

Chapter 130

THREE MONTHS LATER

DAMIAN

"Oh, come on!" I muttered to myself as, for what felt like the umpteenth time, my fingers slipped on my silk tie.

I had tied knots, dozens, even hundreds of times before. But this time, I couldn't even manage to tie a decent one.

I knew what the problem was, though. Apart from the fact that my hands were sweaty, I was anxious and nervous. Seeing as I had gotten wedded once before, one would have thought that I was used to the whole process by now. This time was the first time, in a way, the first phase of my new beginning with Amelia.

"My wife," I said aloud, pausing to stare at my reflection in the mirror. A smile lifted the corners of my mouth.

The word 'wife' did have a nice ring to it. Amelia was still technically my wife, but today, she became mine for real, not only in name. And it wasn't like our first wedding, which concluded in minutes and was void of any emotions.

"Hey!"

I flinched a little and turned to the door, then shot an irritated look at Anton, who had just popped into the room like some annoying jack-in-the-box dressed in a natty dark blue suit with slicked-back hair. The half-made knot on my tie completely unravelled, and I was back to square A.

I complained, "You just ruined a perfectly good knot in the making."

Anton, laughing, shut the door behind him. "It was not a perfectly good thing. It looked like you were trying to tie your shoelaces, not your tie. You have been a long time in here, though. What gives?" He stopped to give me a once-over. And you look nervous as hell. What's the matter, man? Are you scared of the priest or maybe how many hundred guests you've got waiting back there?"

I chuckled, which was good because laughing a little helped relieve some of my tension.

"Well, you would be the same way, probably-no-certainly even worse if you were in my shoes. After all, it's not every day one gets to marry the love of his life. At least for real this time," I added in an undertone.

"What? The last time was a fake?" Anton gasped in mock horror. "I would never have imagined that of you, Damian. Bad, bad, boy!"

I shook my head. The man was a clown, but I was glad of it this time. Now, I was more or less my old self. He somehow knew how to calm me down, even without making an impression that he was trying to do so. My fingers inched up to my neck as I resumed the process of knotting my tie.

Anton's fingers beat me to it. "Hold still. Let me help with that. Looks like you're trying to strangle yourself with it." He smirked. "It would be a shame if you died just a few minutes before your wedding. You wouldn't want to traumatise your wife."

"Take it easy," I said as his nimble fingers moved around my throat.

"Don't worry. I'm doing it just this one time. Soon, Amelia will be doing this for you. It's the sort of thing wives do to perfection."

"Have you been watching those romance sitcoms?" I teased. "But on a more serious note, Anton. Thank you."

"For this? Come on, it was nothing."

After completing his task, he tapped my chest and stepped back to survey his handwork.

"Not for this... obviously," I said. "Thank you for sticking with me for so long. Not many people could have understood me or handled my mood changes the way you did. You were kind and patient with me, and I really appreciate that. Oh!" I exclaimed as though suddenly remembering something else. "How can I forget to also thank you for doing a shitty job as an adviser when it concerned Amelia. Really, I am glad you did a shitty job."

Anton laughed. "Well, that makes two of us. If I had not been such a terrible adviser, I would probably never have met Queenie. But I did try my best. You were just too stubborn to listen to me. I don't know why you needed an adviser in the first place when you would already make up your mind on everything. It's one thing you have in common with my Queenie."

Anton's eyes got that longing, faraway look they always did whenever Queenie was mentioned.

"She is the best," he said half to himself.

"So she must be," I teased, then grew serious. "Listen, Anton. You've given me a lot of advice over the years. I think it's time I returned the favour. You now finally have a chance with a good woman. You have to do everything in your power not to let her slip away because, trust me, the real thing is hard to find. That's one of the reasons I'm glad I've got Amelia. You, my friend, have to make sure you don't mess it up because no amount of money or sex will ever make you truly happy. Whether you like it or not, whether you are conscious of it or not, your heart will always yearn for true love. Without it, you will feel... empty. Without it, you will die without feeling how great it is to give your heart to someone else, for them to nourish and love you. Without it, you'll be nothing. Take it from someone who knows."

Anton nodded solemnly. "Yeah, you're right, Damian. I won't mess this one up." He rubbed his jaw. I just hope Queenie will accept the man I am."

"When you love someone, the man you are may not be enough. You'll have to do better to win her heart. You'll have to let go of those terrible habits that could hurt her. It would be best if you tried to give her nothing but the best version of you. That's the only acceptable thing."

"I can't believe I'm hearing this from you," he chuckled. I'm glad you're here for me, and trust me, I'll need your wise words often."

He moved in about the same time I did, and I gave him a brief hug.

He pulled away and clapped my back. Hard enough to hurt. The solemn Anton was gone. Mischievous Anton was back.

"Right!" he said, grinning from ear to ear and practically skipping on his feet. "Everyone is waiting. Let's get a move on. It will be rude if your bride gets there before you."

I stood there, gaze fixed on the very end of the pew, as I waited. The familiar strains of the wedding march started up.

And then, there she was.

Amelia dressed all in white, looked like a fairy princess, and she radiated brightly, a glow coming from inside her. At her side was Dorothy, looking proud and happy. Everyone stood up at once as my bride, my wife, walked down the aisle.

I felt tears, happy tears, sting my eyes. I really wasn't all panicked about wiping them off as I would have been a while ago. They were a sign of strength, not weakness. Like it was yesterday, I remembered how I had found her, alone and heartbroken. Yet she had somehow healed my own heart. My gaze drifted to her baby bump. Soon, we would be three. My life was perfect.

The bishop's sonorous voice boomed as Amelia came to stand beside me. "We are gathered here today to witness the joining of Damian and Amelia. Marriage is..."

I lost track of the bishop's words as I stared at her perfect face. When it was time to say the wedding vows, I said them with every fibre of my being, meaning every single word.

"I choose you and promise to choose you as my wife every day we wake. I will love you in word and deed. I will laugh with you, cry with you, scream with you, grow with you, and craft with you. To be your kin and your partner in all of life's adventures is all I could hope for in the world. Loving what I know of you and trusting what I don't yet know, I give you my hand. I give you my love. I give you myself the good, the bad, and the yet-to-come. I'm madly in love with you, my wife. Not only do I promise that my love for you will grow with each day, but I promise to be your friend and partner every step of the way. I will be there for you, day or night, in richer or poorer, in sickness and in health. I trust, appreciate, cherish, and respect you. I promise to share my hopes and dreams with you as we build our lives together. I promise to put you first every time. You, my love, are my everything."

This time, unfamiliar feelings swamped me, and emotions I could not describe coursed through my heart as I finished my vows. Yet, I was sure of one thing: I meant every word I'd told her and every promise to Amelia.

I watched as tears streamed down her eyes as she tried to read her vows to me. It might have just been words to her, but to me, they gave me everything-hope for a better future for us, a promise of a lifetime of love. She gave me everything with the words she spoke.

"Damian," she started, then paused to wipe her tears. "Of all the people you've met and places you've visited, you ended up here-with me. It is a very powerful and humbling fact. Through the past months, we have faced obstacles, some harder than others, that have helped us build the strong foundation of our relationship. It has shown me your unwavering love, constant support, and silent strength. Thank you for loving my fun, crazy, and loud self as much as I do. I promise to encourage you to follow your dreams. I promise to continue to challenge you to be the best version of yourself. I promise to make you laugh when you're taking life too seriously. I promise to love you unconditionally. I promise to put you first and never lose our spark. I promise never to stop singing my own made-up songs, although I know you wish I would. Our journey as a family has only just begun, and I can't wait to see what the future holds for us. Damian, you are my true soulmate, and I have chosen to spend forever with you. I chose you back then, I chose you today, and I will continue choosing you forever. I love you."

"I now declare you husband and wife," the bishop said before saying the words I had been waiting impatiently to hear. "You may now kiss your bride."

Gently pulling her into my arms, into which she came unresistingly, I pressed my lips to hers while our guests clapped and cheered. Our kiss was long and slow. It communicated all the words we wanted to say to each other.

"I love you so much," I said to Amelia as we pulled away. "I love you now, and I will love you forever."

AMELIA

The hours passed by in a blur and haze of happiness. If I had ever been this happy, I couldn't remember it. My heart felt like it would burst from the sheer amount of happiness within it.

From my seat, I watched Damain, my husband for real this time, walk up to the stage to the sound of applause. Anton, the groomsman, had just declared in a humorous way that this was a wedding reception and that Damian must say a few words and give a toast.

"Friends, family, colleagues," Damian began, his gaze sweeping through the assemblage of guests. "I'm here as my friend said, to give a toast, but also to say a few words about my beautiful, darling wife, Amelia."

His eyes found mine, and I felt myself tearing up a little. Someone slipped their hand into mine and gave it a gentle squeeze. I was probably my mother, but I couldn't be sure because I only had eyes for Damian. For a long, long moment, it felt like we were the only two people in the world.

"Amelia," he said, hesitating a little. "I know this sounds corny and that Anton would tease me nonstop for it, but I just have to say that you are my sunshine, my life."

"Hear! Hear!" Anton cried, sending a ripple of laughter through the crowd.

With a broad smile that made him all the more handsome, Damian continued. "You are a breath of fresh air, sweetheart. I never knew what love was until I found you. You have changed my life in more ways than one. Today, in front of all these witnesses, I promise to love and cherish every single day of our existence. I promise to love you unconditionally, as well as the kids we will have and raise together. I will be there with you every step of the way, holding your hand in the good and bad times. I love you, Amelia, and-" He raised his wineglass. "-here is forever with you."

"To forever," everyone echoed.

There were laughs and then glasses clinking. Damian downed the contents of his glass and handed it over to someone with a flourish.

"Now," he said, hopping down from the stage. "Enough of speeches. If you would all excuse me, I think it's time to dance with my wife."

He pulled me into his arms and led me to the middle of the dance floor. All eyes turned to us, but I could not feel them. All I could feel was Damian's deep and overwhelming love for me.

"Tell me," he whispered against my ears. "Tell me that you'll never stop loving me."

I shook my head slowly. "I would never dream of it."

"Good. Because it would kill me." He wrapped his arms around my waist. "You and I are meant to be together forever. And if you don't think so, I'll do anything possible to prove that to you for the rest of my life."

"You do not have to prove anything to me," I whispered. "I love you, Damian. I love every bit of you, maybe, more than I love myself."

He smiled softly before he rubbed my stomach. As he looked down at me, I knew that I would give up anything in the world to spend the rest of my life with him. I knew that with him, I didn't need anything else. My heart loved him, my soul wanted him, and my being accepted him.