

THE ALPHA KING CALL BOY

Chapter 101 The Good Mood Balloon

I pushed aside the uneasy feelings – they may have been all for nothing, anyway – and exited Grandfather’s room quietly, following Alexander and pulling the door almost-closed behind me.

We were halfway to the elevator, passing the floor’s reception desk, when I saw that nurse again. The one who was in Grandfather’s room last time Alexander and I were here together. Who had given him a look of longing and a needlessly close pass of her body.

She was standing behind the desk, turned to the side photocopying a document on the glass scanner of a big printer. She caught sight of Alexander as we approached and did a less than discreet double-take.

The last time this happened, Alexander had ignored her attention.

The nurse rudely kept her eyes on my man as he and I passed the desk, walking side by side. Alexander again acted willfully blind to the situation, not reacting in any way.

I decided that enough was enough. If he was not going to make a point of showing her that he was taken, then I would do it myself.

I slipped my hand into his and gave it a tight squeeze. He looked down at me and smiled. I gave him an encouraging wink, and he lifted my hand to his mouth and pressed a kiss into it.

When we reached the elevator, Alexander hit the button with the down arrow. I looked over my shoulder at the nurse. As expected, she still had her eyes on us.

My icy stare hit her hard; she flinched when she met my gaze, and then rapidly looked away.

The elevator doors rolled open. We stepped inside, turned around. Alexander punched the button labeled L for lobby; while his eyes were busy on the button panel, mine flicked back to our friend behind the desk.

Yep – she dared to look over at us again.

I smiled at her. Then I grabbed Alexander by his shirt collar, wheeled him around to face me, stroked his chest and leaned my head to one side, inviting him in. Alexander was easy to wrangle into touching me when I was motivated enough to be pushy and egg him on. He smiled, licked his lips and then planted them on my neck. Air rushed into his mouth and nose in a huge inhale.

It was a satisfying sound.

The elevator doors started rolling, slowly, closed. I found the nurse's eyes again just as her jaw dropped a half-inch, and stared her down fiercely.

Her eyes went wide, her cheeks flushed, and she shivered. Then she turned her whole body away.

I'd scared her.

Good.

Alexander

The weekend passed like a dream. Fiona was on fire.

Monday morning came too soon, and she slipped away before I could wake up enough to even attempt to hold her back in bed with me. I snoozed while she was drying her hair—the sound was like a white noise

machine—and reawakened when she was nearly out the door.

It was only three-thirty.

“Your boss is a real asshole if he expects you in the office at four a.m.” I shuffled my body upright, leaning back against the headboard, and snatched a water glass from my nightstand.

I was pleased to earn a tiny, distracted chuckle. Fiona kept true to her routine, not allowing me to distract her. Shoes, jacket. Then the final check on her lipstick in the mirror by the door.

“I’m meeting Nina for breakfast,” she finally said, turning to look at me across the dim room.

She began running her fingers through her freshly washed hair to fluff it up with even more body and

volume. Distracted by this display, I missed a narrow opportunity for follow-up questions about Nina and her odd availability for pre-dawn meal dates such as these.

“I’ll be back for dinner by six,” Fiona continued, her tone matter-of-fact. “See you then.”

“Okay. Sounds great. I’ll see you then.”

Purse on shoulder, briefcase in hand, Fiona was one foot out the door, but then— “My boss isn’t an asshole, by the way,” she said with a casual glance over her shoulder. “At least, not all the time.” She grinned and winked at me, added “Bye,” and smoothly closed the door behind her.

I was stunned for a second. Dying with laughter in the next.

The good mood balloon was popped and blown to bits the second Iris opened her door.

“I don’t want to go,” she whined before the door had even swung fully open.

“Good morning to you, too, Iris.” I found myself speaking to her as if she were a child. The way she behaved called for it. “May I come in so we can talk?”

“Sure.” She pushed the door aside, just enough for me to pass her by.

I meandered over to the table where I usually perched for my chats here with Iris and took a seat. “So, what’s the problem? Why don’t you want to go to your appointment?”

“I already told you.” She crossed the room and crawled up into her bed, lying on her side with her

head on a flat pillow, facing me directly. “It’s scary. Have you ever done a bunch of medical tests like that, hmm?”

“I have not,” I admitted. “But you’re not going to be alone. I’m going with you to the hospital, and I’ll stay with you the whole time. If I’m allowed in the room, I’ll stay in the room with you. If I’m not, I’ll be waiting for you in the hall. Okay?”

She pulled a pillow from behind her on the bed, held it bundled tightly against her chest. “Okay,” she said at last. “If it’s too much though, we can leave, right?”

“Sure,” I said. Whatever got her out the door at this point. I could deal with that situation later, if it came up.

Iris was seated for the blood draw first. The doctor had recommended getting it over with at the

beginning of our day of tests, since it was what seemed to scare Iris the most.

I was a little surprised at the actual depth of her fear when it appeared in its full form at the sight of the needle. She fully panicked, hyperventilating until the tech intervened.

This woman was infinitely patient and very good at her job. She managed to calm Iris down with breathing guidance, reassurances about the procedure and quick-talking chit-chat. Then she brought out a little partition to shield Iris's eyes from the needle and tubing she was about to hook up into the ditch of her elbow. I suspected this was a tool more commonly used with child patients. Finally, then, the draw was in process, and then a minute later it was done.

I made a mental note of the nametag on the woman's

teal scrubs. I would later figure out who her supervisor was, and make sure they were quite aware of how skilled and valuable their employee was.

Fortunately, the rest of Iris's appointments passed with less tumult.

Even the CT scan, which I had been getting increasingly nervous about, sure that Iris would not have the patience to sit through the long, tedious ordeal with her head inside the machine. But somehow she fell asleep and took a long nap until it was over. My good fortune was not lost on me. I muttered a prayer of gratitude to whichever deity had granted me this mercy.

We returned to the palace mid-afternoon. Iris was tired. I would have been too; she was not wrong about hours of medical testing being an unpleasant, onerous chore.

With just a few hours before Fiona would be home for dinner, I was itching to get back to our room to change and then be on the way to training. I could probably work out with the pack for a little over an hour before I'd need to start cleaning myself up.

“Stay with me for just a little while?” Iris whined when I tried to bid her goodbye at her doorstep.

“I can't right now, Iris. I need to get my pack training started. Plus, you need to rest anyway. That was a lot that you just went through. Take it easy tonight, please, and don't forget to eat and hydrate.” That last bit was a reiteration from the blood tech's parting speech.

“You're always busy,” she said, pouting.

“That's true.” I gave her a sharp look, remembering

that sometimes treating Iris like a child was the most effective way to course correct in the face of her childishness.

“Alright.” Her shoulders slumped with resignation.

“When will I see you again?”

“Well, how about we have breakfast tomorrow morning? I was hoping maybe after you get some rest, we could start trying to talk about my mother. See if... you can try to remember anything.”

She brightened, agreeable to this plan of action. I thanked her profusely for her efforts with the medical tests and then, as politely as I could, got away before she could start complaining again.

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Chapter 102 The Bullet



“How was your day?”

It should have been an innocent enough question. But ever since Fiona made it clear to me how “creepy” it had been for me to ask about her work while I was keeping secret from her that I was her boss, I’d been trepidatious about returning to the habit of asking that question.

“It was fine.” She offered me a tight smile. “Pretty average Monday. Lots of meetings.”

She kicked off her shoes and started putting her

things away. New to the routine tonight was a stop over at her desk, where her briefcase was apparently now going to reside.

“How about you?” she asked.

“My day was good. Busy.” The thought of recapping any part of the Iris medical testing ordeal seemed needless. “You ready for dinner, or want to relax a little before we go eat?”

“Relaxing first sounds nice.”

I waited for her to come to me. It was a few minutes before she completed her routine, including changing out of her work clothes and into something more comfortable in the privacy of her dressing room, before she was finally ready for that task. Relaxing.

“Foot massage?” I offered. She accepted with a polite

smile. No cues to signal I could start at her feet and from there take it further. No; she was not in the mood.

Fiona was very good at hiding her thoughts and feelings. But the longer I knew her, the better I was getting at identifying when she was holding something inside. What she was holding in, that was another matter entirely. But I could, at least, discern her real smiles from the false ones by now.

The fakes were what I was getting tonight.

“What’s wrong?” I asked, once I’d gotten started on the massage.

“Nothing wrong, really,” she answered quietly. “I just have a lot on my mind, I guess.”

“You want to talk about it? Is it work stuff?”

Fiona looked up at the ceiling, thinking.

“Just one thing about work, I guess.” Her chin lowered slowly and she met my eyes. “Conrad said he wants to talk to me about something tomorrow. He was very busy, so that was all he said. I don’t know why but I just got a bad feeling, like it was bad news.” Her eyes went to the side, then flickered back to me nervously. “You don’t know what that’s about, do you?”

“No,” I told her honestly. “I have very little involvement in Conrad’s day-to-day at the company. Truly.”

She nodded. She looked relieved, and like she believed me. “I figured. And anyway, it’s probably nothing. But I turned in a bunch of reports last week that I’m still waiting to hear back from him about. I just hope everything is alright.”

“I’m sure it is. I wouldn’t worry about Conrad. He’s a big fan of yours.”

Fiona laughed. This, for some reason, she was not inclined to believe.

I wondered if something had happened between her and my uncle. Seemed unlikely. Conrad really had come to rely upon and hold great faith in Fiona.

My first thought was to give him a call as soon as Fiona was at work in the morning, to inquire about what was going on. But that, I considered, was exactly the sort of behavior that she would find creepy if she found out about it later.

And I was quite sure Fiona had nothing to worry about. My motive for involving myself in the situation would be, I had to admit, nothing more than curiosity.

Iris marveled, wide-eyed, at the dining room as we walked inside.

“Oh, this is just beautiful,” she said, shaking her head. “And you and Fiona have dinner dates here every single night? Ah. What a life. So romantic.”

Kayden gave me an eyebrow raise. He was well aware of the events of the past few days and the brewing tension between Iris and Fiona.

“I suppose,” I answered, shrugging.

Kayden made polite small talk with Iris; this had been my purpose in inviting him to join us for breakfast. His company supported a lighter mood. And I wanted Iris in a good mood before we sat down for the medical test results and a conversation about our plans for my investigation.

My Beta was a more patient person than I, and I was learning that my patience with Iris was something I could not trust to remain intact through many more of our one-on-one chats. Not if she was going to continue with the pouting routine any time I brought up a topic she found uncomfortable.

The plan worked, and gave me hope for the weeks ahead. Breakfast went fine. Iris was cheerful and positive, reporting that she rested well overnight.

The doctor met the three of us in her room after we ate. She had the CT scan images with her and a whole pile of paperwork.

Bloodwork was all normal; Iris was a “picture of health” in many different respects, the doctor reported happily. I think she was especially impressed with this, given the final reveal of the visit: the brain scan.

There was still a bullet in Iris's head. She had not told me that part of the story. That it hadn't been removed and was still in there.

“Now, it appears as though the damage from this injury was primarily to the bone, in which, of course, you can see the bullet is still lodged.”

The doctor used her finger to draw an imaginary circle around a small area of the transparent black and white image, which she was holding up against the wall for us to view.

“It looks to me as though it entered here,” she said, “ricocheted off this bone, and then implanted itself here, near the base of the skull. I can see why they decided not to remove it. The risk of brain injury would have been too great. And here we can see how the bone has healed around the bullet.”

I was enthralled with the shocking image and details about Iris's injury. But I was also impatient to hear about the damage to her brain. I didn't want to seem overeager, didn't want to reveal my selfishness in wanting to get Iris whatever treatment she needed ASAP in order to start recovering her memories so that I could move forward with my investigation.

I kept quiet and waited.

Finally, after more report results and explanations, the doctor reached my topic of interest.

"As far as trauma to your brain," she said, squaring her body to Iris and speaking, I noticed, rather carefully. "Do you recall what your former doctor, the one who first treated you, said about that?"

Iris frowned, shaking her head no.

“Well, from what I can tell, the bullet had no contact with the brain; your bones did their job and kept the object from entering into any soft tissue areas. The symptoms you’ve described may have resulted from a kind of concussion resulting from the impact. It’s possible that in addition to being shot, you may have hit your head in a fall or other impact.”

“A concussion?” I asked. The doctor nodded. “So you think the gunshot didn’t actually cause her memory problems at all – a second injury, an impact of some sort must have also occurred?”

“Well, I am only guessing, to be quite clear.” The doctor began to put all her papers away, finished with the reports. “It’s difficult to say exactly what happened without knowing the details about... what happened. I can only tell you with certainty the state of my patient in her current condition, and I’m happy to report that she is doing very well.”

“What about my headaches?” Iris asked loudly, abruptly breaking her silence. “If I’m doing so well, why do I still have headaches?”

“Well, many things can trigger headaches. I’d like to continue monitoring your symptoms as they occur. With time to observe your symptoms for myself, I will be better able to figure out the likely cause of your pain. I want you to call me when you’re not feeling well from now on, okay?”

Iris turned her eyes to me. What for, I could not say. But I nodded at her seriously to prompt her to agree with the doctor’s request.

“Sure,” she finally said. Her voice was flat.

“As far as the memory loss, my suggestion is to simply try talking through it. Some patients have

success with visualization. You close your eyes and speak with someone about the few things you do recall, walking through it in your mind's eye. You may be surprised at how quickly you'll be able to begin recalling more and more details.”

“That’s great,” I said. “Thank you so much, Doctor. You’ve been a tremendous help.”

She was out the door a minute later. I asked Iris what she thought about the doctor’s suggestion for how we could try working on recovering her memories, and start talking about the events surrounding my mother’s death. She had no objections.

“Well,” I asked cautiously, “are you up to start right now?”

“Sure.” She smiled, looking confident and optimistic. “Let’s give it a try.”

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Chapter 103 Like Clockwork



Fiona

It had not been a lie that I was nervous about the impromptu and mysterious meeting that Conrad had requested with me. I was.

It had been a half-truth, though. A half answer to Alexander's question about what was troubling me.

I texted Nina again on my way in to the office, just to check in on her.

She replied: I'm totally fine, Fi. Pleeeeeease stop worrying about me.

It was a tough thing to do, but I told her I'd try.

At breakfast the previous morning, Nina had confessed that she'd had an unsettling incident after work a few nights before. I could tell that she had not been looking forward to telling me about it – she knew I was about to be horrified – so she kind of spat the story out quickly.

A customer at the club had gotten handsy with her and the bouncer kicked him out. After her shift was over, though, the guy appeared in the parking lot, apparently waiting for her. (I think all the blood drained from my face as she told me this part.) But because the bouncer had been walking her out, he spotted the creep before anything else could happen.

And I guess beat the guy to pieces.

I was terribly worried for Nina now. I'd had my suspicions about her work being unsafe, but now I knew for sure that it was.

A couple things allowed me to not absolutely lose my mind over the whole thing. For starters, Nina was giving her notice at the club. She had a lead on some other work. "More on that later," she'd said. And she also revealed that she had a new hobby. The bouncer that had intervened with the stalker.

She'd been trying not to smile the whole time she talked about Ryker, which told me there was a little more going on with this guy than was typical for her. I guess they'd hooked up after the incident, and had been spending all their free time together since.

I still worried about her, of course. But the thought of

her having, essentially, a bodyguard was enough comfort to mostly leave her alone about it.

Fortunately, Conrad did not keep me waiting on our rendezvous all day. After the morning meeting was over, he signaled for me to follow him to his office.

He closed the door behind us while I took my usual seat across from his big mahogany desk.

“So what can I do for you, Conrad?” I was eager to get on with this.

“Fiona,” he said rather seriously, lowering his tall frame down into his big leather office chair. “You have been performing remarkably well in your short time here.”

Conrad got to see a genuine smile. He’d surprised it out of me.

“Thank you. That means a lot. I’m pleased that I’m bringing value to the role.”

A smile crept up one side of his mouth. Alexander had a very similar half-smile he did when he was feeling smug. He and his uncle Conrad did not look alike, per se – their coloring was completely different, and Alexander was built more like his father – but they did occasionally exhibit some uncanny family resemblances.

Suddenly Conrad stood, pushing back his rolling chair. He retrieved a lacrosse ball out of a drawer and began to pace the room slowly.

“I need to go out of town for a while,” he said. “And I’d like to task you with running the morning all-staff meetings while I’m gone.”

“Oh. Okay. I’d be happy to cover that for you. And anything else you need. How long will you be gone?”

He tossed the ball straight up in the air. Snatched it with an overhand grab as it fell. Then started doing that in a regular pattern. “At least one week. Maybe longer, depending on circumstances. I will keep you updated several days in advance if I need more time.”

Wow. This was a lot of responsibility.

“I know you still have a lot on your plate with the expansion,” Conrad went on. “But looking at the reports you turned in last week, it appears everything is well underway. At this point you’ll just be keeping tabs on the progress as the project nears completion.”

“That’s true.” I suppose the easing of my (still very demanding) project was to credit for the bit of extra free time I’d had on hand recently.

I felt very relieved to have my new home office in place before I got this news. Because it was going to mean a lot more work. I'd need hours to prepare for each of these meetings. And though I loved a challenge, leaving the office before sunset was highly preferable over pulling all my long hours on-site.

"So? You up for it?" Conrad grinned at me because he already knew the answer.

"Yes," I confirmed. "Absolutely. I look forward to it."

"Wonderful. We can discuss all the details tomorrow. I'll be leaving Thursday night. Thursday at the morning meeting, I'll announce our arrangement to the group."

The group that attended the morning meetings on the eighty-ninth floor consisted of many very important

people. It was a wonder to me that Conrad wanted me, the newest and least senior of all the executive-level employees, to assume any sort of leadership role within such an elite group.

He might have sensed my insecurity despite my best efforts to present only absolute confidence. Because he added, before I left his office, a comment about seeing a unique potential in my ability to drive high standards.

It might have been the most meaningful compliment I'd ever received.

The next couple of days flew by.

I was in the office at six a.m. and out at five p.m. like clockwork each day.

The late-night work-from-home life was a new part of

my reality. Because I was doing more than just a few hours of extra work daily. The task Conrad had given me was even more involved, I came to find as he worked with me to prepare, than I could have imagined.

There was a lot of reading required before I could even start writing out the meeting agendas. A LOT. It was easier reading for the CEO, of course. He had been looking at these types of reports and documents daily for decades. It took me probably ten times longer to complete all the reading than it did for him. Or more than that.

But being able to do a good portion of this extra work in the comfort of our bedroom was a big help. A break for a proper dinner (not eaten at my desk while reading) and some physical attention from Alexander – these things were critical. After spending the whole day in the office, that couple of hours with my Alpha

refreshed me from head to toe, so that I could afterward return to work with a sharper mind. And without shoes.

I did slip into wondering, at times, about how Alexander was spending his days while I was at work. This wasn't something I used to care enough about to let my mind linger on. But knowing, now, that Iris was there at the palace when I was not, and that he was spending at least some of his time with her regularly – it was unpleasant to imagine.

But the situation Iris had come here to help with was very, very important to him. The fact that she was so annoying was just something I had to tolerate.

And I knew that he was thinking about me when we were apart. I knew this from the texts he sent me, the notes and surprises he still intermittently had delivered to my office, and the way he was always

waiting for me eagerly when I returned to the palace in the evenings.

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Chapter 104 The Memory



Alexander

I hadn't expected Iris's memory to come flooding back on our very first attempt at the visualization exercise. That would have been extraordinary.

But after three days of trying to follow the doctor's orders – which was not easy with a willful and reluctant patient – I was getting absolutely nowhere

and I was getting tired of it quickly.

Just how long a road had I embarked upon with this project? Only time would tell. It was reasonable that three days was not long enough for this process to work completely, but it did not seem like a good sign that we had made zero progress.

Iris was still only answering my questions with quick replies in the vein of “I don’t know,” “I can’t remember,” and “This is giving me a headache.”

Was this going to take another week? Two? Three?

Or would it take months?

I couldn’t handle Iris being here months down the road. That had never been my plan. The baby was coming in a matter of months; Fiona would need me even more as the baby grew and took more of her

strength, and once it was here, she and our child would be my focus.

“Iris, please just try.”

Today, she had given up within the first five minutes of our visualization exercise.

“No,” she said stubbornly. “I’m tired. And I don’t see any point to you asking me questions about things I don’t remember, anyway.”

“Iris, the entire reason I brought you here from the moors was so you could help with this investigation. Help me get justice for my mother. If you are going to give up after only a few days, why are you even here? Why did you come?”

“Well,” she said, going to her kitchenette and starting a pot of tea. “Maybe I thought that I could do it. But it’s

just going to take more time. I need a break today. With the headache starting, it's better I just lie down for the evening. We could see about it again tomorrow."

The nervous energy in my body was building up. I could not remain seated, but I also didn't want to pace the room, knowing it might make Iris agitated to see me agitated.

I stood near the door, turned my back to it. Iris was fixing her tea, her back to me.

"All I have asked of you today is five minutes of your time to try the visualization exercise. Please do this." This was my last polite ask.

She carried her tea over to the bed, climbed up and made herself comfortable. All while wearing a pouty face. "I don't want to," she said again. "Will you please

just stay here and hang out with me today?”

I snapped. “If you don’t want to help me with my investigation... if you won’t take five minutes out of your day to help me. Then what the hell are you doing here, Iris? Why did you even come with me?”

“Alexander, stop it!” She looked up at me with horror. “Why are you getting mad at me? Why are you saying these things?”

“Because you are being impossible. And no, I am not going to sit and hang out with you. I have many responsibilities. I don’t have time to waste, and I don’t have time to argue with you, either.”

Iris’s big eyes welled with tears. “I thought you wanted me here,” she said shakily. “I thought you wanted to take care of me. That’s what you said.”

A muscle in my right forearm – I'd probably strained it yesterday on the salmon ladder – started twitching aggressively. It was distracting and annoying. I used my opposite hand to apply some pressure to the muscle but it didn't stop its incessant spasming.

I took a deep breath and willed my body to relax.

It didn't work. I tried to answer calmly anyway.

“I wanted you to come here to help me with this, Iris. And yes, I am happy to provide you with healthcare. I am happy to provide for your needs while you get well. But you have been refusing to call the doctor when you are sick, and now you're refusing to work, even for five minutes, on recovering your memories.” My arms flew into the air in frustration. “So what are we doing here? You're refusing to accept my help, and refusing to help me.”

Iris buried her face in her knees and began to cry. “I’m sorry,” she said between sobs. “I didn’t think about it like that. I’ll do it now. I can try to remember. I’m sorry. I was just tired and being stupid.”

I sat down. “I don’t think you’re stupid, Iris.” A sigh escaped my lips. I hoped she wouldn’t read too much into it. “And thank you for saying you’d be willing to try. Do you need a minute before we start?”

She pushed away from her knees, rubbing her eyes with the sleeves of her sweater. “No I’m okay. We can do it now.” Her voice was back to normal.

Iris laid down in bed and I dimmed the lights, as we’d been doing all week for this process. This was part of the doctor’s instructions.

She closed her eyes. I resumed my seat and we began.

“Imagine that you are in the palace. In Queen Alexandra’s suite. You are working, like any average day. Tell me what you see.”

Iris drew a long, shaky breath. “I see the room. Her big bed with the canopy over it. The furniture.” She shook her head, opened her eyes and turned to face me. “It’s only the same things I already told you yesterday.”

“Iris, please. You have to try to stay in the memory for more than a couple seconds. Please close your eyes and this time, keep them closed. Okay?”

She sighed, exasperated. But rolled back onto her back and closed her eyes.

We began at the start again. But this time, Iris behaved, keeping her eyes closed for several minutes

more of guided visualization.

“Now,” I said, “think about the last time you saw my mother. What did she look like?”

“Hmm.” Iris was quiet. Then, slowly, she said, “She looked real bad.”

“Where was she?”

“She was in bed. Wearing her nightgown in the afternoon. I’d been trying to get her to change, but she was so tired. She could hardly move.”

“Why was she tired? Did she say?”

“Hmm. She said she... she said she felt like she might vomit. I went to get a bin.”

I couldn’t believe it. Iris was remembering things that

she had not been able to recall before.

I tried to be very deliberate with my questions. Not wanting to push too hard, for fear Iris would get irritated and quit again. Focusing on small details like the doctor instructed.

“Where did you go to get a bin?”

“I went to the bathroom. The Queen’s bathroom. I took the bin from under the sink.”

“What color was the bin?”

“White.”

“And when you went back into the room, carrying the bin, what did you see?”

Iris’s eyes flew open. She shot upright. “Oh my god,”

she cried. “Ohmygod ohmygod.”

I went to her bedside, put a hand on her shoulder.

“What is it? What did you see?”

She looked up at me, silent tears pouring down her cheeks. “She already threw up,” she said. She opened her mouth again, looked ashamed, looked away from my eyes. “I don’t wanna tell you,” she whispered.

“Why not?”

“It’s your mom,” she said. “You don’t want to remember her like this.”

I let go of her shoulder and took a step back.

“That doesn’t matter to me, Iris. What I need is to know exactly what happened. Please tell me what you

saw.”

Iris grimaced. “She had thrown up all over herself. It was awful. It was everywhere. And it was all red.”

Suddenly she threw her hands to her eyes, began to shake her head side to side violently and cried, “Oh, please don’t make me think about it anymore.”

I spent several minutes after this comforting Iris, until finally she seemed to calm down and become very tired.

In fact, after I told her I was going to leave to give her some time to rest, she laid her head on the pillow and seemed to fall fast asleep in an instant. I turned the dim lights out entirely before making my exit.

Out of her company, I allowed myself to smile.

It was not a happy smile. But a hopeful one. A

relieved one.

The memory Iris had been able to dig up today was not pretty. But it was a good lead.

And it meant that she was starting to remember.

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Chapter 105 Playing With Fire



After getting the pack started on evening training, I cleaned myself up, asked a maid to change our sheets, and paid a visit to the palace florist.

Fiona had been working a few very long days and

deserved some devoted attention. I was also hoping to give her an incentive, something to convince her to take an evening off.

I knew getting her a home work station would result in her working from home more. What I hadn't expected was the increased workload Conrad was dumping on her while he was traveling.

Over the past few days, my pregnant fiancée had been spending up to sixteen, seventeen hours a day working, when you considered her hours at the office and her late nights at her desk combined. I was concerned about the lack of sleep. And missed her in bed.

I knew my uncle had faith in Fiona, saw her as highly competent and hoped to promote her soon. But asking her to cover for him in leading the executive meetings every single day, with only a few days'

notice, was a huge ask and a lot of pressure.

I found myself hoping, too, that he really had selected her for the job because she was the best person to do it.

But the reason Conrad was out of town anyway was because he was trying to track down her father, who had recently gone missing.

Conrad was not happy to not know where the man was. He was also not happy that I hadn't allowed him to kill Fiona's father "when we had the chance."

Conrad was a good man. His intentions were good. For the most part.

But when it came to Alexandra's enemies, he could be ruthless. And he could be conniving, too, when he'd found a way to justify the necessity of a

manipulation.

I could only hope that having Fiona support his leave of absence came with no hidden agenda. That there was nothing else my uncle was plotting, involving her and her father, without my knowledge.

I had the room set up perfectly by the time Fiona returned from work in the late evening, just as the sun was beginning to set.

She had texted me her ETA as usual – I always appreciated that she did this – so I was able to time it quite perfectly. I had tall candles arranged on surfaces all around the room's perimeter, and a few shorter ones on our nightstands. All lit and flickering, they cast the room in a mild amber glow. The bed was strewn with white rose petals. Bouquets of white roses adorned her desk and our café table.

Just in case she came home feeling peckish, I also had an assortment of sweet and savory treats displayed neatly on the table as well. Some grapes, berries and charcuterie. Smoked almonds, salted chocolates and caramels. A small variety of iced cupcakes.

“What is all this?” Fiona asked when she swung the door open and took in the sight.

“Just a little surprise. You’ve been working so hard all week, I wanted to do something for you.”

“Well,” she breathed. “It is lovely. Wow.”

She looked down at me, shaking her head but smiling, as I assisted in removing her shoes. She was wearing gray suede ankle boots under a black dress. And, I discovered, some very sexy thigh-high black stockings. I fingered the top of one stocking, thinking

about rolling the soft nylon down her leg. But I decided to save it for later.

“Why are you in such a good mood?” she asked. Her eyes narrowed suspiciously.

I realized I’d been grinning broadly ever since Fiona stepped foot in the door.

“I’m happy to see you,” I answered.

One of her perfectly coiffed eyebrows arched tellingly. She scanned the room once again, apparently reviewing and reconsidering my gesture. “That’s all?” she asked.

Nothing got past Fiona.

She was right. I’d been in a good mood ever since I left Iris’s room, after helping her recover that memory

of my mother.

I wasn't squeamish about the content of the recovered memory. I'm not easily shocked. And the relief I felt when it finally happened, Iris finally gave me something – it was like a weight had been lifted off my shoulders.

But I was not willing to open my mouth and utter the name “Iris” in this moment with Fiona – no matter the innocence of the context.

Her blue eyes locked on mine. They looked bright and wild, and shaded with a touch of green. I felt exposed under her intense, penetrating stare.

She knew I was thinking about something related to Iris. She absolutely knew.

Maybe my hesitation to answer her question had

been enough to tip her off.

She was less happy after realizing this than she'd been minutes ago. But she did not ask any questions. After removing her jacket and putting her belongings away, she circled back to where I stood waiting.

She took hold of my necktie and pulled. Then turned and headed for the bed, dragging me behind her.

I let her shove me down into the bed, writhing my neck under the slightly tightened loop of my tie. She climbed on top of me and untied the knot with slow, confident patience, keeping her eyes locked on mine while her dexterous fingers reversed the expert knot and then ripped the tie away fast. It threatened to leave my neck with a rope burn rash on its way out of my collar.

My throat rumbled. "You are so fucking sexy," I

groaned, lying submissive underneath her.

She smiled. And then lowered her mouth to my neck and kissed me. Licked me. And then bit me—hard.

I growled, pushing one of her hands down my center to show her how hard she was already getting me. She let me do it. And started to stroke the length of my shaft lightly over my pants.

I was done for.

I was very sorry if she loved that dress. It did not come away from the scene undamaged.

Fiona was brimming with jealousy. It was an undeniable energy that my wolf recognized and urged me to indulge. I let her take the lead. She wanted to rough me up, and that was fine with me.

When finally we both managed to strip naked – except for those black stockings, I kept those on her as long as I could – I slid inside of Fiona fast, unable to wait any longer, and she reacted by dragging her claws hard down the lengths of my arms.

Her fingernails were long, sharp, and perfect, painted white with silver sparkles. They pooled red underneath the tips as she scratched me, digging into my flesh hard enough to draw blood.

The pain was delicious.

I was relishing this new side of my Luna. The angry and possessive Fiona that couldn't keep her hands off me.

Maybe it was wrong to enjoy her jealousy so much. I certainly did not want Fiona to be upset.

But I was having fun. And it seemed like at least a part of her was loving it, too.

Maybe I was playing with fire.

It was too hot to resist.

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