

Chapter 5

DOMINIC

I was not a man who cared much for love. But loyalty. Loyalty I cared about. 5

I had come from a world where a man could be smiling at you one minute and slipping a knife between your ribs the next. My father had learned that the hard way. I had learned it watching him. 1

So I trusted no one. I moved carefully. I kept my circle small and my mouth shut. 2

And somehow, Seraphine had slipped through all of it.

To flush out the men who had wanted my father dead, I had to disappear in plain sight. Live small. Live quiet. Be the kind of man no one watched twice. The easiest way to do that was to get married. A wife. A boring job. A boring life. No one suspects a boring man. 3

Almost three years ago, I walked into a bar. 5

I saw her first. 4

Three women at a table, laughing about something I could not hear. One of them caught my eye. Soft features. Quiet smile. The kind of woman who looked like she did not know what she did to a room. 1

Celeste. 10

She had whispered something to her friend and they had all giggled. I knew they were talking about me. I had been about to walk over. 6

Then Seraphine cut across the floor. 2

Bold smile. Eyes that knew what they were doing. By the time she was done introducing herself, Celeste was gone from the bar. And from my mind. 6

I went home with Seraphine that night. She fit the role I needed. Loud enough to be seen, shallow enough to not ask questions, beautiful enough that no one wondered why I had picked her. I asked her out. I erased the other woman from my memory. 4

I made my choice. 3

Six months in, Seraphine could not stop talking about her best friend Celeste's wedding. Some millionaire named Julian. A real catch. A big deal. 4

Seraphine wanted that life. She told me so. Often. 1

I told her to give me three years.

Apparently, she did not love me enough to wait quietly. Sometimes she complained. She sulked. She made scenes. But she stayed. And I appreciated her for that. 2

We got married almost two years later.

Nine months into the marriage, I found out she was sleeping with Julian. 6

Three months ago. 3

I had been so sure she was loyal. That was the joke of it. I had built my whole calculation on the fact that Seraphine, for all her faults, would not betray me. She was too lazy. Too comfortable. Too in love with the future



I had promised her. 5

I had been wrong. 1

Once I knew, I started seeing all the rest of it. The old absences. The cold nights. The way she had started flinching from my hands months before I noticed. Excuses to skip touch. And when she did finally let me have her, she acted like she was doing me a favor. 8

After I found out, I stopped trying to touch her. She seemed relieved. She did not reach for me either. 2

Then I started watching.

Her mother knew. Her brother knew. When Sera said she was visiting one of them, and I called to check, they covered for her without missing a beat. Julian was spending money on her, and she was spending it on them. Designer bags for her mother. A new watch for her brother. The whole family was in on it. 12

The whole family was the same. 1

I started keeping evidence. Quietly. Carefully. 1

I had planned to hand her the divorce papers today. No matter where she was. No matter who she was with. 2

Two days ago I changed the plan.

Because Sera kept going to Celeste's house. Smiling in Celeste's kitchen. Hugging her. Calling her sister. And then fucking Celeste's husband in Celeste's own bed. 4

Celeste did not know.



The world thought Julian was a saint. Pictures of him bringing her flowers. Pictures of him kissing her forehead. The internet called her the luckiest woman alive. 

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