

Chapter 91

If only he knew Larissa was thinking about someone else, someone long before Upshaw, someone who even preceded Catrine Carter.

Her pondering continued as her fingers worked through the last of the buttons and peeled his shirt away. She was hesitating, he could see, even as she worked on his belt. To offer her a dash of motivation she needed to open up, Patterson's fingertips made the lightest trail from her waist to her back, then down to her bum before his large hands cupped both buttocks, bringing her closer as their eyes met, hers with desire and his with well-practiced hunger. He just had to think of a woman who truly turned him on, who he truly wanted to drill into to get his shaft to stand the way it did when Larissa freed it from his underwear.

Her slender fingers wrapped around his girth, stroked along the length, at which time he released another practiced grunt when he squeezed her butt to elicit her gasp and moan. She brought their faces closer, their lips inches apart when Patterson said, "Something's on your mind."

"It's not important," she said meekly.

Patterson didn't care if it wasn't important to her, but he'd like to be the judge of whether it was important to him and the hunters. Pressing his lips onto hers as his fingers thread through her hair, he elicited a stream of moans as his hands went to her thighs and lifted her up, bringing her against the wall as he hooked her legs around his ass, building up the tension before he brusquely pulled away, feigning annoyance when he said, "Larissa, something's wrong. Your body's not responding the same way. Tell me, what is it?"

It was a lie, but he tried it a few times when sniffing out intel and - nine out of ten attempts - it worked, so he prayed this was not the one time that it wouldn't.

Larissa's brows knitted, confusion flitting across her face. Her whole body was already sizzling at the sight of him, her mouth watered with need, her lower region was moist and throbbing, ready to take him.

"What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean," he continued his line of bull.

"I am responding to you."

"But not in the same way," he insisted, tone taking a fiercer turn. "We've fucked six times, Larissa. I know what I'm talking about. I know when there's a difference in enthusiasm."

Pulling him closer by his nape, she whispered in a desperate plea, "I want this. I want you."

"That may be true, but until you get whatever you were thinking about off your chest, it's going to impede our fun. And I - for one - am not settling for anything less than the happiest ending."

His next move was a gamble. He unbuckled her legs and set her on her feet, which was when Larissa caved when she said, "Wait."

He paused, let the internal waves of relief wash over him, and waited with a grim expression.

Larissa sighed, reached over to smoothen his arched brows and trace his frown. She swallowed, and began, "It was something that happened over twenty years ago - in his first affair."

Further perplexity marred his features. So they weren't going to talk about Monica Upshaw?

Swallowing a lump in her throat, Larissa continued, "The woman he slept with birthed a child, and she came to him asking for financial support a few years after the child was born. And... I found out about the affair after it ended, but I didn't know who the woman was, not until that day, so when she left... I..." she averted his gaze, then with nothing but vulnerability, she pleaded, "You have to promise me you'll still look at me the same way after everything I'm about to tell you."

That he'd look at her as a vehicle to drive Ferdinand toward the tainted segments of political history and force the minister into resignation once this affair was out? Yes, Patterson was quite sure he'd look at Larissa Ferdinand exactly the same way. "I promise."

She nodded and forced a meek, grateful smile, which fell instantly when she explained, "I called Valor that night, asking for a few hunters and... I lied to him that my husband is preoccupied with a government crisis and I was conveying orders on his behalf, then... lied again that the woman my husband slept with was disguised as a waitress but was capable of the highest degree of danger." Swallowing another lump, she whispered, "I demanded they put an end to her, somewhere deep in a forest where her body can never be found."

Patterson blinked and had to remind himself why he was here. "And I presume you succeeded?"

"Of course," she said it numbly, without a smile or a frown, but there was something in her eyes - the residual cut of betrayal. "I specifically ordered Valor to have the hunters end her by explosive means."

Patterson willed his mind to keep working, to keep going because this was not the time to freeze, not in front of a murderer, and definitely not while he was naked. Clearing his throat, he recalled, "Hunters don't keep explosives in their inventory."

"They don't store them in the headquarters, and only a select few know about the supply. I don't know if it still exists today, but it did over two decades ago."

"And putting a bullet to the victim's head, then using acid afterward has never crossed your mind, I presume?"

"It has," she bit her lip, tears of rage burning in her eyes. "But it was too simple. Too easy. And let me remind you that she was never the victim. I was and still am." Her voice radiated infuriation and her eyes exuded unregretful vindictiveness when she spat, "That woman was the beginning of the breakdown of my marriage, my once perfect life. She deserved a much more brutal end than the one I gave her. Looking

back, I should have ordered them to skin her alive before having her detonated."

Patterson thought back to the minister's conversation he overheard earlier. "Was that the issue with Ferdinand on the phone? A two-decade old problem now resurfacing?"

"No. That's another thing. You see, after my... unauthorized order, not only was I banned from making security calls entirely, I was also forced to stand by and watch my husband hop from one affair to another without being able to say a word, all because he would end my career, my reputation as well as those of my family's by exposing what I did to his first mistress. When the storm of that affair and my... unauthorized instructions passed and we tried to make it work, have our own kids and tried to leave the past behind, we were only hit with the truth that we would never work, and his affairs started again."

In a lowered voice, hushed like a secret, Patterson questioned, "The Carter and Upshaw deaths. Were you..."

She shook her head. "I no longer have the means and access to the professionals to accomplish such a feat, but I'd be lying if I didn't say I'm happy they're dead. My husband has a penchant for huntresses in recent years, probably because they're young and most have an almost perfect body from your profession's need to work out. He was terrified of what I'd do to his subsequent mistresses that he hired professionals to keep them safe. Can you believe that? Hiring people to keep his mistresses safe from his own wife. And the most stupid part of his whole plan is that he thinks I don't know. He hasn't told me about the current crisis, but if I were to guess, I'd say his hired professionals screwed up."

"Clearly," he murmured, doing a quick mental recap. "You mention the first mistress had a child."

Larissa bit one side of her bottom lip, admitting, "Yes. And one of your colleagues carries eerily similar features to that woman."

No length of tenure and experience could keep him composed when his

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eyes widened in genuine shock. "Who?"

Chapter Comments

