



Chapter 23: Richard MacMillus

The hotel of Brickroll Holding was impressive, to say the least, even to Amelia who was used to the lap of luxury. She and Jonathan walked through the lavish lobby, past the cascading indoor fountain, and to the front desk where a concierge greeted them enthusiastically and guided them to the grand ballroom.

"This place is amazing," Amelia whispered to Jonathan as they walked through the ballroom.

"It's all right," he shrugged nonchalantly. She jabbed him in the ribs.

"Just all right?" she laughed and he broke out into a huge grin.

At the other side of the ballroom, heavy, solid wooden doors were opened and they entered a spectacular VIP room. A decadent chandelier sparkled from above and a mahogany table sat as the centre piece of the room. A man in a posh suit rose from a leather seat when he saw them. He was round in the belly (fat if Amelia were being honest) and very short. Jonathan towered over him as he approached.

"Richard MacMillus," he said, extending his. "General Manager of Brickroll." Jonathan shook his hand. The man then turned his attention to Amelia. He looked her up and down with a suggestive smile that made her feel

uncomfortable, like he was undressing her with his eyes. "You must be Amelia. Your reputation precedes you."

Amelia took his outstretched hand out of courtesy. It was cold and clammy. He rubbed the top of her hand with his thumb. "Pleasure to meet you," Amelia said politely, trying to withdraw her hand. Jonathan saw Richard rubbing her hand. He also saw the look in Richard's eyes.

"I assure you, Amelia," he said. "The pleasure is ALL mine."

She withdrew her hand quickly and he motioned for them to gather at the table. But when they went to walk towards it, Richard placed his sweaty hand on her waist.

Not on my watch, Jonathan thought to himself. He gently pulled Amelia away from Richard and to his side. He had to be subtle about it though. He couldn't let this sleazy man grope Amelia, but he also couldn't be too forceful as to damage their business relationship. If Richard noticed Jonathan's move, he didn't show it. Instead, he pulled out a chair for Amelia at the table.

"Hope you like filet mignon," he told her as she sat down. "I took the liberty of ordering a pre-planned five course meal."

"Of course," Amelia smiled, noticing an extra set of cutlery across the table from her. "Will there be someone else joining us?" she asked.

Richard sat down, a condescending look on his face. "This is a business meeting. And this is a big project. It's only fair

that I entertain more than one company. I've asked a representative from another company to join us. He's someone I've worked with closely in the past."

Just then, the door swung open and Gabriel entered. Amelia's breath caught briefly in her throat.

Is it just me or is he even more handsome? she thought to herself. No, that can't be. It's just that I haven't seen him in awhile. Amelia looked him up and down. Has he lost weight? She compared the sight of him to the last time she'd seen him. It had been during the disastrous night at the banquet when his mother and Sophia had made such a scene. He's definitely thinner. Stronger. And he looks well-rested. Those dark circles under his eyes – he looks healthy.

Jonathan saw Amelia watching the man who had just entered. There was something uncomfortable about the way she was looking at him.

"Amelia, Jonathan. This is Gabriel Stormfang," Richard said as Gabriel took his seat.

Amelia did everything in her power to avoid eye contact with him. She smiled and nodded in his direction, pretending not to know him. It made sense that Gabriel was trying to work with Brickroll. Her father had severed all business ties with Gabriel at the banquet. He could only work with Moonstone's enemies now, and Brickroll and it was no secret that Brickroll and Moonstone were not friends in the business world.

I'll give Richard the benefit of the doubt, though, Amelia thought as she sipped her water. He was introduced by Amaya, and there's a good chance that he doesn't know about my personal relationship with Gabriel. But...he surely knows that our company will no longer do business with his. Our severed business dealings have been publicly announced. So he has invited us both here on purpose. To watch us compete with one another while he reaps all the benefits.

If Amelia didn't like Richard before, she certainly didn't like him now. She knew she had to be professional, though, and not let her distaste for this GM cloud her judgement. She looked up then and accidentally made eye contact with Gabriel. He was looking at her intently. It was clear that he was just as surprised to see her as she was to see him.

So he hadn't known that she'd be there either.

"Do you two know each other?" Richard asked in an off-handed way.

Gabriel smiled then, although the smile was tense. "I have met Jonathan on occasion," he told them. "Through business. But only a couple of times and very briefly. Amelia, on the other hand, well, I know her quite well. She's my ex-wife."

Richard's eyes widened for a moment, then settled on Amelia. His gaze flitted from her face to her chest, then back up to her face. "EX wife?" he asked, the emphasis on '

ex'.

Amelia couldn't stand to be beside him for another minute. She felt dirty – the way he looked at her. "Jonathan," she said sweetly. "Perhaps you and I should switch seats. I'm still so new to the company and you know so much more than me. You should sit beside Richard so it's easier to talk... don't you think?"

Jonathan didn't miss a beat. He heard the subtle implication in her voice. "Of course," he replied. "That makes so much more sense."

"But I don't think-" Richard started to interject, but he was cut off by the sound of scraping chairs as Amelia and Jonathan took to changing seats.

Gabriel watched with interest. How close are they? He couldn't help but wonder. He seems rather protective of her, too protective for a business colleague.

Jonathan and Gabriel were now on either side of Richard. Gabriel was staring at Jonathan. Jonathan felt his gaze and stared back at him. Gabriel narrowed his eyes. Amelia could feel the tension between the two men. The first course arrived, an endive salad with pomegranate vinaigrette. They engaged in small talk while they ate. Richard stared at Amelia, who tried not to look at Gabriel, who was glancing at her occasionally, as well as Jonathan, who caught her eyes a few times.

It was the most uncomfortable first course in the history of




business meetings.

After it was completed, Richard dabbed his mouth with a napkin and then smiled wryly.

“Amelia! I’d like you to take a gift back to your father. Magnus and I have a long history. Would you be a dear and go fetch a bottle of wine from my cellar? It’s just over there, at the back of the VIP room.”

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