

The Devil's Fire by Mariam El-Hafi Chapter 3

Althaia

As soon as we entered the mansion, I looked around. In front of me was the beautiful beige marble staircase that led to two small separate staircases on either side to get to the top. With the black railing, a shining crystal chandelier hanging from the ceiling right in the middle of the staircase, with a tiny spotlight illuminating the rest of the ceiling, created a nice exquisite appearance.

We passed by the staircase to get to the backyard, and a strong wave of nostalgia washed over me as I looked around. So many memories were made in this house, and even though most of the interior had been changed, there was still a sense of familiarity. I may not have stayed in this mansion for that many years, but those years were some of the best in my life because, at that time, I had Cara by my side.

Music and chatter reached my ears as we now stood at the entrance of the backyard, still out of people's eyesight. We followed the stone path that winded around the corner to the right side of the house. I took a good look around as beautiful flowers and plants of all hues of color were on each side of the path. I must say that the gardener did one heck of a job because it felt like you walked through a meadow with many beautiful colors.

I halted in my steps just before we rounded the corner to join the rest of the people.

"Just take a deep breath, Thaia. You will be fine, I promise." I turned to look at Michael, and he gave me a reassuring smile

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while giving my hand a small squeeze. I tightened my hold around his hand a little, grateful that he was actually here to ease my nerves a little.

"I know, it's just nerves getting to me. It's been a long time since I've been here, and so many memories." I gave him a small smile in return. He put his hand back at the small of my back and pulled me a bit closer to him, which I welcomed because it did calm down my nerves that were increasingly building.

As soon as we rounded the corner I let out a small gasp at the sight in front of me. I was stunned by how beautiful

everything looked.

“Wow.” I breathed out as took in the sight in front of me.

It was a big open space with massive trees surrounding the place. They have managed to wrap the trees around with light chains, lightning the whole place up, and string lights hanging from one tree to another, creating a form of a ceiling of light in the air. There were big round tables scattered around with plain off-white colored tablecloths, and transparent vases with gold engravings holding the white and soft pink Camellia flowers. If this was just the engagement party, I couldn't imagine how grand the wedding would be. And it definitely would be grand just by looking at the number of people present here.

“Yeah, I agree.” Michael said as he also looked around the backyard.

“I'll just go and put this on the gift table. Can I get you something to drink?” He motioned his head to the far right side where a bar has been set up with a bartender.

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“Anything non-alcoholic would be great, thanks. I want to stay as sober as possible.” It was not that I couldn't handle a few glasses of champagne, I just didn't want anything to mess up with my senses if anything went wrong. And also, I was still nervous as hell and I would probably just down one drink after another to ease my nerves. That, I couldn't risk.

“Sure thing! I will be right back.” He said as he went his way to the gift table.

Shit, I was alone now. I should have gone with him but instead, I was now here, standing alone, and I didn't know what to do. ...Should I just go up and say 'hi, remember me?' kind of thing? Yeah, that sounded like an awful plan.

I decided to look around to see if I could spot Cara

somewhere in the mass of people. What I didn't notice was that half of the people were already staring at me while I was in my own miserable bubble. I

shifted my weight on my feet a little as I started to feel uncomfortable with all the attention

on me.

I suddenly felt underdressed because what in the universe was this? It was like Italian Vogue magazine spat out all of its models into this backyard. I have never seen so many beautiful people gathered in one place. Women were dressed in long beautiful gowns, and men in suits that made them look like people who did not belong to this world, and that was freaking intimidating. The more I looked at them, the more intimidated I felt. It was easy to see I was kind of an outsider and didn't belong here.

I shifted around on my feet again, not knowing where to go. And how long did it take to grab a drink? I wouldn't mind being saved right now as I gave some awkward smiles to the

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people who looked at me. And where the heck was Cara? I kept looking around to see if I could spot her somewhere in the mass of people.

While gazing around, someone caught my attention, and my eyes landed on this man. He was wearing black dress pants, and a black dress shirt that was unbuttoned a bit from the top, exposing some of his chest. His sleeves were rolled up to his elbows and showed off his heavily tattooed arms. His hair was dark, short on the sides, and a bit longer on the top styled into perfection. This man was the definition of perfection, and I wouldn't be surprised if they showed a picture of him right next to the word in the dictionary.

This man was gorgeous. Breathtaking actually.

My eyes scanned him, starting from the bottom, and slowly made their way up to his face. I got a bit startled and I held my breath when we made eye contact. Normally, I would look away immediately, but there was just something about him that made me stare at him just for a little longer. He was standing tall with his hands in his pockets. He tilted his head slightly to the side as he, too, inspected me from head to toe. His face showed absolutely no form of expression as he stared at me. His eyes looked intently into mine, and it was like I was in some sort of trance because I couldn't seem to look away as we kept looking at each other from afar.

“Don’t look at him like that.” Michael suddenly stood in front of me, startling me, and blocked my view from the man.

“He has killed people for staring at him in a wrong way.” He said as he handed me my drink.

“Huh?” I breathed out and stared at him confused. “I was just

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looking around. How am I supposed to find the person I’m looking for if I’m not allowed to look?” I chuckled a little at him and raised my brow at him.

“The way you looked at him can get your ass shot.” He looked at me with a serious expression, letting me know that this is not a joke. I looked at him with wide eyes, suddenly feeling scared that the man would shoot me because I did take my time to look at him. I didn’t mean it in a mean way, he was truly too beautiful not to look at.

“I don’t know if you have heard of this, Althaia, but you have a mean resting bitch face. You looked like you were ready to fight him or something.” I choked on my drink when I accidentally laughed, making a fool out of myself. And in front of so many people.

“I may have heard that a few times.”

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