

## Chapter 26: An Offer They CAN Refuse

Back in her room, Amelia flopped down onto her bed. Her head was buzzing from the night's events. Thoughts of Gabriel, Richard, and Jonathan all jumbled together. But one thought separated itself from the others – her mom.

She went to her bottom dresser drawer and took out a small, velvet pouch. She had retrieved this when she'd gone back to the Eclipse Packhouse after Gabriel had rejected her. She hadn't cared about anything else – clothes, gifts, pictures. She only cared about the contents of this pouch.

She pulled out the first one. A necklace - pearls. It had belonged to her mom – a gift from her father. He'd given it to her after her mom had passed. She set it aside and reached back into the pouch.

The pull-tab from a pop can. Amelia smiled to herself, letting the memory wash over her.

It was a warm summer afternoon, and the air was thick and still. They were sitting under a willow tree, their backs up against the trunk, relaxing in the shade. They eyed each other cautiously while they sipped on ice cold cokes. It was the first time she'd met him – Jojo, the son of her mom's best friend. She'd given him the nickname instantly and he'd called her Mimi. They became friends, until his dad remarried and he moved away. But on this particular day,

there was a friendly awkwardness between them because they'd just met. 1

"Here, Mimi," he said, holding out the pull tab from his pop can.

"What I am supposed to do with this, Jojo?" she asked, laughing at the odd gift.

"One day you can swap it for a real ring. When we're older," he'd smiled sheepishly.

"A gemstone ring?" she'd smiled back. "Promise?"

"Yeah. But only if you keep it."

Amelia opened her eyes, breaking up the memory of that special summer day. She had kept it; she'd kept it all these years. But he hadn't kept his promise. She hadn't seen him for years.

\*\*\*

Amelia walked quickly from the hotel, checking her watch as she walked. She expected to see her driver waiting outside the hotel lobby but was shocked to see Olivia waiting instead.

"Well, look what the cat dragged in," Amelia teased.

"I'm so sorry, Mila. I drank way too much at the bar that night. Stupid, I know. I couldn't get out of bed yesterday. I had to call in sick. Do you hate me?"

"Yes," Amelia smiled. Olivia pretended to pout. "Okay. Of course not. I could never hate you."

"I missed your dinner with Brickroll, too. Jonathan told me all about it this morning. Gabriel was there? Seriously?" Olivia asked.

"I'll fill you in on the way to work," Amelia replied. They got into the car and pulled away.

"Okay, so Jonathan said that Amaya set up the meeting?" Amelia nodded. "That manipulative bitch!" Olivia shook her head and shot Amelia a glance, anger in her eyes. "What's her problem? And this general manager?"

"Richard."

"Right, Richard. He knew damned well that you know Gabriel. Mila, you were totally set. Plus Jonathan said he was a sleaze. He was hitting on you?"

Amelia's stomach fluttered. "Jonathan said that?" So maybe he was being protective, Amelia thought, blushing slightly.

"Yes. He seemed kinda ticked off about it. But not as ticked off as he was about Gabriel. Said he was 'making eyes at you'. And that you helped him out? Why would you do that? Gabriel's an ass. You don't owe him anything," Olivia ranted.

Gabriel was 'making eyes at her'? That's what Jonathan said. That sounds a bit like jealousy...Amelia's stomach did another little flutter. This is ridiculous. I'm overthinking it.

Jonathan and I are colleagues. Nothing more.

"Helloooooo," Olivia said loudly. "Lost you there for a moment. What are you thinking about?"

Jonathan.

"Nothing."

Olivia looked at her skeptically. "Right. Well, I was asking you WHY you helped Gabriel?"

Amelia sighed. "Gabriel was about to let his wolf out. It would have been awful. It would have..."

"It would have been exactly what he deserved. Let him dig his own grave. Stop defending him." Olivia was really worked up, and as a result, she was driving a little too fast. They got to the office in record time. Honestly, Amelia was a little relieved. She loved that Olivia had her back, but Olivia didn't always understand the complications of the business world.

The two women went directly to Amelia's office. Olivia was clearly still indignant and she wasn't about to drop the attitude any time soon. Jonathan knocked on the door.

"You won't believe what I have," he said, his green eyes bright and smiling.

"If it's not a latte, then I don't care," Olivia replied. They looked at her, shocked. "Just kidding. God. Tough room."

"Well, it's not a latte, I'm afraid. But it is from Brickroll."

"Is that what I think it is?" Amelia asked, her eyes wide.

"Yes. It's a copy of Brickroll's offer and their share distribution agreement."

"I can't believe it. I didn't think they'd cooperate." Amelia was shocked. The meeting last night had not gone well. Between fending off Richard's advances and Gabriel destroying thousands of dollars of wine, Amelia had been sure she'd never hear from Brickroll again.

"Don't get too excited," Jonathan cautioned. "It's not a very good deal."

Amelia looked over the offer. She read it twice to make sure she understood it. Then she turned to Jonathan and said dryly, "We can't accept this."

Brickroll was asking for way too much. The benefits the other party demanded were way too high. They could cooperate, yes, but Brickroll would get all the profits. Silvermoon couldn't agree to these terms; Amelia would be the laughing stock of the company if she did. No one would respect her. It was a bad deal for Silvermoon. No one in their right mind would accept it, including Amelia.

Amelia laughed lightly. "Looks like those bottles of wine are far more expensive than we thought."

Jonathan nodded. Then he took the file, marched over to

the trash can, and held the file over it. He raised his eyebrow at her. She smiled and nodded. He dropped the file into the garbage with a flourish.

Just then, Amaya barged in.

This woman needs to learn how to knock, Amelia sighed.

"What do you want?" Olivia seethed.

"I heard you got an offer from Brickroll," Amaya smiled sweetly.

"It was a shit offer. It's in the trash," Olivia responded dryly.

"But I don't understand," she said sweetly. "This was an opportunity. I worked really hard to get you that meeting with Richard. What happened?"

Amelia stepped up close to Amaya. She leaned in close and said, "I'm sure you 'worked real hard', all right."

"What is that supposed to mean?" Amaya asked.

"I recognize your perfume. Richard reeked of it," Amelia hissed.

Amaya gasped. Her cheeks flushed red. She stepped back from Amelia. "I wouldn't sit so comfortably on that high horse if I were you." She wagged her finger in front of Amelia's face. "You think just because you're the chairman's daughter that you're safe? That you're protected? Hah! I've seen women like you married off in a heartbeat for the sake

of the family business. Rich girls like you are sacrificed by their families all the time, honey. You don't have what it takes to succeed in this world. A wall flower like you. These men will eat you alive."

"Back off, bitch," Olivia yelled, stepping towards her.

Amelia held out her hand to stop Olivia.

"You're way off base, Amaya," Jonathan said, shaking his head.

"Oh really?" Amaya shot back. "How so?"

"Amelia's been offered a chance to negotiate with Mandrake Enterprises."

Olivia's jaw dropped open. "Impossible. We've sent dozens of emails. They've all gone unanswered. Mandrake won't take our calls."

"Interesting," Jonathan mused. He went to a stack of papers on Amelia's desk. As if by magic, he slowly withdrew an invitation. "Looks like they've taken someone's call."

He held out the invitation for them all to see. It read Mandrake Enterprises in gold-stamped lettering, and on the ornate black and gold design was a tiny silver tree – the unmistakable emblem of Mandrake. 1