

Chapter 108

AMELIA

I hesitated at the entrance to the dining room, taking in the scene before me. Damian was sitting, but he had not started his breakfast yet. He appeared to have been waiting for me to join him. I didn't want to talk to him, especially after what happened the previous night. But I didn't have a choice but to join him.

Damian mumbled a greeting as I walked in, then said, "You're up."

I nodded. "Yes."

I could feel the awkwardness in the air. It was like a tangible thing between us, something that drove our previous camaraderie away. I knew we were both thinking of the moment yesterday when I had abruptly left the kitchen to throw up. After I had vomited until I felt empty, I rinsed my face and mouth and took myself off to my room. And I had not come out until this morning.

Damian and I stared at each other for a long, uncomfortable moment. He gestured to the covered dishes on one side of the table.

"Breakfast?" he said.

"Yeah," I mumbled.

I dropped into a chair and pushed my food around my plate the entire time while Damian cleared his throat unnecessarily.

Several times when I glanced at Damian, I found him opening his mouth, about to talk to me, but he gave up the attempt every single time.

I didn't blame him. What was there to say anyway? Was I to apologize for throwing up? And then, if I did, what would he say in return? And so I said nothing. Eager to end the charade of eating together, I began to shovel forkfuls of food into my mouth.

I stopped when Damian cleared his throat, more loudly this time. I felt he was about to say something, and it turned out that I was right.

"Amelia," he began, not looking at me but at the bacon on his plate. "Are you going to take a pregnancy test?"

My mouth went dry, but I managed to ask him, in a believable tone of puzzlement, "A pregnancy test? Why on earth do I have to take a pregnancy test?"

Damian laid his fork down and looked up at me sharply.

"You should know why," he said slowly. "You threw up while cooking yesterday and then went to your room without dinner. You didn't bother saying a word to me before going to bed, and I waited several minutes. That is certainly not usual behaviour, and I think-

"You think that automatically makes me pregnant?" I gave a humourless laugh. "I was just feeling sick, that's all. Not every feeling of nausea is a pregnancy symptom, you know."

"I know."

"I'm glad you do know," I said dryly, hoping he would take the hint and drop the subject.

I had no such luck.

"But I still think you should take a pregnancy test," he pursued. "I mean, don't you think it's necessary? I think some women occasionally take those tests just to be on the safe side. Why are you completely shutting down the idea like there's more to it?"

I let my fork fall onto my plate with a clatter. "Don't be ridiculous, Damian. I thought you just agreed that throwing up isn't necessarily a sign of pregnancy. And what exactly do I stand to gain by hiding the pregnancy if I'm truly pregnant?"

"But it is one sign." His tone turned pleading as he said, "I learnt these tests are automatic. They don't waste time at all, and they are easy to do. It wouldn't hurt to make sure that-

"I SAID NO!" I shouted. I pushed my plate away, and he fell silent immediately. "Give it a rest, will you? I told you I'm not taking any stupid test. I'm not pregnant. I will never be pregnant! So don't act like you believe any different."

After my unplanned outburst, Damian kept staring at me in wide-eyed surprise.

"I'm sorry if I upset you, Amelia," he said quietly. "But why would you ever think that you will never be pregnant?" My eyes narrowed angrily, and he backtracked. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to upset you. I was just making a suggestion for you to-

"Save it!"

I pushed my chair back, grabbed my handbag and stormed out of the house.

"Take me to the bakery," I snapped at my driver.

Tears I was too powerless to withhold slipped down my cheeks in the backseat of the quickly moving car. I angrily wiped them off before my bodyguard noticed as I thought about what had happened last night. After I locked myself in my room, I took a pregnancy test with a test strip.

I was so anxious as I waited for the positive line, for any possibility that Noah was wrong and I could be a mother.

The disappointment I felt when the test came out negative was so crushing that I spent the rest of the night awake and weeping.

Damian and I have been together for months, eight months, to be precise. And we've had sex countless times. I didn't want to think about Noah. He couldn't be right. He shouldn't be right.

To make things worse, Damian had brought it up again this morning. Why did he have to get so concerned about the damn pregnancy? Why was it always so important to them? Why couldn't they just love me?

Even though I had not lost sight of the fact that my marriage to Damian was temporal, I had really hoped for a baby, or at least a sign that I wasn't barren. We got closer to the office, and I wiped my tears. I resolved to put my personal issues behind me for the rest of the day.

And then my day got worse.

Noah was standing and waiting impatiently for me at the entrance of the bakery.

"What are you doing here?" I snapped, walking up to him.

He raised one arrogant brow. "I would have thought that was fairly obvious, Amelia. I'm here to tell you to put a stop to your demolition plans."

"To tell me-" I broke off and shook my head. The nerve of this man! Coming here to give me orders. "Listen, Noah. Just leave. I am not in the mood to discuss anything with you."

We stared at each other. He did not move to leave, so I tried walking past him and into the building.

"I'm not done talking," he said, gripping my arms tightly.

"Hands off." My bodyguard, whose presence I had almost forgotten, growled and pushed Noah back, breaking his tight hold on me.

"How dare you?" Noah growled as he stumbled back a few steps.

I angrily smoothed down my rumpled sleeve.

"Listen and listen good," I said as I struggled not to raise my voice. I kept reminding myself that my employees were within earshot and it wouldn't be proper for them to see me involved in an altercation with my ex-husband. That would only serve as fodder for gossip. "Don't you ever lay your hands on me again. If you do, I promise you that I will demolish more than one of your buildings. I will come after you and take everything you have."

His face turned ugly. "You wouldn't dare..."

"Oh, but I will, Noah. I will. I promise you. You know, if you had come off your high horse and asked nicely, I might have considered your plea and left your building alone. But as it is, with you showing up at my place of business and attempting to manhandle me..." I flicked my wrist to check the time and did a quick calculation. "You roughly have just four hours before your building comes down. I advise you to use those hours well."

Noah stepped back when my glowering bodyguard took a threatening step toward him. He left the path to the bakery clear, and I swept past him.

I was worried about Amelia's outburst. Ever since I came into the office this morning, I couldn't stop thinking about what she had said to me.

Never had I seen her as angry as she had been this morning. I thought back to all I said yesterday and even today, wondering if I said anything wrong. After a minute or two, I concluded that there was nothing I could possibly have said to upset her. So, what suddenly went wrong?

My thoughts drifted and dwelt on the possibility of Amelia getting pregnant with my child. Just the thought of it made me break out in a cold sweat.

I didn't want her to get pregnant for me. Not in a million years. I would not be a good father. I just didn't have it in me to be one. It would be wicked to bring children into this world just to traumatize them or to give them less of the love and attention they deserve.

My father had done the very thing, and I couldn't be him. I didn't want to be that deadbeat dad that would have a child who resented him. I couldn't.

I straightened in my seat and a thousand questions started to flit into my mind at the same time. What if Amelia was actually pregnant, but wanted to hide it from me because she knew how I would react?

"Shit!" I muttered, scrubbing my hands over my face.

Now, that was a scary prospect indeed. The thought of it sent my heart pumping in my chest.

Or maybe she wants child support, I thought. Child support? How much more money did she want?

And then my thoughts went haywire as I began to imagine several other things Amelia could want. These 'wants' became more horrifying the longer I pondered on them.

I had a sudden, vivid mental image of myself surrounded by children who were mine. Their eyes were peering into mine as they asked for help.

It suddenly felt very hard to breathe. In a panic, I pushed away the files on my desk. I shot to my feet, grabbed a bottle of wine, and, with shaky hands, poured a generous amount into a glass.