

CHAPTER 1

Jeff left me on a Tuesday morning. He drank his morning coffee as usual, threw his packed bags over his shoulder, and left a note on the counter for me to find. Looking back, it was a pretty cowardly move on his part. I had slept in for the first time in two weeks, and opened my eyes to the sound of the front door shutting behind him. I looked around our bedroom to see his closet door half open; the inside was barren. I sat up in bed and stretched, walked over to it, and opened it all the way. Everything was gone. I walked downstairs and into the kitchen to see the coffee pot still on and a half empty mug next to the sink. I looked around for several moments, then down at the counter beside me. There was a handwritten note, penned in a hurry.

I can't do this anymore. I've been seeing someone else.

I'm sorry, Delilah.

-Jeff

I found out later she was a secretary in his office. And that was it. Everything I'd known for the last eight years came crumbling down in three short sentences.

I lay there, blinking my eyes over and over again slowly, the way you do when you've replayed the same moments in your mind too many times in the past year. I rolled over to find little red digital numbers on the face of an unfamiliar clock. *Ugh, Delilah, it's only 7:32am.* My mind was pleading with me to pull the scratchy beige blanket all the way up and over my head, to cover myself completely. Like if I could keep out the sunlight, this day wouldn't exist. This was one of those moments. One of those split-second moments when you realize everything that has led up to now, that all the choices you've made in life were complete and utter bullshit because they've gotten you absolutely nowhere.

Just two days ago I was waking up for the last time in my own bed, with my own blankets, and my own curtains that did a stellar job of keeping out the sunlight. There was no stupid old clock on the bedside table blinking red because I always just looked at my iPhone. But just two days ago, I spent the day taking down my pretty black curtains, breaking down my comfortable bed, and folding up my smooth gray linens. Two days ago was the last day of my

life. *But this?* I couldn't tell you what this was because I had no fucking idea.

I tried to shut my eyes again and still my mind. But my thoughts had gotten the best of me and now sleep evaded. I threw back the stiff sheet and itchy excuse for a cover and swung my feet over the edge of the bed.

I checked the front of my phone. No new messages. That wasn't surprising. I grabbed the stark white towels from the little rack above the small sink alcove and shuffled my feet across the cold tile floor. This hotel really wasn't all that cheerful. The bathroom was all white. Floor to ceiling. If a person stayed in there long enough they might go nuts. I turned the knob for the hot water and let it run over the back of my hand. I flipped the bathroom light off but kept the door open. I had started showering in the dark a few years ago. Well, not completely dark. I just wanted to dull everything down a bit. In this case, all the white.

I peeled out of my oversized shirt and stepped straight into the scalding hot water. *Maybe this will wash it away.* I squeezed out a few drops of hotel shampoo from the tiny bottle and lathered it into my disheveled brunette excuse for hair. It was basically just one big knot at this point. That's what I get for keeping it up in the same messy bun for three days. I let the water cascade down me, inhaling as deeply as I could. I have always believed in the healing powers of a hot shower. This was always when my thoughts would run rampant. *I need to talk to the mortgage broker and sign the finalized paperwork. I need to talk to my lawyer and see if he accepted the revised papers. I need to send my publisher my first draft. Fuck! Did I just wash my hair twice?* This is what happens when you put everything off until the last minute. Everything bottlenecks into a pile of crap you have to sort out all at once.

I got out and toweled off. I pulled some clothes from my duffle bag, threw on my Converse, and tamed my hair. Despite my lack of motivation, I managed to throw a little makeup on. I had a lot to do today and most of it required me to look like an adult who had their shit together.

When I arrived here yesterday evening, I did absolutely nothing. I came in, skipped dinner, and hit the pillow at 7:23pm. *Pathetic.* What I really needed to do was find a place to rent so I could get out of this depressing hotel. I decided I'd grab a newspaper at the gas station I saw on my way in. I grabbed my purse, keys, and phone, and walked out to face the day.

Louisville, Kentucky held a certain kind of little big city charm, I suppose. When I say little big city, what I mean is that it's a big city for the state of Kentucky, but not nearly a city like Chicago or Manhattan. I hadn't expected much when I started driving. I might as well have thrown a dart at a map. Luckily, Emma sent me a text. I could always rely on Emma even when she didn't know it. All it said was "I hope you can visit soon!" I figured where she lived was as good a place as any to start over. *Start over.* God, those words made it sound like everything until now was somehow wiped clean and nothing remained, but that just wasn't the case. Not at all. Starting over for me felt more like being able to look back on the previous part of my life that didn't work out, and realizing I don't get to bring any part of it with me into this new chapter. Truthfully, anywhere that wasn't Nashville was going to be good enough for me. I couldn't stay there. No way. I imagined Emma would be surprised when she found out I was here to stay, but I wasn't quite ready to see her yet. My oldest friend was about to get one hell of a reunion. She was the last one I had from high school. We were going on 13 years. By far my longest and most successful relationship. I grabbed a newspaper from the stand and paid the cashier for it. I needed coffee next. I was relieved to find a place in walking distance.

Highland Coffee is a quaint little shop, locally owned as I noticed many places were in this part of town. It was full of hipster college students, all with headphones in and laptops out. I ordered my coffee black, added a little bit of sugar, and for a moment wondered how long I had been drinking my coffee this way. It must have been since the first time my ex-husband made me coffee, when he just repeated the process he had for his own. He never asked me how I wanted it, and so I spent the last eight years drinking it the same way. I made a mental note to order it any other way next time.

I took a seat at a small table in the corner next to the window, pulled a pen from the side pocket of my purse, and opened up to the classifieds. *Wow. Okay.* This was going to be easier than I originally thought. There were only four listings for two-bedroom houses in the neighborhood I was looking in. I didn't want an apartment, of which there were plenty. This city did have a rather large university after all. But I needed my space. I didn't want to have to worry about hearing all the noisy student neighbors and the other ones with kids. *Their kids.* I felt a pang in my stomach and covered it with my hand. *Push it away, Delilah.*