

Chapter 53 A Dress

As the day wore on, a sense of exhaustion settled over me like a heavy cloak, weighing down my spirits even as the excitement of the day lingered in the air.

Emily and Sally had proven to be invaluable; their warmth and generosity helped to settle my nerves with me not knowing much about them.

With each passing hour, I found myself delving deeper into Emily's conversation, learning more about Desmond and their life. Her insights offered a glimpse into a world of Alaric's I didn't know existed.

Meanwhile, Sally regaled me with tales of William and Alaric's history, shedding light on the simmering tensions that lurked beneath the surface. Her words painted a portrait of two men bound by blood yet divided by pride, their unresolved conflicts casting a shadow over any good in their lives.

Despite the wealth of knowledge gleaned from our conversations, the day's main objective remained elusive. Four bridal shops and countless dresses later, I found myself no closer to finding the perfect gown. Each fitting seemed to blur together in a haze of tulle and lace, the allure of the dresses fading beneath the weight of disappointment.

With each passing moment, my hope began to disappear, replaced by a growing sense of frustration and doubt. The dresses I had tried on seemed to lack magic, leaving me feeling boring while wearing them.

"Most are... I don't even know the word for it," I confessed to everyone, my voice tinged with frustration. "Plain, or look like the net curtains in someone's window."

Bex laughs at my comparison, but it's how I feel.

A heavy sigh escaped my lips as I sank into a nearby chair, the exhaustion of the day catching up to me in waves. Despite my best efforts, I couldn't shake the nagging feeling of defeat that gnawed at the edges of my consciousness.

"I'm feeling less hopeful right now that I will find a dress," I admitted, my words heavy with disappointment. "I've tried so many on, and none feel right."

As the reality of our situation sank in, I couldn't help but wonder if perhaps our search needed to extend beyond the confines of our current surroundings. Perhaps the perfect dress lay waiting for me in a far-off boutique.

But for now, all I could do was hold onto the flicker of hope that still burned within me, trusting that somehow, someday, I would find the gown that would make me feel like a bride.

As Bex called my name, I turned, feeling a surge of weariness wash over me. I was ready to call it a day, to admit defeat in our seemingly endless quest for the perfect dress. But as she held up the gown, a flicker of curiosity sparked within me, an inexplicable urge to at least entertain the possibility.

Taking the dress from her outstretched hands, I made my way to the dressing area, the anticipation building with each step. With the help of the attendant, I slipped into the gown, the fabric cascading around me like a shimmering waterfall.

As I stepped out from behind the curtain, I gasped at the sight before me. The dress was stunning, a vision of ethereal beauty that took my breath away. The plunging V-neckline dipped lower than I had anticipated, but the intricate beadwork and delicate sequins lent it an air of timeless elegance. I turned to see that it was backless.

"I think this is it," I declared with a smile, the words tumbling from my lips with a sense of certainty that I hadn't felt all day.

But as I basked in the glow of my newfound discovery, my mother's voice cut through the moment like a knife, her disapproval casting a shadow over my joy.

"Is there a way to fix the front?" she asked, her words tinged with concern.

I bristled at her suggestion, my confidence faltering in the face of her criticism. "The front is fine," I insisted, my voice laced with frustration.

But my mother remained unmoved, her disapproval palpable as she voiced her objections. "Ruby, it's too revealing. Highly inappropriate for a wedding," she admonished, her words struck a nerve.

I felt my temper flare at her words, and a surge of defeat rose within me. Yes, the neckline was daring, but it was also undeniably beautiful, reflecting my own sense of style and individuality.

"It's perfectly fine, Mother," I retorted, though the uncertainty in my voice betrayed my resolve.

But she wasn't finished yet, her criticism growing louder with each passing moment. "You're getting married; you're showing too much skin," she continued, her words a relentless barrage that left me reeling.

With a heavy heart, I turned away, retreating behind the safety of the curtain as I struggled to contain the flood of emotions that threatened to overwhelm me. Why did she have to cause issues?

As Sally joined me and settled into a chair beside me, her presence offered a comforting feeling.

"I know that you said your parents were religious and strict, I didn't think you meant this bad." Her words carried a weight of understanding that resonated deeply, her chuckle a gentle reminder that I wasn't alone in facing the challenges posed by my mother's rigid beliefs.

"Anyone would think I was trying to get married in lingerie with how she is acting," I remarked with a wry smile. My mother's disapproval was nothing new, but somehow, her criticism felt more personal when it came to something as significant as my wedding dress.

Sally regarded me with a knowing gaze, her eyes filled with a mixture of empathy and determination. "Do you like it?" she inquired, her voice gentle yet probing.

"It feels perfect, Sally," I admitted, though the weight of my mother's potential reaction hung heavy in the air. "But if I get it, my mother will cause a riot."

Sally's response was swift and unequivocal. "Get the dress. It is your day. Forget what she thinks. If she hates it, she can look at Alaric throughout the wedding."

Her words struck a chord within me, reminding me that this day was ultimately about me and the love I shared with Alaric. With a newfound sense of resolve, I made my decision.

"Okay, I'm getting it," I declared, the weight of uncertainty lifting from my shoulders as I embraced the freedom to choose.

Sally's hug was warm and reassuring, a silent affirmation of her unwavering support. "You will look amazing," she assured me, her confidence bolstering my own. "I will tell your mother that you are getting this dress!"

With determination, I shed the gown and prepared to make my purchase. The anticipation of wearing it on my wedding day outweighed any lingering doubts.

As Sally left the room to handle the logistics, I braced myself for the inevitable confrontation that would follow my decision. But to my surprise, the anticipated raised voices and arguments failed to materialize.

Had my mother chosen to hold her tongue, to set aside her disapproval in favour of preserving the peace? Or perhaps, for once, she had recognised the futility of fighting against me.

Regardless of her motivations, I couldn't help but feel a sense of relief wash over me. For in that moment, I knew that the only opinion that truly mattered was my own.