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**EXCERPT**  
**from**  
**MY HUSBAND, HER MAN**

Chapter 1

CHERYL

I can't believe that I'm lying here eavesdropping on my own husband. I don't want to, but I can't help it. It's 11:34 Thursday night and Greg is holed up in that bathroom again. He, no doubt, thinks I'm still sleeping soundly. Little does he know that my eyes popped open the instant he sprang from our California king bed over a half hour ago. My gut and that low tone tell me that he's not on a work-related call. He's talking to *her*.

I strain to hear the ceremonial conclusion of his nightly tête-à-tête. When I hear him utter, "I love you," I shut my weary eyes tightly and feel both burning and yearning in my heart.

Don't ask me why I find it so absolutely unbelievable that my husband loves another woman more than he loves me. After all, he told me pointblank before we married a little over twelve years ago that Gloria was the most important woman in his life and would always be number one.

So why did I go through with the marriage? Well, he *was* the first and only man to tell me that he loved me. Okay, and maybe my mother's constant quoting of First Corinthians chapter seven, verse nine: "But if they can't control themselves, they should go ahead and marry. It's better to marry than to burn with lust" had a little something to do with it.

I was sure that things would improve once Greg became a father, but even after the birth of our eleven-year-old son, Dante, he insists on allowing his relationship with Gloria to wreak havoc in our marriage.

When he clicks off the light in the bathroom and strolls back into the bedroom smiling like he's just had his soul refreshed, feelings of hurt and jealousy engulf me.

He positions the cordless telephone on the wooden night table, inches from a silver-framed photograph of Gloria and I abruptly flip over, turning my back to Greg and the portrait that, more often than not, drums up shameful emotions of envy, resentment, and regret.

As if purposely trying to rouse me, Greg plops down on the edge of the bed.

As I've done so many nights before, I lie here, pondering what to do about this situation. What to do about the fact that another woman holds my husband's big heart in the palm of her delicate little hand. I could pay her a visit and have a talk with her, in hopes of appealing to her Christian side. But even I would view that as a pretty desperate act.

I could try reasoning with Greg again. Although I don't see what good it would do. He still doesn't seem to grasp how this whole ordeal is affecting me. He's so totally absorbed in Gloria that it's almost as if he doesn't even care that his wife, the woman he vowed before God to love and cherish, is lonely and feels neglected.

As Greg eases up behind me, I slowly open my eyes and we spoon. I know what he wants. Lately, the only time we're this close is when we need each other physically. Our life together wasn't always this way. When we took our vows more than a decade ago, I had no doubt that Greg adored me because he'd shown me in countless ways.

We met as seniors in high school at a varsity basketball game. Greg attended Coolidge in Northwest, Washington, DC, and I was only a hop, skip, and jump away at Roosevelt. We dated exclusively with only a month-long separation from that weekend until the day we married.

From the day my mother first laid eyes on Greg, she loved him like a son. Not simply because he knew all the right things to say, but also because he thought so highly of his own mother. Mama was convinced that any man who loved his mother as deeply as Greg appeared to love his would devote himself to his wife because he understood the importance of a woman in a man's life.

*The greatest lie ever told*, I'm thinking as Greg tightens his embrace around my waist. This man is completely and utterly devoted to one woman. She's his mother and her name is Gloria Davis.

Though they've always had a close relationship, Greg seems to spend more time with her now than ever. It makes me feel like second best and enough is enough. I love Greg and want nothing more than to go the distance with him, but something's got to give. He's going to have to make some drastic changes for this marriage to work because I just can't see continuing this way.

My eyes close again as Greg lightly kisses the back of my neck, and the soft caress of his soothing fingers travel over the curve of my hip and down my thigh. I want to hold on to the resentment, but I need to make love to my husband. During lovemaking seems to be the only time I truly feel connected to Greg lately.

I roll back over and gaze into my husband's warm brown eyes. He plants a light kiss on my lips while massaging my backside. Sure, it feels good, but I know that it'll take more than sensual feelings to sustain our troubled marriage.

"Greg," I whisper as I take his hand and sample each finger.

"Yeah, babe?" Greg pants, accepting the pleasure I give him.

"When are you going to mow the lawn? Andre made a joke about our 'jungle' today and I was really embarrassed."

“Come on, boo, let’s not talk about that now,” Greg pleads breathily, and then kisses me passionately, placing my hand on his special spot.

I pull back slightly, sigh in frustration, and reluctantly remove my hand from his warm body. “I want to talk about it now.”

Greg doesn’t respond. He simply gazes back at me. I want to bop Mr. Cool, Calm, and Collected upside his composed head. The fact that his feathers aren’t easily ruffled is probably the reason I’m always so annoyed.

Back in the day, when we first married, I was thankful for such a laid-back husband, but now I can’t stand that Greg is always so unemotional and seemingly detached from me and my emotions.

“You mow your mother’s lawn at least once a week, Greg.”

“You know what, Cheryl?” Greg sits up in bed and pulls the covers down around his waist. “This is really getting old.”

My eyes are immediately drawn to his sculpted midsection. He knows what that chiseled six-pack does to me. It takes everything in me *and* that blank stare on his face for me not to wrap myself around him and indulge in the only part of our marriage that’s still healthy.

It’s clear that he’s no longer in a lovemaking mood anyway. I know him well enough, though, to know that he’s not too upset. If he was really annoyed, by now he’d be doing his spot-on imitation of one of those spring-necked bobblehead dolls, which always means he’s had enough.

I suck my teeth. “Why are you sitting up?”

Greg laughs facetiously, lifts the remote control from the night table drawer where he keeps it, and then smooths the covers around his narrow hips. “Didn’t you just say you wanted to talk about the lawn? If it’s okay with you, I’d like to sit up while we talk.”

“Then why did you pick up the remote control? You can’t pay attention to me *and* flip channels.” I’m itching to start an argument. At least when I’m enraged, I have Greg’s full attention.

He cocks his head to one side like a curious canine. Like he’s trying to understand the meaning of the words coming out of my mouth.

Finally, he says, “Boo, talk to me. What’s this really about?”

“Whatever,” I mutter under my breath, and shake my head in exasperation. I’m convinced that this conversation will end just as it always does: badly.

Greg is giving me that *woman-you’ve-got-issues* look again, and it hurts. I’ve always felt that I don’t measure up to the Proverbs 31 woman he and God want me to be, although I try hard.

With a small smile, Greg mocks me, obviously hoping a little humor will calm the storm he knows is brewing inside me. “Do you know that a quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping? Drip, drip, drip.”

I narrow my eyes and keep my face tight as a tick. I can’t stand when Greg does that – uses the Word of God to point out my shortcomings. I don’t find it amusing in the least. I know he wouldn’t take kindly to me constantly reminding him to leave his father and mother and become one flesh with me.

I’ll admit that I do fuss a lot and I hate it, but I’m not the only one in this relationship with flaws. The Bible has a very clear set of qualifications for a deacon and his position. I want so badly to ask Greg, “*Isn’t a deacon supposed to know how to manage his family? How can you take care of God’s house when you can’t even manage your own?*”

I know that if I speak what’s really on my mind I’d only be “letting the devil have his way” as Greg likes to say. I really just want him to show more interest in me outside the bedroom and

take me out at least once a month. I mean, I *am* his wife. I want to feel like a woman again and not just a mother.

I sigh heavily, hoping to expel some of my frustration. Maybe I should call the church to get us some counseling. I love my church home. My pastor, Reverend Neil J. Fine, is a handful at times, but he stays true to the Word of God and doesn't just pacify and entertain us. Even if he has to give a good old-fashioned tongue-lashing to do it, he always brings forth a powerful Word from the Lord that challenges me to shape up; think about my actions and live the way God intended.

I just don't believe God intended for me to remain in a marriage where my needs aren't being met, and my husband isn't too concerned about meeting my needs.

"Do we need counseling?" I ask for the third time this week.

Greg doesn't respond for a long time. That makes me a little uneasy. I hope and pray that we aren't as bad off as I think.

"No," He assures me. "I just need you to stop nagging me."

I flinch. "And I need *you* to pay some attention to me." I know I'm in total defense mode, but hey...

Greg slides back down in bed to lie flat on his back, then forks over the remote control.

I snatch the device from his hand and pitch it on top of the night table on my side, bowling over the bottle of Tylenol that I find myself reaching for more and more often these days. "Why are you always over there working when this house looks like who-did-it-and-please-don't-ever-do-it-again?"

Greg smiles, showing no teeth, and locks his fingers behind his head like some king waiting to be fanned. He says nothing. Nothing about why he's always over there working anyway.

"What did I tell you about talking like an old lady?"

“Oh, hush up. I’m serious. This house is practically falling apart and you’re never here,” I whine.

“Boo, you know Dad’s been busy with side jobs. I’m just trying to help out, that’s all.”

I suck my teeth again. “Well, your good will should begin at home.”

Greg lets his fingers loose and raises himself back up on his elbows. “You know what? I’m not going there with you tonight. You always do –”

I cut him off. “Do what?”

He doesn’t respond right away. Clearly, he’s shocked by my rude interruption.

“What do I *always* do?”

“You wait until it gets late to start in on Mama. She’s my mother and if I can be a blessing to her, I will. You’re trippin’.”

Maybe I am, but I’m tired of Gloria’s wants and needs cutting into our time together.

“I can’t help it if you and your mother aren’t as close as me and mine. That’s in no way my fault,” Greg adds.

Now *that* stung. Greg knows that although my mother and I have a pretty healthy relationship...*now*, I would kill to have the kind of bond that he shares with Gloria.

Despite my growing desire to kick off my killing spree right here in my own bedroom, I let Greg’s tactless comment slide.

“What do you expect me to do, kick my mother to the curb when she’s done nothing to get the shaft? Uh-uhn,” Greg says adamantly. “Mama was there for me when no one else was.”

“I’ve always been here for you, so don’t even try it.”

“I could understand your frustrations if Mama ever treated you badly, but she hasn’t. Y’all get along great and she loves you. It’s not fair for you to try to make me own your problems with my relationship with my mother.”

I don't know if I necessarily try to make Greg own my problems with his relationship with Gloria, but I will admit that I do have a serious problem with this whole dysfunctional situation.

I try to share my feelings without going into attack mode because we've had this same discussion about this very same thing so many times that the thought of even debating it again irritates me. "Do you want to know why I'm frustrated, Greg? Do you?"

"Because we haven't made love in four days?" Greg jokes with a pearly white-toothed grin.

I don't know whether to kiss his sexy lips or smack his handsome face. I take a deep breath, choosing to ignore his ill-timed witticism. "I'm trying to have a serious conversation here."

"No, it sounds like you're trying to have a coronary, blowing up like that. I'm just trying to help Mama out, that's all."

"Well, I'm your wife. What about helping *me* out? I shouldn't have to run around here cutting grass and taking out trash! What are you here for? Should I find someone else to do what you aren't?" I roll my eyes, hoping the connotation came across as negatively as I intended it to.

Greg ignores my last question, completely dismissing my idle threat, and simply asks, "Have I ever raised my voice at you?"

"No, you haven't raised your voice at me, but I'm upset, Greg. I need you around here. Dante needs you," I admit, at a lower decibel, hating how desperate I sound. "You have a responsibility to this family and I don't really feel you're living up to it."

Tears pool in my eyes. I don't really mean what I've just said. I'm just frustrated. I just want things back the way they were in the beginning. When is Greg going to wake up and see that his husbandly and fatherly duties should be at the top of his priority list? I mean, after God of course.

Interrupting my thoughts, Greg painfully asks, "I'm not living up to my responsibilities?"

I don't respond because I know that I'm just being hateful. Greg isn't making beaucoup bucks as a detective on DC's Metropolitan Police Department, but Gloria taught him well how to stretch a dollar a month long and he makes sure that Dante and I want for nothing. He's lived up to his word, which, from the day we took our vows, was to show me the same kind of love as Christ showed the Church when He died for it, and to take care of me. He hasn't stopped short of fulfilling the latter of that promise.

Before I even said, "I do" Greg had purchased a large three-story rowhouse in Upper Northwest, DC for his "boo and beautiful babies to come." We own a Lexus *and* a Cadillac Escalade, and although we feel the blow of the current economy, Greg continues to provide a weekly allowance for Dante and a rather handsome monthly shopping allowance for me.

He wants us to be happy and knows me well enough to know that receiving an irate call from an annoying bill collector demanding payment wouldn't please me in the least. Therefore, he sees that it never happens.

"Listen," Greg says in an irresistibly sweet voice. "You and Dante mean the world to me. I don't know how many times I have to tell you that before it registers."

"I need you to start showing me. That's what I need. That's the best way I can think of. It's bad enough that I feel like the other woman, but when my husband's main squeeze is his mother? That's the most bizarre of all."

Greg pulls me closer to him in bed. "You know you're my main squeeze."

I grimace. As bad as I want to snatch away like a defiant toddler, I can't help but snuggle into the man I love. After all these years, he still does it for me. Even when there's friction. "I just don't see why you have to be at her house all the time. Every day. You don't get tired of going over there?"

Greg laughs as if the words I've just spoken are the most absurd he's ever heard. "She's my mother. I love her. Why would I get tired of seeing her? Do you think I could get tired of seeing *your* beautiful face?"

"*She is not me!*" I reply sharply, looking at Greg as if he's deranged. I'm his wife. He's never supposed to get tired of seeing my beautiful face.

In the beginning, I kept my thoughts about this whole weird dynamic to myself, believing that my turn would come. I now realize that it probably never will unless I put my foot down. And that's exactly what I plan to do. Greg is going to have to do better by me or else. Or else... Or else, what? I'll continue to beg and plead for attention and he'll continue spending every waking moment talking to and about Gloria?

*Mama this. Mama that.* Greg never passes up an opportunity to boast about her. To hear him tell it, Gloria bakes the best pies, fries some mean chicken, and has the gentlest touch around. *Gentle.* What is he, a newborn?

Greg has maintained that gentle spirit that attracted me to him in the first place, but it seems strange so many years later, having to handle my masculine husband with such care. Why can't he be more forceful? Better with his hands. Not afraid to get his nails dirty. The preparation of an occasional meal is the only productive task he performs around our house these days.

Greg's voice penetrates my thoughts. "I know she's not you." He's looking at me like he could devour me whole as he begins gently kneading my calf. "Mama never had legs like this."

I can't help myself; I smile because Greg is speaking the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

In a matter of minutes, my eyes roll back in my head and a moan escapes my lips. *Okay, maybe he is good with his hands.*

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