

Chapter 40: The Bid

In the three days leading up to the presentation, Amelia did everything she could to prepare. She felt her chances of being awarded the project weren't high, but she was determined to try her very best anyway. She worked late into the night, fueled by coffee and Chinese take-out. Olivia became her right hand man, staying with her well past midnight, helping her create the strongest presentation she could.

Finally, the day of the presentation arrived. Olivia met her at her office door.

"All set?" Olivia asked. She smiled widely. Amelia was grateful to have such a supportive friend.

"All set," Amelia confirmed, even though she felt anything but.

"Still no word from Mandrake Enterprises?" Amelia asked as they got into their car. She already knew the answer but she was hanging on to a tiny thread of hope. Olivia shook her head. "And Jonathan? Did he say why he wasn't coming with us? Or when he'd arrive?" She hadn't seen Jonathan for two days and she didn't know why. She'd sent him emails and left him messages. It was strange. She'd really wanted his help on this presentation but he was MIA.

She knew he was probably just busy, but deep down she was

worried he was hiding from her.

Amelia ran through the presentation a couple times in the car for practice. That is, until Olivia cut her off.

"I appreciate where you're coming from, Mila. I know you want to be as prepared as possible. But if I have to listen to this presentation one. More. Time."

Amelia laughed then. Olivia was right. There was such a thing as overkill. So they talked about Lily's upcoming wedding instead to lighten the mood.

When they arrived, they noticed a flurry of media reports all gathered around the resort's fountain plaza where the presentations were to take place. Media workers were elbowing their way through the crowds, trying to get a spot in the front.

So many cameras.

So many microphones.

So many reporters.

"Okay, now I'm officially nervous," Amelia said, staring at the men and women with microphones and video cameras.

"Nonsense," Olivia replied, taking her friend's arm. "You'll be fabulous. Like always. You got this. Nothing to be nervous about." Olivia sounded so confident that Amelia almost believed her for a moment. But then she saw how many other companies were there and her heart sank.

The names of the bidding companies flashed overhead on a large screen. Amelia read through them. She knew she had most of the beat, but not all. Then Amelia noticed something.

"Look, Liv." Amelia pointed at the screen. "Mandrake isn't on the list. And I don't see anyone from Mandrake here."

Amelia and Olivia walked to their seats. Amelia felt like someone was watching her so she scanned the room. Her eyes met Gabriel's. He gave her a half-smile and a little wave. Her heart gave an odd little flutter. Her mind flashed back to the afternoon they'd spent together at the amusement park.

And the morning she'd woken up in bed beside him.

You need to stay focused, Amelia told herself. Your company is counting on you. You can figure out your shit with Gabriel later.

She simply nodded back at Gabriel and then walked in the opposite direction, clearly avoiding him. He seemed to take the hint; he didn't approach her.

The first presenter was Richard. Richard the asshole. The sleaze. The complete and utter jerk. Of course, he was presenting on behalf of Brickroll Holdings. Amelia's heart sank as she watched him. His presentation was good; there was no denying that.

Damnit, Amelia thought. His bid price is really good. Way better than ours. And his development plan is impressive. He's a shitty person. But one hell of a business man. And Brickroll is a strong company. They're a contender for sure.

Amelia and Olivia sat through the other presentations. They were all fairly similar. Amelia was one of the last ones to present.

"Where is Jonathan?" Amelia whispered to Olivia. She couldn't believe he wasn't here! How could he? How could he just throw her to the dogs like this.

"Sorry, Mila," Olivia whispered back. "He's not here. And you're up."

Amelia took a deep breath and walked to the podium. At least her presentation was different. She was focusing on a stronger infrastructure, better publicity, more tourism. She gave her Power Point Presentation with confidence. But judging by the reaction of the audience, she doubted that she had beat Brickroll.

She sat back down, defeat written on her face. She caught eyes with Amaya who was smiling snidely. She has an 'I-told-you-so' look on her face.

Bitch.

Amelia barely listened to the last presenter. Her mind was fixed on what she would say to the boardroom when they

found out she'd lost the project. She couldn't help but feel like her days at Silvermoon were numbered now. She had failed.

But just then, she heard a familiar voice. She watched, shocked, as Mercy strode up to the microphone. She flashed a smile as the camera men snapped her pic.

Great, Amelia thought. If Brickroll didn't win, then Mandrake probably would.

"I apologize for being late," Mercy said in that sing-song voice of hers. "But I am here to announce that Mandrake will be partnering with Silvermoon Royal Group on this project."

Some people in the audience audibly gasped. Amelia's eyes grew wide.

"Our name is not on the list," Mercy continued "because this is Silvermoon's project. They'll be taking the lead. We'll be offering them every level of support, and collaborating at every level, but really, this is their project." Mercy clicked on a power point. It was Amelia's (she had sent it to them to review) but there was additional information. Mercy took the audience through the contributions that Mandrake would be making. This included a full scale publicity roll out, an amusement park 're-opening' extravaganza, and a complete overhaul of the technology infrastructure in and around the hotel for top of the line Wifi and internet services.

Amelia dug her nails into Olivia's arm while Mercy spoke.

She was literally lost for words.

"Easy there. I'd prefer not to bleed through this blouse. Blood is such a pain to get out." Olivia looked down at where Amelia was digging her nails into her arm. Amelia sheepishly let go.

"I had no idea," Amelia said, still staring at Mercy.

"I'm as shocked as you are," Olivia said.

Just then, Amelia saw Jonathan. He was lurking in the corner of the stage. She felt instantly happy at the sight of him. She gave him a little wave and a smile.

He smiled back. But there was something off about the look on his face. This was everything Amelia could have hoped for. A partnership with Mandrake! And Jonathan knew this. He should be ecstatic that everything had worked out.

So what was that expression on his face? Concern? Worry? Disappointment?

No. It was more confusing than that.

Jonathan was smiling, but his face held a trace of bitterness that he just couldn't hide.