

Chapter 171 He Is Lying

Fiona

We were eating breakfast when Alexander gave me an odd look.

“What?”

“Something just occurred to me.” He put down his fork, wiped his mouth, leaned back and narrowed his eyes. “I’m gonna try something right now, okay?”

“Okay.”

And then the strangest thing happened. It was like... a knock on the door. The door in the wall inside my mind.

“Whoa. What was that?”

Alex’s face broke into a smile. “I was trying to mindlink you. You have to let me, for it to work, though.”

“Oh. I’ve never been able to do that...”

“I remember. It just occurred to me that you may be able to do it now.”

“Okay. Try it again.”

This time when he reached out, I allowed Alexander to do it... to speak freely to me inside my mind. And when our minds linked, his voice was clear as a bell.

“You’re silly,” I mumbled. Then I tried replying by mindlink, telling him I loved him too.

He grinned.

“That’s wild. I can’t believe all this is happening.”

“You never cease to amaze, Fiona.” Alex resumed his breakfast, looking pleased.

“So this afternoon, is there something in particular you are hoping to uncover with these interviews?”

“Yes. I have just one objective today. Remember the incident with the Hellhounds, when I went to the prison to meet with their pack leader?”

“Of course.”

“Well, there’s something I could never figure out. It still unnerves me, how so many otherwise competent soldiers could go along with such an unwise plan...”

“Peer pressure can be very powerful. Especially with a group that is so close, spends so much time together. The fear of not being accepted can be a strong motivator against sound judgment.”

“That’s true. What I need to find out is who came up with and started promoting the outing in the first place. Whoever started stirring the pot and pressuring the others. This person is not someone I can trust. I’m eager to identify him. I’ve spoken with many soldiers by now but they all claim not to know whose idea it was to go to that club and leave the palace unguarded.”

“So today we’ll ask all of them about it, and see who lies.”

“Correct.”

“I’m sure we’ll be able to root him out.”

Alex nodded.

“Can I ask, what you intend to do with this man after we do ID him?”

He frowned, looking to the side. “Whatever I need to.” After a pause, he returned his eyes to mind and added, “Are you okay with that?”

He was being very vague, but I understood. “Yes. I trust you.”

Interviewing Alex’s men was a learning experience. Attempting to read dozens of strangers was not easy, and I also found myself feeling very drained after only the first ten or so.

We used a room near the barracks and Alexander brought the soldiers in one by one. I shook each man’s hand as we were introduced, and that was how we discreetly arranged for me to tap into their emotions from the outset. Each man’s interior world was like a new book to read. I could only start by scanning the pages for a general idea of the content and tone.

Then, Alexander sat the men beside me at a table and began his interrogations.

I have to admit, I was a bit distracted from my tasking as I watched my husband doing his. He was so commanding and confident, and his men were so respectful and subservient to him. I looked over Alex’s body hungrily as he slowly paced the room and asked his questions. It had been a while since we’d been intimate, and suddenly, watching him work, I began to ache for him.

“Who told you about the plan to go out for Alder’s birthday?” That was Alex’s first question for each man.

They gave varying answers. I kept notes about their responses. And the great majority of the men, from what I could tell, seemed to be answering honestly, their energy calm and earnest throughout the conversations.

Until the first aberrant one.

“Jacob, this is my wife Fiona.”

This young man was tall and stout, with a body like an old-growth tree trunk. He could hardly meet my eyes and when we shook hands, his palms were clammy and his energy was unstable. He was nervous and scared.

I mindlinked Alexander and told him so. He met my eyes and gave one quick nod to acknowledge.

Jacob and I sat down side by side. I could tell this made him uncomfortable.

And then Alexander set in on his questions. It was very interesting – and quite a challenge – trying to track what Jacob was feeling as he gave his answers. He did not have any obvious surges of anxiety in response to the particular questions. He felt the same sorts of emotions all throughout the meeting. It took a while to sort out what they were. But my best guess was a predominant feeling of shame.

I told as much to Alexander by mindlink. And that’s when we revealed to Jacob my actual role in this interrogation.

“Hold out your hand, palm up on the table,” Alex commanded. Jacob, confused, complied. I took hold of his large, sweaty hand, surprising him. “Fiona is going to ask you some questions of her own now. And she will know if you are being truthful. Lie to my Luna, and we will have a serious problem.”

Panic. And a sidelong glance at me with eyes beginning to brim with fearful tears. That was Jacob’s reaction to this revelation.

“Why are you afraid right now?” I began.

I felt Jacob’s heartbeat hammering in the palm of his hand. “I... I do know,” he confessed. “I know whose idea it was. I...” Suddenly he choked back a sob. “I don’t want to betray him, I am afraid for him, I don’t want to get him in...”

“Tell me.” Alexander growled, making Jacob’s head bow and shoulders curl forward.

“Roland, Sir,” he stuttered. “It was his idea.”

“Roland Williams?”

Jacob squeezed his eyes closed, pushing a few tears down his cheeks.

Alex looked at me for confirmation.

If I was reading him correctly, Jacob was not lying. I couldn’t be a hundred percent sure, since his emotions were all over the place, but he didn’t have a surge of anxiety when answering the question. It seemed more like he was feeling a mixture of guilt and relief.

“Why do you feel guilty?”

He clenched his jaw. “I don’t think he meant any harm. Roland. He just wanted to have a good time. I don’t want to get him in more trouble than he deserves.”

“When you first arrived here today,” I continued calmly, “you also felt shame. What have you done to be ashamed of?”

Without raising his head, Jacob peered up at Alexander. His shame intensified and his complexion flushed red.

“Go ahead. Tell her.”

To my surprise, and I think involuntarily, Jacob squeezed my hand, causing our connection to intensify. “I’m sorry, Fiona. I said something, something about you, it was crass and stupid, I... I regret it, and I’m so ashamed and sorry.”

Now a flush came to my own cheeks. “Alright,” I said stoically.

I was fairly certain he was being honest.

Roland’s interrogation came next. Alex wasted no time laying into this soldier, whose energy was wildly fearful from the moment he entered the room, even though he held an apparently loose, casual smile on his face. I distrusted him immediately.

Alexander asked his questions. Roland claimed he couldn’t remember who told him about the party plans. Said he’d been drinking with some others since early in the day, and his memory was hazy.

“He is lying,” I said aloud when Alex looked to me for confirmation.

The soldier wheeled around to face me. “What? No—I’m telling the truth. I just don’t remember.”

“Put your right hand on the table. Palm up. Now.”

Roland complied. I took hold of his hand.

“Lie to us once more and face a severe consequence,” Alex continued. “Tell the truth. Was this outing your idea?”

“No. Absolutely not.”

I retracted my hand. I’d gotten plenty of information already. “Lying,” I said again.

Alex grabbed Roland by the neck and dragged him from the room.

Alexander

“Sir, please, I...”

“Save it.” My voice echoed down the stone corridors of the palace dungeon.

Roland cowered, shuffling backward into the jail cell and falling to his knees. I pushed on the bars to roll them closed and let them slam into the locking mechanism with a metallic thud.

“We’re finished talking for today. Hopefully the next time we speak, you’ll be more motivated to show me the respect of telling the truth.”

The day had taken a toll on Fiona. She looked exhausted by the end.

Nina had been watching the baby, who gratefully was sleeping when we finally returned to our room after having some dinner. Fiona changed her clothes and soon lay down in bed and fell right asleep. I reclined beside her and returned my attention to another lead I was still working.

The old, cracked cell phone I’d found in Lucas’s room. I’d gotten it charged and turned on but of course it was password protected. So far I hadn’t been able to guess the right one.

I’d tried his birthday and the numeric equivalent of his name. Couldn’t really think of other number sequences that would be significant to Lucas, who I hardly knew.

One thing I did know about my half-brother, though. He was very stupid.

I decided to try entering all 1s for the passcode. Didn’t work. I tried 1-2-3-4-5 next.

And that was it.

I was in.