

AITA for Using My Husband's Hobby to Teach Him a Lesson

Dear Reddit –

This is a throwaway account for obvious reasons, but my life is turning upside down and I need to know: is this my fault? Am I The Asshole?

I (54F) and my husband (52M) have been married twenty years. I was up to my neck in tech start-up chaos when we met. When you're pioneering the birth of a software that every creative now uses, you're working sixteen to twenty-hour days and are powered by caffeine. Even when the money started rolling in, there were weeks I didn't see the inside of my apartment. The only reason the plants in my house were green is because they were plastic.

Suffice to say, I didn't have time for men. I wasn't looking for a husband, a one-night stand, or what the kids call a "sugar daddy." I certainly wasn't marrying up. We met at my niece's fifth birthday party. He was the clown my sister hired to entertain the crowd. I was instantly smitten by his dimples, and when he pulled a coin out of my ear, common sense left my body and I married him.

Our marriage was fine. Happier than most, I thought, even though he didn't want kids. "Kids are beasts," he'd say. "Do you know how many times I've been kicked in the nuts by some snot-nosed kid when I was a birthday clown? I'll tell you. One too many."

I was disappointed. Not that I had time to be a mom, but I'd assumed one day I'd feel the fluttering kicks in my stomach and then eat my body weight in Ben & Jerry's like my sister had.

Instead, I decided I could be the best aunt ever. And, really, my company is my baby. I continue to nurture it and my employees so we stay the number one creative software company in the world. I take them on retreats, schedule picnic days, and provide yoga on Wednesdays—sometimes with puppies. And that’s besides the five-star benefits package and in-building daycare. Not to toot my own horn, but working for me is a dream job.

I made time for Roy (not his real name). We had date nights—sometimes in the office since I’d hired him to be one of my VPs—and went on seriously lux holidays. Really, I needed him. He reminded me to stop and smell the roses. He kept life fun.

We were ... good.

Then he turned fifty-two, and the March of the Red Flags began.

The first flag was The Beard. Roy had always been clean shaven. I thought this new hair growth was another “experiment,” like the Year of the Unfortunate Goatee. After six months of enduring that horror show, I told him, “That goatee makes you look like a discount Bond villain.” He shaved it the next week.

So, when The Beard appeared in all its sasquatch glory and my reminders about the Unfortunate Goatee were ignored, I strapped myself in for the long haul. This could be his midlife crisis, I reasoned. He’s 52, after all. And I’d planned for his midlife crisis. In fact, I’ve been proactive. I’d bought him a sports car when he hit fifty. A good sports car, too. A fully loaded Lotus Emira. Not some discount flashy wheels like a Miata. But, I thought, if The Beard is all he wants, then I’m getting off cheap.

Oh, you sweet summer child.

The Beard was followed by several more red flags, each more alarming than the last. First there were the chunky, black framed glasses like my father wore in the sixties. He didn’t

even need them! He'd had Lasik when he turned forty-five. "The lenses are transitional and turn dark in the sun." Ookay. Why not use one of your fifty Rayban, Gucci, or Armani pairs of sunglasses? "Our employees take me more seriously when I wear glasses."

Bizarre, but okay.

Now, I guess I need to admit I knew about Roy's "speedbumps" as the Vice President of Employee Development. He didn't have an MBA or other upper-level education. But that didn't mean he wasn't smart. He knew people and how to make them happy. Puppy Yoga? That was his idea. And after the Fourth of July barbecue where he got some former *Top Chef* contestants to cook for us, he won them over completely. Or so I thought.

The next day, I talked to my COO, Doug (not his real name).

"I wondered when you were going to come see me," he said.

My answering smile was nervous. "That's ominous."

Doug shrugged. "It might not be. But what's up? What have you heard?"

"Roy's started to wear glasses," I said.

"I thought he didn't need glasses anymore."

"He thinks the employees aren't taking him seriously. That they gave him more respect when he wore glasses."

Doug snorted. "The glasses aren't why he feels disrespected. You really have no idea what happened?"

"You're scaring me, Doug. Just tell me."

"Roy's messing with the kitchen."

I sucked in air. The kitchen was the domain of a crazy genius I'll call Isabella. She planned the menus. She ordered the food. She did her own hiring and firing. She was the Queen

of her stainless steel world at the top of the building. Isabella was a real “off with their heads” type.

“What did he do? Then what did *she* do?” I said, my hand covering my throat.

“He’s demanding to see her sourcing and ordering lists.”

I reared back in surprise. “Why? Her food is outstanding.”

“He wants to make sure she’s cooking environmentally sustainable food. Farm-to-Table.”

Doug leaned forward, whispering the next words. “She says he wants the cafeteria to go vegan.”

I gasped. “Vegan?”

“He hasn’t said anything about this at home?”

“No. We eat meat at least four times a week. Maybe she misunderstood?”

Doug shrugs again. “Hard to say. She’s gets worked up easily. I’ll talk to her again when she’s calmer, but if you could maybe ask Roy for his side?”

“Sure.” I was already on my feet, my brain flipping through reels of my interactions with Roy for the last month.

The images coalesced into the second red flag.

Around the time The Beard sprouted, Roy insisted on crack-of-dawn treks to the farmers’ markets. Adorable couple’s time, I thought. Sorting through carrots with a latte in my hand. Whizzing the basil into pesto and tossing it with a fresh pasta to have with a crusty baguette and local cheese. We held hands and were ridiculously cute.

A week after I’d spoken to Doug, Roy insisted we only go to farm-to-table restaurants. Granted, those were more plentiful now, but still expensive experiences. “It’s not like we don’t have the money,” he grouched. And he was right. Money wasn’t an issue.

But what about our visits to our favorite Chinese restaurant? A hole-in-the-wall place where the walls were coated in MSG. Surely, he didn't mean to ban us from pork lo-mien and cashew chicken forever. "No," he said. "Farm-to-table is the only responsible dining out option. Even Isabella agrees."

"Ah. You've spoken to Isabella?" I'd been looking for an opening to talk to Roy about this, and I was relieved I wouldn't have to do this in the office.

"I did. She's on board."

"On board with what exactly? I can barely tell her what to do and I'm her boss."

"She's only going to buy ingredients from local farms, and Tuesdays and Thursdays will be vegan-only options."

My eyebrows climbed to my hairline. I tried to force them back into place, but they stayed stubbornly high. "She agreed to this?"

Roy fidgeted. "Not exactly. She threw one of her big knives at me and it lodged in the wall over my shoulder."

Okay. Doug would have to talk to her about that. "What did she say before she threw the knife?"

"She claimed tofu wasn't a local ingredient. But I told her she could cook with eggs instead."

With a heroic effort, I kept my hand from smacking my forehead. "Roy, eggs aren't vegan."

"The whites are."

Jesus. Christ. I stepped around this stupidity pothole and said, “I’m going to let Isabella continue to run the kitchen how she wants to. The employees are happy and the woman with the very sharp knives is happy.”

“Health of our employees is paramount to our success,” he said. “Their diets need to change. *Our* diets need to change. Our *lives* need to change.” He was annoyingly unmovable about this and slept in the guest room.

I was so frustrated. We had a good life. We were happy. But I guess *he* wasn’t happy? Should I’ve been more supportive and started to change with him? Or should I continue to wait this out?

What do you think, Reddit?

UPDATE #1:

I took your advice to make him feel heard. We started to have lunch together every day. Instead of bringing down what Isabella was cooking, he was making my lunch himself. A sweet gesture, but it was awful! Dry salads, bland tofu on blander rice, burnt eggs. Dinner was more of the same. I couldn’t take it. I began to dump the salads and put imaginary work meetings over the dinner hour, telling him he didn’t have to wait for me, just so I could have noodles and fried eggrolls without his judgy stares.

Then more red flags came rolling in. Books on composting were fanned across our coffee table. During the evenings I was home, we watched shows about backyard farming and homesteading (which the people on TV always seemed to be failing at). Then his closet filled with a shocking amount of flannel. Seriously. I haven’t seen this much flannel since Lilith Fair.

With The Beard, The Glasses, and The Flannel he looked like The Brawny Paper Towel man's nerdy little brother.

But I kept my mouth shut and let him "experiment with this new phase of his life," as one of you put it.

For my birthday, he signed us up for a foraging excursion. He'd taken a foraging class around the time Isabella tried to impale him with her knife (which she'd been admonished for and a letter put into her file), and he'd fallen in love with the idea of "found food." He tried to get me to eat fried dandelion heads he picked from our lawn. I refused as I know what kinds of fertilizer the gardener uses. It's "all natural," and comes off a horse farm. Upon my refusal he stomped to his Lotus and disappeared. In the morning I found him asleep in the guest room.

I felt badly. He was trying something new. I wanted to support him, but it's not just him he's changing, it's me, too. And, frankly, I didn't want to change. I was happy with who I was and who my friends were. Roy had dropped all his friends and was spending more and more time with his "foragers." Even when I suggested we watch his favorite homesteading show he'd claim to be busy and disappear into his Discord server.

I felt us growing apart, and I didn't like it. He'd been my rock. He'd always cheered me up and cheered me on, and I wasn't doing the same for him. I guess that's why I agreed to his next harebrained idea.

My birthday is in the summer. I typically celebrate this holiest of days with margaritas and a book by the pool. But this year, Roy insisted we do a foraging excursion. So, instead of being warmed by the sun, we followed some REI groupie through gnat- and mosquito-infested woods picking weeds and digging up roots that we then turned around and ate in one of the chewiest salads I've had the misfortune of consuming.

One woman almost ate hemlock! She'd mistaken it for this mystical wild carrot-thing the REI groupie was raving about. Her entire salad was thrown out because even a whisper of hemlock can kill you. Heroically, I offered her mine, which she enthusiastically accepted. Roy scowled about this for days afterwards. "You had two bites. You didn't even give it a chance," he said, rubbing his hand down his ever-lengthening beard.

"I did give it a chance," I said. "And I didn't complain once, even though I was hot and there was no tequila or chlorinated water."

My attempt at humor fell flat and he once again disappeared for the night only to reappear in the guest room the following morning.

For his birthday he announced he wanted to go camping. *Camping*. In the *woods*. You want me to sleep on the *ground* with nothing between me and the animals but a material that might as well be made out of thoughts and prayers? No, thank you.

He went into the woods alone.

While he was gone, I had some girlfriends over for an emergency summit meeting. They agreed this behavior was outside the norm of the midlife crisis bell curve.

"So, what do I do?"

"Drink more wine."

"Therapy."

"Divorce."

"Therapy and divorce."

But I couldn't divorce him.

My twentieth anniversary gift to Roy was half of the company I built. We were fifty-fifty partners in life. I wanted us to be fifty-fifty partners in business, too.

Dumb, dumb, dumb.

Now I'm shackled to him. Forced to make our marriage work or I lose half my company.

My baby.

A friend I'll call Kimmy gleefully told me, "My husband slept with his secretary and then he was fine. Maybe you should encourage him to sleep with someone he works with."

I said, "As he works with me, he *is* technically sleeping with a co-worker, and that doesn't seem to be helping."

"You're his boss," she said. "That doesn't count."

"Actually," chimed in Friend Number Two. (A Samantha if ever there was one.) "That should make your sex life kinkier."

I frowned. Our sex life had gone from jalapeno-cheesecake swirl to vanilla. And it was woefully kink-free.

"Maybe you should just talk to him," Kimmy said.

"We talk all the time," I said.

"About work. Talk to him about what's going on with him."

Samantha said, "I bet he's having an affair."

I almost dropped my glass of Pinot Noir. "What?"

Samantha shrugged. "It's the first thing they do when they hit a midlife crisis. Look at Kimmy. Her husband is devoted to her and, yet, he cheated with his secretary."

Kimmy nodded. "True."

"And all these changes. Is he picking out those glasses and that flannel himself?"

I frowned. He had terrible taste. Even though the glasses and the shirts were odd, they were the right color for him and fit perfectly.

“Sonuvabitch.”

Samantha gave me a sad smile. “Exactly.”

“Who would he cheat with?” I said. “I haven’t seen him so much as look at another woman at work. And I’m the boss. No one would be dumb enough to sleep with the boss’s husband.”

“Well, he’s not always at work, is he,” Kimmy said.

“You’ve got to be kidding,” I said.

“Yup,” Samantha said. “He’s sleeping with Grizzly Adams’s little sister.”

“Christ on a cracker.” I held out my empty wine glass. “I need more wine.”

As Samantha refilled me, Kimmy said, “What are you going to do?”

What *was* I going to do? My mind was blank. “I’m not sure. I’ve never been cheated on before.”

Samantha refilled her own glass. “You’re going to find her and see if she’s a threat. Then you’ll either confront him or you’ll deal with him appropriately in a different way.”

“What’s appropriate?”

Samantha’s gave me a mysterious smile. “You’ll know.”

“This is going to be tedious,” I told her, wishing the wine in front of me (not organic or fair trade, which would send Roy to the moon) was a very dry and very dirty martini. But when it comes to drinking, you leave with the one that brought you.

“Men always are,” Kimmy said, patting my hand with the kind of pity I find repulsive.

I slept fitfully. Visions of my building being chainsawed in half by the Brawny Paper Towel Man filled my dreams for the next five days. He’d leer at me and say, “You’re next, Darlin’,” and I’d wake up in a cold sweat.

I was a wreck. Late for meetings, brain in a fog. When I caught Doug giving me his concerned puppy-dog stare I knew this couldn't continue.

Samantha was right. I had to find out if he was cheating on me.

I resolved to talk to Roy that weekend, but he got to me first.

Friday night, he was waiting for me on the patio with a glass of cold, organic white wine waiting for me on the table. Along with a charcuterie board made with, he proudly told me, ingredients he'd sourced either from the farmer's market or that he'd foraged.

After the hemlock scare, I politely declined to eat anything but the bread, which was far, far away from the plant matter on the tray. He noticed, frowning at my lack of enthusiasm, but I simply smiled sweetly and asked him, "It's been years since you've made me anything to eat. What's the special occasion?"

"Emma (not my real name), we're selling the company."

My blood ran cold. "What do you mean?" I think I said the words out loud, but I wasn't sure, because he continued to speak as if he hadn't heard me.

"I've been doing a lot of thinking. What are we doing with our lives? What are we doing here in this big house, buying our food from cold, impersonal grocery stores, wearing clothing made in China? Working our butts off only to send half our money to the government? We're drowning in chemicals and noise. We're killing ourselves."

I looked around at my beautiful slate patio, the twenty-five-yard pool *he'd* insisted we put in, and the custom brick façade of the five-bedroom house we'd both fallen in love with after our company had cleared two million dollars. This felt so sudden. An overwhelming tidal wave of emotions bombarded me. Was he right? Were we killing ourselves? Are we conspicuous consumers? Probably. Could we be better with our carbon footprint? A solid yes.

I felt my soul exhale. He wasn't cheating on me. He was simply becoming a militant environmentalist. This was a preoccupation I could live with.

But then he kept talking.

"What we need to do is sell the business, sell the house, all our possessions, and start over. We get a homestead in Alaska. We build a log cabin, and install solar panels and a windmill, and then we grow, gather, and hunt for all our food. We live off the land. Go back to our roots."

Our roots? He grew up in Detroit. His dad built cars. His feet hadn't touched grass until he was twelve.

But that aside, at fifty-four, could I do this? Could I give up the company I'd created with my own hands and nurtured for almost my entire adult life? Walk away from the comfortable lifestyle I'd earned after living on Cup-o-Noodle for seven years? Carve out a completely new life in the wilds of Alaska? My vision swam with images of this life my husband of twenty years wanted us to have. All I could see were mosquitoes, bears, and snow.

After a long moment I took Roy's hand, looked deep into his eyes, and said, "Are you out of your fucking mind?"

This ... did not go over well.

"I knew it." He'd gone from a doe-eyed dreamer to seething with rage in point-two seconds. "You never let me have my dreams. Just because something I want is outside your comfort zone doesn't mean I'm crazy."

I kept my voice even, but I admit it was a struggle. "See it from my perspective. You're telling me that *we* are selling the multi-million-dollar company *I* built. With no discussion or time to consider exactly what you're *telling* me to do."

He threw his hands into the air with a disgusted *ugh*. “You never listen to me. I’ve been talking about this for months.”

“When did you ever mention wanting to move to Alaska to be a farmer? The closest you’ve come to working the land is playing Farmville, and you didn’t even do that well. And also, I think I would’ve remembered you mentioning selling my company.” *My baby*, I didn’t add.

“Jesus. It’s always ‘your company’ and ‘you built it alone.’ Half that company is mine. I get a say in its future.”

“But I’m the president. I’m the one in charge. There’s no board. There are no investors. There’s just me. What I say goes, and I’m *not selling*.”

“You don’t have a choice, Corporate Godzilla Barbie.”

“Impotent Manchild.”

“Frigid Whore.”

“Literal Clown.”

His eyes narrowed and face warmed up to an unflattering shade of puce. Bringing up his old career was below the belt.

“You. Never. Listen.” Roy picked up his bowl of wild carrot top pesto and pitched it at my head.

As it whizzed past my ear, I hurled a log of horrendous grass-fed goat cheese at him. “Who is she?” I screamed, as the cheese connected to his cheek with a satisfying squashy *thump*. I played softball. I have great aim.

“She who? You think I’m cheating? You’re crazy,” he said, wiping the goat cheese off his face.

“You’re too stupid to come up with this Alaska idea on your own. Plus, you hate the cold. So, who is she?”

This was another below-the-belt-shot. He dropped out of college his junior year and went out of his way to prove how smart he was. If I were being honest he’s average *at best*.

“You’re out of your mind. And I’m not stupid,” he shrieked, chucking the baguette he’d bought from Godknowswhere at me. He again missed me and bounced it into the hydrangeas. Humiliated, he stomped out of the house and tore off in his Lotus.

I wanted to smash the bottle of wine against the flagstone, but I would’ve had to clean up the mess. Instead, I filled my glass to the brim and chugged it. I wasn’t any closer to figuring out if he was cheating on me. That denial could be the true or a big, fat lie. And even if he hasn’t cheated on me, did he expect me to jump for joy about his grand plan? He didn’t even *ask* me if I wanted to sell everything and move to Alaska—he *told* me. Typical. It was our “discussion” about having kids all over again.

I fumed until I hit the halfway point of my second bottle. That’s when I began to really think about his words. Was it always “my way or the highway?” Was I dictatorial in our marriage? As we’ve aged, we’ve drifted slightly apart. We read our books on different sides of the couch. We watch different shows on our phones and iPads. Our bedroom activities have become ... tepid.

Is moving to Alaska the grand adventure that could reignite the passion in our marriage? Have we become tied to material goods in a way that is preventing us from experiencing our lives to the hilt? Should we be trying to recapture our Gen-X childhood fueled by red Kool Aid and Pop Tarts, running wild and wallowing in streams of creativity? Without that kind of freedom I wouldn’t have come up with my software idea in the first place. Maybe Roy was right.

I survived lawn darts. I can survive Alaska.

What do you think, Reddit?

UPDATE #2

Sorry this took me so long to post. It's been a wild week.

Roy didn't come home that night. I didn't expect him to. You don't exactly rush home to the woman who beamed you on the noggin with goat cheese. I also wasn't surprised he skipped work the next day.

However, when he didn't come home the following night, alarm bells rang. Not fire alarm-level bells. More like the bell sitting on the front desk of a hotel. Not as loud, but just as annoying and hard to ignore. I texted him at least ten times, but my phone remained worryingly quiet.

In the morning, I checked in with his assistant, Lila. Roy texted her the first day and said he'd be out of town for "awhile," but she hadn't heard from him since then. Guilt was firmly ensconced on my shoulders as I texted him yet again and got no reply. What if something'd happened to him? Should I call the police and file a missing person's report? He could've been in an accident. Something horrible could've happened.

But then I thought, what if he's simply holed up in a hotel hiding from me? Or worse, consulting a divorce attorney.

The urgency to find Roy roiled through me.

I held my breath as I activated the Find My Phone function on my cell. I think I've checked this twice in our marriage, so it feels weird. I like to give Roy his privacy. Respecting

the privacy of your partner is a cornerstone of a healthy marriage. I guess I was done fooling myself about how great our marriage was.

When I finally figured out how to read the map, I was astonished to see that the location dot hovered over our address. Was it possible he'd been hiding from me inside my own house? More likely, he'd decided to come back while I was out and couldn't catch him.

Canceling all my meetings, I stormed home. The first place I looked for Roy was the bathroom. That man can spend hours on the toilet. He wasn't there (for once), so I checked his office—a room I rarely enter. What was once an erudite, gentleman's office straight out of an English novel was unrecognizable as a place where work was accomplished.

The desk, a colossal beast made of solid maple which had been the centerpiece of the room, was now shoved against the far wall. Instead of the oversized computer monitor he'd sworn he needed, the desk's new centerpiece was a huge Himalayan salt lamp shrouded with copper wires and crystals. More copper wires were alligator clipped to the wire shroud and snaked out to encircle framed photos of majestic moose, bears swiping salmon out of streams, and craggy mountains.

Then I realized I was hearing birds and rushing water, and a woman's voice was speaking.

I am brave and courageous. I am in control of my own happiness. I am strong. I am becoming the best version of myself. I attract wonderful things. I am worthy of greatness. My life is magical. The light from inside me will imbue my goals and ambitions with love and positivity. The negativity in my life will fall away, and only love will remain. I am brave and courageous...

Her calm positive affirmations came in a loop out of a Bluetooth speaker next to the salt lamp.

I felt my jaw unhinge itself. What in the hell was this? The warp core of an alien spaceship? Had the Borg infected my husband?

I picked up a photo of a bear with a salmon in his mouth. Pictures of us used to be in those frames. Stung, I looked at a map of Alaska he'd pasted on the wall. The Vermeer I'd bought for him was still there, underneath it. Thank God it was only a print. Different locations were impaled with a red pin, and each had a copper wire from the salt lamp wrapped around it.

As I fingered the wires, my brain chugged along trying to process what I was seeing. This was way beyond being eco-conscious or wanting to become a homesteader in Alaska. This was new-age, culty, woo-woo territory, and I was a stranger here.

He'd left his phone behind, shiny and silver beside the salt lamp. Probably where the positive affirmations coming out of the speaker were stored. I bit my lip as I contemplated what its presence meant.

In the digital age, a phone is the keeper of all secrets. Did Roy want me to find it? He had to have left it behind deliberately. It's never a good idea to look at your spouse's text messages or emails, but he'd been missing for two days.

Holding my breath, I typed in his passcode, and the screen immediately opened.

Well, if he hadn't wanted me to know what he was up to, he would've changed his passcode, right? Naturally, I started with his emails. And I got what I deserved.

The first email I saw was from Roy's divorce lawyer, dated last month. Before we'd talked. Before I knew he was serious about Alaska. Before I'd even had a chance to say "yes" or "no" to selling my baby.

The betrayal rocked me. Finding the Himalayan salt warp core in his office had been a shock, but this was a jackhammer to the foundation of my being. A tsunami of nausea sent me into the powder room where my stomach folded itself inside out.

Sweaty and shaking I laid on the bathroom's cold tile floor and continued reading Roy's emails.

Roy cited irreconcilable differences and spousal alienation, whatever that was. He'd also attached a list of items he wanted to take. His car (as if a Lotus would be able to navigate the Alaskan backwoods), the Rothko he bought me for our tenth anniversary (fat chance), and the contents of his office (fine by me).

The next email, dated last week, featured a list of items he wanted to make me sell—including the house, the company, and the rest of our art collection.

And he wanted alimony! Twenty-five thousand a month. The absolute nerve. I guess he had learned a thing or two from those homesteading shows. The best way to make a small fortune from living off the land was to start with a large fortune.

The further I got down the list, the more ludicrous the demands became. For example, he wanted a fifty percent stake in any future businesses I might create.

This was bananas. Like, certifiably diagnosable. How I wished this was simply a midlife crisis.

Desperation clawed at my throat. I didn't want to divorce Roy. I loved him. I'd envisioned growing old with him. Going on cruises. Seeing The Great Pyramid of Giza. Spending spring in Paris. I didn't want to move to Alaska. However, the pain of losing Roy was greater than my dread of living a hard life in the boonies surrounded by six feet of snow and animals with sharp teeth.

He was clearly having a mental health crisis. Maybe I should agree to go to Alaska. If I showed him I was open to homesteading, maybe I could talk him out of selling the company. We could take a paid leave of absence to fund his new lifestyle. Give it a try. If he saw I was willing to try, maybe I could then convince him to seek professional help. I'd literally buy myself time to get him to a psychiatrist.

I could save my company.

And save my marriage.

He may not have his phone with him, but since he was replying to his lawyer's emails and messages I knew he did have a laptop that was connected to the iMessage. At least I hoped it was. I'd have to give it a try. I pulled out my phone and typed, "I want to go to Alaska."

He replied almost immediately. "I know, babe. We just have to wait a little longer and she'll be gone. Then we can get to Alaska."

Huh?

I typed back, "What do you mean?" But I'd only gotten to the word "you" before Roy's message blipped and disintegrated, leaving the sentence "Roy unsent a message" in small gray type.

Oh, fuck. He'd thought I was someone else.

UPDATE #3

Her name was Becki.

With an "i."

The very idea you'd spell your name with an "i" is offensively perky, and you deserve to be slapped. Sorry, not sorry.

She was twenty-seven, naturally blonde, vegan, and, if the yoga poses on her Instagram are any indication, very bendy.

She's also been fucking my husband for the last six months. They started right before he grew The Beard.

I found all this out because as soon as he unsent that text to me I pulled his laptop out of the desk drawer where it lived—probably soaking up positive affirmations and good vibes from the Himalayan salt lamp—and began excavating.

First, Roy has a second phone.

Second, he's dumb enough to have iMessage connected to this laptop.

Which means I got to see every text, photo, and (barf) video they'd ever sent each other. Roy evidentially didn't believe in deleting messages.

I read all of them. Took pictures of some of them with my phone and wished I'd thought to have a prenup with a cheating clause in it. But we were supposed to last forever. There wasn't supposed to be a "Becki."

Hurt, anger, and frustration overwhelmed me. I'd been ambushed. Was the Alaska venture even real? Or was this all about getting *me* to divorce *him*?

Roy knew I hated camping. And he'd seen my reaction to that foraging for salads escapade. He must've known I'd never agree to move to Alaska of all places.

But the map. And the lamp and positive affirmation tapes. Those were some elaborate props. Too elaborate to have come from Roy's brain.

So, either his Alaska plan was legit, or Becki-with-an-i was the mastermind behind a Shakespearian-level plot to ruin my life.

Both seemed unlikely. However, the threat was very much real.

The next set of emails I read confirmed it.

First was the email thread from a realtor in Alaska, negotiating the purchase of two hundred acres of land. Becki was cc'd on every email. I clicked on the listing link the realtor helpfully included in his email. It proudly proclaimed it has "adventurous access" and says you can "reach your paradise with a snowmachine or four-wheeler."

Last I heard, the Lotus wasn't marketed as an off-roading vehicle.

I checked out the property on Google Earth. It was a desolate block of land sandwiched between mountain ranges and still covered with snow in this satellite image. No house. No road. No electricity. No water. There was a smattering of trees they can forage around, so I guess that's a plus.

The last email from the realtor was dated yesterday, telling him his bid had been accepted and he'd be sending Roy a contract by the end of the week.

We wouldn't be divorced by the end of the week. In fact, if I couldn't win Roy back—an impulse that was rapidly diminishing—I'd make sure this divorce dragged out for years. He'd never have the \$1.4 million he needed to buy this land by next year, let alone by the end of the week.

I let my anger righteous anger build as I read and re-read the emails, so I was primed to blow when a new one popped into the thread.

"Great. Looking forward to reading the terms. I'll be able to get the deposit transferred after the weekend."

After the weekend? Was he selling his Lotus? Because that's the only way he was going to have that amount of money. My next call was going to be to my bank to lock down the accounts.

And then a text from Becki popped into the laptop's messaging window.

"This is awesome!!! We're in the home stretch!!!!"

God. So many exclamation points.

If Becki thought she was in the home stretch, she had another thing coming. I opened the camera on my phone to take a picture of these texts when a new one from Roy appeared.

"Are you ready to do your part?"

Her part? What was her part?

"Absolutely. Her negativity is about to be cleansed from your life. Forever," Becki replied.

I got up from couch and started pacing, indignant and angry. Roy was constantly telling me I was a negative person who always sees the worst in a situation. However, I'm not negative. I'm a *realist*. If I had followed all of Roy's pie-in-the-sky ideas, the company would be bankrupt by now.

"I can't wait to her have vampiric aura stop sucking away my energy. Did you do the tarot?" Roy wrote.

Ellipses bubbled under his text, and a picture of the tarot card Death appeared.

My breath stopped as a chill raced down my limbs. Were they going to kill me?

Roy gave the image a thumbs up. Then sent the message. "Remember. 9pm. Willow Ridge."

Becki sent a thumbs up. With confetti. How gauche.

But even my disdain for her tastelessness couldn't stop the boulder sinking into the pit of my nauseous stomach. Willow Ridge was my country club, and I was supposed to be leaving my Women In Business meeting around nine tonight.

Roy wanted to cleanse my negativity out of his life by having his hussy murder me. Then a divorce wouldn't be necessary. He'd have access to all the money he needed to build his dream life in Alaska.

If I'm dead, nothing must be split fifty-fifty.

With a shaking hand, I clicked open the search engine's history records. They flooded down the screen. Roy was surfing the internet for hours each day. From early in the morning until late into the night. Restaurant menu checks. Hotel reservations. DoorDash and UberEats. Wordle. Hundreds of searches for land in Alaska. More than a few searches for divorce lawyers in our area. Even a click on LegalZoom. But a few pages stood out to me.

Discord | Homesteaders | General

Chakras for Dummies

Foraging for Beginners: A Journey into Found Food

Poisonous Plants of the Northeast

The Invisible Death of Annabel Jones: A True Crime Blog

I couldn't help myself. I hopped onto the true crime blog.

Annabel Jones was a woman who died after a long illness and battling worsening food allergies. But when the medical examiner did the autopsy, he found an incredible amount of arsenic in her blood. It turns out her husband had been adding arsenic to her food for months.

I checked the date this webpage was originally opened—one week before we'd pelted each other with pesto and goat cheese.

The wind was knocked out of me. Had he poisoned something on that charcuterie platter? I thought about the meats and cheeses spread across the board. There were peppers and asparagus, too.

Oh My God. The pesto.

Made with wild carrot tops, which are easily mistaken for hemlock. Jesus, he'd said it was a wild carrot top pesto, and yet he hadn't served any wild carrots. Then I'd provoked him until he'd whipped it at my head.

I'd literally dodged death.

Now Becki will be waiting for me to leave my country club so she could end my life. And if I called the police and she got caught, Roy could slip away with his only crime being a cheater with a crazy mistress.

What can I do to stop him and save my life?

UPDATE #4

A lot has happened in the past twenty-four hours. I may have done something drastic, and I need to know officially, "Am I The Asshole?"

I decided to confront Roy. I wouldn't mention his murderous intentions toward me, but I wanted one last opportunity to nip this in the bud before I escalated. Get him here and talking; face to face.

I opened my phone and emailed him. "I was wrong. Let's talk."

Typing those first three words nearly killed me, but I was desperate—and they did the trick.

I skipped my meeting at the country club and ran out to get everything I'd need. It was my turn to dazzle him on the patio with my food offerings. Candles were lit. Farmer's market goods were obtained. Organic wine was opened. And I'd foraged the ingredients for an extra special salad. The ambience was right.

A grudging expression turned into one of obscene delight when he saw the salad, *ooing* and *ahhing* over it. “You went out and picked all these greens by yourself?”

My smile was pricklier than I hoped. Mother always told me my face was an open book. Which is why we were outside and lit only by candles. I was nervous. Tense. Roy had to be handled exactly right. One slip up and twenty years was up in smoke, and he was either taking half of everything I owned or he’d sic his hussy hitwoman on me.

But I shouldn’t have worried. He barely looked at me. He only had eyes for that damn salad.

“You even found wild carrot. I thought I’d picked the last of it,” he said.

I pushed the leaves around my plate. “I went on the trail we’d taken for my birthday. There was plenty there.”

He pushed the first forkful into his mouth. “Excellent vinaigrette, Emma. You know, I couldn’t believe it when you emailed that you were wrong.”

I bristled at his gloating tone, but I swallowed sharp comeback on my tongue. I needed to start with the truth and some humility. “That was a hard email to write.”

“What made you come around?”

I didn’t want to say, *Because you want to kill me*. Instead, I said, “I don’t want a divorce. I want to work with you on this marriage. We used to be adventurous people. Maybe we need something like Alaska to shake us up.”

He was really into that salad, speaking around the edges of the leaves. “Wow. I—I’m at a loss for words. Are you serious? I’m just ... stunned.”

“I believe in us.” I didn’t believe in us. What I believed in was Roy’s enormous ego.

Watching me carefully, he said, “I’ve already picked out the land I want.”

“Have you?” I tried for thrilled surprise.

“I’ve been doing the groundwork for months.”

I took a long drink to stop myself from asking what kind of girl is named “Groundwork.” When I’d collected myself, I said, “I wish we’d talked earlier. None of this—the fighting—needed to happen.”

“Actually,” he said, “I think it did.”

I felt both my eyebrows hovering around my hairline. “Oh?”

“You’re hard-headed. You don’t do anything unless you’re backed into a corner. It’s annoying and counterproductive.” He’d finished his salad and was now helping himself to the eggplant parm I’d painstakingly prepared.

If he wanted me to feel like I was backed into a corner, then mission accomplished. But he was going to regret that. “Selling my company is a huge ask and I needed time to think,” I said. “After all, this company is my baby. The only baby you’d let me have.”

He sighed. “It’s always about me not letting you have children. For the billionth time, you knew I didn’t want to saddle myself with kids when you married me. If it’s a ‘no’ for me, it’s a ‘no’ for us.”

And yet my “no” regarding selling my company meant nothing to him.

I settled back into my chair, watching sweat beads swelling around his hairline. “As long as we’re telling the truth,” I said. “Is there anything else you’d like to get off your chest?”

He knocked back his glass of chardonnay. “You’re stingy with your praise. I did a ton of work making the company a fun place to work. It wouldn’t be as successful if I hadn’t been there. Companies without men in leadership roles aren’t successful.”

“You don’t say.” I was marveling at the direction this conversation was taking while he chomped his first bite of the eggplant. Had Roy always been misogynous? Or was this a recent development thanks to his new spiritual interests and Becki?

“It’s like how Queen Elizabeth was nothing without Prince Philip.”

I believe Queen Liz would have a few words to say about that. Philip, too, probably.

“If we move to Alaska, what are we going to live on? Are we going to continue to work?”

Roy waved his fork in the air. “That company is worth hundreds of millions. Maybe even a billion if we can get Bezos really interested. That’s more than enough for the rest of our lives.”

“You’ve reached out to Jeff Bezos? Without my knowledge?” His audacity had me stunned and angry.

“Now, don’t get your panties in a wad. I know a guy who knows a guy who works for him. It was a very soft offer.”

My face felt rigid. “But it was an offer.” Not a question. “How much?”

“Two hundred million.” I started to splutter a response, but he cut me off. “Like I said, a very soft offer. But he’s a big fish and you have to go slowly to reel them in.”

Christ. He’d never fished a day in his life, not to mention I kept him far, *far* away from the sales and acquisitions teams. My VPs had threatened to quit if I included Roy in the money-side of the business. At first, I’d been bruised at their vehemence. Now I was right there with them. Roy was incompetent, greedy, unethical, and a wannabe murderer.

He’d planned to kill me tonight—or have me killed, he couldn’t even do that himself—and he was already entertaining offers for my baby. This wasn’t a conversation of compromise,

nor a reconciliation. These were his terms, and I could take it or leave it. He had all the aces; guaranteed to win.

But he had another thing coming.

Roy reached for wine, knocking over the bottle. “Oops,” I said, righting the bottle. “Clumsy.”

“Yeah.” The word was slow and drawn out. I gave him an up-and-down examination. He didn’t look great. His eyes were glassy and his hands shook as they rubbed his throat. “I’m not feeling—” he started, before sinking out of his chair and collapsing onto the floor.

That’s when the seizures started. Even though I’d expected them, they were terrifying. I’d never been so scared. I couldn’t watch, so I took myself and the bottle of wine to the kitchen to wait.

Sipping my wine, I sent most of the remaining hemlock Roy thought was wild carrot down the garbage disposal. I saved back several sprigs, though, and put them in his foragers bag. When I told the police Roy had done the foraging for the salad, they’d believe he’d picked the hemlock by mistake and poisoned himself on accident. My salad would also have hemlock in it, but my aversion to those foraged salads was on record, so my survival wouldn’t seem suspicious.

Then I made plans to deal with Becki, should she come around to bother me. But you don’t need to know what those are. Suffice to say, Roy’s affair would come out, I’d play the wronged, but grieving widow. I’d keep one hundred percent of my company, and I wouldn’t be moving to Alaska.

When I’d finished two more glasses of wine, I came out to the patio again. Roy was gray and drooly and sweaty with wide, staring eyes. His mouth was tinged blue and his body was still,

so I called 911. The EMTs are annoyingly prompt in our zip code. As expected, they arrived in ten minutes and began resuscitation attempts—but it was too late. He was gone.

As the police left, and the coroner wheeled his body away zipped in a black bag on a gurney, sadness and regret overwhelmed me. When I planned this, I knew I'd need to cry, but these tears were genuine. I'd lost my partner. The love of my life. My companion for over twenty years. The person I thought I knew best, but very clearly didn't. I was so positive I was doing the right thing. Protecting my company and *my life* from someone who was trying to take it all away. I couldn't help but feel wonder—did I go too far?

Am I the Asshole here?