
UNDONE

Chapter One

Jan

Thursday, September 9

I knew. As soon as I looked into Roger Huddleston's eyes. Before I saw David's laptop clutched under Roger's arm. Before I saw the stunned, anchorless confusion on David's face. Before the stammered, awkward words fell out. I knew. But it didn't help.

I had no plan, no alibi, and there would be no reputation-saving heart attack or aneurysm to divert anyone's attention in that moment. I can't run. I can't hide. The earth will not open up and swallow me, nor will lightning strike.

Instead, I had to stand powerless as a nightmare unfolded.

"Pastor . . . I . . . Nancy opened your office. We were looking for the budget for next year. The finance committee meets next week, you know, and . . . we weren't snooping, mind you." He set the laptop on our coffee table, and gingerly opened it.

The image was vivid, wrenching . . . and familiar.

A single bead of sweat trickled down David's forehead. Roger paled. "The folder was called 'finance,' David. I . . . what was I supposed . . .?" He swallowed and locked his eyes on David's in painful accusation. "There are dozens of them."

"They aren't mine."

Of course they weren't.

"But—"

David slammed the laptop shut. "I'm telling you, they aren't MINE!"

I flinched.

David never raised his voice. Never. Not with the children. Not at the dog or the referees on television or even the drivers downtown.

“I don’t know what’s going on, but I didn’t download those pictures! I don’t do that kind of thing! I’m happily married! I’m a pastor, for crying out loud!” Then he turned to me. “Jan, tell him!”

Speak? He couldn’t understand what he was asking. This was the end.

“He’s right, Roger,” I managed to say.

I think that’s when David knew. I saw a flash, a shadow that passed in an instant, in the way the corners of his eyes drooped. ‘Don’t say it, Jan.’ He didn’t want it to be true, and we both realized as soon as the words were out that we’d never go back to the ‘before’ again. I owed it to him, though. Roger and everyone else had to understand that David was innocent. At least innocent of . . . this. “Those pictures aren’t his. He would never—”

“Jan, I understand this . . . is a shock . . . hard to hear, but the evidence is right there. He obviously—”

“The pictures aren’t his,” I said again. Firmly. Confidently. But I couldn’t bear to look at David. “I know that . . . I know because they’re mine.”

Roger had the decency to slip out the door almost immediately. When David turned to me, before he could question or demand or even speak, I hit first. “I want a divorce.”

He squinted in pain, probably physical pain. “I don’t . . . I . . . no. We’re not . . .” He closed his eyes and rubbed his forehead. I almost seized that opportunity to leave and never, ever come back. At this point, I was content to be the villain. I would be anyway. May as well earn it.

“How long?” he asked quietly.

How long what? How long had I wanted to leave? How long had I been the villain? No, he wanted to know how long I had had my ‘problem.’ How long had I been leading a black-hearted double life of sin and hypocrisy? That’s a little more difficult to nail down.

“Since Maddie was little.”

He paled and I saw him shudder.

“Do you love me?” he asked.

I wanted to. David was a good man. Conscientious, hard-working, well-respected. I heard at least every other week how he’d helped someone, how he’d cared for someone. I think I did love that David Shannon. The David Shannon I lived with . . . well, he was a different story.

“So the answer is no,” he said.

“I’m going to pack.”

“Is there someone else?”

There could have been. Bobby Ayala was interested in much more than a doctor-nurse relationship. He had said so again just before I left for that conference.

“No,” I said.

“You have cost me my ministry,” he said before I could leave the room.

Ah, yes.

I waited until he raised his head to look at me. I didn’t blink. “Let Baal contend for himself.”

I closed the bedroom door behind me, wishing that it locked. Surely he wouldn’t come up here. Not now. He needed space as much as I did, and that

meant I needed to pack. In the coming days there would be ample time to mourn the final gasp in my dying marriage and my own infernal stupidity. I cleared the history. I always do that, but sometimes the sites automatically download pictures or video clips. And I forgot to check for downloads. By the time I remembered, David had reclaimed his computer and taken it to his office.

You see, mine was having hard drive issues and I had a conference in Dallas last week. I was ready to buy a new computer, but David lent me his. "I have the desktop in my study. I'll be fine. I'll just work from home until yours is fixed."

So simple. So easy. So reasonable and practical. It was a peace offering. He was less than happy that I was leaving on Sunday morning, and he was genuinely trying to ensure we parted on good terms. Great was too much to hope for. Good was enough. So we watched Maddie play at the band contest Saturday evening, and I left the next morning.

Ironically, Bobby was set to attend that same conference and changed his mind at the last minute. I was disappointed. I admit that, but I reasoned it was for the best. Alone and away from home with Dr. Ayala would have undoubtedly made adultery more than just a passing thought.

So was that my defense? At least I didn't commit adultery.

I pulled the largest travel bag we had from the bottom of the closet and Malcolm appeared from under the bed and lay on top of the bag. He looked at me with his black eyes, the slightest whimper escaped. "Not now," I said, and lifted the bag, dumping him on the floor. I threw in all the clean scrubs from the drawer. I had to go to work tomorrow. Underwear. Two pairs of shoes. Three changes of clothes. My makeup. That would get me through the next week. Or longer.

Malcolm watched every step I took. He knew. "Maybe you should go back to sleeping under Maddie's bed," I said, rubbing his head, scratching behind his ears. "It's liable to be a little lonely in here for a while."

His tail thumped gently. "I'm not sure when I'll be back. I, uh, well, let's just leave it at that for now." He licked my hand, and I knelt down and hugged him. "I wish I could take you," I whispered. "You may be the only one who still loves me after today."

My computer bag was downstairs. I could grab it on the way out. I surveyed the room quickly to double-check that I had what I needed. My purse sat on the floor by the dresser. I only carried it on Sundays. I wouldn't need it anytime soon.

But it was propped against my Bible. Honestly, I didn't want it either, but I knew David would worry less, maybe even preach at me less if he saw I had taken it with me. It was worth a shot. I stuffed it in a side pouch.

I gasped when I nearly ran into David as he stood in the hallway. "You don't have to leave," he said.

"Yes. I do."

"What am I supposed to tell Maddie?"

She had an extra band practice tonight. She wouldn't be home for another hour at least. "You can tell her whatever you think is best. I'm sure I deserve it."

I tried to brush past him but he reached for my arm. "Jan . . . please . . ."

"It's too late, David."

"How can it be too late? I had no idea—"

"Please." I couldn't help but roll my eyes. "It's true you didn't know your wife uses pornography, but I cannot believe you are so blind. Our marriage has been in trouble since we said our vows."

"That's ridiculous! You heard me tell Roger I was happily married! I meant that!"

"I have no doubts. Now, if you'll excuse me."

"You can't hide from this. Or from me. We have to deal with it."

I ignored him. That was my preferred method of dealing with things. "I'll call Grant in the next day or two."

"I will find a counselor. Will you come with me?"

"No."

So I walked away from my husband and my family. As I drove away from the sheltered, manicured neighborhood, the thoughts in my head distilled themselves to a single word—inevitable.