

The Billionaire's Baby Bargain Chapter 16

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Chapter 16 Difficult Assignments

The art gallery was smaller than I thought it would be, but that just meant it was more intimate, more exclusive. Only the best of the best would be displayed here and the pressure I felt threatened to overwhelm me. Why did Arthur think I could do this?

He squeezed my hand as if he could sense my inner turmoil and I squared my shoulders in resolve. I had at least one person's support and an alpha's at that. That had to count for something right.

Arthur led me through the revolving doors and I was greeted by a woman with short, flaming red hair. Her dark navy blue suit and bright hair contrasted with the white walls of the gallery. Even the warm smile she gave stood out.

She held out her hand and I took it hesitantly. "Hello! My name is Molly. I'm the owner of the gallery and a long time friend of Arthur's. You must be Almara. It's a pleasure to meet you and I can't wait to start working with you." Everything about her radiated kindness and I could feel myself smiling back at her. "Yes, it's a pleasure to-" my eyes widened as I suddenly recognized her. "You're Molly Whitmore."

I stared at her in awe. Molly Whitmore was known throughout the art world as a verified genius when it came to curating. There wasn't a single artist that she had taken under her wing that hadn't become famous. I couldn't believe she was standing here before me.

She gave a modest chuckle. "I see you've heard of me, but I can assure you that I'm still a normal person. Please don't treat me like I'm some fluffed up celebrity."

I nodded silently, still too stunned to speak. If I didn't have such a tight leash on my emotions, I would have been fan-girling all over the place. I got to work beside the Molly Whitmore! And it was all thanks to Arthur.

"Well, I'll leave the two of you to get better acquainted. I have some pack business to attend to. I trust that you and yours will treat Almara with the respect she deserves," Arthur said and turned to leave, giving my hand one last squeeze.

I watched him leave and an urge that was all my own welled up inside me. I had to show him how much this meant to me, even if it was because of the contract.

"Arthur, wait!" I called and he paused, turning toward me with his eyebrows raised, curiosity sparkling in his green eyes.

I ran to him and braced myself with my hands on his shoulders. I went up on tiptoe and gave him a shy kiss on the cheek. It seemed silly after our encounter in the car, but that had been mostly Lily. This was all me.

"Thank you," I whispered as I pulled away and was caught off guard at the affectionate smile he sent my way.

He gave my hair a gentle tug. "Anything for you, little wolf."

And then he was gone and I was once again left with feelings that I didn't know what to do with so I shoved them into a box and pushed it as far away as I could.

"Come along, Almara," a cold voice called and I spun to face the newcomer, but the only person there was Molly. I looked around, confused. Who had called my name?

"I don't have all day!" the same cold voice snapped and anxiety jolted through me as I realized it was Molly. All the warmth was gone. All that was left was hostility.

Even the cloud above her head had changed drastically. What had once been a deep yellow that had matched her personality was now a mix of deep orange and dark green. She was very agitated and resentful.

How did she change her emotions like that? I asked Lily. I had never seen anything like it. I hadn't even known it was possible.

Her belief in her own lies is strong enough that she can mask her true emotions, Lily responded and I tucked away that piece of information for later.

Molly led me down several hallways before we came to a backroom that was obviously used to create art. Blank canvases, brushes, and stray paint marks littered the tables. Artwork that was still drying lined the wall furthest from the windows. I breathed in the familiar smells and relaxed...a little.

"It's time to prove yourself, little wolf," Molly started, saying Arthur's term of endearment for me in a mocking manner. "Show us what you've got, if anything, and I'll let you know if you still have a job when you've finished. I've got more important things to do than babysit."

Molly stalked out of the room, slamming the door behind her. I flinched, but started to gather supplies anyway. While I was browsing the paint colors, three people came in, two males and a woman. None of them acknowledged me. They only gathered their own supplies and began to work.

However, I could feel the hostility rolling off of them in waves. These must be my colleagues and no doubt they were disapproving of my presence here. I couldn't find it within myself to blame them. I didn't really belong here and I certainly didn't deserve it.

You do belong here and you do deserve it. Now show them! Lily commanded and I started to paint, losing myself once more in my craft. Every feeling I'd had the past two days found its way onto the canvas. Not all of them were

bad.

When I was finished, I had three completely different paintings. One was clearly my heartache and despair. It featured a woman being pulled apart in two directions, the pieces of her barely clinging to each other. The other was a confusing mix of acceptance and anger.

The last one...I didn't want to look too closely at it. It showed my lust and my budding feelings for Arthur, but that wasn't something I was willing to deal with at the moment.

I brushed the hair back from my sweaty forehead and stood up. For the next couple of minutes, I took the paintings one-by-one to the drying easels, making sure that I didn't smear anything. Then I busied myself by cleaning up. When I was finished, I glanced at my paintings and realized that they now had an audience. The three that had walked in after me had all gathered around the three easels. I couldn't tell from here whether they were impressed or not. I cautiously walked toward them, feeling like I was tiptoeing through egg shells. Butterflies fluttered in my stomach.

"Girl, these are beautiful," one of the men said and I blushed. "My name is Cole, by the way. And this here is my boyfriend, Logan. That lovely piece of work is Katie."

I nodded my hellos to the other two. They were smiling at me and seemed much more welcoming than they initially had.

"You're incredibly talented. I can understand why Alpha Arthur recommended you," Katie said, brushing her shoulder-length turquoise blue hair away. I eyed it with a hint of jealousy. I had always wanted to dye my hair something wild, but Derek would have never let me.

"Do you think Molly will let me keep my job? I don't think she actually likes me much," I admitted, twirling my hair nervously between my fingers.

"Don't mind her. She's just jealous. She and Alpha Arthur went to university together and she's been in love with her ever since. Don't worry. It has nothing to do with you," Logan chimed in and my spirits lifted slightly.

"Sorry we were bitchy earlier. We thought you were just here because of...you know," Cole said, glancing down at the ring on my left hand.

I nodded. "I understand. Honestly, I don't think I'm talented enough to be here. But I hope I can reach that point by learning here."

Whatever they would have said got cut off by Molly reentering the room. She waltzed over to our little group and studied my paintings. Her lips pulled back into a sneer.

"Well, well, well. Color me impressed," Molly said, but in a way I could tell wasn't complimentary. She was pissed that I was good. I felt a small bit of pride that I had ruffled Molly Whitmore's feathers.

"But what would be even more impressive is if you can get Noah Cunningham

to have an exhibit here.”

Noah Cunningham? I squealed to Lily. I had loved Noah Cunningham ever since I had found his artwork. I'd even tried to copy his work a couple of times, but it had never come out exactly right.

Molly clicked her tongue at me and walked back out. The other three were looking at me like we were going to a funeral.

“What?”

“Cunningham keeps to himself. He's rejected every single invite that Molly has extended to him. Every single one,” Kate answered and my excitement started to die down. I wasn't particularly good with people. How was I to succeed when others had failed?

Arthur

“What do you mean she's on a plane back?” Arthur asked, staring at his cell phone incredulously. A cell phone that still smelled slightly of Almara's arousal. Despite the situation that had arisen, a jolt of desire went straight to his groin.

“Sofia hurt herself on stage. She's coming back. You will visit her immediately,” his father commanded through the speaker and Arthur drew his lips back in a snarl. He absolutely did not want to see Sofia right now. He wasn't ready.

“Father, I do not think it wise -” he started but his father cut him off.

“Arthur, as your father and your former alpha, I demand that you go see her. Otherwise, I can't guarantee that anything untoward won't happen to your little painter.”

Arthur's hand shook with barely contained rage. “Of course, Father. As you wish.”

He hung up without saying another word. Arthur threw the phone across the room, watching it break apart with a numb satisfaction.

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