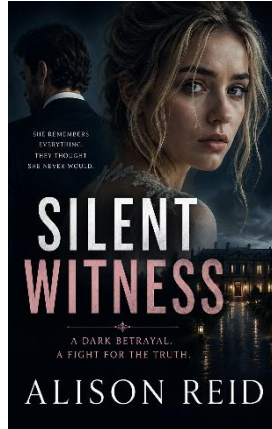


Silent Witness

by Alison Reid



Spencer didn't mean to keep watching them.

He really didn't.

There were over a hundred guests in the ballroom. Important guests. Clients. Politicians. Business leaders. People who required his attention. Yet somehow his gaze kept returning to the same corner of the room.

Daniel and Tiffany. At first he'd told himself he was imagining things. Tiffany was naturally flirtatious. Daniel was naturally charming. The combination was bound to look more intimate than it actually was. But as the evening wore on, Spencer found it increasingly difficult to dismiss.

Daniel was drinking far more than usual. Every time Spencer looked up there seemed to be another glass in his hand. Champagne. Whiskey. More champagne. The man appeared determined to stay pleasantly intoxicated. And Tiffany seemed happy to encourage it.

She laughed at everything he said. Even comments that weren't remotely amusing. She stood closer than necessary. Touched his arm when she spoke. Leaned in when he answered. Subtle things. Small things. The sort of behaviour most people wouldn't notice.

Spencer noticed. Because Phoebe deserved better.

His jaw tightened as he watched Tiffany place a hand on Daniel's shoulder while laughing at one of his stories. Daniel smiled back. Not pulling away. Not encouraging her exactly. But not discouraging her either.

Across the ballroom Phoebe was helping one of the event planners resolve a seating issue. Completely unaware. Trusting. As always.

The familiar protective anger stirred inside him. Not because Daniel belonged to Phoebe. That wasn't the issue. The issue was respect. And whatever was happening over there felt dangerously close to disrespect.

"You look annoyed."

Henry appeared beside him holding a glass of sparkling water. Spencer didn't bother pretending ignorance.

"Am I that obvious?"

"Only to people who know you."

Henry followed his gaze. His expression darkened immediately.

"Ah."

"So, you've noticed."

Henry gave a humourless laugh.

"I noticed an hour ago."

The two men watched in silence. Daniel had somehow acquired another drink. Spencer had lost count after six. Tiffany said something. Daniel threw back his head and laughed. Then she touched his tie. Actually, touched it. Adjusting it as though she had every right. Spencer felt his temper spike.

"What the hell is she doing?"

Henry's eyes narrowed.

"Fishing."

"You think it's intentional?"

Henry looked at him as though he'd asked whether the sky was blue.

"I think Tiffany Hart knows exactly what she's doing."

Spencer couldn't argue with that. The troubling part was Daniel. A decent husband would have created distance. A decent husband would have remembered who was standing across the room.

Phoebe. The woman who adored him. Instead, Daniel seemed increasingly comfortable with Tiffany's attention. The alcohol wasn't helping. Neither was Tiffany's determination to keep herself at the centre of it.

Spencer glanced toward Phoebe. She was smiling as she spoke with several guests. Beautiful. Kind. Completely oblivious. His chest tightened.

Five years ago, he would have given almost anything for the chance Daniel had been handed. And watching that man take it for granted irritated him more than it should.

"Should we say something?" Spencer asked.

Henry snorted.

"And say what?"

Spencer grimaced.

Exactly. Nothing happening was inappropriate enough to confront. Not yet. It was all hidden beneath layers of plausible deniability. Friendly conversation. Harmless laughter. A little too much alcohol. A little too much attention. Nothing more.

But something about it felt wrong.

Henry sighed.

"Let's hope we're both imagining things."

Spencer wasn't convinced.

Across the ballroom Daniel accepted yet another drink. Tiffany smiled up at him. And for the briefest moment, Spencer caught something in her

expression. Triumph. It vanished so quickly he almost questioned whether he'd seen it at all. Almost.

His gaze immediately shifted toward Phoebe. Still smiling. Still trusting. Still believing the people she loved would never hurt her. The sight made his stomach knot. Because if Spencer had learned anything over the years, it was this:

The people most likely to hurt you were usually the ones standing closest.

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