

Madly Yours

Chapter 2

Believed him...

Nora closed her eyes as a sharp ache pierced her chest. She gripped the ring box in her pocket so tightly it was the only thing keeping her from breaking down.

The unwavering devotion she had believed in, the love she had built her entire world upon—it was nothing but a fragile illusion built on sand.

How much of his gentleness and protection had been real? How much was guilt? And how much was just a performance?

Taking a deep breath, Nora pulled out her phone and typed out a reply:

[Mom, I'll take Jade's place and marry Mr. Lancaster.]

Watching the message send, Nora shoved the door to the VIP room open.

Instantly, the laughter died.

The room was dimly lit, the air heavy with the scent of expensive liquor, smoke, and perfume. Over half a dozen well-dressed men and women stopped what they were doing, all eyes snapping to the door.

Nora stood in the doorway. Her long dress hugged her stunning curves, highlighting her radiant complexion. Her features were flawless, but her usually bright eyes were now dark and unreadable.

Edmond sat in the center of the leather sofa, a half-smoked cigarette between his fingers. The rising smoke blurred the sharp lines of his face.

He was the first to react. A flicker of panic flashed in his eyes, but when he saw she wasn't wearing her hearing aids, he visibly relaxed. He stood up, striding toward her, his hands moving in sign language. [Nora, why are you so late? We've been waiting for you.]

Nora's stomach churned.

Before she could respond, a voice drifted from behind her.

"Well, isn't this a party..."

The voice was sweet, deliberately drawn out, every syllable dripping with a sticky, nauseating charm.

Everyone instinctively looked toward the corridor.

Juliette Sterling stood under the warm hallway lights, wearing a tight red slip dress with a slit that rode dangerously high on her thigh. Her wavy hair tumbled over her shoulders, her makeup flawless, her lips painted a fiery red.

Leaning lazily against the doorframe, she scanned the room before locking eyes with Edmond, a meaningful smirk playing on her lips.

Edmond's face paled slightly. Seeing that Nora hadn't turned around, he grew even more convinced she couldn't hear. He quickly lowered his voice and snapped at Juliette, "Why are you out here? I told you to stay in the room next door."

The tension in his voice was crystal clear to Nora.

Juliette just laughed.

"I missed you. I'm just standing at the door. As long as she doesn't see me, it's fine, right? She can't hear anyway, so what's the big deal?"

Her words dropped like a stone into a quiet pond, sending ripples through the crowd.

Someone muttered, "Damn, I almost forgot she's deaf. Scared the hell out of me!"

"No kidding. I thought we were busted for a second..."

None of them bothered to hide their amusement. They didn't care.

Nora's fingers curled into fists. Every word was a knife slipping right past her defenses.

She could hear.

She heard every single syllable perfectly.

Juliette smiled sweeter, raising her voice. "Right, Nora? You can't hear a thing, can you? So pathetic. That accident didn't kill you, but it left you broken."

"Enough!" Edmond hissed, cutting her off. He cast a nervous glance at Nora, terrified she might catch on.

But Juliette ignored his anger, her smile widening. She pushed past Nora into the room, staring intently at Edmond while speaking loud enough for the whole room to hear.

"Edmond, weren't you worried she'd find out I'm back? Relax. She can't hear shit. Even if I called her a little bitch right now, she wouldn't—"

Slap!

A sharp crack echoed through the room, cutting Juliette off.

Nora had spun around and slapped Juliette across the face with everything she had.

The room plunged into dead silence.

Jaws dropped. What... what was happening?

Wasn't Nora deaf?