

Chapter 14

CELESTE

The venue was a hotel that did not have a price list. 1

You knew that the second you pulled into the drive. No valet stand with a sign, just a man in a grey suit who took my keys without a word and trusted that a woman in this dress had not stolen the car she arrived in. Dominic had said he wanted me to be his plus one. In the end, he had sent me an invitation card. 1

I had opened the invitation at home. Gold card. Heavy stock. Hosted by Veil Holdings. 2

I had stared at that name for a long time.

Veil Holdings was the biggest company in the country. The richest. The one everyone wanted in a room with and almost no one got. The kind of company my husband, with all his status and all his careful social climbing, might have qualified to stand near at an event like this.

But Dominic.

How did an ordinary office worker get an invitation to a Veil Holdings party? How did he get a second one to hand to me? 3

Was he working it? Was he staff? Was he somewhere in the management, far enough up to be handed two invitations and stupid enough to spend one on me?

I had not been able to answer it at home and I could not answer it

now.

The invitation said I could bring a guest. Dominic did not need to be my plus one either. He had his own. The only other person I could have brought was Pat, and I could not bring Pat, because bringing Pat meant explaining Dominic, and I was not ready to explain Dominic to anyone. 2

So I came alone. 1

I showed the gold card to the security at the door. Two men, neither of them smiling, both of them built like they had been hired to say no. 1

They looked at the card. They looked at me.

They let me through. 1

I had not felt beautiful in a long time.

Not like this. Not on purpose.

I had spent two years dressing for a man who told me what beautiful was allowed to look like, and beautiful was always something with a higher neckline and a longer hem and less of me showing through it. 3

Tonight I had done my own face. Glassy eyes. A red on my mouth that matched the dress. Diamond drops at my ears that caught the light when I turned my head. A small silver clutch and silver heels I absolutely did not need, strapped up the ankle, the kind of shoe that made a woman walk slower because she knew she was being watched.

I stepped into the hall and I turned heads.

I felt them turn. I did not look. That was the trick Julian had trained out of me and the resort had trained back in. You do not look. You let them. 2

My eyes moved across the room for one face.

Dominic.

I did not find him.

I told myself he was working it after all. I told myself I would find out. I took out my phone to call him. He had apologized that morning for not picking me up. He had promised we would meet here. 4

My thumb was on his name. 2

And then I saw two people I knew.

My husband.

And perched on his arm like a fly that had found something to land on, my so called best friend. 3

Sera.

I did not feel my thumb move. 1

I found out later that it had.

"Hello. Celeste. Hello."

I did not answer it.

I was looking at Julian.

I had told myself I was past this. I had lain in that resort bed and decided I was numb, that the betrayal could not reach me anymore, that I was a player now and not a victim, and I had believed it. 

And then there he was, in the open, in a room full of people, with her hand on his arm, and something in my chest reached up and squeezed anyway. 