

Chapter 11

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Eventually they dated. Eventually I got over it. Eventually we were all friends again and I told myself the story that I had never really wanted him.

A few months later I met Julian. 1

Julian was besotted.

That was the word everyone used for him. Besotted. Smitten. Wrapped around her finger. Look at the way he looks at her. Look at the gifts. Look at the cars. Look at the way he watches the door when she is out, waiting for her to come back.

I was not head over heels. I knew that, even then. But I loved him. I cared for him. I thought he was my whole world because he kept telling me I was his, and I had no reason to question it. 1

He bought everything I wore. 2

Every shoe. Every bag. Every dress that hung in the closet I never paid for. He chose them. He had taste, and he had opinions, and his opinions were that I should cover up more. That I should stop showing skin. That I dressed too sexily for a married woman. 3

I changed. 4

I told myself it was love. I told myself a married woman who loves her husband adjusts. I told myself the compound full of cars I never asked for and the closet full of clothes he picked and the standing

complaint that I worked too hard at the lab were all evidence of a man who treasured me. 4

He gifted me daily. He told me he could give me anything. He told me I did not need to work. He told me the lab made me tired and a tired wife was no good to anyone, and he said it gently, the way a man says a thing he has decided you are going to agree with eventually. 4

I went to the lab once a week. Then twice a month. Then when I could. 3

Pat understood. Sera understood. Sera, by then, was already pulling away. 2

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We had met first year. Microbiology. The three of us in the same lab section, paired by alphabetical chance.

We had stayed together for so many years.

Helix Research was ours. A small independent lab. We studied the diseases medicine had been ignoring for as long as medicine had been a profession. Endometriosis. Unexplained infertility. The conditions that affected one in ten women and got told for decades that the pain was in their heads, that the empty cradle was something to pray about, that women complaining about their own bodies was an old story and a tired one. 3

We were not famous. We were not rich. We were close to something. We could feel it on the good days, the way you feel weather changing. A biomarker for early-stage endometriosis that could

shave seven years off a diagnosis. The kind of finding that did not save a life in one stroke, but gave a hundred thousand women back a decade. 2

Sera left three months ago. 2

According to what she told us, her husband thought she would do better work alone. Her own space. Her own name on the door. Ford Biosciences. Five times our square footage. Equipment we could not afford to look at. 5

Pat and I were not jealous. We were sad. We told her we were happy for her. 1

I do not think we lied.

But I think now, lying in this bed with my husband's missed calls stacking up and another man's marks on my body, that Sera has been leaving for longer than three months. That she has been leaving since the club. 1

That some women take. And some women do not realize they have been taken from. 2

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I opened my eyes.

The ceiling was the same ceiling. The bed was the same bed. The man whose name was on the deed of this house was the same man. 1

I was not. 1

I had spent more than two years calling control by the name of love. I had let a man dress me, undress my freedom, fold my career into smaller and smaller squares, and I had thanked him for it. I had told other women I was lucky. Sera, smiling across a brunch table, telling me how lucky I was to have a perfect husband like Julian. 3

Sera had known. 2

The bitter laugh that came out of me was small and quiet and did not feel like mine. 1

I closed my eyes again and Dominic was there.

His hand at the back of my neck. His mouth at my ear. The weight of him. The way he had looked at me afterward like I was something he had not finished examining. 1

A ridiculous thought arrived without my permission. 1

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