

THE ALPHA KING CALL BOY

Chapter 106 More Important Matters

Fiona

We stayed up late Thursday playing.

I was already sleep deprived from several days of staying up late working, because Friday was the first day of Conrad's leave. The first day I'd be leading the morning meeting in his place.

I was, in fact, fully prepared for the meeting by the time I returned to the palace Thursday night. Conrad had been prepping me for days. I'd finished all my required reading.

But if left to my own devices, I surely would have stayed up late worrying about it and spinning my

wheels over-rehearsing. So Alexander's little stunt with the candles and such was very well-timed. I needed to be forced to take a break. And spending the night soaking up his energy was the best thing I could have done with all that tension and anxiety I had thrumming inside me.

But still I found myself wishing, when my three a.m. alarm went off, that maybe we had called it a night a little earlier. Alexander had left me feeling good, yes. But days upon days of sleep deprivation – some of that fatigue you just can't get away from.

He must have been worn out, too. For once he didn't wake to my alarm, or even while I was moving around the room with some of the lights on. He usually liked to laze in bed watching me start my day. Today he was dead to the world. I watched his broad chest rise and fall with even, peaceful breaths, his lips slightly parted, golden hair splayed on the pillow.

I still whispered “Bye” to him on my way out the door. It was just routine.

The meeting went off without a hitch. It really could not have gone any better.

I was surprised and mortified, though, when Gerald started a wildly inappropriate round of applause after I’d concluded the meeting, and then the entire room joined into it. I kept my professional smile plastered to my face and thanked them, waved them off, and gently told them to stop until they did.

It was all very congenial. I simply had not expected such an effusion of goodwill and appreciation from my colleagues and was, at first, afraid that it was being done ironically. A joke on me, a vote of no confidence from the group due to my greenness. I had been fearing that my peers in the meeting might begin

casting me reproving glances in the halls this week, assuming that my appointment to cover for Conrad was thanks to nepotism.

But no—they were cheering because I had covered our business matters thoroughly but done so within the confines of the actual scheduled meeting time. In other words: I got them out on time. Conrad had a tendency to ramble sometimes, stretching the meetings late simply if he was feeling talkative.

My colleagues were sincerely supportive. The positive feedback felt great. But even greater was the relief that the first meeting was done, and I'd done it well. And tomorrow I got to sleep in.

I was vibrating with pride and energy all the rest of the work day.

But highway traffic was extra heavy this evening, and

the car ride back to the palace took twice as long as usual. I was fighting a nearly irresistible urge to nod off in the back seat the entire drive.

By the time I reached our bedroom, I was practically dragging myself forward.

God bless Alexander and his strange enjoyment of removing my shoes and clothing for me. He even took my purse and briefcase and put them away exactly where I like them to be, while I made for my dressing room in pursuit of a comfortable nightgown.

I absolutely had to lie down before dinner. Alexander agreed when I asked him to hold me until I fell asleep.

I also asked him to make sure to wake me up in twenty or thirty minutes.

I woke to my ringing phone.

It was on vibrate; I kept the sound off at work. But in the dead silence of the pitch dark room, the vibration of the phone on my nightstand was plenty loud enough to rouse me.

It took me a long, confusing minute to figure out what day it was and how long I'd been sleeping.

Alexander was naked and asleep beside me in bed.

I'd lain down for a nap. That was my last memory.

I found my phone, squinted at the screen. It told me two facts that only confused me further.

Conrad was calling my cell. That had never happened before.

Also, it was five o'clock on Saturday morning.

I'd already been staring at the screen for at least half a minute—I was about to miss the call. So I had to pick up before I was fully back to my most coherent self.

I cleared my throat noisily, then answered.

“Hello?”

Alexander began to stir at my side.

“Good morning, Fiona. I hope I'm not waking you and I apologize if I am. I know you're an early riser like me and hoped you might be up.”

“It's no problem at all,” I said. To my overwhelming relief, my voice came out clear. “What can I do for you, Conrad? Everything alright?”

“Well.” His tone was not a happy one. “It is already looking like I will be needing more time away. Rather than postponing a few days at a time, I’m going to go ahead and push my return one more full week.”

“Okay.”

“I want to give you as much time as possible to prepare. Best to plan as far ahead as we can. How are things going? First meeting went alright?”

“The meeting went very well.”

“Good. And the expansion project?” He was talking very fast.

“Still on track.” I was answering as quickly as my half-asleep brain was allowing. Gratefully, Conrad did not seem to need me to contribute much to the conversation.

“Good. You feel alright keeping it up for the next two weeks?”

“Yes.”

“Good. You have any questions, need anything—you talk to Alexander.”

At this, I was stunned speechless. I needed a moment to process some new information: Conrad knew that I now knew about Alexander’s role in the company.

Hm.

“I’ll email you my notes for next week’s meetings by end of day Sunday. And Fiona?”

“Yes?”

“Thank you.”

“It’s no problem. Travel safely.”

He hung up without saying goodbye.

“Why in the world is Conrad calling you this early?” Alexander asked, falling into a yawn as he started on the word “early.”

“Great question.” I returned my phone to the nightstand. Alexander snatched at my limbs and pulled me into him. Between his easy strength and the slipperiness of our silk sheets, I practically went flying across the bed. It was impossible not to laugh.

“What did he want?” His voice was sleepy, his tone playful. He pressed his nose and mouth into my hair, rubbing his face into it.

“Telling me he’s gonna be out a while longer. Another

week.”

“Hmm.” Alexander tensed up a little. Seemed like this had him suddenly awake. “You okay with that?”

I nuzzled my face into the crook of Alexander’s warm neck. It was just there begging me to.

When I started answering his question with my lips on his warm skin – that was when I started feeling odd, again. About our still mostly awkward workplace entanglement.

“I guess,” I said. “It’s not like I have much of a choice. Your boss gives you something to do, you do it.”

Alexander’s next exhale sounded heavy.

I didn’t want to talk about this with him anymore.

I kissed his neck. Ran my tongue lightly up the length of it. Dragged my nails down his chest, my touch going soft and gentle when I slipped down and below the trail of golden hair on his abdomen.

Then the work conversation was over. More important matters prevailed.

After a few more hours of snoozing, Alexander departed to begin his weekend morning routine of making me breakfast in the kitchen, while I showered and dressed.

Nina texted me while I was drying my hair. She asked if I had any free time to hang out this weekend.

I replied: Tell me when and I'll be there.

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THE ALPHA KING CALL BOY

Chapter 107 Going Public



“I’d like to see Nina this afternoon,” I told Alexander. He’d just taken his seat beside me at the breakfast table. “You and I could link back up in the evening for dinner. How’s that sound to you?”

“Sounds great.” He took a big bite of omelette, looking pensive as he chewed. “That’ll give me some time for extra training with the pack, actually. They could use it. Just let me know when you want to do dinner.”

I nodded. “Another thing I wanted to talk to you about,” I added.

“What’s up?”

“Well, I was thinking about you and Conrad, and everything you’ve told me now about your arrangement.”

Alexander’s movements slowed. He put his fork down and reached for his water glass, sipped it and watched me carefully. I was verging into historically problematic territory for us by talking about the company.

“May I ask for a few more details about that? I guess what I’m asking is really, how involved are you with the company’s operations? If Conrad is more or less running the show?”

“Well. Conrad handles all the day-to-day. He has a lot of discretion. I don’t ask him to run anything by me, that’s part of our arrangement. But I keep myself

informed about the company and I step in to make some decisions when necessary.”

I thought this over. It was vague, but it answered my query.

“That makes sense. Okay, new question.”

He tilted his head, curious. “Okay.”

“Now that Scarlet is in the position she is in... having dissolved her rival company, lost her personal fortune, been disgraced. Might this be a good opportunity to go public? Make your ownership of the company known? She is no longer in any position to attack Crescent Ventures. It might be the perfect time to do it.”

Alexander looked at me blankly. “What would I gain by going public?” he finally asked.

“Positive notoriety.” I was a little surprised he had to ask. “Acclaim. A following?”

He gave me a very serious look that told me he had truly not considered this before.

“You are going to be King someday. Perhaps it’s time to start making a name for yourself. Your people should know that you are more than just a fearsome warrior.”

Alexander looked impressed. Pleased with my idea indeed, now that he was fleshing it out in his imagination.

“And how should I go about doing that?” he asked.

“What would be my first step?”

“You could do an interview. I’m sure any finance

magazine would put you on the cover once they knew the story you were selling. After that, the opportunities will come to you. You could pick and choose which you'd like to capitalize on."

Alexander pushed his plate aside and shuffled his chair, angling it to face me directly.

"So what do you think?" I asked.

"I think you're brilliant," he said. "I think we should do it."

"Look what they gave me." Nina was holding up a small, rectangular sticker with a QR code on it. She'd been in her car waiting at the front of the palace.

"What's that?"

"A security pass." She peeled the backing off the

window cling and fixed it to the top left corner of the windshield interior.

“What for?”

“They said I can go through any of these interior gates now. So next time I come pick you up, I can drive in to that parking lot over by the training field. Where Kayden parks. Close to your room so you don’t have to meet me up here.”

“Oh. That’s great! They just gave it to you?”

“Yeah, apparently Alexander left it for me.”

“Hm. That was nice of him.”

Nina smiled distractedly, shifting the car into gear. “I thought so. Now buckle up and let’s get out of here. I can’t wait to show you my place.”

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“That may be the biggest bed I have ever seen.”

Nina laughed. “It just looks big because the room is small. Yours is probably the same size, it’s just in the middle of that enormous suite.”

Her new apartment was in a nice building, nothing too fancy but newly renovated and very clean. Her one-bedroom unit was on the ninth floor, accessible by an elevator from the lobby, and she had a teeny tiny balcony with a gorgeous view of the downtown skyline.

“Speaking of the palace. You have to come by sometime and see my new home office set-up I was telling you about. It’s super cute.”

“I’d love to! That was nice of Alexander to do that for you. And just in time for your new work stuff, huh? How’s that going? You had your first meeting to run yesterday, right?”

“Yes. It went really, really well.”

“Yay! That’s awesome, Fi! Good job!”

She gave me a big hug. I hadn’t realized how much I’d been needing it. “Thank you Nina. I am so tired, though. And all I’ve done is one meeting. I’ve got two weeks more of this ahead.”

“Yeah. You can handle it, though. Just try to keep a lid on the over-ambitious tendencies, you know? Know when enough’s enough and it’s time to take a break.”

“Yes, I know.” Nina knew me better than anyone. “It’s

a balancing act. A lot of the extra work hours really are necessary.”

Nina’s stomach started growling and she suggested we order lunch. Lounging on her new, fluffy couch and eating takeout whilst enjoying the view out her windows sounded absolutely delightful. We ordered pizzas from a place down the block and they arrived in record time.

“So, what’s going on with that weird girl?” Nina asked, handing me a big, greasy slice on a paper plate. “She still stalking you?”

“Fortunately, I haven’t seen her since that last odd interaction I told you about. But she’s there. She’s around.”

Nina scowled. “I don’t like it. I don’t trust her.”

“It’ll be fine. She is... irritating and strange, but Alexander is keeping her away from me, at least.”

“Hm. Well, good news,” she said, switching gears.

“This is my last week at the club. I got a new gig starting week after. Dancing, but for events. Cooler spots, bigger audiences. Less shadowy corners. A very different vibe. I don’t know what the tips will be like, but it’s a better job.”

“That’s awesome, Nina.”

“Yeah, the club’s been good to me. But I can’t shake the jumpy feeling I get in the parking lot now.” She cringed, remembering the recent incident.

But then she shook it off quickly and changed the subject before I could make any further comments.

“Wanna see something?” she asked.

“Sure.”

I followed Nina into her bedroom, then into a smallish walk-in closet. She had an iron safe in there. I watched with great interest as she plugged in a code and popped the door open.

Out came a small black duffel bag. It dropped to the floor with a thud. She crouched down and tugged the zipper open.

“Holy shit, Nina. Are those all hundreds?”

She grinned. “Yeah. I take the smaller bills to the bank. Just kind of started stashing away the hundreds for fun, then they started adding up over the weeks.”

I looked at my best friend in horror. “Nina, cash hoarding is not the way to grow wealth. You should be

investing this in a diversified portfolio of stocks and bonds—”

“Okay, nerd.” She put her hand up flat like a stop sign.

I laughed. And snorted, which didn’t help my case against the nerd accusation.

“Tell you what. I will let you teach me about investing. Show me how and I’ll start putting something aside. But the cash bag stays put. What if I need to go on the run, huh?”

“Nina.” I broke into laughter again. “Who would you need to go on the run from?”

She shrugged, like it didn’t matter.

“And how is Nina doing?”

“She’s great,” I said, not meeting Alexander’s eyes. I was changing for dinner and he was watching me. “Just moved into a new apartment. It’s small, but much nicer than her last place.”

“Good for her.”

“I was thinking about inviting her over sometime. I’ll be crazed at work the next couple weeks, but maybe she could come by next weekend. I want to show her my new desk and everything.”

“Sounds wonderful. Should I see if Kayden can join us? The four of us could have dinner here. Or we could even go out together, do something different.”

“Hmm.” I pursed my lips. “I think... maybe not?”

Alexander understood quickly. “Ah. I take it Nina is no longer interested?”

“It may be more accurate to say she has acquired a new interest.”

He nodded, pressing his lips together like he was trying to hold back a smile. Then the smile spilled out, along with a single chuckle. “I’m sorry. I’m just laughing at Kayden right now.”

“What? Why?”

“He really liked Nina. But I think he’s known for a while that it’s over.”

“Aw.” I puzzled at Alexander being amused with his friend’s heartbreak. “That’s sad. Why did you laugh?”

He shook his head. “A guy thing, I guess.” He used his hand to wipe the smile off his mouth. “Don’t worry about Kayden. He’ll be fine.”

“Are you going to tell him?” I suddenly felt guilty about discussing Nina’s love life with an interested party. I didn’t realize her fling with Kayden had had any substance to it, I guess. Didn’t realize he cared.

“No.” Alexander laughed again. “Definitely not. Don’t worry. I don’t need to get in the middle of that.”

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Chapter 108 An Odd Duck



Alexander

“When you were living with Terry,” Kayden asked,

“what would you usually be doing on a typical day?”

“Woof.” Iris blew air out of her mouth. “I tell you, there was sure no difference between weekdays and weekends.”

The three of us were having breakfast together again, resuming our new weekday routine. Fiona had left for work extra early today, giving herself more time than she really needed to set up and prepare for the biggest executive meeting of the week.

“Every day is just a day on the moors,” Iris continued. “Fishing. Chores. I don’t know. Life is very basic there. Sometimes it gets real old, though. Tiring, you know? Same thing all the time.”

“And how are you liking life at the palace? Are you finding it more interesting, more comfortable here?”

Iris bobbed her head from side to side, pursing her lips. “More comfortable, yes. Very comfortable. I have had better sleep, mm-hmm, in the big cozy bed.” She sighed. “But I will admit, I’m bored sometimes.”

“Do you miss the outdoor activities?” Kayden asked. “Fishing and all that?”

“Nah. I don’t know. What I miss the most, I guess, is having company more of the time. Terry and me did everything together.” She ventured a big-eyed look over at me that I chose to ignore.

Kayden rattled off a list of suggestions for ways that Iris could pass some of her time, hoping to pique her interest. He made a valiant effort.

He could show her the palace library, he said, which she’d be able to access anytime. Iris replied flatly that she could not read, humbling all of us into an

awkward moment. Kayden then reminded her of the gardens, offering to draw her a map of how to get to the best ones from her room. She showed little interest. Finally he mentioned that drivers were available to take Iris into the city if she ever wanted to do anything there. This also fell flat.

Iris's overall mood deteriorated rapidly as we finished eating. Kayden and I exchanged a glance when her back was to us, as we all exited the dining room. I silently granted him permission to take his leave and he did so swiftly.

I walked Iris to her room.

“Do you think you're up to try again today? Try to recover some more memories about my mother?”

She looked at her feet. “I don't know. I think I feel a headache coming on. It might not be the best time.

Please don't be mad."

"It's okay, Iris. I could tell you were not feeling great. We could take a day off. Circle back tomorrow."

"Oh, really? That would be good. You sure it's okay, though?"

The skittish look in her eyes irritated me more than it should have. I wished she didn't hold onto everything so stubbornly. Take everything so literally.

"Yes. We don't need to do this every single day, Iris, if you're not up to it. I was frustrated last week because... it felt like you were unwilling to even start trying."

"But I did try. And I did good, right?"

"Yes, you did very well. Why don't I leave you for

today.” We had reached her bedroom, and she was turning her key in the lock. “And we’ll make sure we take some time to work on it tomorrow.”

“Alright,” she said. “That’s fine. Thanks for understanding.”

Her eyes lingered on my neck. She was looking at the marks Fiona had left on me during our rough play the other night.

The welt on my neck was part bruise, part hickey. Iris had taken quick notice of it when I visited her on Friday morning. She had ogled some scratch marks she’d glimpsed on my arms as well.

Now she was studying my neck again, apparently rather interested in its process of healing.

I jerked my shirt collar up and turned to the side.

“I’ll see you tomorrow, Iris. Get some rest, and don’t hesitate to call the doctor if your headache gets worse. Okay?”

“Okay.” She began to inch the door closed. “Thanks again. See you tomorrow.”

Two hours later, I was returning to our room to shower after training. I checked my phone, hoping to see a text from Fiona regarding our dinner plans and her estimated time of arrival from work. Instead I found four missed calls and seven texts from Iris.

The gist of the texts was: She wished I would come back and hang out with her. Her head was hurting more and she wondered if I’d come take care of her.

I sent her a single text in response: I’m unavailable, Iris. Please call the doctor about the headache if you

haven't already.

I held back everything else I was thinking.

It was best, I reminded myself, to keep the messaging simple and not give her opportunities to drag me into an argument.

Fiona

A productive, successful Monday had me in high spirits as I returned from work in the evening.

I should have known better by now than to stroll the palace halls distracted, though.

Iris popped out from around a corner just as I was passing an intersection of marble hallways.

I didn't startle so dramatically this time. Maybe I was

acclimating to her surprising me like this. (What an unpleasant notion that was.)

“Oh, oops!” she cried out when she saw me. “I’m so sorry, Fiona. I didn’t mean to cross your path.”

I knew right away what she meant. She was taunting me for having requested that she keep her distance.

“Hi, Iris. Please – that’s not something you need to be sorry for. It’s quite alright. Have a nice night, now.” I moved to pass her, heading for my and Alexander’s bedroom.

“Well, I know that’s not true, Fiona. Alexander told me I had to stay away from you. I really didn’t mean to run into you here, honest. I’ll leave.” She dropped her head and turned away.

“Iris, wait. Please listen to me for a moment.” I set my

briefcase on the ground.

She paused, watching my every move carefully.

“I am sorry that you and I got off on the wrong foot,” I told her earnestly. “But we are bound to cross paths every now and again, as long as you are staying here. I hope that we can be civil with each other. That’s all I wanted to say.”

“Civil,” she repeated. “Alright. Hmm.”

I picked up my briefcase to signal my imminent departure. Opting to ignore her characteristically odd response, I calmly added, “I’ll be on my way now. I hope that you are well, Iris. Have a good night.”

She chose not to offer me a farewell of any kind. Just retreated in silence.

I entered our bedroom and found Alexander pacing out of his office.

“Everything okay?” he asked immediately.

“Oh, Alexander...” I sighed. “Your friend Iris, she is something else.”

“What happened now?”

“Nothing.” I pressed a palm to his chest so he could feel my energy. I was calm. “She is just... an odd duck. I leave every interaction with her feeling bewildered.”

“What did she say to you?”

I sighed. “Don’t worry about it, please. Honestly, it was nothing. She was in the hall and apologized for running into me. Being overly literal about our

requests for her to keep some boundaries, I assume.”

Alexander peeled my hand off his chest. Brought it to his mouth and kissed the palm. It tickled, forcing me to smile.

“Okay,” he said cautiously. He waited to see if I had more to say.

“Please forget it,” I told him, shaking my head. “It was nothing.”

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Chapter 109 Scratches



Alexander

“I thought some more about your idea,” I told Fiona as we sat down at the dinner table. “I’m going to talk with Conrad about it later this week.”

She smiled. A real smile. “That’s excellent. I’m happy to hear it.”

“I like your plan about doing an interview, too. I wanted to ask your thoughts about which publication might be best. You’re better read in this industry than I am.”

Fiona loved this topic. She began to enumerate her favorite finance magazines, even recalling the names of a couple writers whose interviews she had read and felt offered thorough, balanced perspectives.

I had forgotten to put my phone on silent.

It began to ring.

“I’m so sorry. Let me just turn it off.”

Of course, it was Iris. I silenced the call, switched my phone to vibrate, and returned it to my pocket.

Fiona did not resume what she had been saying. Instead she turned her focus to her meal.

I wasn’t sure what to say. More promises that I was going to get Iris to stop interrupting our dates were null and void if none ever proved to be true.

The vibration in my pocket told me Iris was calling back again.

Fiona heard the faint noise. “Answer it, please,” she instructed me quietly. “Just see what she wants.”

I walked toward the door as I brought my phone back out and picked up the call.

“Iris, why are you calling me right now? I am in the middle of dinner with Fiona.”

Her breath, noisy in the speaker, was ragged and panicked. “I’m so sorry,” she said, her voice quivering. “But something’s happened. I... I have to show you something. Please come quick. Something happened earlier tonight, with Fiona.”

I froze. Completely turned into a statue. The final words of that last sentence were ominous.

“What are you talking about, Iris?”

“Please,” she whimpered, “just come to my room and you’ll see.”

Fiona was picking at her food distractedly when I returned to the table.

“So?” she asked. “Everything alright?”

“I honestly don’t know. She was not making much sense. She’s very upset.”

Fiona’s eyebrow arched lazily. “And what does she want from you?”

“She asked me to come by her room. Said she wants to show me something.”

Now, Fiona’s mouth curled into an amused smile.

“Wants to show you something? In her bedroom?”

I ran a hand down my face. “I don’t think it’s anything like that.”

My Luna's face turned serious as she picked up on my energy. "Look, if you're really worried about her, just go."

"I hate leaving you like this in the middle of our time together."

"Well, I'm not very hungry anyway." She pushed her chair back and rose to stand. "Go check on Iris. I'll go take a bath."

I walked Fiona back to our room and thanked her for understanding before I left. She shook her head dismissively, as if to say it was no big deal. I knew, though, that it was.

When Iris opened the door to her room, she had a bleeding injury.

Three very fresh parallel scratch marks running the length of her neck.

“Iris, what happened?!”

She was wild-eyed and panting for breath. “She just attacked me, Alexander. I hardly did anything to make her so mad.”

My vision started tunneling. I was understanding everything all at once and everything I was understanding was horrible.

“Iris. Tell me where you got those scratches.”

“I ran into Fiona by accident a little bit ago. She got so mad, said I wasn’t respecting her space and privacy. She just reached out and grabbed me! Those long fingernails of hers scratched me.”

I turned on my heel and walked away, down the hall.

I was furious.

“Alexander! Aren’t you listening to me? Didn’t you hear what I just told you?”

Against my better judgment, my legs whisked me back to face Iris where she stood in the open doorway. “I heard you,” I said firmly, “and I don’t believe you. Fiona would never do something like that.”

“Then who did this to me, huh? Who?!”

The answer to that was very clear. The scratch marks on Iris’s skin looked obviously self-inflicted. Made with the fingers of the right hand pulling downward on the left side of the neck.

“I’m calling the doctor.” I turned again and walked away, this time going farther down one of the nearby hallways.

I got the doctor on the phone and told her everything.

She was heading into Iris’s room and closing the door behind her just as I rounded the corner back into that corridor.

I couldn’t bring myself to go inside. I waited outside Iris’s door for several minutes until it swung open again and the doctor popped her head out, apparently looking for me.

She stepped out into the hall, closed the door, and motioned for me to follow as she made for a white marble bench about five yards down the hall.

The doctor, a small woman in her late sixties, grunted

as she seated herself on the hard bench. “I cleaned and treated the injury,” she said quietly. “The scratches were very shallow, no need for stitches or anything like that.”

“Did she tell you a story too, or did she admit that she did it to herself?”

The doctor sighed. “She admitted that it was self-inflicted.”

I drew in a very deep inhale. Let it out as slow as I could.

I asked the doctor, “Will you wait here just a moment?”

“Of course.”

Iris didn't look up as I entered the room. She was in

her unmade bed, curled into a ball with her knees pressed under her chin. Her neck was now covered in clean white bandages.

I folded my arms across my chest. “Why did you do this, Iris?”

She shook her head. “I don’t know.”

“Iris...” I was lost for words for a moment. But then some came to me. “What the fuck?! Why would you make something like this up? How could you do something like that?”

She began to cry. “I don’t know,” she said again. “I’m so sorry. I was just so upset after I saw her. She makes me feel so small and stupid.”

“Stop.” My voice was loud. It hit the walls and reverberated, making the air in the room feel

unstable. “This is unacceptable. I won’t have you speaking ill of Fiona, in any way, ever again. Do you understand me?”

Iris nodded desperately. She was still holding herself in a ball, still crying, still not looking at me.

There was no logic available in this place right now. There was no use standing here and asking Iris to make any sense.

I met the doctor outside again. She was waiting patiently on her bench.

“People who engage in self-injury,” the woman was eager to tell me, “are at high risk of harming themselves again. With her pain issues, though, I’m a bit hesitant to offer her any kind of medication that might—”

The doctor probably would have gone on for a while if I'd let her.

“I can't go back in there,” I interrupted. “Go ahead and talk to her about whatever you want her to do. I'll call you in the morning and I'll check on her after that. After I've cooled down.”

I didn't wait for a reply.

I was going back to Fiona.

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Chapter 110 Lunatic



Fiona was in the bathroom when I got back to our room. I saw the lights on in there and heard the light splashing sounds of small movements in the tub.

She'd left the door ajar. I pressed it open lightly and found her lying in a steaming, soapy, pine and lavender scented bath.

“So?” she asked. “How'd it go? What was the very urgent thing that Iris needed to show you?”

I let my back fall heavily against the wall. And probably stared at Fiona for a full minute or longer while trying to think of how to begin telling her about what had just happened.

She waited, patient and perceptive. She knew something unpleasant was coming.

Finally I dove in, beginning with the entire scene at

Iris's door. The highly visible and clearly fresh bloody scratches on her neck, and the terrible lie about where they had come from.

I told her about my call to the doctor. Then about the doctor's report, confirming Iris's confession. And about my confrontation with Iris, and the warning I had left her with.

Fiona's lovely, perfect face displayed absolutely no reaction as I worked my way through the short but eventful saga. She only kept her icy eyes on mine the whole time, her expression remaining blank and neutral.

When I was finished, she closed her eyes, muttered, "un-fucking-believable," and then slipped her head under the water.

She came back up about three seconds later. I was

seated on the floor next to the tub by then.

She wiped her face, blinked water off her eyelashes and combed her wet hair back with her fingers.

“I know,” I said. Then, rather pointlessly, I offered, “I’m sorry about this.”

Fiona coughed out a dry, cheerless chuckle. “Don’t be,” she said dismissively. “Alexander. That woman is a lunatic.”

I was finding Fiona’s reaction somewhat confusing. If she was angry – and she had reason to be – it seemed she had taken this anger and shoved it back behind that brick wall where she kept all her other emotions.

I did not like thinking about that. About the wall going back up.

“Will you help me out of here?” she asked, preparing to exit the bath.

“Of course.” I fetched a fluffy white towel from the rack on the wall, gave Fiona my hand for support as she stepped carefully out of the tub, and wrapped her up in the towel, bringing my arms and body along with it and sweeping her into a hug.

She did not push me away. But she did not receive my embrace very warmly, either.

Then she dried her hair, removed her eye makeup, and disappeared into her dressing room, quiet as a mouse.

I wanted to ask her if she would like to talk about it some more. I wanted to ask if she was hungry, if she wanted me to order some food or make her

something.

But when she emerged from her dressing room, clad in comfortable loungewear, she made a beeline for her desk.

I followed her there. “Fiona. Will you please talk with me?”

“About what?” She raised her eyebrows. “Don’t tell me there’s more to that awful story.”

“No, no. I just... are you upset?”

“No.” She shrugged. “I am fine. I do think you ought to reconsider housing a crazy person down the hall from us, though. But ultimately it is your decision.” She turned her computer on and it chimed to life noisily, punctuating the quiet tension between us.

I found myself on my knees beside Fiona, like I was praying to her. “Fi. You know that I can’t just kick her out. You know I need her here if I am going to get justice for my mother.”

My fiancée nodded patiently. There was still zero trace of emotion on her face. “I know,” she said smoothly. “I understand that is important to you.”

“Are you and I okay?”

“Yes, we are okay.” She did me the mercy of placing one of her cool hands to my cheek. The light touch was reassuring enough to get me off my knees.

“I do have a lot of work to do, though, Alexander. Tonight’s events have been very distracting already. Do you mind if I try to focus on work for a couple hours now? I don’t want to be up all night trying to get this stuff done.”

“Of course. I’ll leave you to it.”

It was still early, and I hardly knew what to do with myself if Fiona did not want my company. She wasn’t kicking me out of our room. But she kind of was.

I headed out toward the barracks, texting Kayden on the way. He met me partway across the training field.

“What’s going on, boss? Something wrong?”

“Long story,” I answered. “I’ll tell you all about it on the drive.”

“No problem. Where we going?”

“Well. I don’t want to be gone too long, but I need to give Fiona some space to work, maybe for an hour or so. And I could use a drink.”

“Ah. That good, huh?” Kayden grimaced.

I sighed, gazing back in the direction of our bedroom. Fiona would not like it if I came home drunk.

“Keep me to two beers, max,” I instructed my Beta.

“Roger.” He jerked his head toward the parking lot.

“Shall we?”

Kayden opened his hand in perfect timing to catch my keys as I tossed them over.

Fiona

I was able to complete some work on my computer before bed. But not much. My mind was not feeling very sharp.

I tried to read, but couldn't focus. Tried to review my notes for the next morning's meeting, but could not focus.

I wound up completing a variety of "busy work" tasks instead, just to feel productive. I cleared out my inbox and organized some files on my desktop. Deleted a bunch of things I didn't need anymore.

And I messaged Nina. I told her all about everything that had just happened with Iris.

Upon hearing the bizarre and outrageous tale, my best friend was absolutely enraged. She was borderline homicidal.

I, on the other hand, only felt drained after repeating the details.

Nina wrote: Alexander is going to regret giving me

that security clearance. Because I am gonna come down there and kick that bitch's sorry behind.

I replied: As much as I would really love to watch you do that, Nina – I beg you, please do not.

Nina: Ok. But only because I will do anything you tell me to, Fi. You know I got your back girl.

A series of devil face, bloody dagger, and red heart emojis followed, making me laugh aloud. I was able to put the work away after that.

I was crawling into bed just as Alexander returned, smelling like alcohol. He adjourned to the shower immediately, though the scent of whiskey lingered behind.

I was on my side and already nearing exhausted sleep when I felt the bed dip to accept his weight. He

slid under the covers and slipped right into place behind me, wrapping his warm body all around mine, pressing us as close together as possible.

He did not say a word. Just held me till I fell asleep.

If you find any errors (broken links, non-standard content, etc..), Please let us know < report chapter > so we can fix it as soon as possible.