

Chapter 97

DAMIAN

I woke up the following day with the hope that everything would have blown over, that someone somewhere had realized that all the accusations against me couldn't possibly be true.

How wrong I was! If anything, the lies against me had even gotten worse. When I surfed the net that morning, I found that even more 'proof' about me being a child trafficker had surfaced. Monique was undoubtedly working around the clock to make sure I was ruined. She was doing a pretty damn good job of it.

I paced my room, thinking of what to do, of what other steps to take to nip this situation in the bud. On my return from the window, I spotted my phone.

Without thinking, I grabbed it and dialed Monique's number. She picked up on the very first ring, and I wondered if she had been sitting by her phone, waiting for me to call.

"Monique," I growled. "This ends now."

"What ends?" she drawled.

"You have had your fun, and it ends now. Listen, I give you less than twenty-four hours to take down all the lies you spread about me. If you don't do this, there will be consequences that will destroy you. Do you-"

Monique let out peal after peal of derisive laughter. When her laughing fit subsided, she said, "Now, who's bluffing, Damian? Let me tell you this... You think your life is hell right now, but it's actually paradise. This is only the beginning. Get ready for... more. You can't possibly begin to imagine all I have in store for you."

"Monique, you won't get away with this."

She giggled again. "Oh, Damian, I have already gotten away with it."

I hung up. Calling her was a mistake. She was enjoying herself, and I could not give her the satisfaction of knowing she had gotten to me that much. I flopped into a chair and powered up my laptop. It had just occurred to me that I had to check exactly how much damage Monique's lies had caused me. I knew it would be not good.

But it was worse, worse than I thought. A quick check of my analytics revealed that my stocks were falling. They had not fallen and plateaued. No.

My stocks were still falling rapidly with no signs of stopping. I sighed and turned off my laptop; seeing the damage Monique had caused could give me a headache.

I went down to get breakfast, and when I returned, my secretary had called to give me more terrible news.

"Sir, I'm sorry to inform you that 40% of the shareholders have withdrawn from the company." She told me timidly over the phone. "I fear more will drop, but I thought you should know the recent development."

"How did it happen?"

"They apologized, sir," she said. "but they said in light of what had happened, they had to cut off ties with the company."

"I see," I said slowly, but I was losing my mind inwardly.

First, the mayor, now the shareholders. What next? I thought.

"Keep me posted," I informed her and hung up. My entire world was spinning out of control, and I felt like throwing up in my mouth.

I pulled out my laptop again to find out more about my statistics. I found a news article on the information my secretary had given me. My shareholders, in addition to pulling out of my company, had diverted their funds to Noah since he was my closest competitor.

In anger, I pushed my table over, and my laptop crashed with it. How could this be happening to me? What did I do to deserve this?

I could imagine how overjoyed this must have made Noah feel. The fact that he had scored one over me would be more important to him than all the money his company was currently making.

The need, the urge to give Monique a taste of her own medicine, budded and grew within me until it became a burning desire. I figured that a woman like that, who was involved in so many illegal dealings, would have something in her past that I could use against her, something that would be to my advantage.

I picked up my laptop, which I was beginning to do often and ran a quick search on Monique. I read several articles on her, but nothing important or out of the ordinary came up. All the information about her was just the ones she had planted in the media. After searching the internet for over an hour and coming up with nothing, I became desperate. I knew then that I had to have help before things got out of hand.

I hurried into my study, rifled through the drawers and came up with a little notebook into which I always jotted things that I thought would be of importance. After flipping through the pages, my fingers ran over an entry and a phone number. A while ago, I had come to know of a top-rated private investigative firm, and it was to this I turned for help. I dialled the number.

"Third Eye Private Investigators," said the voice from the other end. "How may we help you?"

I asked to speak with the owner of the outfit and was put through to him when I mentioned who I was.

"Ace Sloane at your service," he said.

I went straight to the point. "I am being framed by a woman called Monique."

"Monique..."

"Yes," I said. "You are familiar with the name?"

"I believe everyone is, sir."

"Right. I'm quite sure that she is involved in several illegal activities, but she has been hiding her trail very well. I want you to dig deep into her past. As deep as you can get, even deeper. Understand?"

"Perfectly."

"Get everything you can about her and further investigate anything that seems even a little off. There must be something in her past that she is hiding, something I can use to my advantage."

"I will get right to it," Ace assured me. "My best agents will be on the job."

"I need everything you can get on her. I'll pay you triple your normal fee."

I hung up. For the rest of the day, I felt like I was going out of my mind. I felt useless, sitting around the house, doing nothing. Even the fact that an investigative firm was looking into Monique did not make me feel better. I wished I could confront her face to face.

But I knew that would not be possible. I couldn't risk driving out, no matter the amount of bodyguards I took with me. Monique had chosen her story well. The public would have been outraged at the news of human trafficking, no doubt, but the thought of children being trafficked would drive them crazy, crazy enough to lynch me if I ever showed my face in public before all this blew over.

I had no other choice but to sit and wait.

AMELIA

On my way back home from the bakery, I stopped at the grocery store to pick up some things I would use in making dinner that evening. I had finished buying almost everything and was just making my way to another aisle when someone's shopping cart hit me on the foot. I turned around to apologize because, frankly, I had not been paying attention to where I was going.

The apology died on my lips as I looked straight into Noah's eyes.

"You!" he said, and then a cold, cruel smile twisted his lips. "What are you doing here? Shouldn't you be home looking after your... husband after what's happened?"

"I have as much right to be here as much as anyone else," I retorted. "And nothing has happened to my husband. Keep your meddling nose out of our business."

I started to walk away. He stepped right in my path. "Don't run away," he said with a chuckle. "I never knew you to be a coward."

"Get the hell out of my way," I said through gritted teeth.

I struggled with the urge to raise my voice, knowing that Noah would like nothing better than for me to inadvertently cause a scene.

Noah clucked his tongue. "Language, Amelia. Language. I'd advise you to be careful of how you talk to me. I'm probably the only one you can come to ask for help, considering the fact that my company is now the best in the city." He smirked, and I felt like knocking all his front teeth out.

I scoffed, not letting my expression betray how much his words hurt. "And I'll advise you to enjoy it while it lasts, Noah. Damian was framed. That is the only reason you are in the limelight. You could only come out of the shadows when Damian took a step out of the light. When Damian is the centre of attention once more, you'll be back to lurking in the shadows as you always have been. Let's face it. You are completely irrelevant, always were, and always will be."

To my delight, Noah's cheeks flushed in anger.

"You're one to talk, you barren bitch," he shot back. He gestured to his cart. "Did I mention that I'm shopping for Lucy? She will soon give birth." He gave me a once-over. "As for you, I have to ask, why aren't you pregnant yet? Is it that your child trafficker of a husband is impotent or... Could it be because your womb is just a useless organ, unfit for bearing children? Yes... I think that's the case. You can't bear children. Even nature thinks you are unfit to be a mother. Ha!"

Noah's words hurt so bad. He always had the uncanny ability to hit me where it hurt the most, but there was no way in hell I would let him see my scars.

I fought to keep my expression deadpan as I said, "I don't have time to keep bandying words with you. Never show your face around me ever again."

I turned and walked away.