

The Devil's Fire by Mariam El-Hafi Chapter 1

Althaia

I looked in the mirror; giving a nod to myself as I was pleased with how I looked. I was wearing a long black backless silk dress with thin straps, the front was a deep v-plunge neckline that showed quite a bit of my cleavage. The dress was tight from the top and got a little loose from the hips as there was a long split on the right side, stopping mid-thigh. I finished the look with a pair of open-toe black stilettos with straps around the ankle. I did a simple brown smokey eye which

complimented my green eyes and had them look a bit cat-like. I decided to let my long curly and heavy brown hair be as it was, but with a rhinestone leaf design clip to lift some of the hair away from my face on the right side.

I kept fiddling with my hands before I forced them to keep still as I took a deep breath. Nervousness was filling my body.

“Get it together. What’s the worst that can happen?” I asked myself, building up the courage to leave my hotel room. The worst that could happen was my father being angry at me for showing up and throwing me out.... My eyes widened and my face paled. I hadn’t actually thought that was a possibility until now.

I quickly shoved that thought away. I was here for Cara, not him, and there was no way I would let that stop me from attending her engagement party. I have always been close to Cara as we basically grew up together in the same household since both of our fathers were running a business, together. Long story short, I found out my father and Uncle were running a mafia, and since they would always be busy doing

whatever they were doing, Cara spent most of the time with me and my mother. Sadly, Cara’s mother died during birth and my mother raised Cara like she was her own daughter. Other than that, we were a pretty happy family.

Or so I thought.

As kids, there was stuff you didn’t notice because, well, you were busy being kids, right? My father, Gaetano, was always a busy man but he did remember to spend time with me from time to time, not as often as I would have liked, but it was better than nothing. And then, one day, Cara and I were being nosy

as always and tried to eavesdrop on my parents because it sounded like they were fighting. We had sneaked down the stairs to get a better look and listen to what was going on but we couldn't hear anything.

But what happened next shocked us both.

My mother, Jacinta, slapped the fuck out of my father that night. We stood still, shocked to witness what had just happened before we ran back to our shared room, and pretended to be asleep so we wouldn't be caught.

The next day, my mother had our bags packed and we left. I remember crying so hard that day because Cara wasn't coming with us. My mother tried to take her with us, but Uncle refused to let her go. It pained my mother to leave Cara behind like that and I was sure she had her reasons to leave. However, the reason for that was still unknown. My father and I didn't stay in touch after that even though I tried to call him because I missed him, but he never once called me. He then changed his number, and I got the message.

We moved to Florida, while my father stayed in California. I

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got to meet up with Cara whenever it was possible, but it did get more difficult for her to leave the house the older she got because her father became strict as hell. He became a parent from hell. He was always intoxicated with alcohol and drugs. A very dangerous mixture that made him insane and beat Cara whenever he was like that. The minute I knew what was happening with her, I told her I was coming to get her out of there but she begged me not to and said it would do more harm than good. I couldn't understand what she meant by it and my heart dropped when she said her father wouldn't hesitate to kill her if she got caught.

To say that I was nervous to be around them all for the first time in forever was an understatement. I didn't know what to expect and kept thinking about how my father would react to seeing me after so long.

"...Don't throw up." I said to myself as I took a deep breath. I felt nauseous but I couldn't risk throwing up, especially now that I was all dressed up.

“Let’s go.” I sighed to myself, finally working the courage to get going, and I made my way down to the lobby.

Cara made sure to send a car to my hotel to escort me to the mansion. My old home. My heart started to beat a little faster at the thought of being there after so long and seeing if it had changed much over the years. My father got himself a new wife not long after we left, and even has a son. Not biologically as it was from his wife’s previous marriage but treated him like his own. I would be lying to say if that didn’t bother the shit out of me because he treated someone else more like his own than me.

Cara had spilled the tea on that immediately and said my

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father had totally downgraded. She said I will see what she meant when I get there, and I was ready to give the stink eye to whoever my father ended up marrying.

On the elevator ride down to the lobby, I felt myself getting more nervous and my hands fidgeted around the little gift box I had with me. It felt like my stomach was in a thousand knots, giving me a stomachache.

“Get it together, Althaia... It’s just family.” I breathed out, trying to calm my nerves.

Reaching the lobby, the elevator doors opened, and I took a final deep breath, holding the small engagement gift in my hands. It wasn’t anything grand, just two champagne glasses saying ‘Mr. Right’ with a mustache, and the other ‘Mrs. Always Right’ with red kissy lips. It immediately made me think of Cara because she had the impression she was always right. Even in situations where she wasn’t, she still was according to herself. She could be a little cocky sometimes.

Nearing the middle of the lobby, I stopped in the middle of my track as I spotted the tall blonde-haired man in a grey suit that hugged his body to perfection.

“Michael?!” I said in shock. He turned around and smiled at me when he spotted me.

“Althaia. Long time, no see.” He said while giving me a perfect smile, showing his perfectly white teeth. It has been so long since I last saw him. My first crush ever. Damn, now I remembered why I was obsessed with him. He had the most beautiful blue eyes I have ever seen, a sharp jawline, and a clean-shaven face. His dirty blonde hair was styled to

perfection, giving the ‘I didn’t bother to try’ look, which just

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made him a hundred times sexier.

We actually dated when we were younger. He just didn’t know.

I just stared at him, my mouth was slightly open as I couldn’t believe my own two eyes.

“Damn, Althaia, just take a damn picture if you’re just going to stare at me like that.” He chuckled, and I immediately felt heat coating my cheeks. Damn, he still had that effect on me.

“Don’t flatter yourself too much, Michael. I was just surprised to see you here.” I laughed, hoping he didn’t notice my flushed cheeks.

“Yeah, well I kind of overheard Cara saying that you were coming, and she was going to send someone over to come and get you. I couldn’t believe that the Althaia was coming, so I said I would come and fetch ya.” He smiled and tucked his hands into the pockets of his slacks. His eyes slowly scanned me. His eyes trailed down to my body, and then up again to meet my eyes, giving me a lazy smirk in the process.

“Can’t say I regret the decision. You look stunning as ever, Althaia.” His beautiful blue eyes turned a shade darker as he drank me in. My heart was beating just a little faster with the way he was looking at me.

“And you look handsome as ever, Michael.” I said with a smile as he slowly walked up to me with a sexy grin on his face.

This was definitely going to be a long night.

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