

Chapter 13

He was at my door.

He had come for me. He had not been able to wait. He was about to walk into this house and put his hands on me right here in the foyer where my husband's framed wedding photo hung on the wall, and I was going to let him.

I opened the door with my heart in my teeth.

A courier.

A man in a uniform holding a clipboard and a long flat box. 

The smile fell off my face. 

"Mrs. Celeste"

"Yes."

"Sign here, please."

I signed.

I looked past him. The driveway. The gate. The street.

Nothing.

No second car. No silhouette in dark glasses. No Dominic. 

I almost laughed at myself.

I took the box back inside and set it on the kitchen island and stared

at the label. 1

'For my game partner.'

I went very still.

For a half second I had thought it was Julian. I had thought he had sent something again. He sent things, especially when he was away. Apology gifts. Guilt gifts. Whatever they had been all along.

This was not that. 1

I opened the box.

There was an envelope on top of folded tissue paper. I lifted the envelope and the tissue parted and underneath it was a dress.

Red. 1

The kind of red that did not exist in my closet anymore.

I lifted it out.

It was heavy in the way only good fabric is heavy. The slit ran up to mid-thigh. The neckline did not pretend to be anything other than what it was. I knew what this dress cost without looking at a tag. Julian had been buying me dresses my whole marriage and I had learned the weight of money in a seam. 6

I stood there holding it.

A small question surfaced.

Where did an ordinary office worker get the money for a dress like

this?

I let the question pass.

I did not want it. I wanted the dress. 

I walked it to the bedroom mirror and held it up against my body. Long red column. Slit up the leg. My collarbones bare. My shoulders bare. A version of me I had not seen in the mirror in a while stood next to a version of me who had been married to Julian for two years, and the two of them did not look like the same woman. 

The phone rang in my hand.

"You did not have to," I said when I picked up.

"I did. I invited you."

"I love it."

"Good."

"But... how did you know my measurements." 

He laughed. Low and unhurried. The laugh of a man who knew exactly what he was about to say.

"My hands have been on every part of your body. Why would I not know your measurements?" 

I felt the heat rise up my neck.

"You know," I said. "When I heard the door just now, I thought you were the surprise."

"Did you?"

"I thought you had come for me. I had already decided I was going to let you have me on the floor of the foyer before I even opened the door."

The line was quiet for a beat. 

"Celeste."

"What?"

"You are making it very hard to sit at this table." 

I bit my lip.

"Good."

"At the party tonight," he said. "I will find a corner. I will find a closet. I will find a wall. And I will slam into you hard enough that you will feel it for days." 

"I will be counting the hours."

"Wear the dress."

He hung up.

I stood in front of the mirror holding the phone and the dress and a heart that was beating loud enough to embarrass me.

I put it on.

Of course I put it on. I had not even taken the tags off and I was

already stepping into it, watching myself in the glass. 1

The slit ran high. The neckline ran low. My shoulders were bare and my collarbones were bare and the long line of my leg was visible all the way up to a place that used to be private property. 1

I turned. I looked over my shoulder. I looked back.

I smiled. 2

A small mean private smile.

If Julian saw me in this, he would lose his mind. 3

I pushed the thought far away from me and focused my mind on the party and what Dominic would do to me there.

I just did not know yet that Julian was also going to be at the party tonight. 15

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