

THE ALPHA KING CALL BOY

Chapter 143 Running Out The Clock

Fiona

I found myself wishing I had a couch in my office. I wanted very much to lie down for a minute after the photo exchange and everything else that happened.

Then that idea got me drifting off into a fantasy about... if I did have a couch in here and Alexander came to visit the office during my workday.

Hm.

I really needed to get back to work, though.

Quite a lot more time had lapsed than I'd planned on spending when I took my phone out. The sea of bliss that my mind and body were still swimming in, though, allowed me to forgive myself for my abuse of

company time.

After all, Alexander owned the company. And it didn't seem like he had a problem with me taking breaks like this.

The all-staff meeting was a breeze. I could not have been more content to sit through the hour with Conrad back in the lead, only contributing intermittently to the discussion myself.

As the rest of the group filtered out of the conference room, the CEO looked at me and made a few movements with his head that I took to mean I was coming with him to his office straight from here.

Once we were seated on either side of his desk, Conrad leaned back in his chair and said, "How are things, Fiona?"

Quite a vague question, delivered with a pointed tone.

“Great.” A practiced tautology. “Well, to be honest, I did have some disappointing interviews this morning. The first two candidates for the assistant position.”

He nodded, frowning. “Hiring can be unpredictable.”

“I have two more coming in tomorrow. I’ll keep you updated.”

Conrad retrieved a toothpick from the container on his desk and bit into it. “Fiona, do you think your talents are being put to best use in your current position?”

“Oh.” Not a question I’d been expecting. “Well, I love my job. I learn so much from the project management work...”

“But your work speaks for itself—there can’t be much

more left for you to learn in that role.”

I wasn't really sure where Conrad was going with this. “There's always more to learn,” I replied, keeping my tone neutral though he was beginning to unnerve me.

He shrugged and held some silence, looking me in the eye and grinding his molars on the toothpick until it cracked.

“What's your ultimate goal, Fiona? Career-wise.”

“That's an interesting question,” I said, buying time.

Maybe because I'd spent my morning conducting interviews of my own, that's what this was starting to feel like – an interview. Though I did not know what I was being interviewed for.

“I don't have a title that I see as an end goal,” I

answered honestly. “I just keep my head down and work hard on the job at hand, while also keeping an eye open for new opportunities. Right now I’m just focused on growing and learning.”

Conrad threw out his splintered toothpick. “That’s fair,” he said, his tone noncommittal.

I sensed more was coming, so I just nodded.

“What if I offered you a new opportunity today?”

“What kind of opportunity?”

“A new position here. A transition out of project management.”

“And into...?”

“Executive leadership.”

I wished he would just tell me what I was being offered.

This was not the first time it had occurred to me that Conrad was a little sadistic. He certainly enjoyed making people uncomfortable and watching them squirm.

He was trying to make me beg for piecemeal information. Who knows why. If I stopped taking the bait though, he would just have to come out with it.

So I waited him out in silence.

Finally, Conrad dropped his elbows to his desk and said, “The staff has taken to you, Fiona. I’ve seen them elevating their work in order to meet the

standards you set with your own. I don't want to lose that momentum. I want you helping me run this team."

"Well, I appreciate that very much. And if you would like me to shift into a new position, I am sure that I can handle the job. If it's for the good of the company, then it's absolutely what I'd like to do."

"Very good." Conrad grinned – a rare and not very pleasant sight. It felt a little like glimpsing the big teeth of a crocodile you hadn't realized was right next to you.

"I wonder, though, how demanding the hours of this new position will be? My only concern is the timing. You know that I, of course, have a baby on the way..."

Conrad did me the courtesy of not allowing his eyes to drop down to my pregnant belly at the mention of

the baby. He simply said, “Yes, I know. How long do you think you’ll need to take off after the birth? You’re entitled to up to eight weeks’ maternity leave, though I have a hunch you may not want to stay away so long.”

I held my face in an expression of cool confidence, despite suddenly feeling overwhelmed with this conversation. I don’t know how I’d gone through my whole pregnancy so far and not even considered my plan for maternity leave, but it just wasn’t something I’d been thinking about.

“I should discuss with my fiancée,” I said, feeling silly as I heard the words in the air. I should have just called him by name. “But I don’t imagine I’ll need anywhere near that much time off.”

“Talk with Alexander and let me know what you decide. What I’m offering you, Fiona, is a brand new

position. We could start offloading your project management work to other members of the team this week. And when you return from your leave, we'll start you in the new role."

"That actually sounds... perfect."

"As it was my own idea, it would be boastful to agree." Conrad smiled again. "But I'm glad you're on board. The title change will come with a salary increase as well, of course."

"I would expect so."

"The numbers, let's discuss later. Along with the specifics of the new role."

I glimpsed a blue light blinking from within Conrad's ear. He was about to kick me out.

I agreed to circle back with him later and rose to leave before he had to say a word. He gave another approving nod in my direction before pressing a finger to his ear and diving headlong into a loud phone conversation.

My mind was racing by the time I returned to my own office.

The excitement of being offered a promotion and raise was overshadowed by the conversation about my maternity leave.

I had gotten into a work-horse habit of living minute by minute, day by day here in this fast-paced work environment. Just staying on top of things, pushing forward, trying to make a name for myself. But suddenly I absolutely had to take a pause and look at my life in the big picture.

Maybe I'd been procrastinating long-term planning as a defense mechanism. A way of not letting myself get into my head about things with Alexander, wondering about what the future held for us. It was easier just taking things day by day with him, too.

But it was getting late. I looked down at my swollen breasts and very pregnant belly.

We had pretty much run out the clock.

The baby was coming soon, and Alexander and I were still not married.

He'd promised to wed me for the sake of the baby, and had moved me into his bed right away. But then he never mentioned a wedding ceremony. Or even a date.

Or gave me a ring.

It didn't seem fair that I had to be the one to broach the topic now. The engagement had been Alexander's idea in the first place. I didn't want to have to pressure him to follow through with his own promise.

I opened our text thread. And lost my breath for a moment at the sight of the last messages we'd exchanged a few hours ago. But I pushed those ideas and memories aside and tried to focus.

I wrote him a text saying I'd leave the office by five tonight, and hoped we could have an early dinner together.

With all the concerns on my mind, I felt like adding something along the lines of "we need to talk."

But that phrase is a live grenade. You can't throw it at someone and make them sit with it all day.

I had no interest in putting Alexander on edge. So I imprinted that message into my own mind, instead. Made a mental note that I absolutely had to talk to him about all of these big, important things tonight.

I drummed my fingernails on my desktop.

I was realizing that I was afraid.

And that I was suddenly hoping Alexander's answers to these questions would align with his recent behavior. Hoping Nina was right, that he wanted to stay with me in a real way now.

But I could take nothing for granted. I had no idea what Alexander would say to me about the marriage, the plans for the baby, my role in his company, any of it...

Like I'd told Nina: if Alexander really did want to commit to me, why wouldn't he have just told me so by now?

Neither she nor I could come up with a good answer for that.

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