

Chapter 111

AMELIA

There was a muted buzz of conversation in the room as I waited for the entire staff to assemble. Soon, the girl in charge of the showroom display came in and the door was shut.

"That's everyone, I suppose," I said to no one in particular.

"Yes," said Rose.

I nodded, looked around at all the staff of my bakery.

"Some of you, if not most of you must have heard of the city's project that I'm handling." There were nods from most of them and murmurs of assent and a few calls of 'congratulations, ma'am.' "Well, the project has added to my many responsibilities. But before I continue, I will like to thank you all for your help in winning the award. Your contributions are noted and appreciated. That being said, to be able to cope with all that I am supposed to be doing, I will no longer be coming to work here as frequently as I used to. To help me manage the bakery full time... I give you Rose."

Rose, staring and then beaming as she realized the import of what I had said, accepted congratulations from her colleagues.

I waited until the applause died down before continuing, "She will do all I've been doing here. I expect you all to give her your cooperation. Thank you. That is all."

There was the sound of chairs being scraped back and then they began to file out. I called for Rose, who was one of the people in line to leave first.

"I want to see you," I said.

I waved her into sit in the chair opposite me.

"Thank you so much for the opportunity, ma'am," she said excitedly before I started talking.

"You deserve it. You have been most helpful here. You're literally the one that holds this place together when I'm not around. I give you total control of the bakery. I'll just be in to supervise once in a while. Of course, this responsibility comes with an increase in your pay."

She shifted so she was sitting on the very edge of her chair with her hands clasped together. "Thank you so much for this opportunity. I promise I will not let you down."

"I'm sure you won't. I know I made the right choice in letting you run the place. I- Yes? Come in."

There had been a knock on the door. It was pushed open and one of my staff poked her head around the door.

"Yes?" I said.

"I'm sorry to interrupt, but there is a woman out there who is insisting to see you. Won't take no for an answer."

I raised a brow. "This woman... Did she tell you her name?"

She nodded at once. "Yes. She said her name is Queenie."

"Queenie!" I exclaimed before I could stop myself.

I was out of my seat in a flash. There was only one Queenie I knew. She was my long time friend. I couldn't believe she was actually here, unless...

Seated on one of the chairs in the showroom, absently flipping through a menu was a familiar figure that was unmistakably Queenie's.

"Queenie!" I exclaimed again.

She turned. A broad smile lit up her face as she took me in. And then we were closing the distance between us at the same time. The next moment, we were in each other's arms, enveloped in a tight hug, talking excitedly at the same time. It was a while before either of us could calm down enough to hear what the other was saying.

"It's been so long," I said, holding her by the hands to take her in.

She still looked as beautiful as ever but was with a noticeable tan that suited her to perfection.

"It's been ages!" she exclaimed with a full, throaty laugh.

I looked around, noticed we were being observed by more than a few customers. I promptly linked my arm through Queenie's.

"Come, let's continue this in my office," I said.

I couldn't stop myself from hugging her again when we got there.

"I was going to call you before I came here," she said when I had waved her into a seat. "But your number wasn't going through and hasn't been for a while"

"Oh. It won't go. I'm no longer using my old phone. But how did you even find me in the first place?"

"That was nothing." She waved a hand airily. "I saw your name and even pictures of you on the news. I did a quick Google search on you and voilà!" Her tone grew serious as she added, "During the internet search and all that, I found out you and Noah got divorced. How did that even happen?"

I sighed. "He threw me out of his house on the very same day I found out he was sleeping with Lucy."

"Lucy? The one I know?"

"The very one. Lucy, our friend. She was pregnant for Noah then. I think she is even about to give birth now."

Queenie scowled. "I never liked her, you know. To me there was always something... off about her. The truth is I actually distanced myself from you because I wasn't comfortable being around her. You on the other hand were perfectly comfortable with her. Now I know I was right to dislike her."

"Let's not talk about that now. What's done is done after all." I sat up straighter. "So tell me about yourself. What have you been up to all this time?"

"Well, since I left, I have been working as an emergency nurse in Ghana."

I nodded. Already I knew all about Queenie's passion for helping people. Immediately after college, she had traveled to some remote part of Ghana to work as a nurse. What I didn't know was that she had been there all this time.

"I lost most of my things in a hospital fire and then the last text I got from you was about..." She scrunched up her brow in an effort to remember. "fourteen months ago."

"I'm sorry, so sorry for not reaching out sooner. I honestly can't say that I have a real excuse."

She leaned forward, patted my hand. "It's okay. I understand. You have had so much on your plate. But I'm glad to see that you have moved on from that douchebag, Noah and even set up a place this nice for yourself."

I chuckled, a little awkwardly at her assumption that I had initially set up this place.

"We really do have a lot to discuss," I said.

"I can't believe your marriage to Damian is a contract marriage," Queenie said, putting her glass down in surprise.

We were back at the house, in the sitting room, and I had just told her of the real circumstances surrounding my marriage to Damian.

"Not to worry," I said with a laugh. "Our... marriage will soon be over and then I'll be completely on my own."

She eyed me speculatively. "Tell me, Amelia is that what you really want?"

Before I could answer the rather uncomfortable question, Damian walked in. I stood up and quickly did the introductions.

"Nice to meet you," Damian said courteously as he shook Queenie hand.

Queenie mentioned she had been in Ghana and Damian made a little small talk about it. Damian then drifted away to take a call. Queenie nudged me.

"He's back and I have to go," she said in a stage whisper.

"You don't have to leave now," I said.

"But we have lots of time to spend together. I'm in town now. I'll be in to visit so often you'll get tired of me."

Laughing, I walked her to the door. She promised to visit soon and then left. When I returned to the sitting room, it was to see Damian glancing at the bottle of wine Queenie and I had been drinking.

"That confirms it then," he said, half to himself. "You're not pregnant."

"What's with you and me getting pregnant?" I demanded hotly. "You always bring it up every opportunity you get. Can't you give it a damn rest?"

He whirled angrily to face me.

"And why do you get so worked up whenever the word 'pregnancy' comes up, huh? Sometimes, I wonder... if you're angry that you're not pregnant so you can get child support from me."

The asshole! After everything that had happened these last few months, he actually thought that I would try to entrap him with a baby?

I was so angry that I reacted without thinking. My hand shot out and I slapped him in the face. I relished the stunned look on his face as he clapped a hand to his reddening cheek.

"Everything is not about money," I screamed. "In fact, I don't want to have your babies. Not now. Not ever. So you and your money can go to hell!"

I turned around and stalked off to my room in anger.