

The Last Word

“I want...”

The words stick, like a seldom-used garden gate. I cough the rust from my throat, and try again. “I want a divorce.” I speak softly, aware that others are standing a few feet away. I can tell they are curious, their desire for gossip-worthy information outweighing my need for privacy.

“I know you left first. But you were gone before I could tell you, so I’m telling you now.” I reach out to straighten his silk tie, but curl my fingers back. The time for that is past. There’s no response, but I don’t expect one.

Staring at the muted gray and burgundy wallpaper behind him, I consider my words. This may be my last opportunity to tell him. He deserves to know. Or maybe, I just deserve the chance to tell him.

I had a speech prepared. A detailed list of his sins and my virtues. But facing him now, I can’t remember a single word.

“You didn’t make me happy,” I finally say. “I’ve been a good wife. I ran your errands and made your appointments. I sent your mother birthday cards. I know your favorite team, how you like your steak cooked. I’ve heard your same stories a hundred times and still laugh at the right places.”

Behind me, someone has eased closer. I glare over my shoulder and they step away.

“You never even bought me a Valentine,” I whisper.

My hands tremble, but I continue. “I realized when you left. When the first thing I felt...”
Tears threaten to choke me, but I manage to swallow them back. “The first thing I felt was a sense of relief.”

The words hang between us. Not just today’s, but all the words that were never uttered.

I’m aware of bodies moving closer again, whether from impatience or curiosity, I’m not sure. My time with him is over. I need to move on.

I decide to straighten his tie after all. Smoothing the red silk, I step back. “I felt relief and that’s just wrong,” I say. “So I needed to tell you.”

And with one last brush of my fingertips across his coffin, I turn and walk away.