

SMM 13- "Regrouping"

I arrived back at home mumbling to myself. I was not happy about Michelle's decision to stay in New York with Jon. What would it take for her to realize this story always ended the same? At least with Brett I learned my lesson in a few years and couple of mistakes. Michelle just kept going back again and again. She was my best friend and I loved her like a sister but she could also be infuriating sometime.

Adam heard me walk in. "Hey babe!" he called from the living room where he was watching TV with Minako. I went into the room.

"Hey baby. Hey Mini Ko." I said using her nickname.

"Mommy!" Minako smiled as she hopped off the sofa and toddled over to me. I picked her up into my arms and hugged her.

"How did it go?" Adam asked.

I sighed as I held Minako close. "Mich wouldn't come home. She said she needed some time alone to process things and clear her head." I said. I hated lying but I also couldn't tell my husband that my best friend was cheating on his best friend.

"When is she coming back?" Adam asked.

"A couple of days I guess." I sighed.

"Rocky isn't going to be happy. He's already worried sick." Adam said.

"I know...but I couldn't exactly force her to come back." I said.

Adam nodded, "I know. I didn't mean you should have. I'm just worried about Rocky."

I was so frustrated with this whole thing. "He knew what he was getting when he married her. She's always been this way!" I cried.

"Whoa, Min, calm down baby." Adam said.

I sighed. "I'm sorry baby. I didn't mean to snap at you."

Minako looked at me confused.

"Sorry baby girl. I'm just frustrated with this whole thing." I said.

Adam walked over to me and put his arm around me. "I know. I'm sorry."

"I just don't have the patience for her antics right now. We don't have time for it. We don't know where the Empress is or when she will strike again, all we know is she is pissed. That's not a good place for us to be." I said.

"You're right. But it's also nothing you guys can't handle." Adam said.

"I'm glad you're so sure." I replied as I put Minako down.

Adam pulled me into his arms. "First of all I believe in the Sailor Soldiers. Second of all, even if the Empress brings in an army that out numbers you, you guys have us. Every Power Ranger that's ever existed would stand and fight

beside you if needed. I will always have your back Mina.”

“Adam’s right.” Artemis said as he walked in, “We have all the help we need. If Michelle is going to be stubborn and refuse to work with the team we will just have to continue on without her.”

“You guys make it sound so easy.” I said.

“No, but we have to do what we have to do. We can’t keep pandering to Michelle’s whims.” Artemis said.

Adam nodded as he let me go. Artemis jumped up on his shoulder. “You are right about one thing Mina...Michelle has always been a little...high strung. She’s a very close friend and amazing Ranger, that said she’s always been a little dramatic and we don’t have time for this right now.” Adam said, “I should probably go check on Rocky though. He’s going to need a friend.”

I nodded. “OK. If he needs us to watch Harley she’s more than welcome to stay with us.”

“I’ll let him know.” Adam said as Artemis jumped from his shoulder to mine.

“You’re not light Artemis.” I grumbled.

Adam laughed. “Time to lay off the tuna man.”

“What tuna? All you guys give me is kibble.” Artemis countered.

“I’ll see you guys later.” Adam laughed as he grabbed his keys and headed out.

I sighed. I needed to get out too. “Artemis, you need opposable thumbs so you can babysit the girls.”

“I can babysit them. I have before.” Artemis said.

“Yeah, but only in emergencies and considering you can’t exactly pick them up I really think it’s best not to do it too often. I do want to go to Lita’s bakery though.” I said.

“Mmmm....I love her macaroons.” Artemis said licking his chops.

“And that is why you’re so damn heavy. Too many of Lita’s macaroons.” I said.

“I can’t help it. They are so good.” Artemis said.

I went upstairs and got Kimber and Minako ready then we went to Lita’s bakery. Lita had her daughter Lea there so Minako had someone to play with. I left Kimber and Artemis to watch them in Lita’s office while I sat in the kitchen and watched Lita cook and ate some cupcakes.

“So she stayed with Jon?” Lita asked as she worked on frosting some more cupcakes.

I nodded. “Yeah, and of course she made me swear not to tell Adam. I shouldn’t have even told you but you’re my other best friend and I needed to talk to someone.”

Lita nodded, “I won’t say anything. I understand your frustration with her though. I’m frustrated too. How can she do this to Rocky? He practically worships her. Jon has never been good to her. I can’t even imagine cheating on Andrew. I just wouldn’t.”

“I can’t say I’ve never cheated because we know I did but almost losing Adam was enough for me to learn my lesson. I don’t want to take the risk of ever losing him again. Brett isn’t worth it. No one is. Especially now that I have

my girls. I'd never risk their family." I said.

"Having kids does change things doesn't it?" Lita asked.

"In more ways than one. Do you find yourself a little more scared every time we have to go to battle?" I asked.

Lita nodded, "Absolutely. We have more to lose now. More to leave behind. The idea of leaving Lea without a mother terrifies me more than I can tell you."

"I feel the same way." I agreed.

"All the more reason to find the Empress and finish this battle quickly." Lita said.

"I'm open to ideas. She seems uniquely interested in destroying Michelle. Without Michelle to attract her we need a new tactic to find her." I said.

"We still have her daughter. I think that's probably more important to her than Michelle." Lita said.

"Good point...but Princess Harlyn got caught in the crossfire once already. I don't really like the idea of using her as bait again. She's just a kid." I said.

"I don't either but I'm not sure we have a choice. Princess Harlyn may be just an innocent kid but her mother is trying to conquer our world. We have to do something to stop her. And the sooner the better. She's not getting any weaker." Lita said.

"No...but we also have overlooked something very important. We need Empress." I said.

Lita looked at me like I'd lost my mind. "We do?"

"Probably. We still don't know what happened to Hotaru and given that she vanished about the same time the Empress showed up I'm guessing Empress knows what happened to her. We need her to find Hotaru." I said.

Lita sighed. "I guess we do...maybe we could make a trade? Princess Harlyn for Hotaru?"

"What happened to not using the kid as bait?" I smirked.

"Like you said, desperate times." Lita said as she sprinkled some colored sugar on her cupcakes.

"Those look really good." I said.

"You ate 3 cupcakes already." Lita said, "These are for customers."

"But I thought I was your best customer." I said.

Lita laughed, "You would be if you ever paid! You just come in and eat my food and leave."

"Isn't that some best friend code? If your best friend owns a bakery you get free cupcakes. It's something like that I'm sure." I smiled.

Lita shook her head, "I suppose so. You've been eating for free since I opened the place. Why change it now?"

"Hey, if it works you don't mess with it." I teased.

"Michelle does realize she's just left us high and dry so she can cuddle up to her ex, right?" Lita asked as she started

to put the cupcakes on a tray.

"I tried to tell her that." I said. "I don't think she cares about anything but Jon right now."

"Of course not. And I'm sure he loves that." Lita said.

I narrowed my eyes. I could see his stupid smug face. "I hate him so much."

"I know. None of us are fond of him." Lita said.

"None of you had to kiss him and pretend to be in love with him on screen. That will always haunt me." I said.

"Maybe, but that movie paid you well." Lita said.

"Good point. It was a hit. Anyway, I don't get it either. But what I do know is we can't rely on Michelle. We just have to keep going. If she turns up, she turns up. If not, oh well." I said.

Lita nodded, "I agree. What are we telling the others?"

"That Michelle needs some alone time to clear her head." I said.

"Raye is gonna see right through that." Lita said.

"I think everyone will...except maybe Serena. But it's what she wants us to stick with. She thinks Rocky will somehow not know exactly what she is doing." I said.

"Do you think he does?" she asked.

I shrugged. "I think if he's honest with himself he does. He's known Mich since high school. He knows her better than anyone else. I do think he'll let himself live in denial because he loves her so much and he can't face the truth. He doesn't want to acknowledge Mich is cheating on him with Jon so my guess is he will choose to believe her story and pretend there's nothing else to it."

"That's so sad." Lita said.

I nodded. "I know. But that's pretty much been the Jon/Michelle/Rocky triangle since high school. You know that as well as I do. And for all her growing up Michelle hasn't really changed that much when it comes to Jon."

Lita sighed, "I guess that's true. You think she ever will?"

I shook my head, "At this point? I doubt it."

Lita shrugged. "I guess we just have to be Michelle's friend and be there when this inevitably blows up in her face."

"Yeah. And you're right...it will. It always does...let's just hope it doesn't blow up in our face by way of the Empress." I said.

"We should probably let the others know Mich is MIA...we need to move forward without her. We can't sit back while the Empress is out there." Lita said.

Mina nodded, "I'll let Amara know so she can fill in the Outers and I'll call a meeting with the other Inners at Raye's. Want me to take Lea?"

Lita shook her head. "No. Thanks, but that kid needs to nap. I'm hoping Minako wore her out so she will actually

sleep.”

I laughed, “Sleeping troubles?”

“You have no idea. I think she’s worried she’s going to miss out on something so she fights her sleep until she passes out...even then she power naps then she’s back up wanting to go again.” Lita shook her head.

“Sounds like her mom.” I teased.

“Uh, no. Her mom needs to sleep. Just one blissful night. I haven’t slept a full 8 hours since she was born.” Lita said.

“It’ll happen. Hang in there.” I said.

“Thanks...tell the others I’ll catch up with them after the bakery closes.” Lita said.

I nodded. “Will do. Talk later.” I hugged her, gathered up Kimber, Minako, and Artemis, and texted all the Inners to meet at Raye’s temple. On my way I called Amara to fill her in on Michelle. She wasn’t happy at all.

I arrived at the temple and found the other Inners with their kids waiting on the front steps. I smiled. I loved watching the kids play. It made meetings much more fun.

“Ok, so what’s the emergency?” Raye asked.

“Michelle is safe but...she’s not coming back.” I said.

“What do you mean ‘not coming back’?” Serena asked.

“She said she needed a few days to clear her head. She promised not to use the Amethyst, but she’s also not coming home yet.” I explained. I hated lying to the team, but if they knew the truth Michelle would kill me and it wouldn’t do anyone any good to be honest.

“Translation, she’s with Jon.” Raye said. I figured they would read between the lines, but I couldn’t confirm it.

I shrugged. “I don’t know what’s she’s doing, just that she said she isn’t coming home yet.”

“Oh come on Mina! We’re not idiots. We’ve known Michelle since high school. We speak her language.” Raye said.

“I don’t know Raye. I’m just relaying what she told me.” I said.

“You’re relaying what she told you to say.” Raye countered.

“Does it really matter?” Amy asked, “Whatever she is doing, she’s not coming home. That’s the takeaway here. We have to proceed without her.”

“Amy’s right. We have to stop the Empress, with or without Michelle.” Serena agreed.

I nodded, “I talked to Lita already. We hate to do it but we think we can use the Princess to draw out the Empress. Maybe make a trade...the Princess for Hotaru. At least then she doesn’t have anything on us and we can attack, no holds barred.”

“We don’t even know she has Hotaru.” Raye said.

“No, but considering she vanished just as the Empress arrived I think it’s a pretty good bet.” I said.

"You're also presuming Empress would follow through on any deal we made. You know she'd double cross us." Raye countered.

"So we don't let her. Damn, you're argumentative. Even for you." I snapped.

Raye glared, "One of our teammates, the one that is the primary target, is MIA so she can have a fling with her rockstar ex...sorry if that puts me in a sour mood."

"I don't like it either, but it is what it is." I said, "We have to deal what it. So can we please try to be productive?"

"Fine." Raye grumbled.

"I don't like the idea of using a little girl as bait." Serena said.

"Neither do I, but she's the only leverage we have on Empress without Mich." I said.

Amy made a face.

"What's wrong Amy?" I asked.

"Well, has anyone stopped to consider that maybe the Empress won't come after us? Michelle is her primary target, like Raye said. Maybe she will go to where Michelle is? And if she attacks Michelle while she's alone then she is a sitting duck...especially in her current mindset. We're talking like we can draw the Empress to us when it's just as likely she's going to take the chance to go after Michelle and finish her first before she comes back for her daughter." Amy said.

I hadn't considered that, but it made sense. I couldn't believe I hadn't considered that. "Crap...you're right. And if that happens Michelle is in more danger than I could have imagined."