

Chapter 98

AMELIA

It was funny how people are always able to think of the right things to say after a confrontation was over. This was exactly my case now. There were so many things I wanted to tell Noah, so many things I had just thought of, things that would have taken him down a peg or two. But he had more or less the last word with that jibe about my inability to conceive.

Somehow, I was paranoid that he was right. That I was somehow barren and destined to have no kids. I didn't have any evidence to prove he was wrong so silence was all I could offer.

My day was totally and utterly ruined. As soon as I pulled up in front of the house, I grabbed the groceries on the passenger seat, and marched angrily into the house.

And then my anger deflated the moment I saw Damian. He was on the living room settee. The television was on, but muted and I could see that the news vultures as I had taken to calling them, were running yet another news feature on the child trafficking case against him. He must have been watching the news a while ago, but now he sat staring at the wall opposite, lost in thought. He stirred, blinked and focused on me when I crossed his line of vision.

"Amelia," he said with a smile that lacked a lot of it's former cheeriness. "You're back."

"I am." I pressed the bag of groceries tightly against my chest, drawing his attention to it. "I want to get dinner started."

He started to lean back against the sofa, but stopped to ask about my day. I arranged my expression to look pleased.

"It was great," I lied.

He nodded once and lapsed into thought again. It had been on the tip of my tongue to tell him about Noah, but then what good would it do? He would want to get back at Noah for harassing me, but right now he was in no position to do so. I was hurting too, but how could I bother him with my problems while he was going through a lot on his own? I didn't even want to imagine how it felt to have the whole world hating on you for something you didn't do.

And so I told him again that I was going to get dinner started, and took myself off to the kitchen. I threw in everything I had into making his favourite meal in the hopes that it would cheer him up a little. There was some cake I had brought back from the bakery, and this I used as dessert. Though a bit tired out, I took pains to make that dinner setting quite elaborate. When I was finished, I stepped back to take in my handiwork.

"Perfect," I murmured.

At the entrance of the dining room, I called out to tell him that dinner was served. He took a moment before I heard him sigh and rise from his seat.

He shuffled in, looking like the weight of the world was on his shoulders. His face brightened a little when he took in the spread before him.

"Looks good," he said and sat with me. He started eating... or pushing his food around on his plate was more like it.

After a few minutes of pretending to eat while watching him, I dropped my fork. I had to call his name twice to get his attention. His furrowed brow smoothed out as he focused on me.

"Did you say something?" he asked.

I shook my head. "You are not eating. Don't you like the food?"

He looked down at his plate.

"Of course I do," he said. "It's delicious. I... just don't seem to have an appetite."

"And I know exactly what's wrong. It's the Monique issue, isn't it?"

Damian gave a weary shrug of his shoulders.

"You read me so well, like a book," he said with some attempt at humour.

I smiled a little. "I'm sure this issue will be fixed eventually, Damian. You don't have to worry so much."

"I would like to think so," he murmured after a thoughtful silence. "But I have always prided myself on being a practical man. The enemy here, Monique, is very dangerous, very slippery. It may be dangerous, even impossible to bring these rumours back to her." He gave up on the pretence of eating and pushed his plate away. "To tell the truth, I think this could be the end for me. Everything is going downhill so fast. I don't think I can ever recover from this." He suddenly leaned forward, pinning me with his stare. "Amelia, I will completely understand if you want to end our contract now."

"What? Why?"

"I'm a sinking man, a drowning man. If you stay, some of this scandal will surely rub off on you. Your name will be dragged down into that mud with me if you stay. Already, people are looking for new angles to this case. Hell! You might even be named as my accomplice." He laughed humourlessly. "That kind of news item will be fodder for their fire."

"I'm not scared," I pointed out, crossing my arms over my chest.

"Believe me, it's not my intention to scare you at all. I'm just telling you how bad it can get. I want you to know the worst case scenario. It's not going to be pretty, Amelia, and if you walk away, I won't blame you. In fact, I think it's the best thing for you to do at this point."

"Don't you think I have thought of all that?"

He raised a brow. "Have you? Have you really?"

I could it in his eyes, the way he hoped, but was desperately trying not to. Again, he was building a wall of defense around himself so he wouldn't get hurt. I could not say I blamed him this time.

"Yes. I know all that can happen and I have made my decision. I am going to stand by you through this phase. Yes, it is a phase," I added, knowing what he had been about to say. "I will be here no matter what happens until the year stated in our contract is over."

"Thank you for your... loyalty," he said, his voice thick with emotion. "I just hope you won't regret your decision."

I leaned over the table to pat his hand.

"I won't and er- contrary to your predictions, I don't think these events have affected me much. Just yesterday, I received an invitation to attend a business gala that will hold in three days."

"A gala? Was it one of your clients who invited you?"

"No. I received the invitation via email. Apparently, it's an event for all major business owners in the city."

"Then I must have received an invite as well," he said half to himself.

But a few minutes later, I could tell from the sudden slump of his shoulders that he hadn't received the email.

"I didn't receive an email," he said. "Looks like in addition to everything, I have also been blacklisted from events."

I thought fast and came to a decision.

"Well then, if you aren't going to be there, I'm not going to attend too."

"Oh no," he said quickly. "You have to go."

"Why? If the organizers can't verify news before ostracizing people, then it's not an event I need to attend."

"But I need you there," he explained. "I need eyes on everything happening in the business world. Who better than you to fill that role than you? Also, if you're still within business circles, I might be able to know if Monique is planning something more. We have to be steps ahead of the enemy, understand?"

I did understand. Damian needed someone on the inside now that this closest associates were abandoning him. It made sense for me to play the role of the insider, but that didn't mean I liked it.

"I'll go," I told him. "But have you thought of involving the police in this? You could tell them everything you saw and they would search her house. The truth will be revealed and you'll free."

Damian shook his head. "Monique must have thought of all those things. Do you know how long it takes to get a search warrant? She would know immediately I contact the police and take steps to defeat me. I will look like a fool if they bust into her house and find nothing."

I sighed. "I guess you are right. What are you going to do then? You can't wait till everyone forgets about this, will you?"

"No." He responded. "I'm trying to work out a solution. Don't worry, I'm doing my best."

"Everything will be fine."

He nodded, glanced briefly at his untouched food and told me he was going up to bed. I cleaned up after him, my mind trying to find ways to help him.

When I went to bed that night, all my insecurities came out to play. I could not stop thinking about what Noah had said to me at the grocery store. Tossing, turning and trying to get a more comfortable spot to sleep in did not help.

I kept wondering if Noah was right and the problem with conception was actually from me. The thought of growing old and dying without having a child to call my own brought tears to my eyes. I eventually fell asleep, still crying.

DAMIAN

I couldn't sleep. I just couldn't.

I had to be the most stupid person on earth, which was odd because damn too long ago, I had prided myself on being very clever. Already, I was about to loose every damn thing I had worked so hard for because I had been such a mug for accepting Monique's proposal in the first place.

Getting blacklisted from events was undoubtedly the beginning of the end. It could only get worse from here onwards. The big question was if I would be able to clear my name before my company was run to the ground.