

The groomsman next to me breathed heavily on my neck. *Ugh, gross.* Regardless, the show must go on. As a professional bridesmaid, dealing with overly enthusiastic groomsmen came with the territory. I noticed the indentation left by his removed wedding ring. *A liar and a cheat.* He reminded me of Kyle. A shudder ran up the length of my spine.

I moved a half-step away from him as I cued the adorable flower girl and ring bearer down the aisle. Their father was waiting at the end for them, making it an easier task. Somewhat. Halfway down the little girl declared she was out of flowers and began to panic. Thankfully we had practiced what to do in that situation and it was quickly remedied.

The bridesmaids were in order and had their instructions. I took my place, the sweaty breather next to me. It took real effort to try not to touch him, but he used his sweaty, meaty hand to pat my own. With a final look of reassurance to the bride, I walked down the aisle to take my official place as bridesmaid.

After more than one hundred weddings, there wasn't anything I hadn't seen. The phrase "always a bridesmaid" literally described my life. Especially since nobody was beating down my door to put a ring on it.

I donned the dress of a bride's closest friend and held their hand through the entire process of wedding planning from dress shopping to bachelorette parties to getting the bride and groom off on their honeymoon in time. I knew when the flower girl was going to pee. I knew if a pregnant bride was going to vomit. I knew if the groom was hungover. Over five years in this career, I had experienced just about every kind of wedding there was. I was also pretty proud that more than two-thirds of the couples were still married.

When everything had gone off without a hitch and the couple were pronounced husband and wife, I retreated up the aisle and made sure the guests were filing out to the reception area while photos were taken. Photos. Again. My cheek muscles could win a bodybuilding contest. They were on point.

The wedding location was one of my favorites. The Promenade was a favorite for Savannah weddings with its tall white columns and gorgeous hallways perfect for a dress to be on full display. It was run by a family who had owned the estate for over a hundred years. If I ever got married, I wanted it to be at The Promenade.

*I should get a discount for all the business I've brought them over the years.* I was on a first name basis with the owner at this point. Cordelia Daniels was retiring and her son would be taking over. While I knew Cordelia, I had not met her son yet. Would he make changes? Major changes? I hoped not. Nearly fifty percent of my weddings were held at The Promenade and I liked things the way they were.

While family photos were taken, I wandered the hall a little. The venue staff were always meticulous and quiet, and I watched as a few servers strode silently from kitchen to cocktail area with silver trays in hand. I ran the magenta chiffon of my skirt through my fingers, enjoying the

texture. There were times, though, I would love to not be in a bridesmaid's dress. Next weekend was one of those weekends. was wide open and I planned to spend a day on the beach at Tybee Island. Quiet and low-key. Maybe I would call my sister, Linaya, and see if she wanted to join.

Footsteps snapped me to attention as expensive shoes sounded on the tiled floor. I looked up in the direction of the sound and saw a man emerging from the back of the house. He wore a dark gray suit with a blue tie that was pulled loose. His wingtip shoes went quiet when he saw the wedding party ahead of him.

Our eyes met for the briefest of moments. His were a dark chocolate brown surrounded by full, thick lashes. He smiled at me for a brief second before someone called my name.

"Amaya, we're ready for you." The photographer, a thin fellow named Jacques, called to me. We had worked together on close to two dozen weddings and we were on friendly terms.

I hurried over as silently as I could. I joined in where Jacques told me to stand and smiled brightly. These photos would be looked at by the couple for the rest of their lives. A few brides had stayed in touch, thinking me a true friend after the ordeal of wedding planning, but most did not. I wasn't friends with any of them. Not that I didn't like them, but it was purely a working relationship for me.

This bride wouldn't think we were friends. She had a small circle while her groom had a larger one. She had needed one more bridesmaid and a wedding planner. I was able to fulfill both roles. And the bride had paid well for both.

My groomsman counterpart came up to me for more pictures and was all too eager to put his arm around my waist. He definitely reminded me of my ex-boyfriend Kyle. Handsy, rude, and just about as misogynistic as they come.

"So how do you know Suzette?" Again, he was breathing on me. We were close to the same height, and his breath was moist on my ear. I shuddered.

"Arm down groomsman at the top." Jacques was a professional and he looked out for me if there were sleazy guys.

As sleazy groomsman – *what was his name?* – put his arm back down, I forced a pleasant expression. "Suzette is an old friend. I'm happy to be part of her day. How do you know the groom?"

"Hodge was a high school friend of mine. We were roommates for a while, too."

I tried to remember the names of this groomsman. I had made the wedding website with the whole bridal party on it. The groomsmen were Lance, Tyler, Coyle, and Heath. If this one was Coyle to match Kyle I would get myself a new bathing suit.

When we were done, sleezy groomsman followed me down the steps. “So what are you doing after this? Think you might want to grab a drink?” He tried to catch my arm, but I yanked it away before he could touch me.

I never wanted to act like a snob, but sometimes it was necessary. “I’m sorry, but I have plans.”

A snort came from the guy. “Plans? How about you make plans with me? I have a hotel room just a block away.”

Getting propositioned was an ugly side of the job. Groomsmen or guests would end up drinking too much and hit on anything unattached. And since I was working, I didn’t have a date. And without a date, I appeared to be fair game to lots of inebriated men.

It didn’t matter that I was literally as single as they come.

An unfamiliar voice spoke up behind me. “Hello, sweetheart. Are you done with pictures?”

I whipped my head around to see the suit with the gorgeous eyes standing there. Was he coming to my aid? Or was he talking to the groomsman? Obviously not. He raised his eyebrows to me and I instinctively stepped closer to him.

“Oh, sorry, man. I didn’t realize she had a date.” The groomsman shook his head and walked off into the crowd.

Was I supposed to be thankful or insulted by his intervention? I shook my head to clear it. “Thank you. I appreciate your help, but I could have handled that. I’ve dealt with his type before.”

His laugh was deep and velvety. “I’m sure you have. But at least now he won’t bother you any more tonight.”

“Why? Are you going to stay by my side all night? Surely you have a date?” I didn’t see anyone lingering by looking for him. But then, he had come from the back of the house. “Are you even a guest of this wedding?”

With a sigh, he put his hands up. “Caught red-handed. I’m not. I work here.”

My eyebrows shot up. “I didn’t know Cordelia hired a new manager. Or did her son hire you?”

“You know Cordelia?”

“I’ve known her a few years. I’ve been in several weddings here before.” I glanced over to the newlyweds who were still taking photos.

A sly smile crept across his face, but his eyes remained cool. “Do you know her son?”

If this guy was working for the Daniels family, I needed to tread lightly and be on my best behavior. "I haven't had the pleasure yet."

He chuckled, at what I wasn't sure. "Allow me to tie up a few loose ends and I will join you for a dance if you're willing. I can check in on you from time to time in the next few hours."

For a moment I wondered if he was a creep like the groomsman, but something in my intuition said he was a good guy. He was smooth at the very least. I gave a subtle nod. "I would appreciate it. I love to dance."

"I'll be back." He moved toward me for the briefest of moments before deciding against it and winked at me instead. He turned and disappeared down a hidden hallway. This time his shoes were quieter.

The bridal party was introduced by the DJ and lo and behold, the creepy groomsman was Coyle. A shiver ran up my spine as I thought back to Kyle and our break-up the year before. I was much better off without him, but I still missed having someone just be *there* for me.

After the couple was introduced and had their first dance, dinner was served. I finally had a moment to sit down and breathe while I inhaled the meal I had helped Suzette pick. My eyes kept going to the door looking for the mystery man. *This is nuts, I didn't even get his name. I hope it's nothing like Kyle.*

When he slipped back into the ballroom while dinner was wrapping up, a giddy feeling bubbled up in my stomach. He strode through the room, his eyes scanning the crowd. While I had the advantage, I studied the man. He was taller than me, but not overly tall. His dark hair was cut close but had a hint of wave to it. He filled out the suit nicely, it was perfectly tailored.

Once his eyes found me, limp hair and all, a huge grin broke out onto his face. I couldn't help but return the smile as I felt the heat creep up my cheeks. He approached and held out his hand just as a slow song began to play through the DJ's speakers.

I bit my lip as he led me onto the dance floor where two other couples swayed cheek to cheek. In that moment, I wanted nothing more than to be held in this man's arms.