

Madly Yours

Chapter 12

The entrance was completely deserted, save for two uniformed officials waiting quietly. The place had clearly been cleared out just for them.

Hudson stepped out first.

Nora reached for the handle, but her door was already being pulled open.

Hudson stood outside, one hand resting on the frame as he looked down at her. The afternoon sun framed him in a golden halo, casting his features into shadow and making his dark eyes appear endlessly deep.

She hesitated for a moment before stepping out. The second her feet touched the pavement, his hand hovered protectively near her waist—never actually touching her, but creating an undeniable shield of warmth.

They were so close she could smell the crisp cedar and faint tobacco clinging to him—a scent that was cold, sharp, and overwhelmingly dominant.

"Thank you."

Hudson didn't reply. He simply dropped his hand and stepped aside to let her walk first.

"Mr. Lancaster," a middle-aged man in a dark suit hurried over from the entrance. His nametag identified him as the chief registrar. "Everything is ready."

Hudson gave a curt nod, his expression unreadable.

The vast hall was empty and blasted with air conditioning.

Paperwork was already neatly arranged on the desk, alongside two fountain pens resting on a velvet tray.

Nora's gaze fell on the marriage application. The name 'Jade Reed' typed across the top was glaringly obvious.

The official slid the forms toward them, pointing to the bottom lines. "Please verify your information and sign."

Hudson picked up a pen. He hovered over the paper for half a second before signing with sharp, aggressive strokes. His final flourish nearly tore the parchment, the dark ink gleaming under the overhead lights.

It was her turn.

She took the pen, her fingers turning to ice. The metal barrel was still warm from his grip, radiating a subtle heat.

She looked down and signed the name 'Jade Reed'.

She wrote slowly, her hand trembling slightly as she finished the final letter.

The official took the forms and turned to his computer to pull up their records. A moment later, Jade's government ID photo popped up on the monitor.

Nora's heart hammered against her ribs.

She watched as the official frowned slightly, his eyes darting between the screen and her face.

The air in the room seemed to freeze.

Nora clenched her fists, a wave of sheer panic washing over her.

It was over.

How could she be so naive to think she could pull this off? The Lancaster family was untouchable, and Hudson was a man who saw everything. This pathetic bait-and-switch wasn't going to last even a few hours!

What was she going to do? If she personally ruined her family's only lifeline, Mr. Lancaster's fury would destroy them all.

Tap, tap.

A rhythmic knocking broke the silence.

Nora jerked her head around. Hudson was leaning back in his chair, looking perfectly relaxed. He lifted his gaze and shot the official a look of pure impatience.

His eyes were an abyss of ink, devoid of emotion and calm as a frozen lake, yet radiating a crushing, suffocating authority.

The official paled instantly, swallowing whatever questions he had been about to ask.

No one in San Francisco dared question the Lancasters, and absolutely no one wanted to cross Mr. Lancaster. If this man brought her in, she had to be the right bride. Besides, cosmetic surgery was so common these days—this girl probably just had some work done.

Realizing he was testing the billionaire's patience, the official scrambled to click through the screens. He grabbed the heavy stamp from the corner of his desk and slammed it down.

"Congratulations, Mr. and Mrs. Lancaster," he said, handing over the certificates with both hands and a sycophantic smile. "The paperwork is finalized. Wishing you a wonderful marriage."

Dazed, Nora accepted the booklet. The ink was still warm.

The catastrophic exposure she had been dreading had just been completely erased.

Was her luck really this good?