

Episode 10- "Diamond in the Rough"

So just to recap, I was in Ireland hanging out with a Duchess so I could protect her prized Blood Diamond from Balassario and his goons. I stopped one attack but Rocky suspected another was right around the corner. While sightseeing around the Duchy with Duchess Colleen we ran into Count Pando. He was from Italy and something about him seemed off to me. I was on alert but Pando was making it hard. He was so charming. Too charming really. Granted he knew how attractive he was and with the power of being a count one would expect charming...but...this was a bit much. He was coming on a bit strong...even for a count.

When we arrived back at the Duchess's estate she took us to her tea room for lunch and then excused herself to tend to some business. This left Pando and I alone.

"You are the most lovely sight I have seen Ms. Michelle. Your photographs do not do you justice. You are a vision to behold in person." Pando said staring at me.

I smiled politely, "Thank you very much Count Pando. My husband thinks so as well."

"Yes, the American commoner. Rocky...I once knew a Rocky. He was a German Shepard." Pando said with disdain.

I rolled my eyes, "I am an 'American commoner' too Count."

"Al contrario. You are the closest thing to American royalty. And I would love nothing more than to make that official." Pando said.

No mistaking that one! He was trying to get me to leave Rocky for him. As if! That's right. I went 90s. "I'm sorry, as flattering as that is, I am happily married." I said.

"Please allow me to court you while we are together. I will show you that I can provide for you so much more than Rocky." he said, again saying 'Rocky' with disdain.

"I'm not sure about the customs in Italy, but in America it is seen as quite rude to pressure a woman once she says no." I said.

"I apologize. That was not my intent. It's only that I have never seen such beauty and I am not accustomed to being rejected." he said.

"And I am not accustomed to being pursued once I make it clear I am uninterested." I said.

"My apologized once more. Say, Ms. Michelle, do you happen to know where Duchess Colleen keeps her Blood Diamond?" Pando asked.

I looked at him, "No. Why?" I asked.

"I hear it is the most beautiful stone on Earth...even more breathtaking than...purple lightning." he smirked as Colleen returned.

"I am sorry. I had business to tend to." Colleen said sitting down.

"Think nothing of it." Pando said, "Michelle and I were just getting to know each other."

I realized that Pando was working for Balassario now but I couldn't tell Colleen that. "Yes. Getting to know each other." I echoed.

"We all have our secrets, don't we Ms. Michelle?" Pando asked with a smirk.

I knew what he was doing. He was warning me if I told Colleen anything he would tell her I was the Purple Ranger. But how did he know? "Indeed." I said.

"I am glad you both are getting on so well." Colleen said with a smile as lunch was served.

I had to find a way to figure who Pando really was and what he was up to before it was too late and I had to do so without giving up my own identity in the process.

I made polite small talk through lunch and noted that Pando kept finding underhanded way to steer the conversation back to the Blood Diamond. Colleen was happy to discuss her prized gem but was smart enough to be vague when Pando asked where she kept it and if he could see it. That said, he was trying to charm it out of her.

"I have heard amazing things about the beauty of the Blood Diamond, but I doubt it compares to the beauty of its owner. The most stunning of gems would pale in comparison to you Duchess." Pando said.

Colleen blushed, "Thank you Pando. You are too kind."

"As Colleen said, the Diamond is under immense security. I'm sure you understand Count." I said.

"Of course, of course. I simply was hoping to catch a glimpse of it." Pando said.

"Well, I suppose there is no harm in that." Colleen said.

"Your Grace, with all due respect, in light of recent events, is that wise?" I asked.

"I appreciate you looking out for me Michelle, but I trust Count Pando. Besides, it will be brief." she replied.

"Very brief indeed." Pando nodded.

I sighed, this was not going to end well. "May I accompany you as well in that case?"

"Of course. You are my guest. I would not consider leaving you out. Let's go." Colleen said.

Colleen led us to her vault and told the guards to let us in. They did so and then went back outside. It was just the 3 of us in the vault. Colleen opened the case the diamond was in.

Pando reached for the diamond.

"I request you not touch it." Colleen said.

"Sorry Duchess, afraid I can't honor that request." Pando said as he transformed into Stefano.

"It's you...the alien!" Colleen cried.

"Foolish girl. I'll be taking this." Stefano said picking up the gem.

I looked around. I had to morph but if I did Colleen would know who I was. I didn't have a choice. I had to hope I could trust her. "Hey, ugly...you're not taking that gemstone!" I cried.

"And what are you going to do about it pop star?" Stefano asked, challenging me.

"I think you know the answer to that! Sonic Boom!" I cried as I morphed into the Purple Ranger.

“Michelle? You...” Colleen started.

“I’ll explain later. Right now I have more pressing matters.” I said taking a fighting stance.

“Ready for you this time Purple Ranger.” Stefano said as he held his hand up, “Goldiator arise!”

And with that a gold monster appeared.

“Well, that’s perfect.” I sighed as I pulled my staff. I had to get the gemstone and defeat the monster and I had to do it alone. This was special. “OK. I got this. First things first...” I used my staff as a pole to vault over the monster and as I came down I kicked the gemstone out of Stefano’s hands. I flipped and caught it. I handed it to Colleen. “Keep it safe Duchess.” I said as I flipped my staff around and charged the monster. We fought hand to hand. I saw Colleen dodging attacks from Stefano. I was trying to figure out a way to help her when the guards ran in. I figured they could hold him at bay while I finished this. It was clear I needed some fire power if I wanted to stop this guy. “OK, time to illuminate the situation.” I said as I used my staff to fire a series of lightning orbs at the monster. I was able to fire enough that I took him out then I turned my attention back to Stefano. “You were saying?” I asked.

Stefano glared. “This isn’t over Purple Ranger. There are other, more valuable gemstones on this planet and we will find them before you.” he said as he vanished.

“I have a feeling I haven’t seen the last of that guy.” I sighed, “Are you ok Duchess?”

Colleen nodded. “Yes. I’m going to return to my quarters. Perhaps you will join me?”

I sighed, “In a moment.” I said as I vanished. I didn’t need all the guards knowing who I was.

I powered down then went to Colleen’s quarters. I knocked.

“Enter.” she said.

I went inside. “Hi.” I said softly, closing the door behind me.

“First...thank you for your protection. But...I don’t understand how a pop star is a super hero.” she said.

I laughed, “Some days I don’t either. But it’s who I am. It’s true I am the Purple Ranger. In truth I’m more than that. I’m the Queen of the planet Saturn.”

“As crazy as that sounds it explains how you are so comfortable with royal protocol.” she said.

I nodded. “But no one can know. Please, you have to keep my secret or my life as I know it is over.”

“Oh Michelle, I would never divulge your secret. I promise you that.” she said.

“Thank you Colleen.” I said.

She sighed, “So I guess protecting that gem is the real reason you came here.”

“It was...but I made a new friend in the process and had so much fun! I really would like to come back sometime for a pure social visit.” I said.

Colleen smiled, “You are always welcome here...your majesty.”

“Oh please no. I am not a Queen on Earth. I’m just Michelle.” I said.

“Fine...then no more calling me ‘Your Grace’ either.” she smiled.

“Deal.” I smiled.

Colleen and I ended up spending the rest of the day together having fun. That night I told Jon I would fly to Russia to meet him the next morning.

And so I did. The next morning I flew from Ireland to Russia. Jon had a car waiting for me at the airport to take me to his hotel. I texted Rocky and told him I was staying in Ireland a few more days just to ensure Stefano didn’t try anything else. While that was technically a lie I did tell Colleen to text me if she saw anything suspicious and I’d ninja streak back to her. I got to the hotel and went to the room that Jon texted me. I knocked and seconds later he opened the door.

“Mich...oh I am so happy to see you.” he said pulling me into his arms and holding me tight.

“I am happy to see you too.” I sighed happily as I practically melted into his embrace.

He let me go long enough to close the door then pulled me into a passionate kiss. I kissed him back. “I missed you so much.” he whispered.

“I missed you too my love.” I whispered back.

He smiled and took my bags and set them down in the bedroom. “Are you hungry? We can order room service.”

“Not right now. Really, I’m feeling the jet lag. Maybe we can cuddle up and watch a movie?” I asked.

“That sounds amazing.” Jon said.

We went to the sofa and cuddled up and picked a movie then we just sat there and watched it as we held each other. After the last couple of day this was all I wanted in life.

After the movie we took a really romantic bubble bath and made love before going to sleep. It was everything I needed to forget about the drama Stefano caused me. I had a feeling I had a personal enemy now in him.

The next morning we ordered room service for breakfast and got dressed. Jon had a sound check to attend and I wanted to go. With Russia only having state news it was easier to keep the press out of my business which meant I could go to the sound check and concert without it ever being reported.

The sound check was great and it was a welcome relief to be on the viewing end of one instead of on stage. I had felt so overwhelmed lately that I really needed this time to just chill and enjoy Jon’s company.

After soundcheck we went to sightsee and eventually made it back to the hotel to clean up before the show.

As always, being backstage at Jon’s show was a blast. Don’t get me wrong...it wasn’t exactly wild parties the way it had been when I was a teenager, but it was more low key. Everyone just hanging out. There might be a beer here or there but the days of hard liquor constantly flowing were gone. It was much more laid back and given the fact we were adults now and not kids it fit us just right. I enjoyed it so much.

And of course Jon put on an amazing show. There was no one I’d ever witnessed in my life that could work a stage like him. He had ‘it’...whatever ‘it’ was. And no one had ‘it’ like him. Every time I watched him onstage I was blown away.

“Still awestruck after all this time?” a voice said.

I turned and saw my old friend Casey. She was married to Dave, Jon's keyboardist. "Oh my god, Casey! It's been forever." I cried.

"I know! Too long." she said.

"I didn't know you were even here." I said.

"I actually just got in and came straight here." she said.

I smiled. "It's so good to see you! I heard you finally let go of Rich and married Dave."

"I did. Rich was pissed but whatever. I'm happy and so is Dave." she smiled. Rich was Jon's ex-guitar player and Casey's ex-husband.

Casey and I caught up backstage. It was so much fun. She had been like a sister to me back in my 'groupie' days. It was so nice to see an old friend.

After the show Jon and I hung out backstage for a little while before heading back to the hotel so he could shower in the dressing room. We went back to the hotel and sat up for awhile talking.

"How's Harley?" he asked.

"She's Harley." I smiled, "Little dare devil and cute as a cupcake. A worms and dirt cupcake." I laughed.

"Sounds about right. I miss her. She's an amazing kid." Jon said.

"Well, maybe after the tour we can do another hockey game with her. She had a blast last time." I said.

"I would love that." he said.

We talked for a few more hours before going to bed. We got in bed and cuddled up. I was asleep super fast. I guess everything was catching up to me.

Around 4 AM I heard my phone ring. I picked up and looked at the Caller ID "Hunter" it read. What the hell? I answered it, "Hello?" I asked.

"Mich, it's Hunter. I know you're in Europe and there's a time difference so I'm sorry if I woke you but...there's been an accident." Hunter said.

I sat up, wide awake now. "An accident? What kind of accident?" I asked.

Hunter's voice cracked and he took a breath. I could tell he was trying not to cry. "A Ranger one. Shane...he's dead."