

Chapter 99

AMELIA

THREE DAYS LATER

I smoothed my hands over my dress. The dress, bought specially for the occasion of the gala was beautiful, fitted me to perfection. I knew that, but still I was nervous, very nervous.

I tried to hide my nervousness from Damian but with each passing minute, it got worse.

Perhaps it was because this was the first time I was attending an event of this kind without Damian or anywhere close to me. And then there was the fact that this was my first real outing since the scandal Monique had stirred up.

I didn't know what people would say about me or if I would eventually be allowed into the venue. What if they invited me to humiliate me? I had a thousand questions running through my mind and I had answers to none.

"Nice," Damian's voice came from the doorway.

I yelped in surprise, my hairbrush falling from my hand and onto the floor. I bent to pick it up but Damian beat me to it.

I smiled weakly. "Sorry. It's just nerves, I guess. I'm a little jumpy tonight."

"You shouldn't be," he said kindly. "That dress..." His eyes roved over me appreciatively. Somehow, I gained a little more confidence. "You look absolutely stunning in it. You're definitely going to distract everyone."

"Thanks," I said and meant it. "I really need a distraction so they wouldn't think about the disgusting rumor Monique spread."

He nodded, bent his wrist to take a look at his watch. "Give me a call if anyone tries to harass you. I think you should be on your way now so you don't get there late."

I quickly grabbed my purse, my keys and was heading out the door when he called me back, "A minute. You are forgetting something."

I looked around, wondering what that could be and then I noticed he held something small, round and black between two fingers.

"What's that?"

"This-" He made the object rest in his palm. "-is a very hi-tech, very sensitive microphone. With it, and with your help, I will be able to hear everything happening at the gala. If... say, you engage someone in a conversation, the person won't know they are being listened to. They wouldn't know they are being recorded. Yes. I can record the conversation if I want."

He looked at me, silently asking for my permission. I nodded. Damian clipped the microphone to the front of my dress. When he passed his hand across it, the microphone was completely hidden from view by the folds of the dress.

I eyed it dubiously. "It won't... fall off?"

"No, it won't. It's not easily dislodged. Just remember you're putting it on, and you will be fine."

I sucked in a breath. "Okay. I'll do my best to get some details you can use."

He gave me a reassuring smile which did a lot to calm my nerves. "I'm sure you will. Oh and... there is one other thing."

Before I could say a word, he was out the door of the bedroom. While I waited for him to return, I smoothed back my hair, applied a little more lipstick.

"Come in," Damian said to someone.

I spun around in time to see Damian ushering in two hefty, heavily built men in dark suits who nodded to me in greeting.

"These are bodyguards to accompany you," Damian announced.

"What? Why?"

"It's for the event tonight."

I marched up to Damian and drew him aside, out of earshot of the bodyguards.

"I don't need bodyguards," I hissed. "Damian, this is ridiculous! I'm going for a gala, not going into a den of kidnapers or murderers or... or why on earth do I even need bodyguards in the first place?"

"Because we're dealing with an unusual situation here," he said. "I have no idea of what else Monique is planning. That woman is dangerous. My priority now is to keep you safe."

"But-"

"Please. They are professionals. You won't even know they are there. You have to let them go with you."

"Fine," I said.

He exhaled and motioned for the bodyguards to escort me out. I was driven by one of them while the other rode in the front seat. By the time I got to the venue of the event, there were already so many people there that I began to wonder whether I was late.

A look at my invite told me this was not the case.

"We'll be within sight," said one of the bodyguards as he killed the engine.

I slowly got out of the car, and nodded.

"Please make sure you don't disrupt the event while trying to do your job." I told them and they nodded in unison.

In front of the building, a red carpet was set up. Several people were granting interviews and taking photographs.

I decided to completely avoid the red carpet. It would give me unwanted attention. Drawing attention to myself was the last thing I wanted at the moment. All I wanted to do was blend in, have conversations that would be beneficial to Damian and leave.

I figured it would be easy to get into the building as the paparazzi were all crowded around someone, taking pictures. But luck wasn't on my side. As I swiftly tried to get into the building, one of the paparazzi, a tall youngish man with a beard, looked up as I passed him.

"Mrs Donovan," he called.

The others turned, caught sight of me. Before I could make another move to escape, they were on me like a swarm of bees with their cameras and microphones held out. I happened to get a clear look at the spot where they had previously all been focused on and realized they had all been photographing Monique.

Monique, in a stunning black velvet dress with a diamond choker around her throat, was staring daggers at me, evidently pissed that I had stolen the spotlight, however inadvertently. She turned and marched into the building, the train of her dress trailing behind her.

The paparazzi had a whole lot of questions. I fielded them expertly, let them take a few pictures and then went into the conference hall. Nearly everyone else was seated. Again, I studied my invite to get my seat number. I glanced at the numbers of the table closest to me. My seat number had to be farther in. As I weaved my way along the tables, I felt that that virtually all eyes were on me.

I shrugged off the Feeling, putting it down to me overthinking things. If they were indeed staring, it had to be my dress.

"Such a shame she can show her face boldly at events like this," someone, a woman, murmured as I passed.

I turned quickly and saw that she was looking right at me. As soon as our eyes met, she whispered something inaudible to the woman sitting beside her and turned away.

And then I really looked and realized my first impression had been right after all. Everyone in my immediate vicinity was whispering and talking. With their eyes trained on me, it wasn't difficult to guess who they were all talking about. Me.

"Trafficker!" someone a few tables away hissed.

With my head held high, I kept moving.

"...low class bitch," a woman in front was saying to another in a loud whisper. "It's obvious she is there for his money. She'll soon go back to slums where she belongs now that everything is falling apart."

"Money!" the other woman scoffed. "His dirty money is obviously gotten from child trafficking. That Damian is a monster. Death is too good for him."

I wanted to walk past. I really did. But I knew I couldn't live with myself if I let the stupid women get away with this insults so I stopped right in front of their table.

They both looked up at me. With my hands splayed on their table, I leaned forward.

"Hello," I said, my smile tight and ferocious.

"Er-" the first woman began.

"Shut up and let me talk," I hissed. "After all, you have had your say, haven't you? I heard you both. I think it's a shame that silly females like you were allowed to attend events like this just to mock another woman like you. You lack intelligence if you lack the ability to judge a man based off what the media says. In fact, I'm pretty sure you both came as a plus one for your husband." "-involving Mr Donovan being investigated on charges of child trafficking, there will be a slight change in this presentation. Since the award list was compiled before the files were leaked, his award will be withheld until his name is cleared."

They stared at me, their mouths agape.

"Look here!" said the first woman. "You can't-"

"Oh shut it!" I said. "Your husbands are involved in much more shady stuff than mine. If you're really concerned about the society, you should donate to charities, adopt animals and travel less with your private jets. But guess what? I'm sure you don't care. So shut the hell up and enjoy the evening."

Before they could recover and move their lips, I walked away. I found my seat, and noticed that Noah was seated two tables away from me. Since Lucy wasn't with him, that meant she was probably far into the third trimester. Noah glanced over at me, and frowned. I looked away and engrossed myself in the event.

The event started momentarily and the hall quietened. After several speeches, it was time for awards to be given to the top business men in the city.

After giving a short speech on the history of the awards, the MC paused and said, "This year's award for the most innovative man of the year was supposed to go to Damian Donovan, but due to some unexpected turn of events-" There were murmurs from the crowd at this. "-involving Mr Donovan being investigated on charges of child trafficking, there will be a slight change in this presentation. Since the award list was compiled before the files were leaked, his award will be withheld until his name is cleared."

I found this very absurd. These people had invited me to this event. They knew I was married to Damian, so why the hell were they going through all this rigmarole? Why couldn't I accept the award on his behalf?

Without giving myself time to think, I shot to my feet. All eyes turned to me and a round of whispers broke out.

In a voice loud enough to be heard through the hall, I called out, "No need for that. I'll accept the award on behalf of my husband."