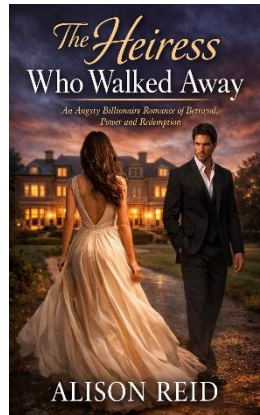


The Heiress Who Walked Away

by Alison Reid



This was it.

Everett knew it before he opened the door.

He felt it in the way his instincts had sharpened over the last few seconds. In the quiet unease that had been building ever since he'd stepped into the corridor. His hand closed around the handle. Then paused. Just briefly. Something wasn't right. He couldn't have explained why. Only that the feeling had become impossible to ignore.

"This is his office."

His voice remained calm. Controlled. Exactly as it should be. He opened the door. And knew immediately. Not from what he saw. From what he heard. A soft laugh. A murmur. The unmistakable intimacy of two people who believed they were alone.

Wrong. Everything about it felt wrong.

"Fuck, you feel good, baby."

Shelton.

Everett's instincts snapped into place, every sense sharpening with cold, surgical clarity.

He stepped inside. And saw. Clothes strewn across the floor. Careless. Discarded.

On the sofa—Shelton, sprawled on his back. His secretary straddling him, bodies moving together in a frantic, unapologetic rhythm. His hands cupping her bare breasts, claiming, as if the world beyond that room didn't exist.

There was no room for misunderstanding. No room for denial. No room for explanation. It wasn't subtle. It wasn't hidden. It wasn't even hurried. It was careless. Brazen. As if the risk didn't matter. As if nothing did.

Time didn't slow. It sharpened.

He didn't look away. Didn't react. Didn't speak. Because he didn't need to. The reality was already there—laid out, undeniable, ugly in its simplicity.

Shelton froze first.

Recognition hit his face instantly.

Followed by irritation.

As though his greatest inconvenience was being interrupted. Not being caught.

Beside Everett, silence. A profound, devastating silence. He didn't need to look at Elise to know what she had seen. What she now understood. He could feel it. The sudden collapse of something invisible but vital. Trust. Hope.

Whatever she had walked into this office carrying. It was gone. Slowly, Everett turned. And that was worse. Far worse. She wasn't crying. Wasn't shouting. Wasn't demanding answers. She simply stood there. Perfectly still. As though every emotion had been stripped away, leaving only clarity behind.

A terrible kind of clarity. The kind that changed everything. For a moment, their eyes met. And Everett saw it. Not shock. Not even heartbreak. Acceptance. The instant someone stops questioning what they're seeing and starts understanding what it means.

The finality of it landed like a blow. Then she turned. No confrontation. No accusations. No scene. She simply walked away.

“Elise, wait—”

The desperation in Shelton’s voice arrived too late. Much too late. Everett stepped sideways, blocking the doorway. A small movement. Enough.

“Don’t.”

The single word fell between them. Quiet, controlled and absolute.

Shelton stopped. Because he understood immediately. This was no longer a situation he could manage. No explanation would fix it. No excuse would erase it. No charm would undo what had just happened.

Everett didn’t look back. The secretary didn’t matter. Shelton didn’t matter. Only Elise mattered. The woman who had just watched her marriage fracture in front of her.

A familiar coldness settled beneath his composure. One he hadn’t felt in years. Because he had seen this before. Different people. Different room. The same wound. The same damage. His mother standing in a doorway. His father’s excuses. The slow destruction of trust. The memory flashed through him and was gone.

Everett stepped into the corridor.

His gaze found Elise immediately. Halfway down the hall. Moving quickly now. Not running. Not falling apart. Just leaving. Holding herself together through sheer force of will.

Something tightened in Everett's chest. No one should have to do that. Not alone. And in that moment, he didn't stop to consider whether it was his place. He didn't hesitate. He followed.

Everett caught up to Elise before she reached the elevators. He touched her elbow lightly. She looked up, clearly expecting Gregory. For a fraction of a second, alarm flashed across her face. Then she realised it wasn't him.

The tension left her immediately. Not completely. But enough. Enough for him to see how afraid she had been of turning around and finding her husband behind her. Something cold settled beneath Everett's composure.

“You can't leave like this,” Everett said. “You need to sit down.”

“I—”

She stopped, finally noticing the tremor in her hands. A faint crease appeared between her brows.

“Okay.”

He guided her into the elevator. Neither spoke during the descent. When the doors opened, he led her toward his office. They were almost there when—

“Elise. Wait.”

Gregory's voice echoed down the corridor. Breathless. Urgent. The sound of approaching footsteps followed. Elise didn't turn. Didn't slow.

“Just let me explain—”

Everett stepped into Gregory's path. Calm. Unhurried. Final.

“Not now.”

Gregory stopped short. Frustration flashed across his face.

“This doesn't concern you.”

“It does now.”

The response was quiet. Certain. A tense silence stretched between them. Behind Everett, Elise disappeared into his office. Each step measured. Controlled. As though stopping might shatter whatever composure she had left.

“Move.”

Gregory shifted as if to go around him. Everett didn't move.

"I said not now."

The words weren't louder. They didn't need to be. Gregory halted.

"You don't get to chase her down a hallway after what we just saw," Everett continued. "Whatever you're planning to say can wait."

"She's my wife."

The anger surfaced then. Sharp. Defensive.

"Stay out of it."

Something colder settled into Everett's expression.

"She is your wife."

A brief pause.

"You might have remembered that ten minutes ago."

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