

Chapter 16: Home

The moment the door clicked shut behind me, the tears I'd been holding back finally broke free. I sobbed as I hastily stuffed my belongings into my bags. He didn't even try to stop me. With trembling hands, I grabbed my phone and took a deep, shaky breath before dialing Edna.

"Piper, dear. How is the trip?" she asked, her voice warm and concerned.

"The trip is over. I need a flight home," I managed to say, my voice firm despite the tears streaming down my face.

"Oh, my. That is disappointing. I'll have a flight booked for you. It'll be waiting at the ticket counter," Edna replied, her tone solemn.

"Thank you," I whispered before hanging up. I slung my bags over my shoulder and hurried down the boardwalk to the main building of the resort. They called me a cab, and I made my way to the airport.

I forced myself to put on a brave face, knowing I couldn't just cry in the middle of the airport. After an hour, my plane finally boarded, and I stared out the window as I flew farther and farther away from what I had thought was my paradise.

"He didn't even try to stand up for me..." I murmured to myself, my reflection in the airplane window blurry with tears.

But what had I been expecting? I should have known it was all too good to be true. I had broken my own heart when I foolishly fell for a client. I shook my head, angry at myself for making such a rookie mistake.

When I finally landed in Boston a day later, the sadness that had enveloped me since leaving the resort still clung to me like a heavy cloak. An agency car picked me up and took me directly to Advantage.

"Miss Stringer, Edna is waiting for you," the receptionist informed me as I entered the building.

I made my way to her office and tapped on the door.

"Come in!" Edna called out, her voice bright. She looked up as I entered and her expression softened with sympathy. "Well, dear. What happened?"

I shook my head, unable to meet her gaze. "A family friend bent on getting into our client's pants outed me to the whole group. There was nothing I could do."

Edna frowned, her frustration evident. "And so you left?"

"They told me to, even the client. Once they knew who I was, they didn't want me near them," I huffed, bitterness seeping into my voice. "Worried I might sully their reputation."

Edna rolled her eyes. "Well, the price of the ticket will come out of your commission."

I sighed inwardly, having expected as much. "Leave the clothes we loaned you and head home," she instructed, her voice gentle but firm as she returned to her desk.

I did as she told me and then went home. Relief washed over me as I stepped into my small apartment, but it was quickly replaced by the torrent of emotions I'd been trying to suppress. The tears came flooding back, and I crumpled to the floor.

I was angry, heartbroken, embarrassed, and ashamed. I hated myself for falling for him.

And I hated Tate for rejecting me.