

Chapter 117

AMELIA

"Perfect," I sighed when I stepped back to survey the dinner table.

I stepped forward, made a few tiny adjustments to the place mats and then it was truly perfect.

I had invited Queenie over to the house for dinner and she was due at any moment. Just then, the doorbell rang. I hurried away to the front door to show Queenie into the house.

"I hope you're not mad I'm a bit late," she said the moment I opened the door.

"Of course not. Come in. I just made dinner." I said.

She began sniffing the air the moment she stepped over the threshold.

"Something smells really good in here," she smiled. "I can see you're still the chef I know."

"No, it doesn't," I said with a laugh. "I cooked in the kitchen, not here."

"Fine then. Where's dinner? Let's start eating already."

I shook my head, and glanced at my watch. "Not yet. We will have to wait a bit. Damian is not home yet."

Queenie and I sat, chatting to pass the time while I waited for Damain who was due to come home soon.

After about thirty minutes, I heard his car pulling into the driveway.

Soon, he walked into the house, closely followed by Anton. What a surprise. He didn't inform me of his plans but Anton was practically family at this point.

Damian greeted me and gave way for Anton to do the same.

Anton's wide smile for me faltered and slipped the moment he caught sight of Queenie.

Queenie exchanged pleasantries with Damian, and her eyes landed on Anton who was already staring at her.

For a moment, I thought they were drooling at each other. There was a slight glint in Anton's eyes and even a toddler would know that Queenie caught his eyes.

On the other hand, Queenie was flushed. Her fingers were playing with the hem of her dress as she stared at him.

It took Anton quite a while to realize the room had suddenly gone silent. When he did, he lurched forward and almost tripped over his own feet.

"H-hi. I'm Anton," he said, extending his hands towards Queenie who blushed. I watched them and I couldn't help but smile. I couldn't let my laughter be the reason dinner would be awkward between them.

But I was quite amused and shocked at the same time that Queenie was briefly taken by him.

Queenie was a master of self control and it was quite shocking to see her so... shaken and thunderstruck. Yes. That was the word.

After a long, long moment Damian cleared his throat and I thought it prudent to say cheerfully, "Dinner is ready, everyone. Shall we?"

Damian changed into something comfortable before coming down again.

We all went into the dining room. I noticed Anton took every opportunity to glance at Queenie even though he was trying not to. Despite Damian's numerous attempts to hold a conversation with him, Anton was distracted.

"Can you pass the hot sauce?" Damian asked me, pulling me from my careful observation.

"Ummm," my eyes glanced around the table. "I think it's in the kitchen. I'll grab it."

"I'll be right back," I added.

In the kitchen, I had just picked up the bottle when Damian came in.

"Dinner is turning out to be... interesting," he said quietly.

I turned, trying to figure out what he was talking about. There was a twinkle in his eyes. The corners of his mouth were lifted just a fraction in a quirky smile.

"What do you mean?" I asked. "And why are you smiling, or trying to smile?"

He moved forward until we were standing really close. "Isn't it obvious? Anton is... what's the word now? Smitten with your friend. He still can't seem to string two words together even though it seems like he's making a very serious effort to do just that."

I laughed. I couldn't hold it in anymore. The idea of Anton, always so talkative, always so confident, reduced to a mute all because of Queenie was hilarious. Damian joined in the laughter, and took the hot sauce I was about to take to the dining table.

"I'll help you with this," he said. "We'd better get going, or they will be wondering where we went off to." He thought for a moment and amended his statement. "At least Queenie will. Anton doesn't seem capable of noticing anything else apart from her."

We laughed and returned to the table together.

Dinner continued with more conversations. Then a lot of it. Mostly Anton's. It seemed he had finally snapped out of his trance.

As the evening progressed, he became desperate, even frantic, to impress Queenie.

"Damian," he said loudly, giving Queenie a quick sideways glance. "Have I told you how good business is these days?"

"Uhm. You must have mentioned it," Damian said with a knowing smile fixed on his face.

Anton nodded.

"I'm into the fashion business, you know," he said, finally addressing Queenie.

"Oh. You are?" Queenie replied. "It's a really good business. You must know a lot of designers."

"Of course, I do. I design a lot of clothes as well." He boasted.

"Obviously," Damian said in an undertone, but low enough so only I heard him.

I hid a grin by putting a forkful of food into my mouth.

"My outfits are mostly only the creations of very popular designers. I work with models. Lots of popular models. Do you watch or attend fashion shows?"

"Sometimes, I do," Queenie was reluctant to impress him but Anton couldn't take the hint.

Before the next words were out of her mouth, Anton asked, "Do you travel often? There's so much to see when you're not buried in work. Do you have a dream vacation country?"

His questions was so unrelated to what he had been saying earlier and it was amusing. Damian and I exchanged glances with each other and smiled.

"No, I don't really travel," Queenie said slowly. "But I have been to some countries, mostly for work and my passion."

"I've been to a lot of countries," Anton boasted again. "My work takes me to many exotic locations, you know..."

And he went off on a spiel about all the countries he had been to, what he had done there, all the famous people he had met or was sure to meet, and how everyone in the fashion industry practically worshipped the ground he walked on. While he said all this, it was a struggle for Damian and I to keep straight faces.

Queenie hung on to his every word but there was a misty expression in her eyes that told me she was not really concentrating on what he was saying, but was just drinking in the sight of him. And then Anton finally ran out of things to say to impress Queenie.

"How long have you known Amelia?" he asked after drawing in a much needed breath.

"I've known her for a really long time," Queenie said with a fond glance at me, a glance she hadn't spared me in a long while this evening. "In the beginning we were a trio, three best friends, but then I found that I didn't really like Lucy. Amelia had insisted we get along with her since she was bullied a lot in school. I guess I wasn't wrong about Lucy especially after what she did."

"Lucy," Damian and Anton said at the same time as they gave me an inquiring look.

"Yes. Lucy." I sighed. "It's the Lucy you both know. She seems sorry for what she did now. Just the other day, she came by the bakery with her baby. She asked me for help, for some money. She told me she was sorry for everything she had done."

Damian waved a hand impatiently. "Please, don't be fooled by that. People- and Lucy is no exception- only make a u-turn and beg for forgiveness and help only when they know they are completely going. It's just basic manipulation to play on your emotions. Don't fall for it. If things were going well for her, she would not have spared you a thought.

"I agree one hundred percent," Queenie said fiercely. "Lucy is bad news. She's just looking for someone to leech on, Amelia. Don't be that person. I'm sure she didn't think her actions would backfire on her."

Anton simply nodded. He still was too engrossed with Queenie to add his two cents to the conversation. Or maybe he was afraid of saying the wrong thing and blowing his chances.

Thankfully, the topic drifted away from Lucy to other things. Anton and Queenie grew more relaxed around each other and the rest of the evening was fun. Some hours later, I shut the door behind Anton and Queenie who were making their way to their homes.

I went into the kitchen to wash the used dishes and Damian followed me quietly. He had been all smiles and laughter, but now he looked serious. Very serious.

"Is anything wrong?" I asked, studying his expression once more.

"I just wanted to talk to you."

I dropped the dishes and gave him my full attention. "I'm listening. What do you want to say?"

"I wanted to say- to tell you that I'm really sorry for what I said about you wanting to get pregnant so you'd get child support from me. I was just angry at that moment. I wasn't really paying attention to what I was saying. I didn't really mean it. I know you're not the type of woman who is manipulative and desperate for money."

I felt something in me- my heart maybe- thaw at his words. It felt like a huge weight had been rolled off me. He didn't know how much it meant to me to have him say he hadn't meant those words.

I wanted to say something, but I sensed there was a lot more he had to say. So I watched him and waited.

He swallowed convulsively before saying, "Actually, the thing is the thought of being a father makes me really nervous. I know I'm a major asshole. I don't want to be a bad father."

"It's okay," I said softly. "You don't have to look so worried. I'm not pregnant. I'm sure. And maybe you're not an asshole, you just think you're an asshole, which makes you act like an asshole." I laughed. "That's difficult to phrase but give yourself a chance to embrace happiness. You won't lose everything good thing that comes into your life. Trust me."

He sighed and his eyes softened. "You always know the right things to say. Thank you, Amelia. You're my light and I hope you can drive away this darkness inside me."

"You'll be fine."

"Goodnight, Amelia."

"Goodnight, Damian."

Damian nodded and took his leave. I finished my task in the kitchen, and went up to my room to change.

I had just bent to grab a pair of pajamas when I felt a rush of liquid making its way from my throat to my mouth.

I bolted to the bathroom, bent over the sink just in time to puke out my entire dinner.