

Chapter 28: Secrets

“I’m sorry, M’am,” the familiar sweet voice on the other side of the phone said. “We don’t have an appointment anywhere under that name.”

Amelia sighed heavily. This was the third time she’d called Mandrake Enterprises this week and every time the answer was the same – no appointment. She was beginning to wonder if there would be a meeting at all.

“I called Mandrake again,” Amelia told Jonathan over their lunch break. They were sharing Chinese food, the little cardboard boxes spread out on her desk. “There’s still no appointment.”

“Right,” Jonathan replied, helping himself to more chow mein noodles. “My friend is on holidays. Went to Greece for a few days, for a quick vacation.”

Amelia eyed Jonathan suspiciously. There was nothing in his body language to suggest he was lying. It seemed strange though. Since when do company executives just leave for a holiday in Greece during the week? Amelia was beginning to wonder about this so-called ‘friend’. But she couldn’t admit that to Jonathan – that would be like calling him a liar. She

wasn't going to do that.

She was struggling, though. The employee whispers had grown in volume. She'd been unsuccessful so far with her business deal and people in the office knew. They were talking about it, and they weren't trying to hide it. She couldn't be sure, but they'd even given her a mean nickname – Ms. Wallflower.

The one stung. She was no wallflower. She had to show them she could do this.

“You gonna finish this rice?” Jonathan asked.

“No go ahead,” Amelia said, just as Stan, the finance manager, walked in.

“Sorry to interrupt your lunch,” Stan said, eyeing the Chinese food. “I won't take up much of your time. Just need you to sign off on this account. So we can submit it.”

Amelia wiped her hands and took the document. It was a finance report.

“Who is the customer?” Amelia asked, scanning the document.

“Starging. We hired them to survey the land for the new resort,” Stan replied.

Amelia looked to Jonathan. He nodded. “It's all in the

report I gave you,” he said.

“Hmmm,” Amelia replied. She looked to the number at the bottom. “That amount seems rather high for land surveyance,” she commented.

“I’m sure it’s fine,” Stan said quickly. “Here, just sign right here.” He pointed to the blank line on the bottom of the page.

Amelia sat down and started to go through it in more detail.

“Honestly,” he said, rolling his eyes. “It’s a financial document. Not really your area of expertise. We simply need your signature. Since you’re a signatory in this company.”

“Yes, I am,” she replied calmly. “And as a signatory, don’t you think it’s prudent for me to do my due diligence and read the document before I sign it?”

Amelia smiled sweetly at Stan. He motioned for her to continue. “Sure, Ms. Wallflower chooses now to be assertive,” he said under his breath.

I knew it. They are calling me that! I really need that meeting with Mandrake. After I look over this document, I’ll talk to Jonathan again and...

But a number interrupted her thoughts. “Wait a

minute,” she said. “You said Starging is a land surveying company, correct?”

“Yes.” Stan rolled his eyes.

“Then what is this amount here?” She pointed at a line on the document.

“It says right here,” Stan said, exasperated. “I told you, this is a financial document. It’s best left to people with an education in finance.”

Amelia ignored his arrogance and continued. “If they’re a land surveyance company, then why are they charging us for materials? That’s what this amount is for? Yes?”

“Yes,” Stan replied. “They need materials to do their job.”

“To survey the land?” Amelia finished. “A huge company like theirs? They don’t supply their own materials?”

“Let me take a look,” Jonathan said. Amelia handed him the document.

“Right here,” she said, pointing it out. Jonathan scanned it quickly.

“Well I’ll be damned,” he said. “You’re right. This doesn’t make sense.”

Damnit, Stan thought to himself. He knew the mistake was there but he didn't think she'd find it. He was going to use her oversight to prove she wasn't worthy of her job.

"Good thing I caught it," Amelia stated. "Even though 'finance' isn't really my thing. Although, I did take some finance classes while I was working on my MBA."

"MBA? I, I didn't know," Stan stammered.

"Take this to the person in charge. Have them correct it. Bring it back to me tomorrow with the RIGHT amount."

She handed Stan the document. He bowed his head quickly and scuttled out of the room.

"Well, you sure showed him," Jonathan quipped.

"That was a big mistake. The company would have lost a lot of money," Amelia said, shaking her head.

"Oh shoot. It's 1:00 already? I have a meeting." He started gathering the boxes of Chinese food.

"Don't worry, I'll clean it up," she said. As Jonathan left, she saw her father standing at the door.

"Daddy!" she said, smiling. "Come in. How long have

you been standing there?”

“Long enough to see my little princess in action.” Magnus beamed with pride. “I knew someone had been messing with the financials. I had full faith that you would catch the errors.”

Amelia hugged her father and kissed him lovingly on the cheek. “Come sit. I have news for you.”

They sat on the lavish leather sofa by the window.

“I’m afraid I haven’t got very far with the resort project,” she admitted, lowering her eyes. “My meeting with Brickroll Holdings was a complete disaster. I’m sorry if I’m disappointing you.”

He reached out and took her hand. “You could never disappoint me.” He gave her hand a squeeze. “I know you’ll figure this out.”

“Well, I do have a meeting with Mandrake Enterprises. At least, Jonathan is helping me get one. I really think they’re the better fit for this project. Brickroll made us an offer, but it was terrible. So I rejected it.”

Magnus smiled. “Amelia, I trust your opinion. If the offer wasn’t going to benefit us, then you did the right thing. I think having a meeting with Mandrake is great. But don’t rely too heavily on Jonathan to

make that happen. You need to show them your own strength. Show them that we could be wonderful partners for them. Our company has achieved great success, but we still have weaknesses. We're not experienced enough in some areas. That's why we need other companies, like Mandrake. You are a strong, intelligent manager, my love. You know the strengths of our company. You will choose the best partner for us in the project. I know it."

"Thank you, Daddy," Amelia smiled. "You're right. You're always right."

"I'm glad you caught me up to date with the project," Magnus continued. "But that's not why I came here today. I actually wanted to talk to you about Jonathan."

"Jonathan?" Amelia's eyes widened. What could her father possibly want with Jonathan.

"You can't trust him, Amelia. Not fully."

That's ridiculous, Amelia thought. He's been nothing but loyal. He saved her at the bar. He went to the Brickroll Holding dinner with her. He helped her understand the company. Not trust him? There's no one she trusts MORE right now.

"I know that sounds contradictory," Magnus

continued. "Since I assigned him to you. But Amelia, darling, you can't really trust anyone, especially humans. They're not like us. They're far more cunning, far more manipulative."

But Jonathan is none of those things.

"There are some good humans, granted, yes."

Like Jonathan...

"But for the most part, humans value money and profit above all else. They don't value family and honor the same way we do. Which is why we can't really trust any humans, not even the ones who work for us, not even..."

"Jonathan," Amelia finished. Magnus nodded solemnly.

"I'm so happy you returned," Magnus said. "Together, we can really establish my strong hold in the company. But as for Jonathan, well, I'm unsure of his loyalty to Moonstone. Which is why I placed him with you. It's strange, Amelia. I've had him investigated, but there's no trace of him before he started working for us. His work record, his experience, all of it. It's like it's been erased."

"Erased?" Amelia asked. What is he hiding? "But how can that be?"

+20 BONUS

“That’s why I’m still trying to figure it out,” Magnus sighed.

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