

Chapter 103

AMELIA

I couldn't sit still for long. I stood with my hands clasped together, offering a silent prayer to whatever force was out there. I had to get this contract. I just had to.

Even the universe had to agree that I deserved a break after all I had been through.

I couldn't let Noah take this one thing from me again. I had to get this.

Noah's voice interrupted my musings.

"Scared already?" he smirked. "I think I understand how you feel. You must feel like a fish out of water. You shouldn't have tried to fit into where you obviously don't belong in the first place. Next time, stick to accepting your husband's award on his behalf. Women have no place in the business world."

I said nothing, but my eyes did the talking. His taunts were probably a way to overcome his nervousness about the board's decision.

I knew he was nervous, too, and I had seen it on his face when the board commended my proposal. I had to get this contract so I could shut him up once and for all.

I glanced at my watch, wondering how long it had been since the board members told us to wait outside. Had it been only five minutes? It felt like thirty.

"Not too late for you to beat it," Noah said again. "Save yourself the humiliation. Get back to your bakery because my proposal is sure as hell going to be the winning one. This so-called decision of theirs? Just a formality."

Obviously, ignoring him was giving him the erroneous impression that I was afraid. I turned to face him.

"I know what you did, Noah," I retorted.

"What are you talking about?"

"You tried to sabotage my bakery this morning so I wouldn't show up here." I laughed in his face. "For someone so sure his proposal will win, you sure seem threatened. Maybe some part of you has realized, like I have, that you are not as good as you say you are. You're scared that a woman will beat you at your game, and hell, I will."

Colour flooded Noah's cheeks, but he quickly iced up. "You think being here makes you part of the city's wealthy society, huh? Let me tell you something, Amelia, the importance you attach to yourself is all in your head. You're very insignificant, and I'll be a fool to ever go out of my way to squash you."

I opened my mouth to tell him that if that were the case, he was actually a fool, but the meeting room door opened.

"Please, come back in," the man holding open the door beckoned to us.

"We have come to a decision," Mr Thompson, the head of the board, said immediately after Noah and I were seated before them. Both of your proposals were quite impressive." Noah moved impatiently. For someone who claimed he was sure he had bagged the contract, he looked very uneasy. "After much consideration, the proposal we chose was Amelia's. We believe her idea is a novel..."

What?

I didn't hear the rest of what he said. I was still trying to convince myself I had heard correctly. Had he actually said my proposal had been chosen?

"Sorry," I gulped. "You mean my proposal was chosen?"

"Yes," he said with a smile. "And I offer you my congratulations."

I almost leapt to my feet in excitement. It felt like a dream, but it was so real at the same time. I had to remind myself that I was in the midst of dignified men, which stopped me from screaming out with joy.

"Impossible!" We were all startled when Noah slammed his fist on the table. "How can you give her the contract?"

"Mr Allen. Please compose yourself and calm down."

"Don't bloody tell me to calm down. I know what's happening here. You let her get the contract because she is screwing one of you. Which one of you is it, huh?" His eyes fell on Mr Thompson, a grey-haired man pushing seventy. "It must be you. Have you no shame sleeping with a woman your daughter's age?"

"Enough!" One of the board members rose to his feet. Surprisingly, Mr. Thompson was calm. "Mr Allen, we can get you arrested for making such allegations... but we will let it go this once."

Mr Thompson fixed him with a steely stare.

"There will be consequences for your actions," he shook his head. "You will be barred from ever winning the community impact award."

"You can't do that!" Noah cried. "You don't have the right to do that!"

I noticed one of the men press the intercom on his desk. Seconds later, a couple of security officers burst into the room. They began to advance to Noah even before they were told to escort him out of the premises.

"Let go of me," Noah screamed as he backed away from them. "Do you know who you're treating like this? You're going to regret this. All of you!"

Disgust was written on the faces of each board member as Noah kept attempting to fight the security. Finally, he was dragged out, screaming and cursing. When the attention of the others was utterly engrossed in his tantrum, I gave him a wave and smile, which served to enrage him further. And then the door closed behind him, restoring silence.

"I'm sorry about that, Mrs Donovan." Mr Thompson was unusually calm.

I gave them a smile to show I was not offended. In fact, I was doing a jig on the inside. It was all I could do to maintain a professional manner. I could not have scripted Noah's disgrace better. Not in a million years.

A board member cleared his throat. "Now, to return to the business at hand. For the amusement park you intend to build, we are willing to provide you with a sum of four hundred million dollars."

I nodded as though I had worked with such a humongous amount before. It was the largest amount of money I've ever dreamt of managing or spending on a project.

"That's a good offer," I smiled.

"We are glad you think so. Also, you will be granted permission to demolish any buildings on the construction path. On this project, you will be working closely with the mayor, and you have the right to give the contract to the contractors of your choice."

"That is all for now," Mr Thompson added. "We will notify you if there is anything else for you to know."

I thanked them, shook hands all round and left with the feeling that I was walking on air.

It wasn't just bagging the contract that mattered. I finally put my ex-husband in his place. A woman has no place in the business world my foot.

NOAH

I kicked the door to Monique's house open. Ignoring the sudden flare of pain in my foot, I stormed into the house in search of her. She jumped to her feet the moment she saw me.

"What has happened?" she said. "Is someone here? What's wrong? You almost took down my door."

"Everything is wrong," She frowned. "Why the hell couldn't you destabilise Amelia like we agreed on?"

"I did... I did try."

"Well, you didn't try hard enough. Amelia won the fucking contract bid."

Monique's jaw went slack with shock. "What?"

"You heard me! What do you have to say about that, huh? You said she wouldn't even stand a chance! Do you know how embarrassing it was for me?"

"She wasn't supposed to be there," Monique glanced around in confusion. "Yesterday, I bribed some inspection officers. I told them to close down her bakery so she would forget about the board meeting and attend to her business."

"You should have devised a better plan then," I snapped. "Listen, we have to find a way to stop Amelia's disturbances once and for all. We must do something drastic if that is what it will take. I want to get rid of her. She's a fucking bug in my hair!"

"No," Monique laid a hand on my arm. "Don't let your brain get clouded with anger. We'll stop her, all right, but doing something now will only attract attention to us. People might begin to think we have a hand in sabotaging her. Don't let anger cloud your judgment."

"Who the hell cares what people think?" I angrily knocked her hand off. I couldn't believe Monique was the one preaching about caution now. What happened to doing everything it took to bring Amelia and her fool of a husband down? I could picture them now, having a good laugh at the way I had disgraced myself before the board members. "Get your head in the game, Monique! Get off your ass and do something to stop her before she gets even more grasping. This was not part of our deal, and I've been keeping to my own end of the bargain. You're the one messing up every—"

"Oh, shut up!" Monique yelled angrily. "You should be more worried about Lucy than Amelia. Stop barking orders at me!"

It took a few seconds for me to process her words.

"What did you say?" I asked quietly. "What has Lucy got to do with this?"

Monique sighed. "I wasn't going to tell you this, at least not yet, until I confirmed what it was all about."

"Spit it out!"

"I have seen Lucy visit Mr Thompson twice. Although I think it's nothing... I'm not sure."

I frowned. "Thompson? Who is he?"

"The head of the planning and zoning board. One of the men you met this morning."

I remembered him. He was even the one I had accused of screwing around with Amelia.

"But- but why on earth would Lucy visit him? What possible business could she have with him?"

"I don't know yet," Monique admitted. "That's why I haven't told you. Until I have more information or they meet in a place I can tap into their communication, I have nothing to give you."

I got over my surprise—a little. "Anyway, I'm sure that Lucy will explain that for her visits."

"Don't be so quick to brush this off, Noah," she warned. "Mr Thompson is not on our side. I'm not sure, but I'm afraid that Lucy might be leaking information to him. If that is what she is doing, it could jeopardise everything we worked hard for. You also have to try to find out what these visits are about."

She was right. I had to.

"I'll do that, but your focus should be on Amelia. I want her down, and I want her down fast."