

## Chapter 41: To Dance or Not to Dance

The press conference finished up in a blur of blinding camera flashes and loud reporters yelling questions. Once the media was satisfied that they had everything they needed, the organizers excused themselves to discuss the bids.

"The winner will be announced this evening at the banquet. We sincerely hope you will all attend and thank you for your presentations," the CEO smiled.

Amelia was exhausted from the tension and anxiety of the day, but after a quick rest back at the hotel, she and Olivia got all dolled up for the banquet. They both looked like a dream, Amelia in a sleek, floor length silver gown and Olivia in an A-line vintage blue satin dress. All eyes were on them as they made their way through the lobby and into the banquet hall.

Amelia is immediately met with Magnus. He takes his hands in hers and smiles broadly.

"My darling princess. I am so incredibly proud of you. I knew you could win the favor of Mandrake. Just as I knew you would rise to the occasion in this new role at the company."

"Thank you, father. But honestly, I was quite shocked today. Mandrake wasn't answering my calls and I didn't expect them to co-operate with us. Not for such a low price,"

Amelia confided.

"How did you win them over, then?" Magnus asked.

"Well, Jonathan arranged a meeting with the Chairman of Mandrake. Turns out she's an Alpha."

"She? So they have a female Alpha?"

"Yes. Strange, right?"

"I don't know that I've ever heard of such a thing."

"Me neither," Amelia agreed. "But she was very strong. She had a powerful presence. It was all very odd. I have a feeling that Mandrake is an all werewolf company. I know we thought it was a mixed company, like ours, but I don't think it is."

"Hmmm. But when you left that day, had you and the female Alpha..."

"Sephora," Amelia offered.

"Sephora. Had you come to terms on a deal?"

Amelia shook her head. "Not at all. That's why I was shocked today. We barely talked business at all. We ate gazpacho and talked about skiing. Then I saw her garden."

Just then, Jonathan walked in. He was handsome, dressed in a stylish black tux, his brown hair tousled.

Okay. So maybe handsome isn't the right word.

More like drop dead gorgeous.

Amelia shook her head again. Nonsense. No point in thinking like that. He's a business partner, nothing more.

"It must have been Jonathan," Amelia said to her father. "He must have brokered the deal with Mandrake, since Sephora is an old friend of his. I don't know what terms he used though, to get them to take the deal."

Magnus was silent for a moment, clearly deep in thought. But his thoughts were interrupted by Mercy.

"Amelia," Mercy said. "I am really looking forward to working together. This must be your father? Magnus?"

"One and the same," Amelia smiled. Mercy and Magnus shook hands. "Mercy," Amelia continued. "I am delighted that you've decided to collaborate with us. However, I would be amiss if I didn't ask. What made you decide to take our deal?"

Mercy giggled then and tucked her hair behind her ear. "Sephora took quite a shine to you. She said she admired your tenacity. Plus, she wants wolves to work together. A collaboration allows us wolves to have more resources at our disposal. As wolves, we should be helping each other, don't you think?"

There was nothing wrong with what Mercy said, nor the way she said it. But all seemed a bit too simple. For the

betterment of wolves? That's why Sephora took the deal? That didn't seem right...

"Oh, I see champagne. I simply must indulge. Excuse me. Amelia, we'll talk soon." And with that Mercy left. Once she was out of ear shot, Magnus leaned in and whispered in Amelia's ear.

"Watch out for that one. That woman had the scent of a Beta."

Amelia felt uneasy. She needed to know how Jonathan had brokered this deal. She highly doubted it was as simple as Mercy had made it sound. She knew so little about Jonathan. He always seemed focus on her but he never really revealed very much about himself. It was starting to bother her.

Who was he? Why was he tangled up with wolves all the time? He said Mercy was an old school friend. Was that true? What was his connection to Mandrake.

Amelia was just about to look for Jonathan when she felt a hand on her shoulder. She spun around and came face to face with Gabriel.

His cologne was intoxicating, familiar. She was instantly thrown back into her days as his Luna. She shook her head.

You are not his Luna anymore, she reminded herself.

"May I have a dance?" he asked, holding out his hand. His

eyes looked so earnest. "As a friend, of course."

No. Do. Not. Dance. With him.

That's what her head said.

But her heart?

"Of course," she agreed, taking his hand. Besides, what was the harm? They're just friends now. Right?


They walked to the dance floor and he put his hand on the small of her back. She rested her hand on his shoulder and their other two hands clasped together.

"You were such a lovely Luna," Gabriel said, fixing his eyes on hers. "Virtuous. Dedicated. Loyal to the pack. And to me." He twirled her around. She felt so safe in his arms. "I don't think I ever told you that. And now? I can't believe how good you are in this world – this world of business. Amelia, you're truly amazing. But every definition of the word?"

What is happening? Oh god. Why is he looking at me like that? She could feel his muscles through his shirt. His familiar scent. The look on his face.

"I know I messed it all up. But Amelia, do you think we could start over? Like a fresh start? There was so much misunderstanding between us. But it's gone now."

Start over? Is that what he wants? Amelia's mouth went dry. She looked away.

 +20 BONUS


"I won't force you," he said. Then he let go of her hand and lifted her chin so that their eyes met. "Just please, don't avoid me."

"I hate to interrupt," a voice said, pulling Amelia out of Gabriel's gaze. They both turned to look. It was Jonathan. "But I need to borrow your dance partner."

Gabriel looked warily at Jonathan. "I wouldn't ask if it weren't important. I need to talk to Amelia about something," Jonathan explained.

And as much as Amelia wanted to keep dancing with Gabriel, she also really wanted to talk to Jonathan. There was so much she needed to ask him. So she leaned in and whispered in Gabriel's ear: "You said you wouldn't force me, right? I need to talk to Jonathan."

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