

Chapter 43: Side-Stepping

"Married? You're getting married?" Amelia asked, suddenly feeling a wave of sadness wash over her.

Why am I sad? Why do I even care? This is silly. I should be happy for him, Amelia thought to herself. Although, it is a little strange. I've never even heard him talk about a girlfriend. Then she stumbled over her words. "Con... congratulations." She knew she sounded awkward, but she couldn't help it.

Jonathan didn't reply. He only stared at her for a moment and then nodded quickly. The silence between them was borderline unbearable.

"Well. I guess we should be getting back inside then," Amelia suggested.

"Yup," Jonathan agreed.

"Nothing else to tell me?" Amelia teased.

"Nope."

"Just that you're a werewolf. That Gabriel helped with the deal. And that you're getting married? Sounds like enough confessions for one night." They began walking back towards the hotel.

"Come on. You already knew I was a werewolf." Jonathan

nudged her arm.

"I had my suspicions," Amelia winked back.

They walked back into a ballroom that was only half as busy as it had been. The ball was winding down. There were far fewer people now and most of the food was gone. Amelia saw Olivia at the bar and decided to join her for one last drink.

"Champagne, please," Amelia told the bartender. Then she asked Olivia, "Have you seen Asher?"

"Why would I know where Asher is?" Olivia snapped at Amelia. "I mean, I'm not his keeper." Olivia sounded like an angry child and Amelia sensed that something was wrong. Perhaps she'd had an argument with Asher? It wouldn't surprise considering how much Olivia and Asher bickered all the time. "Seriously, Amelia," Olivia continued, rolling her eyes. "He's YOUR brother. If you don't know where he is, why would I?"

Amelia couldn't help but chuckle a little. Olivia could be quite immature sometimes, and she certainly didn't hide her feelings well. It was one of the things she loved about Olivia, though. She wore her emotions on her sleeve.

Just then, the President, the CEO, and other high ranking management approached Amelia. They were followed by Mercy. They congratulated Amelia and Mercy on being awarded the project and told them there would be a

meeting tomorrow morning to finalize the paperwork. Then they excused themselves for the evening.

"I still can't believe it," Amelia said, her cheeks flushed with excitement.

"Believe what?" Mercy asked in a monotone voice.

"That they chose us," Amelia replied.

"Right. That. Having a night cap?" Mercy asked, eyeing Amelia's glass of champagne.

"Yes. A celebratory drink. Join me? We can cheers!" Amelia motioned to the bar.

"No, thank you. I rarely drink at business functions. I try to keep it professional," Mercy said bluntly. And although Mercy hadn't said anything wrong, Amelia felt slighted.

There was something about Mercy that Amelia couldn't quite pin-point.

She's polite enough, Amelia thought to herself. She was polite from the first time we met. But she seems a bit distant now. Mercy was looking at the ball room floor, clearly trying to locate someone. It's strange, though. We won the project together. I'd think she'd be happier. But she seems less than enthusiastic. Almost stand-offish. I don't get it.

"I haven't had a chance to properly thank you for your presentation. It was flawless," Amelia said to Mercy.

Because it was. Mercy was a very capable business woman – calm, cool, collected and very, very smart.

"What's that?" Mercy asked. She wasn't listening to Amelia. Her attention was still focused on the ball room floor.

"I was just saying that I really liked your presentation. I think it's one of the reasons we were awarded the project."

Mercy turned to her then and smiled tightly. "Nonsense. It was presentation and speech. You convinced the president. I had little to do with it."

Amelia nodded but she wasn't so sure. It felt like there was a lot more going on, a lot that she didn't know about it.

Amaya approached them. "Well, I suppose congratulations are in order," she sighed. There was no sincerity in her voice; she sounded like a child being forced to say something nice by an overbearing parent.

"Thank you, Amaya," Mercy nodded. "It's been a long time. I see that you're well?"

"Very. Yes. Thank you," Amaya responded.

They know each other? But how? Amelia wondered, surprised by their acquaintance.

"Although, I must say, I didn't expect you to be interested in this project. Not after I spoke with someone over at Mandrake. They said your company had declined a collaboration with Silvermoon. Funny – you were never

mentioned at Mandrake. So how is it that you became the project leader? And I'm dying to know – who exactly over at Mandrake has taken interest in her." Amaya motioned at Amelia. "At our little wallflower princess?"

Amaya was clearly lashing out because she was annoyed that Amelia had secured the project. Mercy turned and smiled politely at Amaya.

"It's really none of your business, I'm afraid, since you aren't part of this project," Mercy replied, her voice thick with fake sweetness. Amaya's cheeks burned red with embarrassment.


Just then, Olivia came marching over. There was no way she was going to let Amaya ruin her best friend's night.

"Olivia! What a lovely dress. Very vintage." Amaya said sarcastically as Olivia approached. "Second hand, I assume? Hope you got a good deal."

"Enough," Olivia said. "Time to go." She reached out to grab Amaya's arm so she could lead her away from Amelia but Amaya side-stepped. Then she pretended to lose her balance.

"Oh no! Oh dear," Amaya said, as she awkwardly stumbled forward. Then she stepped down hard, right on the hem of Amelia's dress.

The thin halter strap snapped. Amelia tried to reach for the top of her dress, but it was too late. It was already falling

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off. All the women gasped. Except for Amaya. She just laughed.

Just before her dress fell clear off her chest though, Amelia felt something wrap around her.

Gabriel had been watching and had seen the whole ordeal. He'd whipped off his suit jacket and jumped in just in time. He wrapped Amelia from behind with his jacket. He then wrapped his arms around her to keep the jacket on.

He held her tight. His lips were close to her ear. She could feel his breath on her neck.

She struggled against him.

"Gabriel, let me go," she said in a hushed whisper.

"Not unless you want to expose your body to everyone here."

Then she saw a dark figure rushing towards them. She wasn't sure but was it –

Was it Jonathan?

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