

Chapter 25: Negotiations

Amelia and Richard whipped their heads towards the door just as it broke down.

It's Jonathan, Amelia thought. He's come to save me. Just like he did at the bar that night.

But Amelia was shocked to see Gabriel. He stood in the doorway, breathing hard. The strong scent of wine wafted into the small room. Clearly, he'd broken a ton of wine bottles to make his way inside here, some of which were probably really expensive.

Amelia gasped. Richard instantly let go of her, panic written all over his face.

"How – how did you get in here?" Richard stammered. But then his fear and shock shifted to anger as he recognized Gabriel. "What are you doing?" Richard demanded. "You're supposed to be my business partner? And you just barge in here? Breaking God knows how many bottles of wine?"

Gabriel was breathing heavily. He'd seen how close Richard had been to Amelia. "Just bill Stormfang Incorporated. My company will pay for the wine." Then he fixed his eyes on Amelia. "Come," he said, holding out his hand to her.

Richard looked from Gabriel to Amelia. "I thought she was your EX wife." He made sure to really emphasize the EX. "

And I thought you were here tonight because you wanted MY business."

It was clearly a threat. Richard was implying that if Gabriel didn't back off, Richard wouldn't do business with him. But Gabriel wouldn't be persuaded.

"Amelia," he repeated, his hand still outreached, taking a step towards her.

"You have no idea what you're doing," Richard yelled, clearly angry by Gabriel's refusal to leave. He flew at Gabriel and grabbed him by the collar.

Gabriel's eyes flashed yellow. Amelia saw this. He's angry. His wolf is going to take over. I have to stop this. Gabriel will destroy him.

Amelia took a deep breath and walked calmly up to Richard. She grabbed his wrist, firmly. Feel that? she thought to herself. See how strong I am? You're no match for us.

Richard looked at her, shock in his eyes. He let go of Gabriel's collar.

"We didn't realize we've been gone so long," she said sweetly to Gabriel. Calm down, Gabriel. Control your wolf. "Honestly, we were just talking about wine. Richard knows so much. He was telling me about different red blends. I didn't even know we wandered so far."

Gabriel's eyes changed back. His anger was subsiding. He'd thought Amelia was in trouble, but perhaps he'd been

wrong? She looked perfectly fine. Better than fine, in fact. Her smile was sincere.

"And I'm sure Gabriel was simply worried," she said, turning to Richard. "We have been gone for a while. Did you think there'd been some sort of accident, Mr. Stormfang?" she asked Gabriel. He had been worried, yes. Not about an accident exactly. But this excuse seemed to calm down Richard. "So there's no reason to be upset with Mr. Stormfang. He was only trying to help us."

Richard nodded. Amelia had successfully calmed down the two men. Sure, she had to make excuses for both of them, but if it stopped them from fighting, then it was worth it. Amelia was happy with her intervention. That is, until Richard spoke up.

"I urge you to reconsider my – suggestion," he said to Amelia. He looked at her in that lewd way, like he was imagining what she looked like under her dress. Apparently, he wasn't completely satisfied with how the evening had turned out.

Gabriel's eyes narrowed. Amelia knew Gabriel would lose it if he found out that Richard was propositioning her. She thought fast.

"Thank you," she said to Richard. "I know you've suggested a very precious bottle of wine. But I still think my father would prefer this wine, from this estate." She shook the bottle of red in her hand for emphasis, praying that Richard would get

the point.

Just then, Jonathan walked in. "Quite a mess out there," he smiled. "And you've all missed the main course."

"Yes. A lot of expensive wine has gone to waste," Richard replied, annoyed.

"Our company can let out one percent point as compensation for..." Jonathan said.

But Gabriel cut him off. "I already said I'd pay for that."

Jonathan and Gabriel stared at each other. Then Jonathan backed off, shrugging. "Sure. My bad. I didn't know you had already offered. And with that, Amelia and Jonathan left.

On the way back, Jonathan and Amelia discussed the evening's events.

"You're a confusing woman, Miss Amelia," Jonathan smiled at her from the steering wheel. "You could have left Gabriel to his own devices. But instead, you defended him. Why did you help him? Don't we want the relationship between Brickroll and Eclipse to go sideways? So we can get a deal with Brickroll?"

Amelia sighed deeply. "Honestly, Jonathan, I don't think they're going to do business with us. Even with Eclipse out of the picture."

"Then why did they meet with us tonight?"

“Amaya,” Amelia said. “This was all just a ruse. She wanted me to think we had a chance. When really, she knew all along that this evening wouldn’t go well. She’s setting me up to fail. And it’s working! Our relationship with Brickroll is even worse than it was before.”

I can’t believe I fell into her trap, Amelia thought. Amaya can’t be trusted. She’ll do everything she can to make sure I don’t succeed over the next month.

Jonathan cleared his throat then. “But you still have feelings for him? Don’t you? Gabriel? Isn’t that why you helped him tonight? I heard your break up was really rough...”

Amelia whipped her head towards Jonathan. He was looking straight forward, avoiding eye contact. He thinks I still have feelings for Gabriel? And why does he care? What an odd question.

“No,” Amelia says, shaking her head. “I’m done with him. Honestly. Our relationship is over. It wasn’t about that. Didn’t you see his eyes?” Jonathan shook his head. “He almost lost control of his wolf. If he had, they’d think he was a monster. The humans. It would cause so much gossip. I don’t want that.”

Jonathan seemed relieved by her answer. His shoulders relaxed. “That makes sense,” he nodded.

“Humans will never accept us, Jonathan. Not into their society,” Amelia confided. There was a hint of sadness in

her voice. "Well, MOST humans," she added, touching Jonathan's forearm.

"Right. Humans," Jonathan sighed. She let her hand linger there on his arm. "Is it fear? Do you think humans are afraid of your race?"

"I don't know. You're human. You tell me. What is it about our race that keeps you from accepting us?"

Jonathan shook his head. "I, I don't...I mean. I don't represent ALL humans, so I can't really. There isn't," he stammered. Amelia laughed then.

"It's okay," she smiled warmly. "I didn't really expect you to have all the answers. Humans are complicated. As you know."

"Yes. As I know," he repeated.

"Well, what now? We blew it with Brickroll. They're out," Amelia said, changing the topic.

"Well now we meet with Mandrake," Jonathan replied.

"Impossible," Amelia said. "We can't a meeting with them to save our lives."

"Maybe YOU can't. But I can," Jonathan teased.

"What are you talking about?"

"Well, turns out I know someone at Mandrake. She's an old friend from school. She holds a really high position there.

So, I called her up and asked if she'd meet with us. She was delighted to. She promised to give Silvermoon a fair shot at the project."

"Really?" Amelia asked, hope flooding her.

"Would I lie about something like that?" he chuckled.

"Jonathan. You're absolutely the best!" Amelia exclaimed. She threw her arms around him in excitement.

"Whoa there. I'm driving," he laughed. She giggled and removed her arms. He was thankful it was dark outside. Otherwise, she might have seen him blushing.

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