yes, I think I will need the bottle.

It's hard looking at her in the eyes. My gaze drops and my eyes glaze over as I head towards her kitchen. I see her rest back into the corner of the couch and let out a sigh. I am relieved that she doesn't feel the need to follow me. She hasn't left me alone all night. I'm grateful to have a friend like Kate. It makes me feel selfish though, that she hurts so much for me. There is nothing I can do to ease the pain for her. It's obvious that I am nowhere close to being okay. At least the wine is helping.

“He's a fool Emma,” she breaths rather than speaks her conclusion. I stop midway to the kitchen and her hard wood floors creak in response to my weighted halt. I'm momentarily immobilized by her words. I don't want to succumb to reality. I grip the stem of the glass tighter, close my eyes to prevent the burning, and breathe deep. My eyes fill but I hold back for a moment and then continue to move as I release my breath and let the tears fall carelessly down my cheeks to my chin. I continue to the kitchen without acknowledging her or the hot unwelcomed tears. I just keep my head down. Why do I keep crying? *Because your life is falling to pieces all around you, and there is nothing you can do about it.*

It's the last bottle of red, but it should be all I need. I already feel light-headed and fuzzy. I haven't had this much to drink since our first night as an official couple, ordained by gossip magazines. We were so careless and it felt so good. I still remember every amazing detail. The way he touched me. The way his lips tasted of sweet wine. I relieve myself of that thought immediately, shaking my head angrily. I don't want to think about being with him. No looking back on the past any more tonight. I need to concentrate on my immediate future, an affair with a bottle of Merlot. It's no Cabernet Sauvignon, not smooth and sweet, but it will get the job done.

I wonder if that was what he thought: she would get the job done. *No! Stop it! No thinking, just drink! Stop doing this to yourself!* I breathe in and harshly streak the tears away from my face with the back of my hand.

I pour a glass and greedily drink all of it, tilting my head back to secure the last drop. All I can taste is bitterness. The glass slams down on the granite with all of my weight; I stumble back a bit shocked. I don't know if that was the result of my drunkenness or the anger that is craving to escape. It takes me a moment to realize that it isn't broken, and relieved, I carefully pour another. I take a small sip and stand there for a moment. I feel the warmth run down my throat and settle in my chest. I sway a little. I need to sit

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down ASAP. I consider resting on the cold hard kitchen floor, but I decide that I should confide in the warmth of the sofa and Kate's comfort.

I saunter back to the living room, the bottle of bitter Merlot in my left hand and the almost-filled glass in my right. Kate is no longer cocooned in the blanket. Instead she's on the edge of the sofa leaning into the laptop on the coffee table. *Not this again.*

I was happily unaware. I wish I could just go back to not knowing.

Do you?

I decide not to answer that question. I don't want to think about it. I haven't looked at the screen all night. I don't want to see it again; once was enough. The images are burned into my mind. Just thinking about it is torture; there they are, staring back at me, haunting me. Kate looks for something in the pictures, a detail to reveal the truth maybe. But there is nothing there but undeniable evidence, and I can't stand to look at them.

The soothing blue walls are no longer comforting. It makes me feel cold and lonely. I search for Kate's eyes and on cue she looks up at me. I nudge the bottle in her direction, which almost causes me to spill the much-needed wine in my glass, but she just shakes her head. *Good, more wine for me then, if I need it; no, when I need it.*

âMaybe it's not true,â she says, glancing at me from the computer screen. Her eyes are warm and her expression is soft. âYou can never believe what you see on TV.â Her voice sounds hopeful, but not moments ago she called him a fool. What conclusion is she coming to? Did he or didn't he have an affair? The pictures support the former.

My shoulders move up in a pathetic attempt at a shrug. âIt was on the news, Kate. It's not like the news is going to lie.â My voice is low and drone. I see her body collapse to the weight of my negativity. I look down at the floor. *She is only trying to help.*

I sit cautiously next to her, careful not to look at the screen. I don't want to see. Those pictures were the end of my happiness and the start of my downfall. Staring vacantly ahead I move the glass to my lips and take a small sip before the tears start again.

I force my sadness into anger. How could they post such awful things? It's amazing how quickly those vultures will grab onto a story and let it spread like wildfire. I'm sure it will be on every gossiping magazine cover tomorrow. *Isn't that a little conceited? Your meltdown of a life is significant enough to make the cover? I'm sure some celebrity is doing coke or tweeting pictures of their prick; that's a bit more interesting than your disaster of a marriage. Keep those fingers crossed and hope that some housewife slut is pregnant with triplets.* The nasty thought actually puts me at ease. I can only hope I don't have to endure the ridicule of trashy magazines grabbing hold of these photos and plastering them everywhere.

I can't help but to torture myself, I look. As soon as my eyes catch a glimpse of his hands on her, I feel the unforgiving tears swell, I don't blink; I just let them fall. They land hard and loud on the pillow in my lap. Those strong hands that hold me to him at night and the hands that hold my chin when he kisses me before he leaves for work, those are the same hands wrapped around some harlot's waist. I shift my eyes towards the blank television screen. I'd rather look at nothing than to submit myself to those damned pictures. I seek comfort in another sip of wine, and another.

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I sit my glass down as softly as I can and gently remove the unwanted tears. I don't want to cry anymore. My hands cover my face, and then move to grip my shoulders. I pull my hair back and start twisting at the nape of my neck, moving the twisted locks to my shoulder, away from my face. I swallow hard biting the tear on my bottom lip and feel the pain. I need to develop a different nervous habit. I calm myself, breathing slowly in and out. All I have to do is breathe.

My serenity is jolted as my phone vibrates against the coffee table for at least the tenth time tonight; it's him. I ignore it. A total of eight missed calls and an even larger number of unanswered text messages from friends and family and him. I can't face my family, not by text message, phone, definitely not in person. I can hardly speak to Kate, how could I possibly hold a conversation with them?

I wonder if they have called him. Have they yelled at him, screaming viscously into the phone like I so badly want to do? I wonder what he has told them. Is it a harsh conversation, ending with him determined to divorce me or is he calmly explaining that there has been a mistake? Maybe he is apologizing profusely and asking them to talk to me, to ask me to forgive him. I can't bear the thought of it being anything other than him refuting it. But how could he possibly deny it?

I don't want to speak to him. I don't want to hear what he has to say. More than that, I dread speaking to him. I know it will mean the end of everything that I thought we had. The anger starts igniting in me, making my stomach feel twisted and hot and my chest starts pounding. I feel split between my struggling anger and sadness. I don't know which emotion I should embrace.

I look at Kate's computer, feeling her eyes burning into me, meticulously watching me. Wondering if she should close the laptop? Maybe she is waiting for me to speak?

My eyes are helplessly drawn back to the picture on the screen. She is gorgeous, so gorgeous. And she looks delighted in his arms. A tall blonde with big blue eyes, perfectly rose-colored cheeks, and supple lips. She is one of the most beautiful women I have ever seen, even more beautiful than Kate. Not to mention her body. *Well no shit, if he is going to cheat, of course she is going to look like a fucking super model.*

I take another sip of wine.

Who is this woman? Curiosity makes me reach to the laptop and I drag it towards me. Kate leans back a little bit. She doesn't look relaxed though. Her mouth is in a hard line and she is biting her thumbnail. I think she is waiting to see if I can handle this. Truthfully, I'm not sure if I can handle it.

The headline reads, *Thomas A. Grant has a Mistress!* The same headline I saw on the TV at the bar. *Why do they care? Why is this on the news? Don't they have something more important to report than the intimate details of my marriage?*

I thought the same thing when we got engaged. We aren't celebrities, he's just unbelievable wealthy and successful. At least then I was just a bit uncomfortable posing for pictures and giving bits of information for articles. At times, I even enjoyed it. I wore the most beautiful dresses for photo shoots. They even let me keep my favorite ivory lace ball gown. Of course Thomas would have paid for whatever I wanted, but for the designer to gift me the dress, I was ecstatic. But now, I feel sickened.

I can't read the text; my vision is blurred through the tears. But I can see his arm firmly wrapped around her oh-so-skinny waist, pulling her up to his lips. His fingertips are gripping into her body, skin touching skin. Her short, tight skirt is clinging to her in all the right places. His left hand is out of view, so I can't see his wedding band. *He probably took it off anyway.* I cringe at the thought and let out a small pathetic sigh. I have to look up for a moment and steady myself. I pick up the glass again, finding comfort in the

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wine.

I can't believe he allowed that kind of indiscretion to be photographed. He is always so private, making sure that no one is watching and only allowing photographers when it benefits us. I can't believe how reckless he was. *How could he do this to me?* My heart feels like it's being tightened into an unusable mass and shoved up my throat.

How can I not believe this? I blurt angrily, hitting the screen and glaring at Kate. I smack the screen so hard that I think I may have broken the screen. Seeing it still intact my thought changes to, I might have broken my finger. I move my hand to my lips and my face displays the pain.

I don't know, she mutters as she drops her gaze. She looks hurt and I immediately regret my outburst. Why am I taking my anger out on her? The pain in my chest deepens.

I swallow hard, I'm sorry. She looks up at me managing both an apologetic and forgiving look. She readjusts herself so that she is close to me, rubbing my back while placing her head on my shoulder. I wipe under my eyes with the sweater that is covering the back of my hand. The soft cream cashmere is defiled with eyeliner and foundation.

I look down at the screen, analyzing the photograph. It's one of three or four, I can't remember which, but by far it is the most incredulous. Maybe there are even more photographs. I hope there aren't anymore; I don't think I could bear seeing more of these. *If he is leaving you for her, you might see one of her in a wedding dress.* My chest collapses and my throat forcefully tightens. I try to swallow and fail. More wine.

Maybe it was photo-shopped? Kate offers up a ridiculous idea.

There is no way that they would broadcast a photo-shopped image. I take a deep breath, and come face to face with the harsh reality, these are actual photographs.

My gaze drops to the floor as I finally admit it to myself. There is no denying it. He was with this woman. And from the looks on their faces, he enjoyed it and so did she. The tears are back and the saltiness makes my eyes burn even more. The pain is unwelcomed.

Maybe it was taken a long time ago, before you? she almost whispers the last two words. Again her voice is hopeful and I don't know how to respond. I rest my head on hers while we both look at the screen. It's possible it was taken a long time ago. Not too long ago though.

His wavy dark brown hair is just long enough to grab onto and force his head up to kiss me when we are in bed.

That's one thing I just don't get. Our sex life was unbelievable. There was undeniable chemistry. Why would he cheat on me? *Maybe he wanted to see if blondes really were more fun.* I release myself of that thought.

He is so handsome in the picture. Gazing down at her with his beautiful blue eyes. He looks so strong and masculine, broad shoulders and muscular arms. It must have been taken after work. It looks like they are outside his office building. The stonework on the wall behind them gives the location away.

He's in his grey suit pants and navy striped tie with a bright white dress shirt. I can't remember the last time he wore a suit. Usually he wears slacks and a crisp white button down. It must've been taken after a

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business meeting or maybe when one of the partners came in to talk mergers. I can't recall him wearing a suit anytime recently.

Back to the picture, back to the tie. It's one of my favorite ties. In fact I used that tie to blindfold him on his 28th birthday. He was so shocked and surprised. I was happy he gave up some control and let me take the lead. It was so unlike him and so unlike me. He got me back though, with that same tie. I smile at the memory. Maybe that's why it's my favorite. *Maybe he used it on her.* My face turns to disgust and my eyes dart back to the photograph.

His lips look so soft and kissable. He looks like my Thomas, but instead he is holding some unknown woman in his arms. More than holding her, he is embracing her. They look like they are happy and in love. Or at least she looks like she's in love. The more I look at his face, the more he seems annoyed. I scrunch my forehead and squint my eyes. Yes. That's what it is. He's annoyed. I scroll down to look for the other photos.

“Did he leave a voice mail?” Kate interrupts my thought.

I slowly grab my phone without looking at it, keeping my eyes on the screen, then, on second thought, I set it back down. I readjust myself to sit up right, shifting Kate to sit beside me and take another sip of wine. I have to meticulously and gently set the glass down, my nerves are running so high that I am practically shaking, and finally I take the phone in my hands.

“Yeah, two of 'em.” My voice sounds weak, barely audible. What happened to my strength and anger? I feel wounded, thinking about him calling me, knowing that I am deliberately not answering. I wonder what he said in his messages. The possibilities are endless. *I'm leaving you for another woman, a much hotter, more attractive, sexier woman. Oh and I bound her up in your favorite tie while I fucked the shit out of her.* The thought send shivers through me and my anger is back, full force. I ball my hands into fists, my nails digging into my palms. No more sadness, I'm over taken by anger.

Six voicemails to listen to, and I don't want to hear any of them, two from him and four from my mom. I don't want to listen to hers either. My heart breaks thinking of what she said in the messages. I can't imagine what is going through her head right now, my poor mother. If I listen, I will have to call her back. I can hardly speak a word calmly; there is no way I could bear listening to my mom let alone speaking to her.

And then there are his voicemails. I can't imagine what they say. Well I can, but I don't want to think about it. I can't bear the thought of him confirming it. Even if he did try to deny it, I don't know if I could believe him.

My mind wanders as I look at the swirling bitter liquid in the glass. I couldn't wait to get in bed with him tonight. After a little wine and girl talk I look forward to being on top, teasing him moving my nipples around his lips. I love it when he bites down gently, rubbing his tongue on the sensitive ends, making them hard and forcing me to arch my back in absolute ecstasy. *Stop that thought right now!* I push the glass away from me. I've had enough.

“Do you want to listen to them?” Kate whispers her question. She has refocused herself so that she is cross-legged and directed at me, forcing me to acknowledge her question. I'm so glad she isn't a mind reader. I hope my face doesn't give her any insight into what I was just thinking.

What should I say to her? Any normal, rational woman would have listened to them by now. It's been hours since we arrived to the safety of Kate's house, containing my sadness away from the public eye. I hadn't answered my phone or responded to anyone. I just collapsed on her sofa and let out painful sobs

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while she reassured me that everything would be fine.

“It can’t hurt to listen to them. You have to eventually talk to him, right?” Her eyes are piercing into me, begging me.

I suppose I should listen to what he has to say. I have to face the reality, whatever that might be. It might mean the death of my marriage, such an abrupt and unwanted end. Maybe he really hasn’t cheated; maybe he left messages begging me to forgive him. I won’t know until I listen to them. I reluctantly look up at her and nod, like a conceding child.

There’s a loud knock making my body shudder, an unrelenting pounding of a hardened fist against the cold door. *Bang! Bang! Bang!* We both stiffen and our eyes widen; Kate looks at me in terror.

“Kate, open the door! Emma!”

Oh shit, it’s him.

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