

The Billionaire Alpha's Assistant

Billionaire Alphas of Aspen

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Chapter One

Alex

My face is stuck to the desk when I wake up, my cheek swimming in a puddle of drool. Sunlight is streaming in through the grimy window, and someone is vacuuming on the floor below.

Slowly, I peel my face off my desk and wipe the drool off my chin. There's a sticky residue on my cheek from the late-night Snickers I inhaled, and my mug is empty apart from a few yucky rings from yesterday's coffee.

People are already trickling in for the nine a.m. briefing, so I grab a makeup wipe out of my drawer and discreetly fix myself up. Keeping your nose to the grindstone is one thing, but nobody here needs to know that I'm this worried about my job.

My stomach feels empty and a little sour, so I head to the break room for a fresh cup of coffee and a two-day-old donut. My editor, Roger, has already started the briefing by the time I've fixed my "breakfast," so I find a spot near the back.

"I'm sure you've already heard whispers, and yes, the rumors are true," he says. "Unfortunately, after the unexpected Q3 losses, the powers that be at UltraComm have decided they need to cut costs. There are going to be layoffs."

There's a collective groan from everyone present, and the sour feeling in my stomach intensifies.

Of course UltraComm would decide to make cuts at our little online-only paper. The Colorado Daily Beacon is an independent newspaper with a long track record of pissing off advertisers and hemorrhaging money. UltraComm added us to their portfolio just last year, and there have already been two rounds of layoffs.

"As of right now, I'm not sure how bad the cuts will be, but I've been told to prepare to lose at least a quarter of our staff."

There's a round of distressed murmurs, and my heart thumps harder.

"It's unfortunate that these cuts are happening just before the holidays," Roger continues, "but my hands are tied."

I glance around at my co-workers, mentally ticking off the less-senior reporters and Tim, the lazy graphic designer. I'm still counting when I get to copyeditor Kyle and myself. We started here around the same time, which means one or both of us could be on the chopping block.

I lose track of whatever Roger is saying about the new firewall IT installed, panic swirling in my gut. It's not that his announcement comes as a surprise. Journalism is not exactly a secure career these days, and rumors of more layoffs have been swirling since they released the Q3 earnings report.

And yet I always held on to this vague notion that if I just worked hard enough, I'd somehow be able to scrape by and avoid disappointing my dad.

My chest tightens at the very real possibility that I could be laid off. I make a pittance as a reporter — barely enough to cover my rent, groceries, and the insurance on my crap-tastic car. I have exactly forty-seven dollars in my savings account, and I'll probably need to dig in to that to pay for the parking ticket I got last week.

I can't afford to lose my job.

Suddenly, the shabby newsroom seems way too stuffy. I need to get out of here.

Slamming my laptop shut, I toss it into my worn-out bag and push past the knot of gossiping reporters to reach the exit. The stale bear claw I ate isn't sitting well, and even though eating out is a luxury I can't afford right now, this morning calls for my favorite food-truck burrito.

My phone rings just as I step out onto the sidewalk, and I have to fish through the pile of old receipts and gum wrappers at the bottom of my bag to find it.

It's a local area code, so I answer automatically, thinking it might be one of my sources. "This is Alex."

"Hello, yes. Is this Alexandra?"

"Yeah. Call me Alex. How can I help you?"

"This is Margie Stipes. I'm the director of human resources at MatchAI."

The woman ends her statement like a question, as if I'm supposed to know why the fuck she's calling me.

There's a long pause on the other end of the line. "I was just calling to let you know that your application was selected from our pool of candidates."

"My . . . application?" I repeat, my brain working hard to connect the dots.

"Your application for the position of Mr. Cabrera Garcia's assistant."

The name bounces around in my head like a pinball, and my mouth falls open as the realization hits me. Rafael Cabrera Garcia is the founder and CEO of MatchAI — a tech company specializing in artificial intelligence.

Weeks ago, I submitted an online application for the position, not thinking I could possibly get it. It was just background on a story I'd been working on about MatchAI's most recent publicity stunt — using its proprietary AI solution to select the CEO's assistant.

“O-oh,” I stammer. “You're kidding.”

“No,” says Margie, sounding annoyed. “Our algorithm selected you as the ideal candidate for this position. I've already sent over an official offer, along with the required paperwork. If you accept, Mr. Cabrera Garcia would need you to start right away.”

I shake my head, still stunned that the AI would have picked my application out of the thousands they must have received.

I'd only applied so I'd be able to write up some scathing commentary on how AI distills human beings down to their résumés without taking soft skills into account, but I'd been disappointed to realize that the application was more of a souped-up personality test than a questionnaire about past job experience. I'd chalked it up to some new-fangled talent-development strategy and thrown out the story. I'd completely forgotten about it until now.

“I don't . . . I mean, doesn't he want to interview me first?” I ask.

“No. MatchAI is so confident in the accuracy of our algorithm that we are prepared to hire you on the spot.”

I let out a heavy breath, still at a loss for words. While I have no interest in serving as the assistant to Satan himself, my mind is churning with possibilities.

Maybe I've been coming at this story from the wrong angle. MatchAI is a fascinating company that people love to hate. It had the most successful IPO in history and has a market cap of two-hundred and eighty-six billion dollars. Their generative AI technology is what caused my dad to lose his job as a sports reporter. It's fair to say I hold a grudge.

But maybe I should write an exposé on the man behind the company — Rafael Cabrera Garcia, the ruthless billionaire CEO.

The man is an enigma who rarely grants interviews, but I've read that he works ninety-hour weeks and survives on just four hours of sleep per night. I've also heard that he swims with tiger sharks and that he ate pangolin when traveling in Vietnam, though I doubt either of those things is true.

Working as his assistant would give me unprecedented access to the man and get me a behind-the-scenes look at MatchAI.

“Hello? Ms. Langley?” Margie is getting impatient, and it takes me a second to remember that “Langley” is the alias I used when I filled out the application.

“I-I’m here,” I stutter, shaking my head.

As much as I don’t want to pose as the assistant to a man who stands for everything that’s wrong with the world, this could be the story that saves my career. Hell, it’s the type of story that makes careers. It’s an opportunity I can’t pass up.

“Uh, when do I start?”