

Madly Yours

Chapter 16

She turned back to Nora. “You’ve been studying abroad all this time, haven’t you, Jade? Where was it again?”

“London,” Nora answered smoothly.

Jade had spent the last few years in the UK and had only returned to San Francisco earlier this month. Almost no one in their circle had seen her face, which was the only reason Nora dared to accept the swap.

Beatrice smiled. “What did you study?”

“Arts Management.”

Beatrice nodded approvingly. “No wonder you carry yourself so well.”

Nora was just about to exhale when Eleanor suddenly chimed in.

“Oh, that reminds me,” she said with a sickening smile. “Didn’t Tiffany go to a charity gala a few weeks ago? I think she ran into our dear Jade there.”

Nora’s stomach dropped.

Tiffany, who had been scrolling on her phone, looked up with a malicious grin. “I sure did. She caused quite the scene, didn’t she?”

A cold sweat broke out across Nora’s back.

She had no idea what charity gala they were talking about.

“It was... a very crowded night,” Nora lied, praying her voice wouldn’t shake. “I must have missed you.”

Tiffany’s smirk widened. “Something pretty wild happened that night. You haven’t forgotten, have you?”

Nora’s throat went dry. She forced herself to sound casual. “I was in a terrible mood that evening. Most of it is a blur.”

“A blur?” Eleanor picked up her teacup, taking a slow sip. Her eyes locked onto Nora with predator-like amusement. “That was barely two weeks ago. Your memory is slipping.”

The tension in the room spiked.

Nora's mind raced for an excuse, but before she could speak, Hudson's lighter snapped shut with a violent crack.

He looked up, his dead, hollow gaze locking onto his aunt. The sheer menace in his eyes made Eleanor's hand freeze mid-air.

"Your memory seems perfectly fine, Aunt Eleanor," Hudson said coldly. "Just like last year, when you tried cooking at my estate and nearly burned Cloudwater to the ground. After the firemen put it out, you were still running around looking for your roasted bird. You haven't forgotten that, have you?"

Tiffany snorted a laugh before her mother leveled a furious glare at her. She slapped a hand over her mouth, her shoulders shaking violently as she fought to keep it in.

Beatrice expertly defused the tension. "Enough. That was a long time ago. Let's drop it."

She patted Nora's hand warmly. "You're family now. Hudson can be a bit cold, so you'll have to be patient with him. If he ever gives you grief, come straight to me. I'll handle him."

Nora nodded in relief. "Thank you, grandmother."

"Alright, it's getting late."

Hudson lazily checked his watch and stood up. "We're leaving."

Beatrice frowned. "Back to Cloudwater? You have a pack of attack dogs roaming around there. Don't terrify the girl on her first night. If you have to, just take her to one of your other properties in Azure Bay."

Attack dogs?

Nora shot Hudson a startled look. He kept dogs?

"Got it," Hudson waved her off impatiently. He grabbed Nora's hand and pulled her toward the exit.

"That boy!"

Watching them leave, the matriarch finally retired upstairs for the night.

The living room was left to Eleanor and Tiffany.

“Mom, did you see her?” Tiffany sneered. “She didn’t know a thing about that gala. She’s definitely hiding something.”

“I heard she got into a jealous screaming match at that party and slapped a waiter right in front of everyone. She’s a complete psycho! Now she’s acting like some innocent angel in front of grandma? She’s not good enough for Hudson!”

Eleanor picked up her tea, blowing on the hot liquid. “Don’t worry. I’ll be watching her every move. She’ll slip up eventually.”