

Chapter 35: Lunchtime Talk

Amelia took Gabriel's hand and looked him in the eye. "I want to thank you," she said softly. Her voice was genuine.

"For what?" Gabriel asked, confused.

"For today," Amelia sighed. "For taking the time to show me around. I just...I..." Amelia faltered.

"Go on. You can tell me," Gabriel urged. He couldn't help notice how nice her hand felt in his, warm and comforting.

"Being with you today, it's made up for some of the past pain I felt, when we were together."

Gabriel winced. It was hard for him to hear about how much he'd hurt her. He didn't want to interrupt Amelia, though. She continued.

"I'm so glad we could have this time together. This is how I want to remember us. Like this. Happy."

Gabriel lowered his head and nodded. He understood what she was saying and it hurt. She was right, it was nice to have such a lovely day together, but the way she said it – well – it sounded so final. And he wasn't willing to accept that. She wasn't angry, or overreacting, or emotional – she was calm. She was seeing their whole relationship, spread out behind them, with calm, steady eyes. She had a different

perspective, and neither of them really knew what that meant. f

Gabriel looked back up at her. Amelia's eyes were full of kindness and caring. His had a glimmer of hurt in them. He squeezed her hand and she squeezed it back. There was nothing left to say. Not at the moment, anyway.

"Shall we go to lunch?" Amelia asked then, lightening the tense mood.

They sat down for lunch. Amelia filled Gabriel in about all the details of Silvermoon Royal Group and the project. He listened attentively. They talked together easily, like old friends. When their lunch was served, Gabriel took her plate and carefully cut up her steak for her, like it was the most natural thing on the planet.

"So you see," Amelia said, popping a piece of steak into her mouth. "Our company has been doing very well in the country. We shouldn't have any profitability problems. I just need to find the right partner for this project to really secure my position within the company."

Gabriel couldn't help notice the change in her. Sitting here, talking about things like profitability and partnerships, she seemed so far from the woman he knew back in his pack. As his Luna, she had been warm and tender, unwilling to stand up for herself or point out any wrong-doings that came her way. But here? She was a true businesswoman.

And he admired her all the more for it.

"So...." Gabriel said, switching the subject. "Tell me. Are there any men in your life? Any of interest?" He fidgeted with his fork as he asked.

Amelia shook her head and sighed deeply. "Truth be told, after the past two years, it will be a very long time before I can trust any man again, if ever." But even as she said the words, an image flashed through her mind.

Green eyes. Brown, tousled hair. That boyish grin. Those strong arms...

Jonathan.

But then she heard her father's words.

You cannot trust any human, Amelia. Not even Jonathan.

"So no. Nobody special," she trailed off. Gabriel nodded. "And you?" Amelia bounced back, ready to deflect. "I was sure you'd be with Sophia once I left. So I was pretty surprised when I saw her here with Lucas. I assumed that's why you were here. But it doesn't seem to bother you, her with him? Not that I want to get involved in your shit."

Ugh. Why am I asking him about this? This is none of my business. You don't care, Amelia. He's free to do as he pleases, Amelia thought to herself. But it was too late. She'd already brought it up.

Gabriel smiled, somewhat amused.

So she does care, he said to himself. A little bit, at least...

"It was never like that with Sophia," Gabriel said. Then he took a big sip of wine and thought for a moment. "I promised her brother, Rick, I'd protect her. You know that. When he died, Sophia had no one left. I owe my life to Rick. He was my beta, and the best beta an alpha could ask for."

Amelia only nodded. She knew that he'd promised to take care of Sophia, but still...it had seemed to her that Gabriel had more than 'sisterly' feelings for her.

"There's something really off about Lucas," Gabriel confided. "This might sound crazy, but I think he's connected to the people who were after me. Back then."

"When Rick was killed?" Amelia asked. "Why do you think that?"

Gabriel let out a long sigh. He trusted Amelia so he decided to tell her. "Well, that night, I had received a malfunction signal. You know, from the pack lighthouse, so I went up to the mountaintop to check it out. But Amelia, when I got there, I was ambushed. I was surrounded by twenty armed werewolves and trapped in a cave. Rick just happened to be there, too. He was escorting Sophia on her first shift as an adult wolf. We didn't know what to do. So Rick came up with a plan. He said he would go out first and distract them. We swapped clothes and he took my car. But then. Then there

was..."

Gabriel's voice cut off. Amelia reached for his hand. "The explosion," she said softly.

"Yes. My car exploded. If I had gone instead of Rick..."

Gabriel made a fist with his other hand and his eyes filled with tears. Even after all this time, it was too awful to think about. Too painful.

They sat in silence for a few moments while Gabriel regained his composure. "Anyway," he continued. "I didn't have any clues, not even a single one, until recently."

"And now?" Amelia asked. She had a bad feeling about what he was going to say.

"Mandrake," Gabriel replied, looking her in the eyes. "Amelia, the weapons they used come from the same source as the weapons that Mandrake runs behind their back."

"Wait. What? Mandrake is involved in weaponry?" Amelia was shocked. "But what does this have to do with Lucas?"

"I had him investigated."

"And?"

"And let's just say, he's not clean. Far from it, actually."

"And you let Sophia be with him?" Amelia asked, suddenly irate. "What if he's dangerous? Are you just using Sophia too?" And Amelia felt something for Sophia she never, in a

million years, though she would EVER feel for her.

Sympathy.

"He won't hurt her. I'm pretty sure of that," he said shaking his head.

"He DRUGGED me," Amelia protested.

"Sophia isn't being reasonable. She's fallen out with my mother and I. She won't listen to anything we say. What can I do? I mean, it's not like I'm going to watch her walk into fire. I still care about her. I'll still try to keep her safe."

"Try? Please tell me you'll do better than try?" Amelia was breathing heavy. Sure, she and Sophia had had their fair share of differences, but no one deserved to be mistreated by a bastard like Lucas.


"I didn't expect to see you here, Amelia. Sophia is safe with him. I know it. But when I saw him put his hands on you. I couldn't contain my anger. I won't stand for it." Gabriel's voice was tight and firm. "I can't stand to see my woman get hurt."

My woman?

"But Gabriel. I'm no longer..."

"The ruby," he said bluntly. "The ruby still shines for you. That means it's not over between us."

Amelia opened her mouth, but she had no reply. She didn't

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know what to say.

Gabriel rose to his feet and grabbed Amelia's hand tightly.

"Amelia, I..."

No Gabriel. Don't do this. Not now...

But just then Jonathan came marching towards the table.

He removed Gabriel's hand from Amelia's and replaced it with his. It all happened so fast, Gabriel didn't even have time to react.

"What the?" Gabriel spat out. "What do you think you're doing? Amelia accepted my confession. She's mine to protect. Let her go."


But all Jonathan said was: "Amelia is my responsibility, not yours."

And then he led her straight out of the restaurant.

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