

# Chapter 15 - Green dress lady

Friday 1st of May 2015

Azzurro. Early evening. The light went gold across the sea.

Maria hadn't arrived yet.

Boris sat alone on the marble terrace, legs crossed, one arm draped on the chair. His phone lay face-down beside a folder of printouts. A breeze caught the edges.

Below, a waiter emerged from the arched corridor, silver tray steady. Crisp uniform. Shoes silent.

"Compliments of the guest," he said, placing a single flute on the low table.

Boris raised an eyebrow. "Which guest?"

The waiter only smiled and disappeared.

He glanced toward the stairwell. No sign of Maria. Probably delayed again. She hated being late. Unless she wasn't sure she was coming.

A message blinked on his phone.

From Maria "Just finishing a call with California. Need to close summer The Camp logistics. 2 more mins."

He picked up the glass.

The prosecco caught the light. Fine bubbles rising like secrets. Cold on his fingertips.

He lifted it slowly. Sipped once. A quiet toast to something that might still be possible.

*"Maria finally trusts me,"* he thought. *"Maybe we're winning again."*

The glass lingered at his lips. A pulse tapped under his eye.

He blinked.

One breath too long.

One beat off.

It was nothing - just the heat, maybe. The terrace tiles were still warm from the sun. He leaned back, letting the sea breeze cool his temples.

Then he saw her.

Through the tall glass doors, across the inner lawn.

Laughing with someone - a tall man in a dark suit. She touched his arm lightly as they stepped onto the grass. He was slightly limping on his right foot, but Boris' attention went elsewhere.

Same green dress.

No mistaking it. Not similar. The same one.

The silk caught the wind. Her hair was up. Her heels delicate on the stone.

Boris froze mid-sip. His throat didn't move.

The glass trembled in his hand.

"No..." he muttered.

She didn't look at him.

Or she did - and chose not to see him.

That was worse.

The flute tipped sideways, gently. A droplet ran down his wrist.

She walked on, past the columns, past the olive trees. Careless elegance. That same posture from Agrigento. Detached. Being in the centre of attention. Being out of place.

He was back there in a blink.

Flash.

Agrigento Temples, a year ago. Sunlight breaking through the ruins.  
 The green dress appearing between ancient columns.  
 Maria whispering: "She doesn't belong here."  
 His own words: "Tourist? Actress?"  
 And now -  
 She wasn't watching the temples.  
 She was watching them.  
 His breath caught.  
 He set the glass down. Slowly. Carefully. As if it might explode.  
 Too late.  
 Memory crashed.  
 Was she always the handler?  
 Was Maria the target?  
 His chest tightened.  
 He tried to stand.  
 The chair scraped. His vision lurched sideways. The sky dimmed at the edges.  
 He smelled the prosecco again. Something off. Too sweet. Too sharp.  
 "Am I drugged?," the thought hit, sudden and cold. "Am I poisoned?"  
 Prosecco slipped from the table - glass shattering against the marble in a fine, high  
 chime.  
 He staggered back. Legs failed. A hand against the pillar. No strength.  
 The dress. The laugh. Her fingers on someone else's arm. The smile that didn't reach  
 her eyes.  
 "She was there..." he whispered. "From the beginning."  
 His pulse thundered.  
 Not just Dublin. Not just London.  
 From the ruins. From Agrigento. From the moment he brought Maria back to Sicily.  
 A sharp sound in his ears. Like pressure folding.  
 A woman's laugh rang out - close. Too close.  
 He turned with his vision blurring heavily.  
 A figure in green spun gently. Laughing. The sound carried like a memory.  
 Beside her - a man in black.  
 The angle, the blur - something in the jawline, the way he stood. Boris squinted.  
 His gut dropped. "That profile - Franco. He'd seen him in court footage. From  
 Marseille. Was it him?"  
 A man's voice drifted over the terrace. "Beautiful evening for a reunion."  
 The green dress caught the wind again. The laugh curved through the air.  
 His mouth moved before thought could catch it. "Marina."  
 Then -  
 Collapse.  
 And the laughter kept going.

