

## The Alpha King Call Boy

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Chapter 221 Spitting Image

### Chapter 221 Spitting Image

Alexander

“Thanks for coming on such short notice,” Conrad said. “I know you are a very busy man.”

I shrugged. “I’ll always make time for the business.” Things had been chilly between us all afternoon as we worked together through back-to-back meetings. That was my doing. I was just still pissed at him; my anger over his deceit and insubordination, and the way he’d hurt Fiona, rose hotly back to the surface every time I looked at his face.

Our attorneys had just departed from the last meeting of the day. Conrad closed his office door behind them and crossed the room. He cleared his throat awkwardly while sitting into his desk chair and immediately snatched up a toothpick and started to gnaw on it.

I was pacing slowly along the exterior wall of the office, gazing out the glass at the moving shapes of the city below. I was tired of sitting down after doing so for the past hour.

After a minute of tense silence, Conrad asked, “How is she, Alexander? The baby?”

I wheeled to face him.

I really hadn't thought about the fact that Alexis had not yet met her great-uncle. The revelation of his betrayal coincided with her birth—I'd been mad at him for as long as she'd been alive.

"She's great." I paced over to the desk and sat across from my uncle. The expression on his face was unreadable. "She's beautiful. And doing well. As is Fiona."

Conrad nodded. "That's good to hear."

I took my phone out of my pocket and opened up a photo. Maybe we were not in a place right now where it'd be comfortable to introduce Conrad to his grandniece, but I could show him a picture.

I put the phone down on the desk and slid it over to him. Conrad looked down and exhaled heavily. "Wow. She is the spitting image of your mother. But her eyes, they're just like..."

"Fiona's."

He frowned again, pulling the phone closer to him. It didn't need to be said aloud, but I knew Conrad was thinking about someone else, too. Someone else who, when he was alive, had my daughter's same icy blue eyes.

Maybe my uncle was remembering having looked into blue eyes like those while he drained the life out of them.

Conrad kept staring at the picture. And started to shake his head.

“Alexandra,” he whispered. I had never heard my uncle speak so quietly in my life. “Oh, son...” My phone screen, having not been touched for too long, went dark. Conrad looked disappointed. He pushed the phone back across the desk. And hung his head.

“She would not have wanted me to do what I did,” Conrad continued. “I never... I never even thought about that. But this child... I remember her now. My sweet, kind... forgiving... sister.”

He swiveled in his chair, facing sideways, and fixed his eyes on the gray sky beyond the glass.

I saw a blue light blinking on the side of his face. A call coming in on his Bluetooth headset.

He pulled the earpiece out and set it down on the desk.

“I have been so angry for so long,” my uncle said, his voice still impossibly soft. “Over what happened to her. That anger took precedence over everything. It made me forget something much more important.”

Finally he turned to square his body to mine again, and lifted his eyes.

“I forgot who she was,” he continued. “But I remember now, looking at that face. Your mother...”

she would be ashamed of me, Alexander, if she were here today. Of what I have done in her name. I have not honored my sister with an act of bloody vengeance. I have disgraced her.”

Before we parted ways, my uncle insisted that I follow him to his apartment, saying he needed to give me something. I was thrown off by how differently he was acting. I didn't ask any questions. We left the building together and I followed his chauffeured car to his home.

I could have given him a ride. But I don't think either one of us wanted to be alone together in a car right now. We did not talk while riding up the elevator to his penthouse apartment.

Once inside, Conrad went to work searching for something in his bedroom closet. I waited in the dining room, pacing with my hands in my pockets, wondering what it was my uncle wanted to give me. Something to do with my mother.

Finally Conrad found what he was after and brought it to me.

I didn't let myself look at it too closely yet. At first sight of the precious item, emotion threatened to overtake me. Before it could, I closed the thick white envelope and slid into my jacket pocket and quickly took my leave.

I had been planning to kill Scarlet when I caught her. And I would catch her. It was only a matter of time.

It had been months since I first came to understand that Scarlet was behind my mother's assassination, and I'd been planning to kill her ever since. And now she'd tried to kill my father, too. Crippled him. And betrayed our nation to a ruthless enemy that was slaughtering our people. Many a dark and sleepless hour had I spent swept up in murderous fantasies about my stepmother. I had visualized beating her, imagining the sweet satisfaction of feeling her bones breaking under my fist. I'd envisioned choking her to death, watching her struggle and suffer and go blue while she tried in vain to pry my steely hands off her strangled neck. And more.

I felt ashamed of those fantasies now.

It really did something to me, seeing the change that came over Conrad when he looked at that photograph of Alexis. The change in his attitude and countenance had been immediate and extreme. He'd almost looked spooked when he saw my daughter. Like he'd seen a ghost.

A guilt was there in my mind, now. A nagging shame over my own murderous desires. I'd wanted to kill Fiona's father, too. I'd only wanted to wait on it a bit longer, hoping for hard proof or a confession first. And up until this morning, I still had a plan in my mind to end my stepmother's

life with my own two hands, as soon as I had the chance.

But now that seemed so selfish. And shameful. Revenge was something I wanted for my own hateful pleasure.

What would my mother think of me, if she were to look down upon the scene as I enacted my vengeance? It was hard to imagine her being proud of a son depraved enough to abuse and slay a woman—even if it was her own murderer.

And what kind of example would I be setting for Alexis, if she ever found out what I had done?

My precious, innocent daughter. My Heir.

It would break my heart if I ever knew that my sweet baby girl grew up to become a killer. I

would not be proud. I would hate myself for having taught her that murder was acceptable when justified. I would not want her to live with the hateful misery of always knowing she had blood on her hands.

I hardly noticed the world passing by as I drove back to the palace. My body had gone on autopilot while my mind turned over all these thoughts. Suddenly, I was there at the gates.

I finally let myself look at the photograph while I walked in from the parking lot.

It was a black and white image of my mother as a baby, being held by her own mother. The two

were standing outside somewhere sunny, with a kind of meadow in the background. My grandmother was holding her free hand up to her face to shade her eyes against the sun. My mother, probably about a year old, was holding a flower close to her nose and smiling.

The picture was printed on heavy photo paper and glued inside a kind of folder or bifold envelope. I closed the envelope before unlocking the door to our bedroom, but kept it in my hand.

“What’s this?” Fiona asked when she saw it.

I gave her a kiss hello. “I’ll show you in a second. Let’s sit down.”

The bed was the nearest place to sit. Fi walked over and perched on the edge. I joined her and passed her the envelope.

She held it closed and looked up at me, waiting. “Conrad gave that to me. It’s a photo of my mother when she was a baby.”

She flipped it open. “Oh, Alex,” she breathed. I saw her blue eyes sparkle while she gazed down at the photograph. “She looks just like her. That’s remarkable.”

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Chapter 222 You Made Me A Better Man

## Chapter 222 You Made Me A Better Man

Fiona

“What is going on, Alex?”

I had set the photograph of his mother aside and now took both his hands into my own.

“Something is really bothering you, I can tell. What happened today? Is it something to do with Conrad, or is it about the business stuff?”

My husband seemed really not okay. He was feeling... ashamed about something. Deeply ashamed. That's the predominant emotion I sensed as his energy pulsed from his hands into my own.

“I showed Conrad a picture of Lexi,” he started.

“That's why he gave me the photo of my mom.”

“Okay.”

“He had a strong reaction to seeing her.” Alex closed his eyes and gave a small shake of his head.

“One I certainly did not expect.”

He opened his honey-gold eyes again and brought them to mine. The pain in his gaze was undeniable.

I wanted to lean in and give him a little kiss. Stroke his beard. Do something to offer him comfort.

But I got the sense that maybe he did not want comfort right now. He was feeling bad about himself, very bad, and like he deserved this pain he was sitting with.



“And how did he react?” I probed gently.

“Their similarity, it made him remember my mother. Seemed like the most he’d really thought about her in a long time. And he... I don’t know, Fi. He regrets it now. Killing your father. He saw Lexi’s eyes, your eyes, on a face so much like that of his sister, and he was overcome with feeling like he’d betrayed her. Like she would be ashamed of him, if she could see how he reacted to her death. What he did in the name of avenging her.”

“Hm.” Yes, this was definitely unexpected. I never imagined Conrad Knight capable of emotions like regret and shame. “And... why has this gotten you so upset, though?”

He swallowed hard and said the next part very fast, like he was trying to get it out before he could hesitate any more.

“I planned to kill her,” he said quietly. “Scarlet. Ever since I learned about her involvement in my mother’s death, that was my plan. I was going to kill her. I was sure that I was going to do it. Not in any sort of legally justifiable way. I was just going to kill her with my bare hands.”

The depth of raw emotion that flooded through Alexander as he spoke of this was too much for me to handle. I had to slide my hands out of his, leaving his palms open and empty. “Alex...”

He rubbed his eyes. “I know. It’s...”

“I am not judging you, Alex. Look at me, please.”  
He pulled his hands away from his face and did so.  
That pain in his eyes... it was deep and  
dreadful.

“Your thoughts don’t define you, Alexander. We all  
have fucked up things we think about  
sometimes. It doesn’t make you a bad person.”

He frowned. “Going through with it might.”

“But it doesn’t sound like you are thinking about  
going through with it any longer. You said you  
were planning to kill her in the past. Not that you still  
are. Am I right about that?”

He nodded and cleared his throat. His voice was thin  
when he spoke again. “You’re right. I was  
thinking about it on the drive back. I just can’t... I  
can’t do something like that in my mother’s  
name. And I can’t set that kind of example for Alexis,  
either.”

I dared to reach out and take hold of one of Alex’s  
hands again. “You don’t need to, my love. You  
can get justice for your mother, without violence.  
You can hold Scarlet accountable for her crimes  
using legal means. And your mother would be proud  
of you for doing so.”

His energy softened when I uttered that last  
sentence. I felt the change, the relief, in my entire  
body.

My Alpha gave me a long, hard look. “You and Lexi have made me a better man than I used to be,” he said somberly.

I reached out and ran a hand through his long, fluffy blond hair. He leaned into my touch, his eyes fluttering closed for a moment when my fingernails grazed his scalp lightly.

“No, I don’t think so,” I said. I brought my other hand to his chest and let it rest atop his beating heart. “I think you have always been a good man, in here. You just needed a little help seeing yourself as such.”

Third person

Kayden: I’m about to hit the gym. Wanna join? I’ve got the Gammas meeting me there tonight, though – so it might not be as fun as last time ;)

Nina blew out a noisy exhale, accidentally sending a lock of her fuchsia hair flying forward.

She replied before she could think too much about it.

Nina: Yeah, sounds great. I could use a

workout.Kayden: Cool. I’ll come pick you up from your

room in a few.

She locked her phone and tossed it down onto the bed. And released another heavy sigh.

Nina wasn’t sure if she was hoping that guy would be there tonight or not. The broad shouldered,

square jawed Gamma with dark, lust-drunk eyes, with whom she'd recently shared a heated moment.

She'd been thinking about him. And not just about what happened at the gym. Also about that night they'd gone to Bad Wolf together.

She definitely had not been doing any of it for fun or pleasure, when she kissed and rubbed herself all over all those guys on that night of their mission. It had been necessary for their cover, and their cover had worked. Their mission had been successful.

But of those four guys she'd kissed – right in front of Kayden, who she knew was hating every second of it – this one had stood out.

Literally. The others three lieutenants had worked hard to remain stoic as their Beta's lover smeared glitter and hot orange lipstick all over them. They had all gotten a little aroused, of course. But only this one... didn't fight it. He didn't grope her or anything. But he'd groaned a little into her ear when she was kissing his neck, apparently unable to stop himself from doing so, and pressed forward slightly when he started getting hard, letting his bulge push into the soft skin of her exposed stomach.

Nina shook her head, trying to jostle that memory out of her brain. She hadn't even thought about

all that since it happened. Not until she saw the man again in the gym.

She changed into her workout clothes quickly. A pale green tank top and a pair of black leggings with heart-shaped cutouts down the sides. Then she went to the bathroom and brushed out her hair.

She selected a tight black hairband to pull it up into. And paused.

Yeah, it was time for a change.

Nina toyed with her hair for a few minutes, pushing it this way and that, watching herself the

mirror and thinking. Trying to decide on a new color.

Kayden's knock sounded on the bedroom door just as she was finishing up. She tied her now

emerald green hair up into a high, tight ponytail.

Guys liked high ponytails. They liked thinking about holding onto them like handles.

She flicked off the lights and made for the door, but not before giving her reflection one last reproving shake of her head.

Nina knew she was playing a risky little game. But she could not seem to stop herself.

She liked games. She was good at them.

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## Chapter 223 Traitor

“Where is he? Please tell me he is alive. Please, Donovan, punish him if you must, but do not kill my son. Please, let him live...”

For the first time in her life, Scarlet had been reduced to begging.

And Donovan seemed to be relishing seeing her in this state. She did not enjoy providing him with the pleasure of watching her squirm, but she was too tired to be proud. Too well-hypnotized to be disrespectful. And too desperate to know what had become of her son to care much at all about anything else.

Donovan threw a pointed glance at Scarlet to silence her. “Do not worry,” the vampire said, imitating a tone of soothing reassurance. “Your son is alive. And it is my intention to return him to you. But Caius is quite insistent that the boy must first be punished. Thoroughly.”

Scarlet hadn't seen her son since he had opened his big mouth and offended Caius by asking about the vampires' daytime resting place. Lucas should have known that was an off-limits topic; his mother still couldn't decide if the young man had only let those words slip carelessly, or if he'd actually thought he would get an answer... an answer that he could then somehow use to

betray the vampires to Alexander.

At least they had not killed her son in front of her.

That had been her greatest fear. But Donovan, seeming rather pleased to have the opportunity, did bite Lucas quite brutally and feast on his blood while she was forced to watch. And then Lucas had been deemed an enemy and hauled away, and Scarlet had returned to their double suite on the fourteenth floor of the now eerily quiet luxury hotel alone, tortured with dread over her only child's unknown and surely doomed fate. "Is he still here?" she asked. "In the hotel? Please tell me the truth, Donovan. Will I ever see my son again?"

The vampire whispered out a breathless chuckle, shaking his head smally. He reached out and stroked Scarlet's hair. The light touch sent a shiver down her spine.

"Scarlet, Scarlet," he muttered, his tone playfully reproving. "Yes, your son is in the hotel. But here's what I wonder. Why do you doubt I would be honest with you? Hmm? What reason would I have not to tell you the truth? In all the years that we have known each other, have I ever lied to you, or not kept my word?"

"No," she answered quietly.

"I don't suppose you have been dishonest with me?" the vampire drawled. "Are you keeping

secrets, my dear? Telling lies, or half-truths?”

“No,” she said again, this time more forcefully. “Of course not. What would I have to lie about?”

Donovan narrowed his dark eyes and stared down at the werewolf queen challengingly.

“Where do we go from here?” she asked, breaking a long, tense silence. “What’s next?”

To Scarlet’s surprise, the vampire’s pale face broke into a wide, toothy grin. “We only go up from here. Next, we kill that detestable stepson of yours, and win this war.”

“I have told you everything that I know.” Scarlet was back to pleading. “I have tried to be helpful.

To prove myself. If there is anything more that I can do, I will do anything...”

Donovan’s smile held, his lips curling even more at the sound of her whimpering. He stroked her throat upwards with a single finger and lifted her chin. “Hush, my dear. We have a new plan for Alexander. All you need to do now is be patient.”

The steady, constant drip, drip, drip of water leaking onto stone somewhere in the chamber was a special kind of torture.

The irritating sound was one thing. The drips were timed perfectly to match the seconds passing.

It was like a ticking clock. A ticking clock counting down to imminent death.



But the drip was also a cruel, relentless reminder of Lucas's desperate thirst. His tongue, textured like sandpaper, felt hard and foreign in his mouth. His throat ached; it was as dry as the desolate desert sands that stretched for hundreds of miles in all directions from this hellhole where he was being held captive.

The vampires were keeping Lucas and the other werewolves down here alive, providing just enough food and water each night for survival... so that they could keep feeding on them.

Lucas had only been here a few days. He'd been fed on three times. Some of the others, though... they had been here much longer. Their clothing was in various stages of tatter, their abused bodies thin from blood loss and starvation.

Lucas shook himself awake, his sit bones shivering painfully against the rough stone floor.

Or had he been asleep? The dripping sound rang in his ears and his mind whether or not he was conscious. It was the ticking clock counting seconds when he was awake, and a metronome clicking in the background of his dreams.

Yes, he must have been asleep. He didn't remember leaning back against the wall, with a jagged stone digging right into the base of his spine. He must have passed out and slunk back into this

awful position, from which he slowly shifted forward now, wincing at a sharp, stabbing pain between his shoulder blades.

The sound of Lucas's chains dragging across the hard, uneven floor echoed throughout the quiet chamber as he shifted his weight, trying to find a seated position that was a little less painful.

A whimper sounded nearby. Lucas looked to his left and discerned the shape of two figures huddled together against the wall about ten feet away from him. The prisoners had both stretched to the furthest reaches of their chains in order to get close enough to touch each other.

"Shh," came a hoarse, quiet voice. "Shh. The sun is rising. They're gone."

The whimpering quieted gradually.

There were no windows in this basement prison, but it was poorly insulated and from just the few top inches of the underground chamber leaked in tiny, blessed slants of sunlight in the daytime. In this moment, pitch dark was just starting to give way to daylight, revealing the lumpy shadows that populated the long, cold room. They were all starting to move and sigh and groan in pain.

Lucas had begun a chain reaction, waking the two prisoners on his left, whose whispers in turn roused others from their fitful slumbers.

Who knows how much later it was when the prisoners started talking more, mumbling to each other quietly. It was full light by then. Lucas might have dozed off again. Or maybe not. The seconds ticked on endlessly all the same, the dripping water like a hypnotist's acoustic trick, making his mind a blur... until...

"It is him. It's the prince—the younger one. Scarlet's son. It's him!"

Lucas's mind snapped to attention. Someone was talking about him. He turned toward the whisper, looking for the speaker.

"Oh, my gods," came a gravelly, grumbly man's voice from about the same general direction. "It is."

"Isn't his name..." whispered the woman uncertainly.

"Lucas," said the man, gaining volume.

Lucas found the source of the voice and met the man's gaze. It was dim in the chamber still, but the man happened to be sitting in the vague glow of a nearby errant sunbeam, and Lucas could see his face clearly.

The man's eyes were dark and glaring. His frame was big but he was skinny from malnutrition, with sagging skin on his shoulders and hairy chest. He looked about fifty years old.

He might have actually been much younger, though. Torture and starvation had a way of making

people look very old, Lucas was learning. “You’re the prince, aren’t you?” Now the man was talking directly to Lucas and practically shouting, his deep, rasping voice filling the room. “The son of the fugitive queen? And you’re here. Why? It’s true, isn’t it—you really are traitors! You were working with them!”

“My mother,” Lucas interrupted, shocked at the crackling sound of his voice. “She is the traitor. She’s the one who worked with the vampires.”

“You left when she did,” the woman whispered-shouted. That seemed to be as loud as she could vocalize. “That’s what they said on the news. You’re both wanted for war crimes.”

“Yeah, I fled,” Lucas croaked. “But I had no choice, she’d already done what she did and I’d just be blamed if I didn’t—”

“But did you know?!” demanded another voice, a louder female voice, from closer by.

Lucas swiveled his head and easily spotted the woman as she continued to rage.

“Did you know she was going to do it?” The skeletal woman’s hair was so filthy with grime and dried blood, he could not tell what color it would be clean. Her neck and chest were a mess of gruesome bruises and scabs in various stages of healing. “You could have told Alpha Alexander! You could have stopped her!”

The woman thrashed against her chains as if she wanted to get up and come running at Lucas and fight him. She bared her teeth, looking absolutely animal, and like she hated him. Like she would shift and attack and kill him in a second flat if her limbs were not chained to stone.

“They killed my baby!” she shrieked. “They killed my little girl! They ate her!”

“Yeah!” came the man’s voice again. “You coulda stopped her! If you knew and you didn’t stop her, you’re as guilty as she is! You’re a traitor to your own kind!”

“Traitor!” came yet another hoarse, pained voice.

“How could you?!” Now the shouts were all around him.

“Traitor!!!”

“TRAITOR!!!”

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Chapter 224 God Of War

## **Chapter 224 God Of War**

Fiona

I woke with a jolt, partway through turning my body over in my sleep, and gasped for breath. My hand instinctively reached out for my husband, but my sweaty palm only found cool, empty

sheets on his side of the bed.

“Hey. Are you okay, sweetheart?” Footsteps neared. Then I felt the mattress dip to absorb Alexander’s weight.

I sat up against the headboard a little while blinking my eyes open and was surprised to discover it was still full dark. Alex got under the covers and shuffled toward me. He must have been up walking around with no lights on.

“Mm.” I cleared my throat. “Yeah, I’m fine. Just woke up abruptly. What time is it?”

“Almost eight.”

“Wow. The sun’s coming up so late these days.”

He didn’t respond to that. Just asked if I wanted some water and passed me a glass he apparently already had in his hand.

I took it and drank, while Alex took hold of my other hand and set it in place to cradle his jaw.

Begging me to comb my fingernails through his beard.

I put the water down on my nightstand. Ran my fingers through his soft facial hair and asked teasingly, “When are you gonna shave this? You’ve been letting it grow for kind of a while now.”

He turned his face to plant a kiss on my palm.

Slowly. My hand drifted into his unkempt hair and began to drift lightly across his scalp. He leaned his head into my touch and finally answered,

quietly, “When I return from battle, victorious.” I had not been expecting this heavy answer. Nor could I have anticipated how thinking about such a thing could turn me on. I just suddenly became hyper aware that I was lying in bed with an Alpha King. A valiant slayer of powerful, evil monsters. A legend. A god of war and a god of sex. I turned and straddled him, covering his body with mine, clutched at his hair and kissed his lips. A low, restrained growl vibrated in his chest and throat. With a fluid, rhythmic movement I moved my hands through his hair, pressing my fingernails into his scalp then dragging them down his neck and chest. Alexander’s entire body started vibrating now, as he bit back and swallowed down more growls of pleasure. I lowered my lips to his ear, pausing along the way to nuzzle my cheek into his soft golden beard. I think I whispered, “Sometimes I just want to worship you,” or something like that. I don’t know for sure because suddenly I was dizzy with desire. My Alpha’s energy was pulsing into me everywhere our skin touched. Feeling his pleasure on top of my own almost felt like more than one person could possibly handle, but I didn’t want to think about my mental wall. I didn’t want to block out his energy. I wanted to feel it.

But my golden god's hungry touch turned my body up to max and switched my brain off completely. So I cannot be held responsible for losing control and moaning audibly when his lips found their way to one of my sensitive nipples, mouthing at it through the fabric of my thin nightgown.

Yes, it woke her up. Alexis.

Alex and I both froze and darted our eyes over to the monitor as the small sounds began. She coughed a couple times and whimpered a little.

I started to slide off his lap, but Alexander's arms turned to steel. He held me in place on top of him with an inescapable vise grip. "Shh. Maybe she'll settle back down," he whispered.

God bless her, she did. We watched the video on the monitor together and both our bodies relaxed as it appeared the baby was, in fact, falling back asleep.

Alex kept that firm grasp around my body and nuzzled his face back into my chest. Everything he did felt good, but a little sliver of maternal anxiety had me distracted now. I was fairly certain Lexi was about to wake up again, and it was too hard to be quiet when Alex was touching me like this.

"We should get up anyway, my love."



He stopped what he was doing and sighed. It took a couple seconds but finally he loosened his grip around me, giving me an option to withdraw from his embrace.

I patted his bearded cheek. “We have a busy day ahead of us.” I slipped off his lap, moved over to the edge of the bed and tugged on my bedside lamp, finally interrupting the oddly late pre-dawn dark. “Lots to do to prepare for our guests.”

Before I could get up and out of bed, though, Alex grabbed my wrist and pulled me back to his side. I flew across the silk sheets easily.

“Fiona,” he said quietly, looking deep into my eyes. “I need to say something to you.”

“Okay.” My heart did a little overtime, unsure if this “something” was something bad... or something very bad. Lately, most serious topics of conversation seemed to fall into one of those two categories.

But to my surprise Alexander said, maintaining that serious tone, “I am so grateful that I have a Luna who understands my role and responsibilities. You are incredible, Fi. You never make it hard for me to get back to work. You never take it personally when I have to suddenly leave your side. I just want you to know that I don’t take it for granted. I don’t take you for granted. You deserve

to have my undivided attention, and I hate that I just can't give that to you right now. I can't promise we won't be interrupted, but I will make time for us tonight. Once this busy day's work is done."

I threw my body on top of his once again. The love and gratitude in his words were yet more unexpectedly powerful aphrodisiacs. Alex caught me and pressed me into his lap easily, like we'd choreographed and planned that move. We kissed slowly, deeply, and as quietly as we could.

But that child of ours... she is an attentive creature of mischief. Right on cue, she roused again and this time, she launched right into wailing.

Tracy met me at the front of the palace. She was more nervous this morning than she'd been in the interview, which I found appropriate and acceptable. Her anxiety on her first day of her new job just told me that this mattered to her.

The decorator was already hard at work in the East Wing by the time my assistant and I met her there. And then the three of us entered a time warp – the hours just flew by as we conferred and divided and conquered and made decisions together and straightened picture frames and fluffed pillows.

It's amazing what unlimited money can accomplish. This was a huge renovation, and we were

getting it done in just a couple days.

By late afternoon, my stomach was growling, and I realized I'd forgotten about lunch. I also realized, guiltily, that I ought to have been providing my employees with a break. But Tracy and Isabel were hard workers, and they didn't complain. I left the ladies to a break and returned to the West Wing to check on the baby. She had been napping and giving Nina an easy morning. This allowed me opportunity to sit down at my desk and write out some brief hand-written notes for our guests. Just a few words of greeting and welcome. I'd also prepared some assorted bath items into gift baskets; spa goodies I hoped the couples would enjoy as they relaxed after a long day of traveling.

Lexi woke just as I was finishing up my notes. I fed her, changed her, and then held her while rocking in the chair till she was asleep again. It was a nice, quiet break for me after the bustle of the morning and afternoon.

The construction crews were all gone by the time I got back to the East Wing. Only Tracy and Isabel remained. My eager helpers rushed over to take the unwieldy gift baskets from my arms as soon as they sighted me in the hall.

"It's all ready," Isabel confirmed, once she'd given me the full tour. We'd staged the gift baskets

in the bathroom suites along the way.  
I thanked the proudly smiling ladies and sent them home. But I lingered behind after they'd left.  
And wandered over to one of the rooms that we had left empty for now.

A vision filled the space in front of my eyes. A hospital bed along this wall. But a comfortable one. A big TV directly opposite. So Grandfather could watch his true crime documentaries.

If he even still did that.

The doctor's warning floated back into my mind, telling me I ought to be prepared for how different my beloved relative now looks. I tried to picture it. His thinned body lying on that imaginary hospital bed, under the flickering glow of a TV screen.

When I realized I hadn't been breathing for so long I was on my way to becoming lightheaded, I forced myself to turn off the light and leave the room without another look.

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Chapter 225 Bliss

## **Chapter 225 Bliss**

Our guests finally arrived a few minutes before midnight. Our little night owl was wide awake so

we carried her with us to greet them at the front of the palace. A servant was easing open the back door of the limousine we'd sent to retrieve the foursome from the airport, just as my husband and I reached the top of the stairs.

First out of the car was a very tall, distinctly strong but somewhat slender man with jet black hair streaked through with wisps of silver. His eyes landed upon Alex immediately and he bowed his head before stepping aside to make room for the others to exit the vehicle.

There was no doubt in my mind that this was Grayson, the leader of the Cold Moon pack. I felt a surprising recognition of his Alpha powers, even from a distance.

This was the first time, I realized, that I'd been near another Alpha since the awakening of my own abilities. I was looking at a stranger, but he seemed so familiar. Puzzling through this sensation, I realized it stemmed from the fact that he reminded me of my husband somehow. Their bodies and faces resembled each other in no way. It was only their energies, an intense aura of power and dominance that they shared.

As the servants wheeled away our guests' luggage ahead of us, Alex and I welcomed the travelers inside and engaged in introductions.

Grayson's wife Olivia, who insisted we call her Liv, was about as tall as me and had a long tangle of dark brown hair swept forward over one shoulder. Her eyes were dark blue, rimmed with thick black liner, and she had one of those big, pretty smiles that I could just tell was liable to be contagious.

The other woman was much smaller and much younger, with light skin and prominent freckles, big green eyes and shoulder-length black ringlets. She looked about eighteen, and she was impossibly beautiful in a very unique way. Her name was Dana. She and her husband Chase – Grayson's Beta, a chiseled and handsome brunet about Alexander's age – seemed glued together. They couldn't keep their hands off each other, and Dana looked up at her man with an adoring gaze that told me they were likely newlyweds, and madly in love.

Liv was the chattiest of the bunch, and I found myself grateful for her unexpected energy. She adored Alexis at first sight of her and asked me lots of politely friendly questions about the baby. Having someone else contribute so much to the conversation was a relief. After that push to finish the renovations, I had little energy left tonight for playing hostess.

We walked Chase and Dana to the stairs that led to their tower suite first and said goodbye to them there. Then Alex and I led Liv and Grayson to the forest room, Scarlet's old suite, where they would be staying.

"Whoa." Liv glanced through the doorway and stood before it frozen, then swung her eyes over to me dramatically. "This place is incredible. Beautiful." My heart swelled with pride. This little project had been a lot of work, and it meant a lot to me. It was my first attempt at really taking ownership of the palace. Of acting like a Queen.

"Thank you," I said with a sincere smile. "We have some refreshments staged in the TV room, too. I didn't know if you'd be hungry at this hour, but there are some options in there for you just in case you are. Please rest and enjoy. It's the least we can do to thank you for traveling all this way to meet us here, and on such short notice."

Liv, perhaps feeling particularly sensitive because she was tired, had a shimmer of emotion welling in her deep blue eyes as she looked into the room once more. She was still frozen in place.

"It's our pleasure," Grayson said, taking his wife's hand and giving it a squeeze. "Truly, it's an honor just to be here and meet you both. And this is lovely," he added, darting his eyes into their

room. "Thank you."

"Fiona just finished renovating these rooms," Alex bragged, sliding an arm around my shoulders.

I rolled my eyes, I suppose trying to shrug off the compliment as too much.

"No," Liv almost shouted. "You did this? Oh, it's beautiful, Fiona!"

My cheeks felt go hot. "Certainly not on my own. I had lots of help. But thank you."

I'd enjoyed the appreciation for my work when it was anonymous, but now I wanted to get out of the spotlight Alexander had just shone down upon me. I looked up at him and glared. He grinned and gave me a mischievous wink.

"So," Alex asked, pulling our bedroom door closed behind him. "What do you think?"

"I like them."

"Me too." He reached out to take Lexi off my hands. She cooed at her father and melted into his chest.

"We'll need to actually have some conversations with them, of course, in order to develop an informed opinion. But I like their energies."

Alex raised his eyebrows, interested. He waited for me to say more.

"Especially Grayson." I paused, trying to figure out how to articulate what I perceived of the man.

"His energy reminds me of yours."



“Huh.” Alex bounced Lexi in his arms. He bobbed his head a little, seeming to agree. “I might not be an empath, but I got a good feeling from him, too.”

Just then, a knock sounded on the door. A knock I recognized easily – three quick little taps.

“Nina?” I opened the door and raised an eyebrow at my friend. She strode right inside while I looked down at my watch, bewildered. It was almost one a.m. “What are you doing here?”

“Reporting for duty,” she answered, walking over to Alex with her arms outstretched.

He passed the baby right off to her, then looked over at me and beamed.

“I promised you I’d make time for us tonight,” he said. “I know it’s very late. But she doesn’t mind.” He pointed his thumb at Nina, who met my eyes and nodded to confirm. “Unless you’re sleepy, and want to crash out instead?”

“Very late date sounds... perfectly acceptable,” I decided.

Alex said he would make time for me, and I already appreciated him providing that. But there was even more to the surprise, I discovered once he swung open the door to our getaway.

Candles filled the room with low, flickering light, and as soon as we were inside I spied white

rose petals adorning the bed. The floral, slightly smoky aroma in the air put my senses at ease immediately.

“This is so sweet.” I put my hands to Alex’s chest and slid them up to circle his neck.

In between light kisses, he whispered into my mouth, “But wait... there’s more...”

I laughed, nuzzling into his neck as his hands crossed behind me. He lifted me up into his arms and carried me over to the bed. He tossed the petal-strewn blanket aside and lay me down gently on the crisp, silky sheets, giving me a little jolt at its cool touch.

Standing back, Alex shrugged off his jacket and cast it to the foot of the bed, then loosened his tie and shirt sleeves. I followed his eyes to the bedside table and discovered a little device there. It was a bowl full of oily liquid, atop what I soon discerned to be a warming apparatus plugged into an electrical outlet in the nightstand.

“Hot wax?” I asked, raising my eyebrow at my husband as he began removing my clothing.

One side of his mouth twitched upward into a devious half-smile. “It’s massage oil. Warm, not hot. But now that you’ve put that idea in my mind...”

Alex’s eyes darted around the room at all the flickering candles. He licked his lips.

“I think the warm oil will do for tonight,” I said a little sternly.

He smiled down at me. “Yes, ma’am...”

I let my eyes flutter closed while he finished undressing me, lazing back and letting him do all the work both because I knew he wanted to and because I was tired. I adored him for this. For knowing just what I needed.

“I’ve been thinking about this all day,” he grumbled once his project was complete and I was naked underneath him.

He buried his face into my neck and breathed in my scent heavily, his hot breath so intense on my skin that I couldn’t help but shiver and moan.

“Hm. You’re cold,” he said, pulling back. “Good thing I have a remedy for that.” He pushed his rolled sleeves further up onto his forearms before reaching out and dousing his hands with oil. He rubbed it into his hands and let a little excess to drip back into the bowl before bringing them back to my body.

He pressed his hot, wet palms to my neck first. The intense heat and his expert touch were absolute bliss, flooding my muscles with soothing relief and my brain with serotonin. Then he pulled his hands heavily down my shoulders and arms, sweeping in one slow, firm, fluid motion

all the way to my hands, where he squeezed hard on my palms and fingertips.

“Oh,” I whined. “That feels amazing.”

My eyes were closed, but I could hear the smile on Alex’s lips as he tried to swallow some breathy, self-satisfied laughter. Then I heard his hands dipping into the wax again. But before returning them to my skin, he paused and said, huskily, “Tell me what to do.”

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