

# Resetting Marcus

by

Evelyn Hughes

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## Chapter One: The Third Time

Andrea found out on a Tuesday, which felt wrong somehow. Discoveries like this, she would think later, ought to happen on stormy nights or at least on a Friday when the week was already ruined. But it was a Tuesday in October, mild and grey, and she had simply picked up Marcus's phone to check the time because her own was charging in the bedroom.

The message was from Sandra. It was not ambiguous. She was his lover.

She set the phone down on the kitchen counter with enormous care, as though it were something fragile, and stood looking at it for a long moment. Then she put the kettle on, because she did not know what else to do with her hands. Marcus came downstairs twenty minutes later, freshly showered, tie half knotted, reaching past her for the coffee.

"Morning," he said.

"Is it?" she said.

He looked at her then. He had always been quick, she would give him that. He saw something in her face, and his hand stopped on the coffee jar, and the silence in the kitchen changed character entirely.

"Andrea?"

"Sandra," she said. "The intern. Twenty-one years old, Marcus."

He said nothing.

"This is the third time," she said, and her voice was very level, which frightened her a little because she did not feel level at all. "The third time I know about at least."

"Andrea, I..."

"Don't," she said. "Not yet. I need you to not speak for a moment."

He waited. She made her tea. She watched the bag steep and thought about four years ago with the woman from his conference, and two years ago with his colleague whose name she had never been able to say without her jaw tightening, and now Sandra, twenty-one years

old, waiting on a message from a man who had kissed Andrea goodbye yesterday morning without any apparent difficulty while going off to screw someone else.

“Sit down,” she said.

He sat. He looked terrible, she noticed. *Good.*

“Tell me why,” she said. “Not an excuse. A reason, if you have one.”

“I don't have one,” he said quietly. “There isn't one.”

“No,” she agreed. “There isn't. There never is.”

“I love you,” he said. “I know that sounds like nothing right now.”

“It sounds like quite a lot, actually,” she said, “which is what makes this so exhausting.” She sat down across from him. “Do you want to save this marriage?”

He looked up. “Yes. More than anything.”

“Because I will leave,” she said. “I want you to understand that I am not making a threat for effect. I will leave, and I will be sad about it for a long time, and then I will be fine. I know that about myself.” She wrapped both hands around her mug. “So if you want to save this, you need to mean it. And meaning it can't just be a feeling, Marcus. Feelings haven't been enough, have they?”

“No,” he said slowly.

“So it has to be something else,” she said. “Something structural.”

He nodded slowly. “Whatever you think. Whatever you decide. I'll agree to it.”

She looked at him for a long moment, this tall and handsome man she had married six years ago in the garden of her parents' house, who made her laugh and knew how she took her coffee and who had, apparently, very little ability to keep himself faithful when left unsupervised.

“I'm going to speak to Donna,” she said.

“Donna,” he repeated, and she could see him trying to read her expression.

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“Don't look so worried,” she said, though she felt that worry was perhaps appropriate. “She's my friend. She's sensible. She'll have thoughts.”

“And I don't get a say in whatever she suggests?”

Andrea stood and took her mug to the sink. “You said whatever I decide,” she said. “I'd think carefully before you walk that back in the next thirty seconds.”

Marcus was quiet.

“Go to work,” she said. “We'll talk tonight.”

He rose slowly from the table, and she heard him gather his keys and his bag, and then he paused in the doorway to the hall.

“Andrea,” he said.

“Tonight,” she said firmly, without turning around.

The front door closed. She stood at the sink and watched the garden and drank her tea, and after a while she picked up her phone and called Donna. Donna listened to the whole thing without interrupting, which was one of the things Andrea valued most about her.

“Third time,” Donna said, when she had finished.

“Third time of screwing around.”

“And he said, whatever you decide?”

“He said whatever I decide.”

There was a pause on the line. Andrea could hear Donna thinking, which was a particular quality of her silences, purposeful and slightly dangerous.

“I have an idea,” Donna said. “And I need you to hear me out before you say anything.”

“That's not a promising opening.”

“I know,” Donna said. “Hear me out. I think you will like it.”

