

## THE ALPHA KING CALL BOY

### Chapter 111 Before Sunrise

Alexander

Fiona's windchime alarm woke me from an anxious half-sleep.

I'd been in and out of vivid dreams all night, startling awake every hour in the middle of clear and precise thoughts, all of which revolved around the two things that were troubling me in my waking life.

The odd, unsettling business with Iris was one of these things. The problems brewing within my pack were the other.

I caught Fiona by the wrist before she could slip out of bed and pulled her back to me. Her phone clattered

onto the bedside table.

“Stay just one minute.” My voice was hoarse from disuse and a touch of dehydration.

“Okay.” I heard a smile in her voice. She buried her face against my neck. “One minute only though.”

I kissed the top of her head. Her sweet smell filled my senses and instantly started to calm my anxious mind.

Fiona slipped a hand up to my neck, cradling one side while lightly kissing the other. I felt her first two fingers find a pulse point and pause there. She noticed that my heart was racing.

“Are you okay?” she asked gently, sitting up.

“I’m fine.”

She stared down at me silently, not accepting this answer.

“Just didn’t sleep well,” I added. I took her hand and brought it to my mouth, kissed her palm and then pressed it against my cheek. “How about you?”

She frowned. “I didn’t sleep great, either. Strange dreams.”

I wondered silently if we’d shared any of the nightmares I’d fallen into last night. I certainly hoped not.

“I really need to get up.” She patted my cheek.

I nodded. “One last request.”

“Yes?”

“Can I tempt you to sit and have some coffee with me before you head out – after you get ready? Just five minutes. I’ll get a pot brewing while you shower.”

Fiona narrowed her eyes and said, cautiously, “Okay.”

“Five minutes. I promise not to undress you.”

She chuckled. “Alright. You put some clothes on, too, though.”

“Yes, dear.”

She rolled her eyes, trying to hold back an amused smile.

I turned the lights on, threw on some clothes, made the bed, and started the coffee.

My hands completed these tasks while my mind

drifted quickly into a swarm of busy thoughts.

Kayden had given me some disturbing information last night.

And here I thought I would be the one with the good story to share when I told him I needed to go out for a drink. He listened patiently to my story about Iris and the bizarre stunt she pulled, first. But then, as soon as I was done with my tale, he told me he actually had more bad news.

Turns out, while he and I were traveling to find Iris, a couple members of our pack got into some trouble while partying in the city.

They'd kept it from us for as long as possible, but finally Kayden happened to overhear a few of them talking about the incident.

I had known something was not right with the pack the day after we returned from the moors. But thus far the only information I had was that several of my men were under-performing at regular drills and lagging in their reaction times.

Kayden and I had been trying to get to the root of the problem for the past week. We'd been testing and timing and tracking each man's performance. Attempting to pinpoint the team's weak spots and plan for an intervention.

No action on the matter would be effective, though, unless I understood the source of the issue.

Now I did.

There were a couple troublemakers in the pack that were stirring up distraction and division.

I knew well that this kind of problem would always have a ripple effect. Distrust between even two members could quickly spread to disunity amongst the pack as a whole.

I finished fixing our coffees just as Fiona emerged from her dressing room.

“This is nice,” she said. We sat at the table simultaneously. “Thank you.” She took the mug I handed to her and closed her eyes while taking a big inhale of the fragrant steam.

“It is, isn’t it?” It was very satisfying to see a smile on her face and know I’d put it there.

She made an mmm sound with her first sip. “This is delicious.” She eyed me with a mildly impressed expression.

“I’m glad you like it.”

“What’s in it? Tastes like... cinnamon? Something else, too?”

I took a long, faux-thoughtful sip of my coffee, then reclined back in my chair. “If I told you that, what would you need to keep me around for?”

Her eyebrows went up. “Hm. I could name a fair few things.”

“Could you?”

“I could...” She looked at me over her coffee cup, blowing lightly over the surface of the steaming liquid to cool it.

“Maybe you can name those things for me later,” I said, shifting my weight forward and resting my

forearms on the table. “When you’ve got more than five minutes to give me afterward.”

She sipped her coffee composedly, keeping her eyes on mine, and nodded slightly.

Five minutes came and went quickly. I rose to stand when I saw her glancing at her watch, letting her know I was not going to fight her on leaving.

“Thanks for this, really,” she said, standing and performing a small stretch.

I moved in and kissed her neck. She melted into me just a little. My lips trailed up to her cheek and hovered there.

She gripped the back of my neck and pressed her lips to my ear. “Maybe I’ll go in a little later tomorrow,” she said. “I like waking up like this...”

“Like what?” I asked, pulling back a little to look her in the eye. “With bedside coffee service? Or... with my mouth on you?” Like she needed a demonstration, I dipped back down into her neck, kissing it again, a little harder this time...

I heard a low purring noise come from her throat.

Then she gently pushed me away, smirking.

“Yes and yes,” she answered. “Let’s do more of both tomorrow. I’ll, uh... work it into my schedule.”

She made herself laugh with this last comment, snorting a little and covering her mouth.

I loved to hear her laugh. She didn’t do it very often.

I mindlinked Kayden as I headed out to the training

field and found he was awake.

We met up outside around a quarter after four. That gave us less than two hours before sunrise, when the pack would be coming out for morning training. We'd need to move pretty fast.

First stop was a tool shed located about a hundred yards behind one of the rose gardens. We looted it for pickaxes and shovels.

Then we headed to the far side of the open field that we used for drills and sparring practice. At the end of this field there was a hill. It sloped upward gently from the palace-facing side, but led to a sharp incline on the other side that dropped down steeply to the edge of the forest.

Kayden and I were going to identify our troublemakers today and bring an end to their negative impact on

pack morale. Once the source of the pack's problems could be dealt with, the other men would fall in line.

We started digging immediately, careful with our balance while we worked on the incline-side of the hill, and dug until sunrise.

We dug a very deep trench into the slope. It was completely invisible from the other side of the hill.

Essentially, it was a trap.

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## [THE ALPHA KING CALL BOY](#)

### Chapter 112 The Pit



A cool wind whipped across the palace grounds, drying the mud and sweat on our bodies into a hard crust. Kayden and I returned the tools to the shed and then parted ways, hurrying to our rooms to get ourselves cleaned up.

We met back on the training field just before the break of dawn. The pack came trooping out of the palace minutes later, jogging over to the field in perfect time with the rising sun.

Their chatter died down, pace slowing as they neared me and Kayden.

“Good morning, men.” They inclined their heads in to acknowledge me. “We’re going to start with sparring practice this morning. Find a partner you haven’t worked with in a while and let’s get going.”

The pack did as I instructed, spreading out across the

field in pairs and beginning their fighting practice.

Kayden and I paced between them, watching.

Counting landed blows. Confirming some things we already knew about who was in good fighting shape and who was moving too slow, taking too many hits or touching the ground.

I came upon one pair that was looking particularly pitiful, and stopped in my tracks.

My wolf began itching with anger at the sight the two men. Their form and footwork was sloppy. They looked tired and bored.

My skin flushed warm, heart pounding with adrenaline.

These were not soldiers who would be ready to go into battle tomorrow if we were called to war. And that

is something that could happen any minute of any day, with no warning whatsoever.

My body was ready for an instinctive display of dominance in response to this appalling performance by men who were supposed to represent me, were supposed to be loyal to me and uphold my standards.

“Come with me,” I told them. Then I mindlinked the rest of the pack, told them to stop what they were doing and pay attention.

I led the two pack warriors, both men in their late twenties who’d been with me for a handful of years, to the center of the group.

“Two on one,” I called out. I began walking a slow circle around the men. “Take me down. No holds barred. Give me everything you’ve got.”

I stretched my shoulders, threw my arms back and forth to loosen them up, rolled my neck and cracked it. The two men assumed defensive stances, turning slowly to keep their eyes on me as I prowled around them. The rest of the pack formed a larger circle around the three of us, inching backward to give room, making a little arena there in the center of the training field.

The pair of soldiers were doing their best to keep their chins up. I could sense how very little they wanted to fight me. Neither felt prepared. Neither wanted to strike first.

Fine.

I waited until one of them looked briefly at his feet, and pounced on the other.

I had the one man on the ground immediately.

When the other reacted, lunging at me in an attempt to tackle me off the first man's back, I caught him by the neck with one hand and used his forward momentum to flip him hard into the ground. I threw him face-down right beside his buddy.

I flattened my body over the first man, pinning his arms over his head. He struggled, but I had him incapacitated. Then I moved up into a seated position with my left knee between his shoulder blades, kept hold of his wrists with one hand, and used my right arm sweep the second man into a chokehold, grasping his neck in the crook of my elbow and pulling his back into my chest. His hands flew up to fight my grip, but I pulled tighter till he gave up and tapped out.

I released the chokehold and he slumped forward onto his knees, then to his fours, coughing. I stood, releasing the other man I had pinned underneath me.

I paced a few yards back and said, “Again.”

The pair righted themselves as I started circling them for a second time.

For a second time, they failed to initiate. They waited for me to attack.

For a second time, I had the both of them in submission in less than a minute.

“Again.”

I fought the two soldiers in front of the pack until I was sure they were thoroughly humiliated.

By the time I decided we were done, they were exhausted and depleted, looking near fainting. But they were uninjured.

The rest of the pack grew serious. They worked a lot harder when we came back together after a short break. I had them bring out weapons and targets when they returned to the field and we began target practice.

Across the board, performance was improving. No one here wanted to be next to be singled out and made an example of. But we were not finished yet.

Around the time when we would usually be finishing up our morning training, I told the pack to take five for water. And then return for strength training.

Kayden took half the team to the weight room and I kept the other half in the field. He had his men doing rope climbs and up-downs on the salmon ladders. I did push-ups with mine. The guys that dropped before we reached 1,000 reps, I told to stay down till we

were done. They got to start over with sandbags on their backs after the first set.

“Final task,” I announced, once Kayden had brought the rest of the group back to the field. “Distance sprint.”

I pointed to the hill that crested over the pit Kayden and I had dug into the opposite side of the slope.

“Run due west,” I instructed. “When you crest that hill, the last leg of your sprint will be down a sharp incline. Turn around when you’ve hit the shade of the tree line. Sprint back up the hill and back here. I’m timing you. If you don’t make it back in under twelve minutes, you’re going to run it again until you do.”

The pack was utterly exhausted. But I liked what I was seeing in their eyes.

Resolve. Determination.

They did not want to fail another test. And they really, really did not want to do this sprint more than once.

I counted them down. Kayden started a stopwatch and off they went.

The gradual slope toward the hill was the easy part of all of this. The pack went surging forward fast, running full sprint, sweat-drenched and adrenaline-fueled.

The dozens of men reached the hill within seconds of each other. And one by one they went flying over it.

I watched as the fastest of the men went over first. A few simply vanished from view. I did catch a glimpse of a couple gray tails as men shifted into their wolf forms and stretched forward to leap over the chasm. These ones had felt the change in terrain underfoot.

They had paid attention, sensed danger, and reacted the way they should've.

Within the space of two seconds, the entire pack was out of sight. I heard at least four or five thuds that I knew were bodies landing in the bottom of the pit or crashing first into the edge and then falling in.

I brewed more coffee while taking another shower, and drank the whole pot as I got ready afterward. My hair had become a filthy, tangled mess that I had to comb out carefully after washing.

Once that was done, I dialed the palace doctor on the way into my dressing room.

She picked up and I put the call on speakerphone, set the phone down on an empty shelf, and got dressed while we talked.

“I paid Iris a visit early this morning,” the doctor said. “Her condition is much better today. She seems in a fairly stable mental state this morning. Much more clear-headed, at least. I plan to check on her again later. When will you be seeing her today?”

“I’ll be on my way over there in just a few minutes.” I finished buttoning my shirt, tucked it in and selected a belt. “Do you know if she’s already eaten breakfast?”

“Actually, yes. I offered her a mild pain killer for her headache, and insisted she eat something before taking it. I ordered room service for her.”

“Thank you. I appreciate the care you’re taking with her.”

“She is my patient,” the doctor said matter-of-factly. Then she cleared her throat and made a very quiet, almost silent “hmm” sound.

“Something else?”

She sighed. “I fear it’s not my place to tell you, sir, what to do, or...”

I understood her meaning. “You can skip the formalities, doctor.”

“Very well.” She sounded resigned. “I need to ask you to try to be patient with Iris. Recovering traumatic memories that have been suppressed for years... this can be very stressful, very draining for someone like Iris. Give her some time. Time to rest. Time to adjust.”

“I will take that under advisement. Thank you, doctor.”

I hung up and closed my eyes, took a breath. Tried to summon the requested patience. Finished getting dressed. And headed over to Iris’s room.

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## [THE ALPHA KING CALL BOY](#)

### Chapter 113 She Was Here To Stay



Fiona

A sharp cramp in my abdomen nearly buckled my knees in the middle of the morning meeting.

I gritted my teeth through the sudden pain, doing my best to make sure no one in the room was any the wiser to my troubles. No one seemed to notice.

That's just instinct to me—hiding pain. It's a well-practiced skill, and one that's useful in many

situations. Fighting? Letting your opponent see your pain gives them power and makes you more vulnerable.

And this executive meeting? What a wonderful thing that would be to break down in front of everyone, just when I'm trying to win over their confidence in my leadership abilities. I did not need my coworkers to start seeing me as a delicate, wailing pregnant lady who probably ought to be home with her feet up instead of here bossing them around.

I slowly made my way over to my seat at the conference table while Gerald finished addressing the room. He passed around stapled packets of paper, copies of some reports I'd asked him to compile and share with the group.

"Thank you Gerald," I said when he was finished. I looked at my watch. "It's a few minutes early, but I

think we can call it for today. Thanks to everyone for a productive meeting. Let's all review Gerald's reports, and let me or him know if you have any questions."

My coworkers, perhaps feeling a little lazy with the spare minutes I'd just provided them, were slow to move. I wished they would hurry out of my way. The cramps had eased up, but now I was feeling nauseated. I smiled politely, gathered my materials at what I hoped was a very normal, casual pace, and finally made my way back to my office with calm, measured steps.

When I was alone at the end of the hall, I stepped inside my office in even stride, closed the door quietly behind me, and locked it. Only then did I allow my smile to drop. I closed the blinds on the hallway-facing windows, paced quickly to my desk, sat in my chair, snatched up my little waste bin and vomited into it.

I groaned. The effort of holding that back for so long plus the plain exertion of throwing up had me wiped out. I cautiously set the bin back down on the floor and then rested my head on the desk, piling my forearms under my forehead for a pillow. I noted that my face was slick with sweat.

This was due to sleep deprivation. And Alexander-deprivation. I could tell.

The previous night had just been terrible. Nothing at all like I'd been expecting when I rushed home to meet my fiancée for dinner.

I'd swallowed down the rage that had threatened to explode inside me last night when I heard about Iris's claim that I'd attacked her. It was still in there, though. The anger. I'd extinguished the flame for now, but it was still smoldering. I was still working on stamping out the embers.

Yes, I was angry. I wanted that crazy lady out of our lives. But there was nothing I could do about the situation. I'd said my piece to Alexander, and it would accomplish nothing to complain or press the issue.

I'd slept for several hours overnight after all the drama was done, but I did not sleep well.

I had some very unpleasant dreams. Dreams about the baby coming early and all kinds of things going wrong with the birth. I certainly did not wake up feeling rested.

Those few extra minutes that Alexander had insisted upon spending with me in the morning, though... that was helpful. That little dose of contact with him gave me just enough energy to muscle through that meeting.

I pulled my phone out from my purse and opened up our chat thread.

I didn't really have anything to talk to him about, though.

I locked the phone again and put it away.

Alexander

“Oh, hi, Alexander.” Iris inched the door of her bedroom open slowly. Her eyes flicked up to meet mine for a second, then darted down to the floor.

Iris seemed subdued. Her energy had changed dramatically since last night.

“Good morning, Iris. Can we talk?”

“Sure, sure. I mean, yes.” She stood back, opening

the door wide. “Come in, if you want. I’ll make us some tea.”

“Okay. Thanks.” Iris hurried over to her little kitchenette while I closed the door behind me. “How’s your head feeling today?” I asked from across the room. “Do you mind if I open a window?”

“Sure.” She didn’t look up from her task. “Go ahead. My head’s okay. Doctor gave me something earlier.”

I pushed the curtains aside on the big window near the door, then eased the window open. It was a crisp, breezy day. Fresh air and sunlight flooded the room, making it feel easier to breathe inside.

“Here we are,” Iris muttered as she returned with a tea tray carrying two mugs. She set it down on the table and took a seat. I joined, sitting opposite her. “Listen, Alexander... I’m so sorry about last night.”

Her eyes were downcast, looking at her hands as she fidgeted with her tea. But I could see that they were red and puffy, presumably from a long bout of crying. She seemed to currently have pulled herself together, though.

“Thank you, Iris. I appreciate that.”

“I am really embarrassed, too. Really embarrassed.” She covered the small white bandage on her neck with one hand, hanging her head and shifting in her chair. “I understand if you hate me. I understand if you want to send me away.”

“Iris, I don’t hate you. And I certainly don’t want to send you away.”

“Really?” She pulled her eyes up to look at me. They were round and pleading, like a sad puppy dog

remorseful for misbehavior.

“Of course not.” I rubbed my eyes, searching for the right thing to say. “Iris... listen to me. I need you here. I know I’ve said that a lot already, but it’s true. And I sincerely care about your well-being, too. I want to help take care of you, like you cared for my mother. I just... we need to find a way to coexist here peacefully.”

“Thank you,” she said quietly. “Thank you for being so kind to me. And you got to know, I will never do something like that again. I...” Her breath hitched, but she regained composure before speaking again. “I really want to stay here with you and help you with your investigation. It’s why I left my home and the only person I got that’s like family. Because...”

Her big eyes welled with tears. She looked away and wiped them on the sleeve of her shirt quickly.

“Because she was like family to me, too. Alexandra. We spent so much time together, and she was always so kind to me. Last night, I think, I just... I went a little crazy for a minute. I don’t know how to explain it, cuz it doesn’t make sense. My life just changed so much, so fast. But I promise I am gonna get myself better. I’m gonna keep myself busy. Kayden was nice to give me ideas about what to do with my free time. I’m sorry for everything, really. I promise I won’t be so much trouble anymore.”

“I am glad to hear that, Iris.”

She nodded. “Do you, um, want to do the thing today? The memory thing?”

I shook my head. “No. You should rest. I’ve got some business in the city anyway. Let’s take some time off from the memory exercise. I want you to focus on

getting better right now.”

“Thanks.” She smiled at me, her eyes glistening. “I got a to-go cup, if you want to take your tea with you. You go on ahead. I’ve been up since early, I think I’ll lie down for a bit now.”

“That’d be great. Thanks.”

Iris bustled away, returning with a paper coffee cup and a plastic lid. She poured my tea from the mug into the cup, handed it to me officiously, and walked with me to the door.

It was a relief to feel her being much less desperate for my attention. To hear her speaking rationally again, too.

The fact was, Iris just wasn’t going to give me everything I needed as quickly as I had initially hoped.

I had pushed her too hard from the jump. Tried to do too much too fast. With a person I knew was not well.

Now, I was coming to terms with the fact that Iris was just going to be around for a while. Keeping her here might be causing some trouble with Fiona, but it was paying off for my investigation—albeit very slowly.

I needed to be patient with Iris, if I wanted access to those valuable memories buried somewhere in her troubled mind.

For now, she was here to stay.

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[THE ALPHA KING CALL BOY](#)



Fiona

Gerald was very nervous. That was not normal.

Usually my colleague was calm and confident. He'd been working for Crescent Ventures for over a decade, up on the eighty-ninth floor for nearly half of that tenure, and seemed very much at home here.

"Hey, Fiona," he said, gritting his teeth. "I've, uh... got some bad news. Okay if I come in?"

"Of course. Please, have a seat." I was very grateful I'd had time to empty my wastebin and freshen up in the restroom before he arrived at my door. "What's going on?"

He sat down in my visitor's chair, sighing as he went. He didn't wait till I was seated across the desk before

he leapt right in. “I was just on the phone with the development company. We’re looking at a big delay with the build sites.”

“Okay. What kind of delay?”

Gerald shook his head, frowning. “The short story? Aftermath from what happened with their rival...” He meant, of course, the scandal with Scarlet’s real estate firm. A company that no longer existed. “A couple of the contractors went out of business. The entire industry has been affected by everything that happened... a lot of closures, small businesses that had depended on one or another of Scarlet’s companies that she’s now dissolved or declared bankrupt.”

“Mm-hmm.” I narrowed my eyes at Gerald, nodding.

I internally reprimanded myself for not anticipating

something like this happening. I should have seen it coming.

“Keep talking,” I said, turning to face my computer. I started searching for news stories on this topic while Gerald told me more about his conversation with our client, the real estate developer I had been working with for months to expand their property holdings.

It had seemed like everything was going very well with the project lately. We had just broken ground on the third and final construction site, while the other two were well underway.

I should have known that streak of luck was bound to run out at some point.

“What do you want me to do?” Gerald asked hesitantly.

I sighed. “We have a lot to do. A lot.” I drummed my fingers on the table. My mind was already racing.

“How about we meet in the conference room in half an hour to start talking through all the details.”

“That sounds good.”

“Call the client back in the meantime. Let them know we will have a proposal ready in the morning, detailing our new plan of action in response to this issue.”

He nodded. “Anything else?”

As if on cue, my stomach growled loudly. Gerald arched an eyebrow.

“Have lunch delivered to the conference room,” I added. “Oh, and will you also go and tell Tavis and Emmie to join us? I’d like to loop them in quickly.”

They can help us with all the damage control we need to get started immediately.”

Gerald was all agreement and thanks; I could tell he was very glad he was not the one responsible for these decisions right now. He left with his assignments, and I retrieved my cell phone from my purse.

I texted Alexander to let him know I would not be back in time for dinner with him tonight.

I thought about sharing the specific reason. But I would rather not get into it. I just said I needed to work overtime with the team.

I really hoped he would not read into it. Take it the wrong way. Think that I was being emotional about Iris and avoiding him.

Alexander

I drove myself into the city. Something I did when Kayden, who was a better, more patient driver than I, was busy, or when I wanted to use the time for a private conversation.

I'd driven to the downtown courthouse plenty of times – I didn't need directions. But I plugged the address into the Benz's GPS anyway, looking for a current ETA. Looked like afternoon traffic had started early.

I had Conrad on the line a minute after rolling past palace security onto the service road that led to the highway.

He answered, "Alexander," then coughed loudly. I pushed a button on the back of the steering wheel to lower the volume on the car speakers. "How are things back home?"

“Things are fine here. You have a minute to talk, Conrad?”

“Of course.” He cleared his throat. “What can I do for you, nephew?”

“I need to ask you something.”

“Mm-hmm.”

“Do you have something in the works that you’re not telling me about?”

Conrad’s voice fell flat when he replied, “No. Like what?”

“Like... anything involving Fiona? I’m curious about your decision to have her take on so much responsibility right now, covering your meetings.”

I heard Conrad breathing. Slowly. He was trying to piece together my meaning.

“Tell me straight, uncle. Does it have anything to do with her father? With our investigation?”

“No.” Here, Conrad’s booming voice returned to full force. He sighed, sounding frustrated. “Why would I even... Listen, Alexander. I told you I’d leave her out of it, a long time ago. I am a man of my word. You know that.”

“Okay.” I believed him; his tone and demeanor seemed sincere. “Why are you piling so much on her, then?”

“Is she okay? Seems like she’s handling it fine.”

“Of course she’s handling it. Fiona can handle...

anything. But you do remember this is my pregnant fiancée, right? She needs time in the day to sleep, Conrad. She's working twenty hour days right now. It's not healthy."

He grunted. "I'll give her a call today. We'll figure something out. And to answer your question... I told you I want to promote her. She's a good project manager, but her best talents are wasted in that role. She needs to be in leadership. I'm using this opportunity to train her. And test her. See if she's ready."

I thought this over. It made sense. "You do realize, though, you've got her doing two full-time jobs at once right now."

"Yes, I do. Listen, son. We should speak about this further, but can it wait until I return? I'm on the road right now."

“Me too. That’s fine.”

“Everything going alright with the maid?” he asked quickly, like a parting thought.

Little did he know, this was not a simple question. That topic of conversation, too, would have to wait until later, when we had more time for storytelling.

“Iris is okay,” I answered. “She did start recovering some memories related to the case. But the doctor says we need to focus on her medical care and recovery, before I push her on it any further.”

Conrad made a short “hm” sound.

“She is going to give us what we need,” I assured my impatient uncle. “She knows exactly what happened. I know she does. She’s got the information. But it’s

going to take some time to get it. We have to be patient.”

I rolled up to the courthouse and turned into the parking structure that stood nine stories tall beside it.

“I have to let you go, Conrad.” I slowed the car, sure I’d lose reception as soon as I was ten yards deep into the concrete structure. “Call me when you’re back in town.”

“Will do.”

I drove all the way up to the top level, where fewer cars tended to park. I parked the Benz straddling two covered spots in a far corner, my usual spot when I came here to meet with my attorney.

Before I got out of the car, I checked my phone. A smile spread across my lips when I saw Fiona’s name

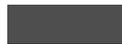
on the lock screen.

It melted away, though, when I opened and read her text.

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## [THE ALPHA KING CALL BOY](#)

### Chapter 115 What Are You Craving?



Fiona

Alexander responded to my text just a few minutes later. To my relief, his tone was light and understanding.

He wrote: That's too bad. Good luck with everything

there and let me know when you'll be home.

I replied: Of course. I'll keep you posted.

Three moving dots told me Alexander was typing. I sat watching, waiting for this next reply for several seconds before I noticed what I was doing.

I had business to attend to. Very pressing business. I didn't have time to waste. I put my phone down and started collecting all the materials I'd need for my strategy meeting.

But then when the phone buzzed again, I couldn't help but pick it back up.

Alexander: Tell me something I can do for you tonight. You'll eat dinner at the office... I could have dessert waiting for you at home. Does that interest you?

I replied: Yes. That sounds wonderful.

Alexander: What are you craving?

I laughed under my breath, pressing my lips together against a guilty smile. He knew full well what he was asking. I toyed with the idea of sending a suggestive reply... but I only had a few minutes before meeting my colleagues. I needed to get back into a professional headspace.

Finally I answered: Chocolate cake.

But then, unbidden by my conscious mind, my fingers also typed and sent: And you.

I cursed at myself under my breath.

He replied: Both will be ready and waiting when you get home.

My mouth started watering, thinking about that. I huffed out an exhale.

Just as I locked my phone, determining to put it away, it buzzed again.

Alexander: Send me something to hold me over until then.

Me: Like what?

Alexander: I have no pics of you. Send me a couple.

I blushed. I am not a girl who loves taking selfies, or has any special talent for doing so with flattering results. I glanced up at my office door, which was ajar. And again at the clock. I was running out of time.

I replied: Can't now. Maybe later.

Alexander: I'll hold you to that.

I shook my head, locked the phone and put it in my purse, then put my purse away in the drawer where I kept it. That was enough distraction for now.

My stomach growled again. It was time to get some food in my system – my energy was totally shot after I'd lost my breakfast – and then get down to work.

Alexander

Onlookers cowered, stared, and whispered to each other as I passed through the crowded lobby and security checkpoint of the old courthouse.

It was something I was used to.

This was how people reacted to my presence

everywhere. Ever since I returned from war.

Sometimes the people recognized me. I'd hear my name in their whispers. "That's Alpha Alexander!"

Other times, they had no idea who I was. But either way, they always took notice. My stature alone does plenty to command attention in any room. And I suppose my time at war did something to change the way I move through the world. That part is more difficult to explain.

I ignored the stolen glances and wide-eyed stares alike. I did have to smirk at a few funny remarks I overheard, but I never trifled to make eye contact with anyone.

I stepped up to the elevator bay just as one elevator rolled its doors open and released a diverse bunch of suit-clad passengers. They startled slightly, each in

turn, when they noticed me.

There were dozens of people waiting around for an upwards-heading elevator. But once this one emptied and I stepped inside, only a few others dared to join me.

Zero men. Just one unfazed elderly lady and two younger women who were accompanying her, and a tall, blonde, expensively-dressed attorney whose heart I heard beating fast as she came to stand very close beside me.

“You’ve been summoned.” My lawyer passed a manila envelope to me from across the table. “The trial starts next week. I can’t tell you right now when you’ll be called to give your testimony, but I’ll let you know as soon as I know.”

“Great,” I muttered, opening the envelope and

scanning the document.

Testifying against Scarlet in her embezzlement trial was not a problem in itself. But court appearances could be very time-consuming, and time wasn't something I had in endless supply right now.

I was pleased, though, to see some confirmation that my father was actually going through with it. That Scarlet hadn't somehow convinced him to drop the charges against her. Yet.

There was still a long way to go. The criminal hearing was just the first step. Sentencing would follow a guilty verdict in the first trial. There was no doubt—in my mind, or just about anyone's—that Scarlet was guilty. But I couldn't take it for granted that she was going to wind up actually being held accountable for this crime.

“There’s something else I wanted to talk to you about, as well,” I told Brandon.

My attorney was a tall, sturdy man in his early forties with youthful facial features that contrasted sharply against his prematurely pale gray hair. He had stern gray eyes that were slightly magnified by black-rimmed glasses, and always wore expensive gray suits with silk ties and pocket squares in shades of red and purple.

“What can I do for you?” he asked.

“It’s about Crescent Ventures. I’m considering going after some publicity, both for myself and for the company. Starting with letting my ownership become public knowledge.”

Brandon leaned back in his chair, nodding along as I continued. He was well aware, of course, of my role in

the venture capital firm, and the reasons I had for keeping it private all these years.

“My fiancée suggested I do an interview. Tell me your thoughts on that.”

“Well, be careful with interviews, that’s the first thing I’ll tell you. Reporters are liable to be a lot more interested in your involvement with your stepmother’s trial, right now, than they are in what you want to talk about. That’s what they’ll be after, if they book an interview with you. They’ll push you for it. Could become a very delicate situation.”

“Fair point.” I held my face neutral, though I felt like frowning.

“The trial will last a couple months,” Brandon continued. “Or longer. As your attorney, I strongly recommend that you wait until it is over before you

start your press tour. However long it takes. It's in your best interest.”

I indulged a guilty pleasure on the way to my next meeting.

Our accountants worked in a separate, smaller building half a mile uptown from Crescent Ventures headquarters. It was easier to park a couple blocks south and cross diagonally through a city park to get there, than it was to try to find a spot right in front of the building itself.

The only problem was the hot dog vendor who sold some absolutely delectable treats from a cart in the center of the park. The small, portly man smiled when he saw me from a distance, topping a fresh footlong hot dog with mustard and relish before I even reached him. I traded him a crisp twenty dollar bill for it; we made our exchange quickly and I hardly slowed my

stride across the park. He knew to keep the change.

I was always telling myself to stop eating street food. It was the definition of unhealthy. But just about every time I walked up to this building, I gave in. I needed recovery calories after my morning activities, anyway. The hot dog was gone by the time I reached the other end of the park.

I chewed a handful of breath mints in the elevator, combed my hair back with my fingers, straightened my tie and buttoned my jacket to make myself presentable.

“I apologize for my uncle’s absence,” I told our accountants as we settled in for our weekly check-in meeting. “He’s away on some unrelated business this week.”

The two of them exchanged a glance. They muttered

some overlapping niceties: “No problem at all,” “totally fine.”

They did not mind Conrad’s absence. I appreciated that they were professional enough not to smile outright about it though.

My uncle is a well-respected man, but he is also a shark. He always gets his way. That’s not often a pleasant person to be in a room with. It also happens to be why I trust him so unilaterally with the company.

On top of that, my boisterous uncle’s egregious speaking volume, and the way he can never stop moving his body... these things, I think, people find annoying. And maybe a little scary, too. Unnerving.

I finished my business with the accountants quickly. I reviewed a batch of reports, signed about a dozen checks, and was on my way out once I had warm

photocopies of everything to take home with me.

I made another stop on my way back through the park, this time at a newsstand. I grabbed up copies of all the business magazines they had in stock. Plus a couple more rolls of breath mints.

I checked my phone when I was back in the car.

No response from Fiona since our earlier exchange.

I chuckled to myself. She wasn't going to do it. She wasn't going to send me any pictures.

Well. Maybe if I pestered her about it enough, she might.

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