

Bullied To Love by Amal A. Usman Chapter 1

I am waiting in a room full of potential applicants—a few who look like strippers—all with the hope of getting the job. I wonder why they come dressed half naked. Is seduction the only way they think they can get the job? Why do some women think so little of themselves? I pray the boss is not like all those bosses who are looking for a personal assistant who helps in other areas like his bedroom, if you know what I mean. A few others dressed more professional than me look like they have been in this profession far longer than I have. It's making me feel unqualified with my MBA right now.

I was eager to get this job because the money would help my mama and I. Being a single mother is never easy, but she pulled it off. She brought me up in the best way possible. I never really got to know who my father is or where he is from because every time I ask mama about my father, she tells me that he was a one-night stand. And while I believed there was more to the story, I knew better than pushing her to tell me. I am not forcing the issue, and I know she is silently grateful for that.

I am brought back to earth when the secretary calls my name. She is a blond with big grey eyes and a pretty smile. I walk up to her table.

“Hi, I am Joan, you must be Katherine. Walk to the door on the left. He is waiting for you.”

“Alright, thank you,” I say, walking to the door while saying a silent prayer before knocking.

“Come in.” I hear a husky voice say.

I walk into a beautiful office. The walls are painted black with golden lines all around it, with mahogany brown in some places. On my left is a wall adorned with white glass, a tile thing I think, with a beautiful

golden line pattern on it. There are two black armchairs and a two-seater couch with a brown wooden coffee table in the middle. The windows have two green plants in front of it. The desk area has this long book shelf behind it. There are two black chairs in front of the brown wooden desk. The person behind the desk has his nose buried in some documents, so he has not seen me yet.

“Come and have a seat,” the man says. His voice sounds very familiar, but I hope it’s my mind playing a trick on me.

“Thank You, Sir.”

“Let’s begin,” he says finally lifting his head. Once he does it’s like all the blood leaves my body, making me freeze on the spot. I can’t believe it’s him. The one person who I thought, or rather prayed, I would never see again. He made my life a living hell in high school. My sworn enemy, Lorenzo Costanzo.

He has changed. He was handsome before, but he is even more attractive now with his grey shirt unable to hide a fantastic chest... I stare into his beautiful green eyes forgetting why I am here.

“When you are done staring, I would like for us to begin,” he says acting like he does not know who I am.

“What is your name?” he says.

Is he really asking me that question? I can’t believe he is acting like he does not know me. Maybe he is asking to be sure.

“My name is Katherine Luciano,” I say, and I genuinely wish he does not remember who I am after what he did to me in high school.

“What school did you go to?”

“I attended NYU.”

“I am talking about your high school.”

“I attended Stuyvesant high school,” I say giving up all hope of him not figuring out who I am.

“Hm, interesting.”

“Can I ask something, sir?”

“Sure, why not.”

“I find it weird that you care only about my high school information. Please, why is that?”

“Did you really think I would forget you, Bella?” He says with a smirk on his lips.

Oh no! He remembers me. He just called me by the name he always used in high school. I am totally not getting this job.

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“Then why did you act like you did not know me a minute ago,” I say.

“Because I felt like it,” he says, still acting like the same jerk he always was.

I don't say anything but give him a look that says ‘seriously?’ I can't believe that deep down I wish he had changed. He stands up and walks towards the windows giving me a view of his gorgeous ripped abs underneath his shirt. He turns his back on me showing off his amazingly

broad shoulders. But even with such a fantastic body and a handsome face he still has the heart of a devil. What a shame!

“I want you here Monday morning, don’t be late.”

“Are you saying I have the job?” I ask.

“Do I have to be more explicit for you to understand?”he asks.

“No, you don’t.”

“Good! See you on Monday morning with my coffee; black, no sugar.”

“Alright sir, but I have to say, we did not even have a real interview. Not that I am complaining or anything.”

“Bella, I have known you for almost half of our lives. I know you won’t be a threat to me, and from your resumé I knew you were good for the job even before you walked in.”

“Oh! Alright then, thank you.” I say, happy I got the job but also feeling worried deep down. Did I get the job because I am qualified, and he knows me? Or is there another reason? I will have to wait and see.

“See you on Monday,” I say walking out of his office.

“Don’t be late!”

While walking out of the building, I call mama to give her the good news, but she does not pick up. I am guessing she is in a meeting. She sends a message a few minutes later saying I should meet her for lunch in an hour.

I grab a taxi and take it home to freshen up, to meet up with her in an hour.

I get home, shower and change into something more casual. I am wearing a black cami, a NYC tank top, pink and black striped high-waisted pants and a pair of patent leather pumps. I order an Uber to the restaurant we are meeting at.

I arrive and walk in, already knowing where she will be sitting since this is her favourite restaurant.

“Hi, Mama,” I say sitting down.

“Hi, baby girl, how was the job interview?”

“It was quite strange, but I got the job.”

“I am happy for you, and what do you mean by strange?”

“I will explain after eating, I am quite hungry.”

About halfway through the meal I tell her how the interview went.

“Mama, you won’t believe who my boss is. It’s none other than the mighty devil himself, Lorenzo Costanzo.”

“How many times have I told you to stop calling him that?”

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“But that’s what he is.”

“No, he is just a confused man who does not know how to express his feelings.”

“I am pretty sure he has expressed them well by showing how much he hates me.”

“He does not hate you.”

“He does mama, and do you know the funny thing is we were not even cla**mates. He was my senior in high school. I don’t even understand how he noticed me or had time to bully me when there were other girls in school, and prettier ones in his cla**, who would die for the attention he gave me.”

“He noticed you because he likes you.”

“How do you know that, mama?”

“I just feel it.”

“Okay, whatever you say. But I still doubt he does, and mama, do you know he acted like he did not know me at first.”

“What do you mean?”

I explain to her about what happened in the office and how much of a jerk he was, but she feels maybe he just wanted to be sure.

Mama left shortly after we finished talking and eating as she got a call from her office.

After lunch I decide to go shopping, because last time I checked my closet it does not have clothes fit for a personal a**istant. I also have a lot of time to spare before going home so I take a taxi and go to the mall.

I visit about ten different stores or more, looking for the best outfits that say ‘sophisticated’. I won’t lie, it was hard but worth it. I am visiting the last store for the day when a strange number appears on my phone screen.

I answer, wondering if maybe it is Enzo wanting to remind me of something.

I answer and hear the worst news anyone could receive about their mother. The person on the phone says mama was rushed to the hospital while on her way home from the office. She said she fainted, and they tried waking her up but to no avail, so they rushed her to the hospital. I ask the person to send the address of the hospital so I can be on my way.

I take a taxi and ask the driver to drive as fast as he can without killing us. To say I am scared would be an understatement! I am terrified because mama is one of those people who is always healthy and hardly ever gets sick, so to hear she fainted and is in the hospital makes me very scared.

I arrive at the hospital and quickly go up to the front desk to find out how mama is doing.

“Where is my mother?” I say to the nurse at the front desk.

“What is her name?” a lady wearing a nurse’s uniform asks.

“Christine Luciano,” I say.

“Your mother is on the second floor. Take the elevator to the second floor. Once you get there, walk straight down the hall. The first door to your left is where you will find her.”

“Thank you,” I say taking the elevator to the second floor.

I follow her directions and find the room with no difficulty.

I walk inside and see mama using an oxygen mask to breathe. Oh, my God! What is happening?

I walk towards mama's side and notice she is awake. Thank God!

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"Mama, what is wrong?"

"Don't cry, my baby girl. Everything is going to be fine. I am going to be okay, you should not be worried." she says taking off the mask to speak to me.

"How won't I cry mama, when I see you like this," I say, holding her hands in mine.

"Don't worry, everything is going to be fine" she says giving my hand a warm squeeze.

A doctor walks in later and asks me to see him in his office about mama's condition. I follow him to his office praying there's nothing too seriously wrong with mama. He asks me to take a seat, but I insist on standing. The way I am feeling right now, all I want to do is to hear what he has to say and be by mama's side. But he insists, so I sit down with trembling hands.

"Your mother has breast cancer, but we can..." he says, but I don't let him finish talking before I cut him off.

"No-No, this can't be happening!" I cry before I breakdown in tears.

"Miss Luciano, I need you to be strong. Everything is going to be fine," he says while he tries to comfort me.

"Your mother needs all the support she can get, so you need to be strong."

“You are right. I need to be strong for mama,” I say wiping the tears that have fallen and trying to keep the others at bay.

“So, what can we do?” I ask trying to sound strong.

“That’s more like it,” he says smiling reassuringly.

“Your mother is at the first stage of cancer, luckily we detected it in time. She will need surgery, but everything should be fine.”

“How much does it cost?” I ask the one question I have been scared to ask since I found out mama has cancer. Mama and I do not have much money, but you could not call us poor, because we have three meals a day and live a comfortable life.

“\$ 20,000,” he says, and I think to myself, ‘where am I going to get that kind of money?’

“Doctor, I don’t have that kind of money now but I promise you I will get the money within due time. Please don’t stop the treatment for my mother.” I say praying Enzo pays well so I will be able to pay for mama’s treatment and surgery.

“The only thing I can do for her now before you get the money is to put her on drugs until we have to do the surgery.”

“Thank you so much doctor, thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

“I will go and see my mother now.”

“Alright, see you next time Miss Luciano.”

I walk back to mama's room to find her sleeping. I sit down on the chair beside her bed. I can't imagine my life without mama—she is the only family I have. I hope Enzo pays well so I can pay the hospital bills as soon as possible. I spend the weekend with mama at the hospital. On Monday she will be discharged, so after work I will be coming back to get her.