

## The Devil's Fire by Mariam El-Hafi Chapter 31

Althaia

We came to a stop in front of a tall building with massive double doors. Couture Du Vie was written on the doors in large gold cursive letters.

"You want to shop?" I turned to look at him.

"For you. You need a dress for tomorrow." Damiano stopped and grabbed his phone from his pocket, frowning as he looked at the screen.

"I need to take this. Go inside and see what you like." He picked up the phone and walked to the side to talk.

Shrugging, I went inside and stopped by the door to look around. The store was huge and bright. Almost too bright as I made my way down the aisle before coming to an open space. The interior was all white marble with gold patterns, and a few armchairs and small tables were placed around to create a lounge area. There were even a few artificial white trees with gold leaves on them.

This place screamed expensive.

I mentally cringed as I looked down at what I was wearing. I wasn't exactly dressed to be in such an extravagant boutique, and I just knew this place was one of those who judged you by the way you were dressed to assess if you could afford their clothes.

"Excuse me, can I help you with something?" I looked up and was met with a pale-skinned woman, with blonde page hair and blue eyes. She was wearing a tight white dress with red heels and of course, bright red lipstick.

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"Yes, I'm looking for an evening dress. Can you show me where you have them?" I smiled.

"Sure..." She gave me a tight smile and led me to the back of the boutique, walking down a few steps to where racks of dresses were hung. I let out a small sigh when she just stood to the side and raised a brow, not making a move to help me out.

I went to one of the racks and started to look through the dresses. I smiled when I came to stop to a familiar dress.

"I think that might be out of your price range." I looked over at her only for her to look me

up and down.

“And why do you think that?” I tilted my head to the side as I gave her a sweet smile. I hated people like her. She was the kind of person that will only help you if you scream money. Was she expecting me to come in a freaking gown before she would be nice?

“That dress is a limited edition by Jacinta. Very few boutiques were lucky to have her designs, and we’re one of them. Not that I would expect you to know who she is.”

“Oh, I’m familiar with her.” I looked back at the dress. It always made me proud of my mother whenever I saw one of her designs in boutiques, and she had worked so hard to get where she was today.

I remember working with her on finishing the dress. We had hundreds of different sketch ideas of how the finished product would look like if it was a short dress or a long dress with a long trail behind it. Eventually, we settled for something in between; the front of the dress would stop mid-thigh, in a curved shape, where the rest would continue into a long trail behind.

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“Look, I think we’re both wasting our time here...” She suddenly stopped when the sounds of footsteps could be heard. Damiano showed up with the stone face expression he always wore and made his way towards us.

“Mr. Bellavia! So nice to see you again!” I scowled when her whole attitude and posture changed as soon as she spotted Damiano. A feeling of satisfaction filled me when he ignored her and didn’t spare her a single glance as he walked past her with his eyes set on me.

He frowned when he saw I was looking displeased.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing...” I muttered but quickly found a smile and pulled the dress out to show it to him.

“What do you think? I helped my mom make this dress. It even has my initial!” I showed him the label on the dress, pointing where it said A.C just under my mother’s name. I wasn’t looking for a response but he still gave a small nod. It was mostly just to show how she shouldn’t be judging people when she clearly had no idea who they were.

“A.C for Althaia Celano.” I gave a small wink to the lady, and she looked shocked. Her eyes were wide, and she was quickly turning into a bright red shade, matching her lipstick and heels.

"I – I'm sorry, your mother?" She stuttered.

"Where's Chloé?" Damiano asked in a stern voice, his eyes snapping to her.

"Y-yes, I'll get her right away." She quickly turned around and almost ran away.

"What a rude b\*tch..." I muttered under my breath as I looked at her retreating form.

"I'll get her fired."

"No, no." I quickly shook my head.

"She just needs to change her attitude." I gave a small smile. Sure, she was rude, but I couldn't have that on my conscience if she got fired. She probably worked hard to get where she was as it was a brutal industry.

"Damiano Bellavia!" A woman walked over to him and greeted him with kisses on his cheeks. She was wearing a long, off-white Versace corset-like dress, and her hair was up in a tight bun. She was also wearing red lipstick and red heels. I guess that was the dress code for working here.

My fingers were suddenly twitching a little when I noticed she still had her hands placed on his shoulders.

"...Althaia." I snapped my eyes to Damiano and realized they had been talking to me. But I was too focused on Chloé's hands on him.

"Huh...?" I was confused and my cheeks heated up a little. I had totally been caught glaring at her hands. Chloé just gave a little laugh and stuck her hand out for me to shake.

"I'm Chloé, the owner." She was a little older and had a thick French accent.

"Oh, hello. I'm Althaia." I smiled at her and shook her hand.

"Damiano tells me you need a dress for tomorrow, yes?"

"Something like that..." We followed her into a private room with a  
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small circular stage surrounded by mirrors. She asked me to step on the small stage and started to measure me. Damiano sat on the white couch close to the stage and watched me get measured.

"I have a few dresses in mind for you to try. Though I think they might need to be sewn in at the waist as you'll need a bigger size as you have quite a big bust. I'll be right back." She quickly walked off in the direction of the gowns.

I stepped down from the stage and walked over to Damiano. He took hold of me and placed me to sit on his lap. His golden-brown eyes stared intently at me, which

continued to give me a fluttery. feeling.

“So jealous.” He simply stated as he played with a strand of my hair around his finger.

“I’m not.”

“You’re also a lousy liar.”

“Whatever... Oh, wait, weren’t you the one who beat up his own cousin for dancing with me.” I looked at him in a teasing manner.

“Mmhh... That’ll teach him not to touch what’s mine.” He said and he kissed my shoulder. My heart s\*ipped a beat at his words. Before I could say anything, Chloé returned with her hands full of dresses and that was when it hit me.

“I’m not wearing any underwear!” I whispered in a panic to Damiano who only looked amused.

“Come, dear, let me help you.” Chloé called me over as she hung the dresses in the fitting room.

“Oh, it’s fine. I can manage on my own.” I quickly got up and

Together In Public

stepped inside the fitting room.

“Are you sure...?”

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“Yes, yes, don’t worry.” I cut her off as I closed the curtain. I undressed and took a random dress. It was a long and tight white dress with a v-neckline so deep it stopped in the middle of my stomach and the cups pressed on my breasts, making them appear huge. I opened the curtain and stepped out.

“No.” Damiano said immediately.

“Why not?” I already knew the answer. It was too se\*y and too revealing but I wanted to mess with him a little.

“I said no. Try another one.”

“Well, I like it. It’s making my boobs look great.” I grinned and stepped out to look in the mirror. My breasts looked like they were about to spill over at any minute.

“I should get this one.”

“Absolutely not.” Damiano came to stand behind me and I turned to face him, seeing him glaring at me.

“Do you want men’s hungry eyes on you?” It came out as a low growl from him, and my pulse sped.

“Hmm, do you think they will like this dress on me?” His eyes darkened by my answer and his expression changed, which sent me right back to the fitting room.

This continued with every dress Chloé had brought with her. I didn't even need to step out of the fitting room, I just pulled the curtain open, and he would immediately say no and send me back in.

“What's wrong with this dress?!” I asked frustrated. I was wearing a long turquoise dress; neither se\*xy nor revealing so what could be wrong?

“It's ugly.” He simply answered. I sighed and plopped down on the couch next to him.

“Well, this was the last dress.” Chloé had a finger up to her mouth, thinking as she looked at the dresses I had tried on.

“I'll be right back.” She said and left.

“You're impossible to please.” I sulked.

“You are doing a rather good job in bed.” Damiano gave me a smug look, and I dropped my jaw.

“Don't say that loud!” I smacked his arm playfully, earning me a smirk.

“This dress will do!” Chloé returned with a dress, and I tiredly got up, hoping this will be the last dress to try. It was a long deep wine- colored, backless dress with lace petals around the deep v- neckline which showed a bit of my cleavage. The top was tight and the skirt flowed out from my hips with a double high, but the extra red transparent material on the outside covered my legs. It was really a beautiful dress but I already dreaded Damiano's reaction.

I pulled open the curtain once again and stepped out. Damiano's eyes scanned my body from head to toe, and I raised my brows in surprise that he didn't say no immediately. I stepped on the little. circular stage and did a little spin for him to see the whole dress.

“We'll take this one.” He nodded in approval.

“Finally!” I exclaimed and dropped my arms to my side dramatically.

“I'll have it ready and send it to you as soon as possible.” Chloé said relieved. I got dressed back in my clothes and Chloé took the dress to put it aside.

“Do you have a restroom I can use?” I asked.

“Just right down there and to your left.” All the fuss with the dresses made me hot and I needed to splash some cold water on my face. Luckily, I had decided not to wear any

makeup. It was too hot anyways and it might have melted right off my face. I dried off my face when the door suddenly opened. I turned to see Damiano had walked in and before I could say anything, he grabbed me and kissed me hard, tugging on my lip with his teeth to deepen the kiss.