

Chapter 100

AMELIA

The whole hall went so silent that one could hear a pin drop. I had been expecting this, of course. I would have been a fool not to, but the silence was unnerving all the same. I fought the urge to cower, to back down. Instead I held my head high, looked right at the MC. These people thought the Donovans were finished, but I was going to correct that impression no matter what it took.

The silence was broken by the MC clearing his throat while adjusting the bow tie of his midnight blue suit. He took a sweeping look at the crowd and his shock changed to amusement at their surprised faces.

He chuckled and said, "Mrs Donovan. This is rather... unusual." He stole a glance at the table close to the stage where the mayor sat cleaning his glasses and blinking like an owl. "I will need a second to ask the mayor if you can accept the award on his behalf."

There was a rumble of conversation the moment the MC got off the stage. I kept my eyes fixed on their exchange, ignored the whispers and hissing going on all around me. Knowing that I was the focus of the cameras, I maintained my poise.

It shouldn't have been a topic of discussion if I could accept Damien's award. But since we were being scrutinized by the public, we had to endure the consequences.

The seconds passed. Then a minute. And the MC returned to the stage, wearing a bold smile.

"It turns out Mrs Donovan's request is valid," he said. In a loud, booming voice, he continued, "Ladies and gentlemen, let's welcome to the stage Mrs Amelia Donovan as she accepts the award for the most innovative man of the year on behalf of her husband, Damian Donovan."

There was a smattering of applause which quickly died down before I got halfway to the stage. Thankfully, the sound of the music masked this. I didn't care about their less than enthusiastic response because a win for Damien was all that mattered in the face of our recent challenges, and this was definitely a win.

I climbed majestically up to the stage, received the award, waited a beat for pictures to be taken and was going back down before the MC stopped me with a "If you please Mrs Donovan, your husband's name is on yet another award."

To my delight, I climbed back up the stage, received the second award. The MC chuckled when he flipped another card with Damian's name on it. It turned out that Damian had won seven awards consecutively. I accepted them all.

By the time I returned to my seat, it felt like I was walking on air. I was smiling so much my cheeks hurt and I just couldn't stop. My grin got wider when I noticed Noah visibly fuming. I sat back down gracefully and proceeded to ignore him.

He had always seen Damien as his biggest rival before we even got divorced. I could only imagine how he was feeling but I knew he didn't feel good.

"Well, that was quite something," said the MC good humouredly, distracting me from my thoughts and a few of the people laughed. "Now, it is time to announce the winner of the community impact award..."

The community impact award. It was an award the city voted for, an award Noah always won because he somehow managed to charm the city with his hypocrisy. I remembered that he always came home with it. A lot of these awards had pride of place in his study. The upside of this particular award was that whoever won it got the opportunity to create a unique project with the mayor for the year.

It was the reason Noah could even boast of being rivals with Damien. With the community impact award, he had leverage over the city.

Now Noah shifted in his seat, his eyes alight with excitement and anticipation. I couldn't resist rolling my eyes. Already, he was preening himself like a peacock, about to accept the award he no doubt thought of as his birthright.

Again, I banished Noah from my thoughts and refocused on the MC who had just flipped the card to check the winner of the award. There was a look of the utmost surprise on his face. I began to wonder if Noah was not going to get the award this year after all.

"This is indeed an evening of surprises," the MC said with a laugh. "It's funny how women always seem to take everything with them after a divorce happens, isn't it?"

From the blank stares of the others, I could tell that no one, like me, understood his joke. And then the MC went ahead to mention that my bakery had won this year's community impact award.

For a second or two, I believed that I hadn't heard him properly, but then everyone was staring at me, so it just had to be me. I forced myself to get to my feet again and walked up to the stage.

"Please, say a few words to everyone," the MC said after I had received the award.

I launched into an unrehearsed speech thanking the organizers and the community for voting for me. I spoke without making a single blunder, despite their stares, most of them hostile.

After that, I walked regally back to my seat. Noah was so livid that I half expected to see smoke pouring out of his ears as he glared at me. Though I knew it was somewhat petty, I couldn't resist waving the award in his face just before I took my seat.

He rolled his eyes and grit his teeth in anger. I could see veins popping out around his head and I almost laughed out. He must have thought I was enjoying Damien's spotlight for the night. But jokes on him now.

"Excuse me," Noah murmured angrily to the woman sharing his table minutes later when he couldn't stand the heat of me winning.

He rather rudely pushed her aside as he stormed out of the venue.

I chuckled, and relaxed in my seat. The evening wore on but I found I could not really pay attention to everything else. I was still riding on the high of my success. After the event, I was congratulated by very few people. The rest just up and left but I didn't really care. After the last person offered her congratulations, I left the venue. I had just stepped out of the hall when I was suddenly pulled aside.

"Noah!" I exclaimed.

"Yes. Me," he ground out. "I know what you did."

I raised a brow, assumed my most intimidating expression. "And what did I do?"

"You bought the votes for the award. I'm sure of it. There is no way in hell Damian and... you could have won that many awards fairly." He spat. "Or did you also fuck the major to change the decision of the votes? You're quite capable of doing that."

"Don't be ridiculous. Need I remind you that I didn't even know when the voting took place? So stop making stupid accusations." I fired back. "And I think you've mistaken me for Lucy. If there's anyone you should insult for fucking around, it has to be her."

"All you do is try to take what you don't earn. What you are is a filthy gold digger." His voice deepened. "You've taken this award from me, what else?"

I barked out a laugh. "Your words can't hurt me. You are just bitter because you didn't win the award. But here's the thing, if I have more opportunities, I'll crush you, Noah."

Noah flushed angrily and raised a threatening finger. "A warning for you, Amelia. If you don't back down, the same thing that happened to Damian will happen to you. I will make damn sure of it. I will destroy you so you can rot with him."

"Do your worst, Noah," I spat out.

With a pert head toss, I left Noah only to run into Monique a few paces away.

"Amelia," she called, her lips curving into a practised smile. "Allow me to offer my congra-

"Shut the fuck up!"

Leaving her standing there, I made it to the car where the bodyguards were already waiting to drive me home.

DAMIAN

My heart still felt like it would burst with pride more than an hour after the event.

The microphone had been excellent as promised. I had heard everything that had happened at the award presentation. More than the awards I had earned, I was glad and proud that Amelia had stood up for me.

The community impact award she had won had come as a shock though, but I was happy that she had earned it.

There was something else I had learned.

Noah's threats to Amelia had proven that he was working hand in hand with Monique. This meant I hadn't been imagining things during my breakfast meeting at Monique's house. The man I had seen leaving through the back door had been Noah. But what was his intention? Did he really think that I would go down for long?

I pondered on this until Amelia got home.

"Damian," she called excitedly the moment she sailed into the house. "I-

"I know."

Smiling, I pulled her into my arms for a brief hug before pulling her onto the sofa.

"I heard everything," I said. "You were wonderful there."

We spoke about everything at the event. I knew by the look on her face the moment her thoughts turned to Noah and Monique.

"Noah and Monique are in league," she said.

"I deduced that from the way he threatened you. It had occurred to me that Monique had to have help for her scheme to have worked as well as it did. Who better to assist her than my archenemy, Noah?"

"Now we know that they are working together, we have to find their weaknesses. We should focus on getting to Noah. I think he will be harder to get to than Monique."

"That makes a whole lot of sense," I said. "I'll get to work on him right away.aq"

Just then Amelia's phone beeped. I gestured for her to check it. She dug it out of her purse and quickly read through.

"It's a text message from the mayor," she told me. "I'm to meet him tomorrow to discuss the details of the award."