

Chapter 101

AMELIA

Bright and early the next morning, I was at the mayor's office. I was so excited to be there, hoping we were to immediately start preparations for the yearly project.

"He is expecting you," the secretary said immediately I introduced myself. "Please step into his office. He will be right with you."

I nodded my thanks, confidently marched into his outer office and immediately stopped short. Already seated in one of the chairs, smirking and looking very pleased with himself was Noah. After recovering a little, I took a seat as far away from him as possible. I ignored him, but couldn't help noticing that he kept smiling sheepishly.

What was his doing at the mayor's office? And why did he have that dirty look of his?

Minutes later, the door to the mayor's inner office opened. He appeared at the door and smiled at us.

"Mrs. Amelia. Mr. Noah. Please, come right in. I was making some urgent phone calls just now. Sorry for keeping you both waiting."

I frowned. I thought Noah was here for something else entirely, but being called in by the mayor at the same time was odd. Very odd. It almost seemed we were here to discuss the very same thing with the mayor. Still I forced myself to be pleasant enough as we exchanged pleasantries.

"I'll get right to the point," the mayor said once he had ushered us into seats. "Amelia, there are some..." He paused with his head to one side while searching for the right words. "... complications with the award you received last night. I am talking specifically of the community impact award."

My frown deepened as I tersely said, "I don't recall there being a complication. Everything looked very straightforward to me. I had enough votes to make me bag the award. I did."

"Did you?" Noah drawled.

"Of course, I did."

I threw a glance at Noah, silently daring him to say anything to the contrary, but he just kept looking at the mayor expectantly.

"You are right, of course," the mayor said.

"Then what-"

"-In a way." I pursed my lips as he went on. "You won the award. No contest there. Normally, you are to be the one who will handle the yearly project, but the business committee has decided that you and Mr. Noah are to compete for this position."

I felt angry warmth flood my cheeks especially when Noah nodded in a satisfied manner. What an absolute asshole.

Why did I have to compete with him when I won the award fair and square?

I knew Noah was behind the scheme but how could they easily let him have his way?

"Sorry, but that is ridiculous," I ground out. "I mean why on earth do I have to compete with him for anything? You know as well as I do that I am perfectly capable of handling any project, so why does it seem like my capabilities being undermined? Does this have anything to do with the fact that I'm a woman? I have to know."

The mayor cleared his throat self consciously. "No. We are not sexists here. This has nothing to do with the fact that you are a woman."

"Nothing at all," Noah chipped in.

This time, I didn't bother acknowledging him with a stare.

"Yes. Er- you see Mr. Noah has been winning this award for a really, really long time. This year, he contested the transparency of the award since it is unusual that he lost. We had to look into his suit. It is not in our nature to simply discard the views of others in matters like this. The board came up with the idea of making everything fair and square."

Noah couldn't hold back his triumphant grin. Not wanting to give the impression that I was very upset, I bit back an angry retort.

"What are the details of this... competition?" I asked.

"Good question." He flipped through some files on his large desk. "You and Noah will have to each propose an idea to the city's planning and zoning board. They will vet your ideas. Whoever they select will be the one to handle the project for the year."

"That is not how the social impact award works," I pointed out. "Why have the rules changed because of him?"

The mayor lifted one shoulder in a shrug. "Well, special situations call for special..."

"Oh no. There is nothing special about this situation. What is going on here simply reeks of unfairness. You all have gotten used to Noah's face and name on the award, and it is pretty obvious that Noah is definitely going to be favoured by the board."

"I understand your anger, Amelia," he murmured sympathetically.

"No you don't," I muttered.

"However, let me be the first to assure you that the board members will be very fair in their judgment of your ideas. They will be free of any forms of prejudice against either of you."

He was wrong, of course. He was wrong and he knew it. I was so angry it felt like I would explode at any moment. To be given the award, to have been publicly recognized as having done something better than Noah, and to have all that snatched away with twenty-four hours was cruelty at its peak.

The city voted for me, they believed I deserved the award. Why was the council trying to take it away from me?

Though I should have known Noah would not let it go that easily. He was petty. Making sure he got the better of some other person by underhand means was sort of his specialty.

"What else are we expected to do?" Noah asked.

"You are both to come up with your proposals in less than twenty-four hours. This is because you will meet with the board members tomorrow."

"Of course. I understand. I will have something for the board by then." Noah turned to me expectantly.

I said nothing, merely pushed to my feet and took my leave of the mayor. I was just several steps out of the building when I felt a hand on my shoulder. I spun around.

"What is it, Noah?" I hissed.

"Hi, Amelia. You were such in a hurry to leave. I wonder why. I needed a word. Do me a favour and answer this question, will you? I have been trying to decide if you are angry that I contested the award or if you're scared that I will get the contract. So tell me-"

I didn't wait to hear the rest of what he had to say. Standing there, listening to him goad me would only make me end up bandying words with him. He was such a childish prick, looking for attention at all times.

Besides, I was sure he wanted to give everyone who cared to know the impression that I was jealous of him, that I somehow was too flawed to merit such an award. No one needed to tell me that this time, Damian and I needed only more of positive publicity.

I turned on my heel, and marched to my car where my driver was waiting to take me home.

NOAH

I was in a state by the time I got to Monique's house. Seeing that bitch and hearing her talk always managed to do things to me. Never would I have believed that Amelia would grow from being a minor irritant to a royal, consistent, insistent pain in my backside.

Fuming, I stormed through Monique's house and went straight to the room she used for yoga practice. She was in tight yoga pants, bending her body into fantastic shapes. She paused in her routine to glance at me.

"You look like you've swallowed a bee," she said. "Why are you so angry?"

"It's her... Amelia. She just won't get off my back. Anywhere I turn, she's here and I'm just realizing that most of this is your fault."

Monique's eyes widened slightly. "My fault?"

"Yes." I bit off. "You promised to help me dominate the city, but you sit here doing yoga, while my ex wife does a damn good job of trying to take the city from me. And guess what? She is succeeding in some ways."

She sat on the mat, and reached for a bottle of water by her side.

"Don't be ridiculous, Noah," Monique said with a laugh. "No one is taking anything away from you, least of all Amelia. That woman is nothing but an irrelevant fly. I can get rid of her with just a snap of my finger. Trust me."

"Irrelevant or not, I don't want to take any chances. I can't afford to. I want you to handle her before we meet the board tomorrow. You have to deal her a heavy blow, one that will be guaranteed to make her not even show up for tomorrow's meeting. I'm sure if she doesn't show, they will think she chickened out. Working on the mayor and then board members from then on will be easy. I'll get the contract and she will be put in her place. Monique, you have to see to it that this happens. You must."

Still smiling, she waved a hand airily. "There is no need to get your panties in a twist. I got it. I will handle her." Slowly and sensuously, she pushed to her feet until we were inches apart.

"Speaking of panties, why don't you stop talking and working so you can take mine off? For some reason, I really want you in my bed this morning."

A smile curved my lips as I took a long, leisurely look at her perfect body. My inspection did not escape her notice.

"The bedroom?" she asked.

I nodded. She took my hand and led me to it.