

Chapter 15

It was not the love. The love was gone. I had checked.

It was the disrespect.

Weren't they supposed to be on their trip? Weren't they supposed to be at the resort, the one with the balcony, the one Julian had video called me from with that careful tender face? How many of these had there been? How many parties? How many nights he told me he was closing a deal in another city while he was forty minutes away with his hand on the small of her back? 1

They had been so sure. That was the part that burned. They had been so certain that Celeste and her ordinary little life would never end up in a room like this that they had stopped being careful. They walked in together. Openly. Like a couple. 4

And the worst of it, the part that made my jaw tighten, was the dress. 1

Sera was in black. Cut low. Slit high. Bare down the back to the base of her spine. She looked incredible and indecent and Julian did not say one word about it. He stood there with her hanging off him, comfortable, proud, smiling at someone across the room. 4

If it had been me in that dress, I would have heard about it in the car. I would have heard about how it made me look. How it made him look. He would have said it gently, the way he said everything, with a hand on my cheek and a sad little smile, and by the time we got home I would have changed and thanked him for caring. 1

Immoral. Indecent. Not for a woman of your standing, Celeste. 1

Double standards in a tuxedo. 2

And they had the perfect cover. That was the genius of it. Sera's whole social media was Celeste. My sister. My soulmate. My best friend since



college. Pictures of us at brunch, at the lab, at my wedding. Some of the people in this room thought Seraphine Ford and Celeste were practically sisters. So if anyone saw Julian and Sera together tonight, they would think nothing. The dutiful husband. The loyal best friend. Keeping each other company while poor Celeste was at home. 6

They had built a wall out of my own friendship and stood behind it to do this to me. 3

I was going to be sick or I was going to laugh.

I did neither. 1

A voice cut across the hall and the room turned.

A man had stepped up to the podium.

Grey suit. Easy in front of a crowd. The kind of man hired to warm a room before the important person spoke.

I peeled my eyes off Julian and Sera, who still had not seen me, and made myself look at the stage.

He talked about Veil Holdings. The numbers. The reach. The list of things the company had built that I half recognized from headlines I never read closely. The applause came on cue and he rode it. 4

Then he said the company had become what it was because of one man.

A chairman who had taken the reins as a teenager, he said. Who had built an empire before most men his age had finished deciding what to do with their lives. 2

The whispering started. 2

Because nobody knew who the chairman of Veil Holdings was.



I had heard this before, the way you hear a piece of trivia and file it. The Veil chairman never appeared. Never photographed. Never interviewed. A name on documents and nothing else. There were theories. There were jokes. People in this very room, people who ran their own companies, had spent years trying to get a meeting with a man none of them had ever seen. 2

I looked down at my phone. 2

I had called Dominic. He had picked up. I had said nothing into his ear while I stared at my husband.

I cursed under my breath and started to type an apology.

And the man on the podium raised his voice. 1

"It is my great honor," he said, "to invite to this stage, for the first time in public, the chairman of Veil Holdings. Please. Give it up for Chairman Dominic Ford." 15



Comments



Support



Share