

Two Can Play

Chapter 3

CELESTE Dominic didn't take me home. I didn't argue. I couldn't. The rain was coming down so hard it was impossible to see three feet in front of you, and I was soaking wet and shaking so badly I could barely hold myself upright. He spoke quietly to one of the resort staff, handed over a card, and within minutes we were being led to a suite in the West Wing. The suite was warm and expensive and too beautiful for the kind of night I was having. I walked straight to the couch, sat down, and stayed there. I didn't take off my wet clothes. I didn't move. I just sat there and stared at the wall while the rain hammered the windows and something inside me kept breaking over and over in the same place. Dominic moved around quietly. I heard him adjusting the heater. Heard the clink of mugs in the kitchenette. He didn't talk and I was grateful for that because I had nothing to say. He set a mug of coffee on the table in front of me. I stared at it. "Drink it," he said. Not unkindly. I picked it up with both hands because one hand wasn't steady enough. The warmth seeped into my palms and I held onto it like it was the only solid thing left in the world. I cried quietly for a long time. Not the loud, dramatic kind. Just tears that kept coming no matter how many times I wiped them away. The kind of crying that doesn't ask permission and doesn't stop when you want it to. Dominic sat beside me. Not too close. Just present. At some point I started shivering again, even with the heater on. My clothes were still damp and the cold had settled into my bones somewhere between the garden and this suite and refused to leave. "Come here," Dominic said. It wasn't a question. But it wasn't forceful either. Just calm and certain the way everything he said seemed to be. I leaned into him without thinking about it and his arm came around me and pulled me close. He was warm, solid, and smelled like rain and something clean underneath it. I cried a little more. He didn't tell me to stop. He didn't tell me it was going to be okay. He just held me and let me fall apart and somehow that was exactly what I needed. I don't remember falling asleep. --- Morning came grey and quiet. I opened my eyes slowly and the first thing I registered was that I was alone on the couch, a blanket tucked around me that hadn't been there last night. The heater was still running. The rain had slowed to a steady drizzle against the windows. I sat up and looked around. No Dominic. He must have gone back home. I remembered falling asleep against his shoulder. Remembered the warmth of his arm around me and the steady rise and fall of his chest. I pushed the memory away quickly and reached for my phone. I would call a cab. Get home. Figure out what came next. I was still staring at the screen trying to make my brain work when the suite door opened and Dominic walked in carrying two bags. I stared at him. He set the bags on the counter without making a big deal of it. "There's a pharmacy and a small shop about ten minutes from here. Go freshen up. I've ordered breakfast. I'll drive you home after I shower." I opened my mouth. Closed it. "You didn't have to do that." "I know." He said it simply, without looking for gratitude, and something about that made my throat tighten in a way I wasn't ready for. "Thank you," I managed. He nodded toward the bags. "Go ahead." ___ The toiletries were exactly what I needed. I stood under the hot shower for a long time and let the water run over me and tried very hard not to think about

anything at all. I failed completely. Julian's face kept coming back to me. The way he had looked at Sera. The way he had reached for her like she was his and had always been his. The way he had laughed while I stood in the rain, about twenty feet away and watched everything I thought I had turn to nothing. I pressed my forehead against the cold tile and breathed through it. When I finally got out, I reached for the clothes Dominic had bought. I held them up and blinked. The shorts were tiny. The top was fitted and small across the chest. I tried both on and looked down at myself and almost laughed, which surprised me because I hadn't thought I had any laughter left in me. My legs went on forever. The shorts barely covered my thighs and the top sat snug in ways it clearly wasn't designed to sit on my frame. I walked out anyway. I was going straight home. It didn't matter. Dominic was at the counter pouring water when I came out. He turned and his eyes moved over me once, quickly, the way you do when you're trying not to be obvious about it. He looked away. "They were the only options available," he said, his voice perfectly even. "It's fine," I said. "I'm going home anyway." A dry look crossed his face, almost amused but not quite. "I bought them based on Sera's size." The name landed between us like a stone dropping into still water. We both felt it. "Of course you did," I said quietly. He cleared his throat and gestured toward the table where breakfast was laid out. "Eat. I already had mine. I'll be quick." He disappeared into the bedroom and I sat down at the table. --- I pushed the food around my plate more than I ate it. My mind kept dragging me back to the resort garden. Julian's hands. Sera's laugh. The rain. The way she had leaned against that tree like she owned the world and everything in it, including my husband. I put my fork down and stared at the window. They were still there right now. In this same resort. Two wings away. Warm and together and completely unbothered while I sat here in borrowed clothes that were two sizes too small trying to figure out how to breathe. The bedroom door opened. I turned and immediately wished I hadn't. Dominic walked out in nothing but a white towel slung low around his waist. He had clearly forgotten his shirt. He crossed toward the couch where it was draped over the armrest, completely unselfconscious, water still on his skin from the shower. I had not planned to look. I looked. Eight. I counted without meaning to. Eight defined ridges of muscle across his abdomen, the kind that didn't come from a gym membership but from actual discipline. His shoulders were broad and his chest was the kind of chest that made you understand immediately why a woman would make terrible decisions. A thought moved through my mind before I could stop it. Seraphine Ford, what on earth is wrong with you? This man was standing in your home every day and you went looking elsewhere. Dominic picked up his shirt and turned to head back to the bedroom and I looked away quickly, picking up my fork again and pretending to be very interested in my eggs. "Seraphine," I said before I could think better of it. He stopped. I kept my eyes on my plate. "What do you think they're doing right now?" There was a short silence. Then I heard him move, and when I looked up he was leaning against the doorframe, shirt still in his hand, watching me with an unreadable expression. "Probably keeping each other warm," he said. "Seeing as the weather is still miserable." I nodded slowly. "We were good to them." "Yes." "We were really good to them." My voice came out steadier than I expected. "And they did this to us anyway." He let out a long breath. "I know." We looked at each other across the room for a moment. Outside the window the rain continued its slow, grey persistence. I forced a short laugh and looked away. "Maybe we should just cheat on them too." Silence passed between us. I could feel him looking at me. I kept my eyes on the window. "You're joking," he said. I turned and met his eyes. "Am I?" He studied me for a long moment. Something

shifted in his expression. Not surprise exactly. More like he was turning the idea over carefully, looking at it from every angle. "What if we did?" he said quietly.