

LEONORA TARANTINO

She was here.

My mother-in-law was already here.

I swallowed nervously as I parked my car right beside hers, quickly heading for the backdoor where I could easily sneak into my room for a quick shower and a change of clothes before I had to meet her.

If, by now, you haven't gured it out, well, let me tell you.

Leonora Tarantino did not like me.

Don't get me wrong, she was civil and all of that, but her words were always carefully veiled, mostly hinting at the fact that I had come from nothing... that my success today would not have been possible without their inuence and what not.

She was cold and calculating, and really not what I needed in this state of mind that I was in, but I was still determined to play the role of the perfect host, the perfect daughter-in-law.

Already, I was failing.

My shower was very quick, the hot water exactly what I needed to soothe my anxious nerves.

I won't lie, being back in my marital home did not feel great.

With what I knew now about my husband and best friend, every single picture, every gift, it all reminded me just how much of a sham all of this had been, but now was not the time to dwell on that.

I rushed out of the bathroom, toweling myself dry as I entered the walk-in closet to pick out an outt.

I chose an elegant but conservative number, a light blue knee-length pencil skirt and a black cardigan-like blouse that was guaranteed to earn me some points with Leonora, at least in the appreciation of looks department.

The click-clack of my heels on the marble oor seemed too loud as I descended the grand staircase, and I caught sight of Leonora waiting in the sitting room, her disapproval already showing from the way a perfectly plucked eyebrow was raised.

Her posture was almost regal, a clear indication of someone who knew she was from old money and acted like it. I closed the rest of the distance between us, and as our eyes met, she acknowledged me with a curt nod, one which I reciprocated with a tight-lipped smile.

"Penelope," she greeted, her tone neutral.

"Leonora," I replied, matching her tone as I sat down, "It's nice to have you visiting us."

"You're late," She said disapprovingly. "And you look like a whale in that skirt."

I ignored the second comment, choosing to focus on the rst one instead. "I apologize for my lateness, Leonora, I had to attend to a couple of work issues," I lied calmly, the silence that followed after so palpable that I almost let out a sigh of relief when one of the house staff brought in coffee. I knew she wanted some reaction from me, but I was not going to give her that satisfaction.

"I really can't believe that Fabian still makes you work." She scowled, "We Tarantino women are supposed to support our husbands, Penny, to master the art of house and familial management... you fail so horribly in this regard, girl... but I guess the blame is not really on you, because you're not one of us and you will never be any way."

I shook my head, showing her my ring, "I am married to your son, which makes me one of you too, Leonora." I said, surprised at just how calm I was, even though I did not really believe my words despite my pretense.

"Well, let's see how long this will last then shall we? I must say, I'm surprised you've done three years with him, but I can see an epilogue to this fairy tale you're living with my son approaching really soon,"

For the rst time since I'd known her, she didn't bother to conceal her hatred, "And when all of this is done, you will return to the slums where you belong and you'll be out of our lives for good."

She stood up, "Tell Fabian I was here." And I watched her walk out of the house, wondering why I allowed myself to be walked all over like so.

Was the concept of family that precious to me that I'd submit myself to such degrading treatment just so I could feel like I belonged?

At least it still wasn't that bad.

Fabian's father, Enzo Tarantino adored me to bits.

He and Fabian normally shielded me from Leonora's dislike, but with Fabian barely unrecognizable in my eyes, I wondered what that was going to be like now.

I stood up and headed back to my room with a heavy heart, still stunned by Leonora's rather blatant display of disdain.

I won't lie, it shook me up a little bit, and it made me wonder how she'd react if she heard what Kira and Fabian had done.

There was no denying that she'd take her son's side, of course... throw me out into the streets where she claimed I belonged, but that was just the thing; I started at Alu-Steele Trust and Co from the ground as a mere intern, and I had built myself up... it had all been me and my hard work and staunch determination, and I was already in quite good standing when I met Fabian and we got engaged to be married not long after.

Of course, I wasn't denying that being associated with their family had come with some perks. I was just saying that I wouldn't be as miserable as she thought I'd be without them.

I thought I'd fall into a deep sleep, or at least any sleep of any kind, but I was restless.

I don't know why, but I had this weird feeling of uneasiness coursing through me, and it worsened considerably when my gaze itted to the Luxury Marble Wall Clock from Caveman Watches.

Fabian should have been home by now, if nothing at all, at least for a change of clothes, right?

Also, wasn't he the one who had promised me a fancy trip to celebrate my promotion?

I sat upright in the bed, hating the uncertainty that threatened to claw at my chest.

I had thought that once Fabian realized he had been found out, he'd turn over a repentant leaf or at least pretend to, so why wasn't he here yet?

Was he still at Kira's?

The mere thought of my best friend sent a surge of heat coursing through my veins, my heart rate picking up as anger and betrayal lled me and right there it just dawned on me, that while I could try to forgive my husband for his indiscretion, it would take quite a while for me to forgive Kira, that is if I was even going to forgive her at all.

But if Fabian was still with her, after everything that had happened last night, then there really was no going back or working through this like I had initially thought.

After a moment, I couldn't take it anymore, I had to see for myself, and so, grabbing my car keys, I headed out of the huge, quiet mansion and towards my car.

I was going to nd my husband.

The rst place I went to was his oce.

I couldn't bring myself to go back to Kira's apartment just yet and so soon.

The fates must have felt my plight, for the drive to his oce was a breeze, and when I got to the huge Tarantino Conglomerate and made my way to the lobby, the receptionist smiled at me warmly and told me he was in.

I don't know if it was my own paranoia or if it was real, but everywhere I passed, I couldn't help but notice looks of pity from the employees, but I tried to ignore all of that, completely focused on nding my husband.

Just as I got to his personal assistant's desk, he came out of his oce, that boyish smirk I had fallen in love with instantly making its way onto his face as soon as he saw me.

He had been expecting me, it seemed.

"What are you doing here, my love?" He approached me, wrapping his arms around me in a hug.

Before I could utter a word, his lips found mine, and he kissed me, the simple act of love almost making me forget about everything that had happened in the past few hours.

Almost.

Nevertheless, I melted into the kiss, my heart surprisingly warm.

Maybe we could get past this after all.

Fabian pulled away nally, dragging me to his oce without a spare of a glance at his assistant.

I couldn't help but notice how uncomfortably tight his grip around my arm was, and all my subtle efforts to get out of it proved futile, and so I just bore with the pain until we nally made it into his oce.

Fabian bolted the door shut, the loving mask he had on earlier slipping off with the action.

"Can't you take a f*****g hint? I am done with you, Penny... done!" He yelled in my face.

No one was going to hear a word thanks to his soundproof walls, and so he really went off.

"At this point, we're just going to pretend to be the poster-perfect couple we have always been. You were the one who ruined it with your over-curiosity after all, being in places you shouldn't." His voice lowered an octave, a strange calm washing over him as he stared at me, a resigned look in his eyes, "Unfortunately, I just can't go back to the way things were, and it's all your fault."

Well, so much for hoping.

His words were a painful punch in the gut, and I don't know, but this time, something in me just snapped. "You know what?" I hissed, "f**k. You."

Tears welled up in my eyes, and I angrily blinked them away, "You're done with me? Fine... I say good riddance anyway, because after all these years of me loving and caring for you, you go behind me and f**k my best friend, and somehow, I'd been stupid and naive enough to want to continue living in this sham of a paradise with you, so if you're done with me, be done in every sense of the word, because I sure as hell want nothing to do with you, much less talk about being your poster wife." I yelled passionately in his face, screaming out my frustration the right way I should have yesterday.

He breathed heavily as he stared at me, a look that was akin to fear in his eyes as he whispered the words, "What do you mean, Penny?"

I looked up at him, my eyes reecting how dead I was inside, "If you're done with me like you claim, let's nalize it then. Divorce me."