

A BETTER FOREVER by Tracey Cramer-Kelly

EXCERPT

Connor hadn't slept a wink. In twelve years of marriage, Mel had never kicked him out of their bed, and it was a damn cold place to be. All night long, her words had banged around in his head.

She knew. She knew everything.

And she thought he was capable of cheating on her.

Yes, he looked at other women, but that's all it was.

It's still wrong, the small voice in his head said.

By morning he'd resolved to do some serious groveling. And explaining. And he'd give her the attention he should have been giving her all along.

Instead of heading to work at first light, he started the coffee when he heard movement on the upper floor.

Mel looked surprised to see him when she came down, already dressed in a floral blouse and tan slacks, Andie right behind her.

Dad!" Andie jumped into his arms. "What are you doing here?"

"Yeah, why aren't you at work?" Kurt appeared behind her, rubbing his eyes. "Are you sick?"

"I decided to go in a little later than usual." He ruffled Kurt's hair. "I wanted to have breakfast with you guys before you go to school."

"Are you sure you're not sick?" Andie said as she slid into her chair at the table. "You never eat with us. Not even on weekends most of the time."

He winced inwardly. "Well, I am today."

He glanced at Mel, but she wouldn't look at him. Instead, she busied herself making the kids' lunches. Nor did she say anything during the short breakfast of toaster waffles and cereal.

He didn't try to interfere with their usual morning routine—heck, he didn't even know their morning routine—instead staying seated at the kitchen table until the kids were loaded with their lunch boxes and backpacks.

“Kids, get in the car.” Mel gave them a little push toward the door. “I’ll be right there. I need to talk to your father for a moment.”

“Bye, dad!” Andie skipped out the door, Kurt following at a more sedate pace.

Connor waited for the door to close behind them. “Look, Mel, about last night—”

“I did a lot of thinking last night.” She looked down at her sandalled feet, then back up, although her gaze didn’t meet his. “I’m obviously not meeting your needs, Connor, and frankly, you haven’t met mine for a long time.”

Her words held no anger, only resignation. Still, they felt like a punch to the gut. “I know I didn’t handle our conversation very well,” he said. “Why don’t we talk about it after you drop off the kids?”

Her mouth flattened. “It’s a little late to talk. I think it’s best we take some time apart.”