

Second Life Extras

Unedited Version 12/05/2013

(This extra interfaces with chapter 58; Rob returns from the hospital, where he has visited George)

ROB

When I open the door, my mother is sitting at Susan's tiny kitchen table, and it is covered with shredded paper towels. If she's actually regressed to this anxiety-induced habit, she must be truly sweating bullets, and I'm glad. She deserves it.

She looks up when she sees me, so I walk over to her, setting down the bag I've brought for Susan. I picked it up a sandwich from the hospital cafeteria. My mother looks briefly at the bag, then at her watch, as I stop in front of the table. "You're cutting it close," she says. She shuts her lips tightly upon finishing her sentence. She's restraining herself from saying more, from asking the question she wants an answer to, but one she knows I won't answer if she asks.

"I know," I say quickly, as the reason for my lateness come to mind. I sigh, remembering how pale and weak George looked. Remembering it's her fault. "It was harder to leave George than I expected. Jane kept insisting I stay, and I just didn't have the greatest excuse for not staying a couple minutes more." She nods, and sucks in a breath, still keeping in check her urge to ask. I want her to stew a moment more, so I ask, "How is Susan?"

She looks up at me, but her face is pale and distracted. "She's good. She came out a few minutes ago to get something. So she's fine." She wipes the little tissue into a single pile on the table. "How is George?" she asks.

"He looked pretty good. He was in good spirits, all things considered."

She looks down at her pile of tissue. "Even after you told him? He was still in good spirits after that?"

I wait a moment before answering, a part of me relishing her anxiety. She did this to George. She almost did worse to Susan, so I want her to feel anxious that I've done the worst. They way I felt leaving Tisdale's office when I couldn't reach Susan. But then a small part of me sees that pleading, worried look and I can't help but feel bad for my mother. I take a deep breath, then speak. "I didn't tell him, mother," I say, a little louder than I was speaking before, loud enough that she can hear and make no mistake.

Her entire face floods with relief. She relaxes her shoulders, her arms. Then she smiles. "Thank you Rob," she says, joy radiating from her voice. "Thank you so much for not telling him."

"Thank Susan," I tell her. "Despite everything you've done to her, she has never once said or done anything vindictive to you. She thought George deserved time to recover and she's right."

My mother nods appreciatively. She probably ought to thank Jane too. My sister-in-law would've killed me if I'd laid this on George tonight. Though I won't tell my mother that; she should think of Susan's benevolence in the face of all the malice she has laid upon her. Undue malice. And it was more Susan's words that halted me in my resolve to tell George. Seeing the protective way Jane hovered over George just cemented the decision.

I'm ready to go give Susan her sandwich and get this show on the road, when my mother looks up at me with a look I've come to hate. A look that says ambush. "There's something I need to tell you about Susan."

I am tempted to take a step back, to get away from her, but I don't want Susan to hear, so I lean forward and whisper. "I don't want to hear it mother. And I can't even believe you're going to try to do this right now."

She shakes her head fervently, and I notice her reaching into her jacket pocket. She pulls out a folded envelope and hands it to me. I give it a dubious glance, then take it. Unfolding it, I see Rob written across the front in Susan's handwriting.

"She asked me to give that to you if anything happened to her."

Alarmed, I turn toward Susan's bedroom, ready to go find out what's happened. But my mother grabs hold of my arm. "No, she's fine," she whispers. "I just thought you should have it now. After is always a bad time. It's better you know now. Plus, I know there were things you would've liked to have said to Molly and didn't get a chance."

I put up a hand. "Don't talk about Molly."

Her entire body freezes, and she looks down at the table, reminding me of the way dogs bend down and supplicate themselves to show they are inferior to the alpha dog. I turn away from her, and instead look down at the letter in my hand, unsure what to think. I am so distrustful of my mother that I wonder briefly if this letter is really even from Susan. But as I stare at the handwriting, I am certain it is Susan's. She's encased my name in a heart, which warms me, and makes me wonder why she would give this to my mother to give to me. Even though I can't imagine Susan using her as a go between, the proof is in my hand.

"Why did she give this to you?"

"She was concerned you two might be captured," my mother says softly. "She told me that if I was able to convince Tisdale to spare only one of you, that I pick you, and give you that letter."

I close my eyes, count to three silently as I try to tamp down the anger bubbling up inside of me. "And if we're captured, what are you going to do?"

"What you asked me to do," she says clearly. Then, she pauses. "But, if you're captured, we're already in trouble."

I run my fingers through my hair, and nod. She's right. It's just that I'm not in the mood to hear it and we're going to get behind schedule. "You need to go, mother."

She stands and puts her arm on my shoulder, "Even though you're upset with me, and even though I've made mistakes regarding Susan, I want you to know that I love you, and I will do my best to correct the mistakes I've made."

I don't want to deal with her now. "Just go," I say.

She leaves, and I sit down on the sofa to read Susan's letter.