

THE ALPHA KING CALL BOY

Chapter 56 Nda



Alexander

I opted not to use any of my Crescent Ventures contacts or resources as I searched for information, not wanting word to get back to Fiona that I had been digging into Scarlet's company. I needed to help her in her war against my stepmother, but it would be tricky to let her in on my plans without revealing the ways in which I was already involved with everything.

A private investigator I'd worked with years ago was happy to help me out, hardly asking for any information once I gave him the name of that odd, seemingly imaginary company that I had seen on Fiona's copies of the competitor's expense reports.

“Anything strange at all about this business, I’ll find it out,” he said. “I’ll update you asap.”

And I did not have to wait long on an update. I started some work in my office, but hardly got anything done before my phone rang and I saw it was the PI calling me back already.

“I just texted you an address,” he told me. “Meet me there now.”

The investigator pulled into a nearby parking spot seconds after I got out of my car.

“What is this place?” I asked, approaching him.

We were standing in a square parking lot in the middle of a motel property. The building was in a U-shape around the parking lot, with a small lobby at one end. The room doors were painted in mismatched

shades of red, with sun-bleached plastic numbers nailed over the peepholes. And there was graffiti on everything, including the filthy, reeking dumpsters located in the center of the parking lot.

“Let’s go and meet our new friend.” The investigator, an unassuming man in his fifties with a quiet voice but decisive manner, nodded in the direction of a rusty metal staircase on my left. “She can explain. Number twenty seven.”

Up the creaking stairs we went, and just as I held my fist up to knock on the brick-red door to room twenty seven, it flew open, revealing a short brunette woman in her 40s with one finger pressed to her lips, saying “SHH!!!” She waved us in frantically, then closed the door behind us quickly once we were inside.

“My apologies, ma’am. I was given to understand that you were expecting us.”

“No, no, it’s alright.” The woman shook her head at me and gestured to a small table, around which she had arranged three mismatched chairs. The only other furniture in the room was a twin-size bed, a small bedside table, and a narrow bookcase packed with piles of folded clothing. The PI sat in one of the chairs.

“Thank you, but I’ll stand,” I told the woman politely, moving to a place in the room where I could keep my body facing the door.

“You can just never be too careful around here,” the woman continued. She peeked through a tiny gap between the curtains on the room’s sole window, which looked directly out over the parking lot.

Apparently satisfied that we had not been followed, she finally relaxed, changing her tone when she addressed me again. “Alpha Alexander, it is a great

honor to meet you.”

“That’s very kind of you. My associate tells me that you have some information you want to share with me?”

“Yes.” She swallowed heavily and cleared her throat as she took a seat. “I just don’t know what will happen to me if I am caught talking to you. I signed a contract, you see. An NDA. And if you think I’m bad off now—” she waved her hand around the motel room slowly—
“Oh, it would be even worse to be on the street.”

“Someone is threatening to put you out on the street?” I asked. “Whatever you signed, it sounds exploitative at the least. Or it may not even be legal.”

The woman nodded again. “Oh, I’ve thought about this so much. I’m afraid I really have no legal recourse. The only way I can tell you what you want

to know, and survive, is if you promise you will not tell them that I blabbed. Never make me go to court. They will ruin me if they find out. Please – tell me you won't reveal me as your source.”

“I promise.” I looked the woman in the eye. “And I keep my promises. I will make sure that you are safe.”

“Alright.” She poured some water from a plastic pitcher into a paper cup and took a sip. “Are you sure you don't want to sit down?” she asked, looking me up and down. “It's a long story.”

Fiona

“What?” Conrad barked into the intercom on his desk. “I told you to hold all my calls.”

He and I had been in his office strategizing for hours, trying to find a way to negotiate with the vendors that

were still refusing to sell us materials for our construction sites.

“Sorry to interrupt,” his assistant replied, his voice sounding urgent. “But there’s something you should see on the news, Sir.”

Conrad slid open a drawer and grabbed a TV remote, aimed it over my shoulder and pressed a button. I turned around and saw what I always thought was just a wall opening up to reveal a huge flat-screen TV. The TV powered on while the apparatus continued pushing it forward into the room.

“More information,” an anchor was saying, “about this shocking scandal and how it all started. If you’re just joining us, we’re sharing breaking news about a property management company that allegedly bribed code enforcement officials to certify buildings with outdated electrical wiring. One of these buildings

caught fire last year, and while no residents were killed in the blaze, eleven were injured and hundreds were left homeless.”

Conrad got up and crossed the room, folding his arms across his chest as he stood before the TV, watching. I went over and stood beside him.

“Now, a former resident has broken their silence,” the reporter continued. “The resident, who chooses to remain anonymous, is speaking through a class-action attorney, claiming that after the fire, they were forced to sign non-disclosure agreements swearing to secrecy about the cause of the fire, which was an electrical short in one of the units. The attorney also claims that the property owners have failed to provide adequate housing for those who were displaced after the tragedy...”

I knew Conrad was listening intently, taking all the

information in, but also had his mind going a million miles an hour already, deeply considering what it all meant. He was still as a statue, eyes glued to the TV.

“In a shocking twist,” the news report went on, “the owner and CEO of the company responsible is none other than the Luna Queen herself. A legend in the industry, Scarlet is a well-known investor in the real estate market. But this story could be changing things for our royal Luna, as more evidence comes to light...”

Conrad sent me away, telling me we’d reconvene the next morning. He was on the phone with someone and yelling at them already before I could close his office door behind me.

The story was everywhere. TV, news websites, social media. I started reading press reports and articles while streaming a live news feed in a second browser

window. Soon, more breaking news was announced: victims were coming forward, emboldened by the pending lawsuit, breaking their silence and speaking out. One after another, they told their stories about losing everything in the fire and then being intimidated by the property managers into signing the exploitative NDAs.

I shook my head, thinking how easy it would be to simply update the electrical equipment in an old building before leasing it out to residents in the first place. Sure, electrical work was pricey, but it was necessary for safety.

What was even worse, though, was how the company responded after the fire. The non-disclosure agreements were given to the residents with the promise that if they signed, they would be set up with free housing the next five years. But when it came time to hold up their end of the bargain, they moved

the residents into cheap motel rooms in an unsafe part of the city instead of proper, permanent homes.

I started packing up to head home and realized something. I had been very focused at first on catching up with the details of this story. But now I started thinking about the timing of it being revealed just as I was up against this problem with Scarlet and my project.

The secret about the fire had been kept quiet for so long. Why was the truth coming out today?

Conrad had nothing to do with it. He had been just as shocked as I was when he saw the news.

If it was a coincidence, it was a very lucky break for me indeed.

A lucky break, or something else going on that I was

not yet privy to.

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THE ALPHA KING CALL BOY

Chapter 57 The Truth Always Comes Out



Back at the palace, I got my shoes off and feet up, then couldn't help but get back on my phone to see if there were any more updates on the Scarlet scandal.

Alexander walked in just a few minutes later. He gave me an affectionate smile when he saw me.

“Did you talk to Conrad today?” I asked.

He chuckled, unbuttoning his suit jacket and

loosening his tie. “Hello to you, too. And no, I have not talked to Conrad today. I imagine he is very busy right now. But I did see the news. I think just about everyone in the world must have, by now.”

“It’s insane, huh? I’m still reeling. And I can’t stop refreshing my news feed, either. It seems like there are more victims coming forward every hour.”

Alexander hung up his jacket, then came and sat down next to me on the edge of the bed. “Give me the phone.” He held out his hand and I passed it to him. He set it on my nightstand, face down. Then he took both my cold hands into his, pressing warmth into them. “I already knew my stepmother was a criminal,” he said, “but yes, this kind of crime of against innocent people is always shocking to anybody with a conscience.”

“There’s something else I keep wondering about, too,”

I told him. Alexander raised a curious eyebrow. “I just keep thinking, why today? After all this time, why was this revealed right when Scarlet was about to take down my project? It’s weird.”

He shrugged. “I suppose it was only a matter of time before it was exposed.”

“Hmm. You might be right. I guess the truth always comes out at some point.”

Alexander lifted one of my hands to his mouth and kissed it. “How are you feeling, by the way?” he asked. “Ready for some dinner?”

“I am hungry, but my feet are killing me. Can we do dinner after I rest them for just a few more minutes?”

He frowned, then scooted down the bed toward my swollen feet. “Can I rub them for you?” He pulled one

foot into his lap.

“I won’t argue with that.” He started kneading the arch of my foot with his thumbs, giving me immediate pain relief and eliciting an involuntary mmm sound from my throat.

My eyes flickered closed and I relaxed. This was an unexpected pleasure. But when my phone chimed with a text notification, I snatched it right up, wide-eyed and alert. I may have been physically fatigued, but I was also still wired, high on adrenaline from all the excitement of the day.

Alexander raised his eyebrow again. “Is it Conrad? Something urgent?”

I shook my head. “Nina text.”

It read: Wyd rn? Can I come over?

“You should invite her over for dinner again,” Alexander said, setting my feet aside and standing up.

I texted Nina: We’re just about to eat dinner. Want to join?

Nina took a minute, then replied: You go ahead. I’ll meet you after if that’s ok.

Her timing was perfect. Alexander and I returned from dinner and he had just finished changing his clothes for evening training when Nina texted me and said she and Kayden were walking up to our room.

After some pleasant hellos and goodbyes, the two men left together, and Nina and I headed off in the other direction. I had told Alexander I just wanted to enjoy some fresh air while the sun was still out. He

gave Nina a pointed look before we parted ways that I took to mean he was asking her to be careful and watch out for me.

As soon as we emerged out into a sunny courtyard, Nina leaned close to me and whispered, “I need to tell you something, Fi.”

“I figured. What’s going on?”

She hooked my arm through her elbow and led us across the courtyard, over a tiny wooden bridge that crossed a shallow creek, and into yet another rose garden. “Okay, first of all, I told Kayden the reason I needed a ride here was that you had something pregnancy-related to discuss. Men don’t ask questions about that kind of thing. So, if anyone asks, that is why I am here, alright?”

I narrowed my eyes at her and said, “Alright.”

We approached a wooden bench and I tugged at Nina's arm to let her know I wanted to sit down. She kept her head on a swivel, glancing over the tops of the rose bushes as we did.

"Here's the thing," she said quietly, once she was sure we were alone. "Kayden let something slip to me. And of course, he begged me not to tell you, and of course I swore to him I wouldn't, but of course I am going to."

"God, Nina, what is it?"

"Look, Alexander... I believe he cares about you a lot, Fiona. I see how he is with you, like when we were all together the other night at dinner. But there's something he didn't tell you about, and whatever the reason, you deserve to know about it. It's just that he was the one that got the story going about the

scandal with Scarlet's company. But apparently he wanted to keep it secret from you that he had anything to do with it."

I closed my eyes and kept them closed a moment. Of course, this made sense.

Alexander had gone digging into Scarlet's business after all our conversations about my project and Scarlet's war on his uncle's company. He must have done all this to help me.

But why keep it a secret? We had just been speaking about the whole thing. It would have been easy enough to tell me what he had done.

"You okay, Fiona?"

"Yeah." I snapped my eyes open. "Ugh. Thank you for telling me about this, Nina. I am very glad to know. I

wish he would have told me, though. I can't understand why he wouldn't have."

"I know. I keep wondering about that, too." Nina stood and started pacing the rows of rose bushes, looking around corners to check that we were still having a private conversation. "Maybe he was trying to be humble or something," she said as she passed me by. "You know, not asking for credit for doing a nice thing for you? That was my first thought."

I frowned, letting my eyes focus on a large bee that was crawling inside of a pink rose in front of me.

"Maybe."

"Of course," Nina added, "I also generally feel like you can never really trust men, especially ones you know have lied to you."

"Ha. Just men?" I smiled at Nina as she walked back

toward me. She and I had known each other for most of our lives, and I understood her to be the least trusting individual in the world.

Nina smiled back, taking a seat at the other end of the bench. She turned to face me and crossed her legs in front of her, briefly making me jealous of her lithe, non-pregnant body. “Nah, you’re right,” she said. “You can never trust anyone. Except, of course, for your best friend, if you’re lucky enough to have one of those.”

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Chapter 58 Prove It



Third person

“I have been watching something rather interesting,” the King said. “Care to watch with me?”

Scarlet had not been surprised when she received word that her husband required her to come and speak with him urgently, knowing precisely what it was regarding. She hurried back to the palace from her office in the city and found her husband waiting for her in their bedroom, alone, with the viral video queued up on the TV screen.

While he waited for her, the King had been watching the video over and over again, alternating between fantasizing about how he would punish his Luna for her treachery and wondering what role Alexander had played in promoting the news story about her.

“I have seen it,” Scarlet responded, quiet with fearful

respect despite resenting the King's condescension.

"Hm." He looked over at the TV. The video was on pause, freeze-framed on an image of a crying old woman. "How about once more?"

He hit play.

Scarlet wanted to look away but did not, knowing that doing so would give her husband just the reason he needed to throw her to the ground and begin punishing her without any further conversation. The right way to play this was just to play along while he toyed with her. And once she could think up something good enough, lie her ass off.

The video was about three minutes long. Scarlet had seldom before considered that to be a long duration of time, but as she stood there beside her husband, feeling the increasing heat radiating off his body, it felt

like an eternity. The King stood perfectly still while watching the video, his facial expression neutral, with one hand tucked casually into his pants pocket. He looked very calm indeed. But he was getting angrier every second, making his wolf's blood run warmer and warmer, and speeding his heart rate up to a hammering pace.

“I would never expect to be treated like this by anyone,” the old woman on the TV said between snuffles. She was a commoner, with tough, tan, deeply wrinkled skin and translucent hair piled in a knot on top of her head. “By anyone. And what they did to us was very bad, but it feels even worse when you thought you could trust the person, you know? That’s why we moved there in the first place. We lived in one of her other buildings before and thought they’d treat us right. We thought the Queen would treat her people right. Yeah. That’s what we thought.”

The video switched focus to the interviewer, a young woman wearing thick black eyeliner. “And what can you do when the person who’s wronged you has so much power?” she asked the old lady.

The white-haired woman just shook her head helplessly and continued to cry.

Then the young woman addressed the camera directly. “How can we hold the Queen accountable for what’s happened here? There’s one thing we all can do. Boycott Queen Luna’s companies! You’ll find a complete list below of all the companies she invests in. Stop giving Scarlet your money! And don’t forget to like and subscribe for more of our—”

The King hit pause.

He tossed the remote up and down in his hand a few times, then pointed it at his wife. The tone of his voice

was still playful as he said, “Would you care to explain what we are looking at, my dear?” The look in his eyes, though, was stone cold.

“A viral video,” she answered quietly, “in which I’m being blamed for something terrible that I had nothing to do with.”

The King growled, his lips quivering with the first hint of a snarl. Hot hair hissed out from between his teeth as he said, “Try again.”

Scarlet swallowed. “I’m sure you’ve heard all about the whole story,” she said quickly. “And yes, the fire happened. But I swear to you, I was not responsible. The way the story is being portrayed is a deliberate attempt to disgrace me – Alexander’s whore Fiona is behind it! I even heard her admit it from her own lips. Please believe me.”

Before Scarlet brought up their names, the King had already suspected that Alexander, Fiona, or the both of them had something to do with inciting this media circus. So when his wife claimed that Fiona confessed to setting it up, he paused, considering whether it could be true.

The King was feeling quite sure, by now, that his wife was a criminal. He'd been fairly convinced of her guilt ever since the night that Alexander exposed what appeared to be damning evidence of an active embezzlement scheme. But there was a chance, albeit a very slight one, that Scarlet was being set up.

The King did really despise and distrust Fiona. Circumstances with his eldest son had been tense enough already, before Alexander went and impregnated a pretty young Luna from a rival pack and moved her into the palace with him.

“As if it weren’t shameful enough that your son is dragging that trash into the gene pool,” Scarlet continued, taking advantage of the King’s hesitation. “She is treacherous, too. Don’t you see? Fiona is trying to destroy me to get to you.”

“You’re deflecting,” the King snapped. “Whether or not Fiona had anything to do with this, you do bear responsibility. And if you are lying about her, well...”

He lifted a hand to Scarlet’s face. She tried to resist it, but flinched just slightly. He smiled, buried his fingers in her thick hair, and stroked her scalp gently. Then he balled his fist, clasping a handful of hair and pulling hard, and dragged her over to the wall. Threw her up against it and shoved her face to the side. Pressed his face to her neck and throat, smelling her furiously, trying to sniff out whether she was lying.

“I will divorce you, and I will be sure you are

sentenced most severely for your crimes,” the King continued, still pressing his huge, strong body hard against Scarlet’s. She struggled to keep her breathing even, revealing as little of her fear as possible. The King brought his face to hers, then, so that they were eye to eye, only an inch apart. “But first, I will punish you myself.”

“I swear to you that I am innocent.” Scarlet’s gray eyes were big and pleading. “You will see.”

“Prove it, then,” he said with finality. “And do it quickly.”

Scarlet was back in the city as fast as her driver could get her there.

At her company’s headquarters, she ascended the elevator patiently, strolled into her office, locked the door behind her, closed the drapes over the windows,

and quickly set about shredding any and all paperwork she could find that could possibly be used as evidence.

This was it. She had reached the end of all the scamming and scheming. There was no way to save her work anymore, no way to keep hold of her ill-gotten earnings. All she could do now was shift gears into damage control mode.

In the morning, she would declare bankruptcy and liquidate all her assets. All of her businesses would be destroyed. But at least it would muddy the waters for investigators, making it more difficult to trace where the money for all her initial investments had come from.

Scarlet just needed to be sure that, even if some of her crimes might be proven true in court, the worst of them could still remain hidden. Because if the King

ever found out her worst crime, he would not only beat, divorce, and imprison her. No, her fate would be much worse.

Trading military secrets with vampires was not an infraction that the Alpha King would pass off to the courts.

He would kill his treasonous Luna if he found out she had done that.

He'd probably even kill her in public. With his bare hands.

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[THE ALPHA KING CALL BOY](#)

Chapter 59 I Needed Him Close



Fiona

I hung up the phone just as Gerald walked into my office.

“Hey,” I said, gesturing to the chair across from me at my desk. “What can I do for you, Gerald?”

“Actually,” he replied, “I came in here to ask you that very same question. The boss wanted me to check in with you about the expansion and see what I can do to help. We’re putting all hands on deck, he says, to get the project back on schedule.”

“Really?” I couldn’t help but glance in the direction of Conrad’s office. My active mind ran quickly through a few different reasons that our boss might assign Gerald, someone who held a title senior to my own, to join my project. I hoped he was not second-guessing

my performance.

Gerald must have read my thoughtful pause, because he said, “Don’t worry – I’m not taking over any part of your project. You’re lead on this and I don’t think anyone would expect that to change. You’re doing an awesome job, Fiona.” He smiled tightly. His eyes appeared sincere.

“Thanks,” I replied with a polite smile, controlling my facial expressions as I am so practiced in doing. If I didn’t have that skill, I would have been blushing.

Compliments always caught me off-guard. Something I don’t have practice with is accepting praise. It’s just not something that I was offered when I worked for my father, who never trusted me and always accepted the credit for my accomplishments for himself.

My current boss did sometimes offer me effusive

positive feedback. I had grown to expect it, even, when I handed in work I knew he'd be pleased with, or if I had good news to report. But something in my gut told me that these words and actions – when the CEO called me “superstar,” for instance – were bits of well-rehearsed playacting, not sincere expressions of true gratitude. Conrad Knight was a highly experienced businessman who had dealt directly with thousands of subordinates over the years. Every word he spoke to his employees was carefully thought out and delivered in just the right way, targeted to incite his desired response.

Conrad was good at that – keeping inside whatever it was that he really thought and felt, and projecting a highly controlled image. It's not like I could read those thoughts that Conrad was holding in, but I did recognize what he was doing. It takes one good actor to spot another, I suppose.

“Anyway,” Gerald said, “I’m here to see what I can do for you, for the expansion, like I said. Just tell me what I can take off your plate and I’m on it.”

“Okay.” I tilted my head at my coworker for a moment, considering. “My throat’s gone a bit hoarse from all the phone calls I’ve been making. Since all of the... recent events...”

Gerald nodded, widening his eyes and raising his eyebrows, his lips pressed together against a smile. Very barely holding in his delight with the Luna Queen’s misfortune.

This morning, we learned that Scarlet had declared bankruptcy and closed down her property management company. The business was going to be dissolved, all its assets liquidated, and the resulting funds would be distributed amongst the fire survivors as a quick and decisive settlement for the pending

class action lawsuit.

“...we are now finally able to get all the materials that we need,” I continued. “I’ll send you a list of orders that still need to be placed, and you can handle those for me.”

“I’m all over it.” Gerald rose to stand. “Email me the list and I’ll get started right away.”

I glanced at the clock and frowned. It was already late afternoon, and most of my coworkers headed out every day around five p.m.

“Something wrong?” Gerald asked, pausing on his way to the door.

“It’s just that I wanted to get all the orders in tonight. Do you think you can stay late to make sure they are all done before close of business? And I’ll need you to

send me copies of all the POs, confirmations, and the info for your contacts, too.”

“Not a problem,” he replied, bowing his head slightly.
“Whatever you need.”

Gerald left and I got the task information sent over to him right away, then opened up my planner and reviewed my to-do list. With the dedicated assistance of a competent colleague, I could get a lot more done tonight.

I breathed a sigh of relief and a fresh surge of energy and motivation washed over me. It felt very nice to be given adequate support when so much was expected of me right now, and it made me feel like I could really do this. Not just get the project done eventually, now that Scarlet could no longer stand in our way. But get it done on my original timeline, despite the setback. That was my new goal.

Conrad never said anything to me about wanting to stick to that original deadline, and I was sure he wouldn't be surprised if we needed to delay the construction start date. He may not even care if we did. But I cared. I wanted to make the impossible happen. To prove to myself that I was the best, maybe. Maybe to prove that to everyone else, too. Or maybe because I just thrived under pressure and lived for a challenge.

I sent Alexander a text to let him know I was going to be home very late. He replied right away, saying we could eat a late dinner together whenever I got home.

That was a relief. Nights when I didn't have much time with Alexander turned into mornings when I woke feeling dreadfully exhausted. The cub needed him close as much as possible, and so did I.

Alexander was waiting for me in our room when I finally returned to the palace.

He was looking delicious, wearing a deep blue shirt with the sleeves rolled casually to the elbows and the top few buttons undone, revealing his strong forearms and a glimpse of his muscular, golden chest. His hair was still damp from his post-training shower. His energy felt light and easy, edging on cheerful. That was new.

“Hey,” he said, with a knowing smile. I felt my cheeks go warm and dragged my eyes away from Alexander’s body. I had been staring.

Not that he minded.

“Hey yourself,” I replied, passing by him as I made a quick trip in and out of my dressing room to hang my briefcase in its place. “You ready for dinner? I’m

hungry.”

“Yes.” He met me at the door, but once again paused at the threshold, taking a moment to give me some physical attention. He swept my hair to the side and stroked my neck as I melted into his chest, breathing in his scent with pleasure.

Some strange, docile part of me wanted to close my eyes and whisper, “I missed you.” But I chuckled at the fleeting thought. It was only chemical, I reminded myself, the way being with this man made me feel. The physical effect of his body on mine, a reaction of my hormones while I was in heat.

Nothing more.

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[THE ALPHA KING CALL BOY](#)

Chapter 60 Loving The Lust

Alexander hardly waited until we were seated in the dining room before asking, “So how are things going at work?”

“Well, my project is back on,” I answered. “Scarlet’s company was effectively destroyed by the scandal. An activist got a boycott started just yesterday and I suppose the pressure was too much, because Scarlet announced already that she’s going to liquidate the company in order to settle the class-action suit.”

I watched Alexander’s face carefully as I brought up this subject, studying his reaction. Ever since learning

from Nina that my very own fiancé had been the one to uncover this scandalous story and bring it to the media, I had been wondering why Alexander would keep such a thing secret from me.

He nodded along as I spoke, keeping his eyes on his dinner plate. “I saw something about that on the news,” he replied between bites of food. “So Scarlet can’t keep trying to sabotage you anymore, right?”

“I guess that’s right.”

Alexander finally met my eyes. “I’m so glad,” he said, reaching out to touch my hand. “I hated that she put you through that. Your job is hard enough without someone directly targeting you like that.”

I sipped my herbal tea, studying Alexander’s eyes as he gave me a sweet smile and squeezed my hand affectionately. I believed that he was being genuine in

this sentiment. Nina had suggested that Alexander was working secretly to help me fight Scarlet because he just wanted to support me without asking for any credit.

Of course, she'd followed that idea up with a warning to never trust anyone.

“So your big project is back on track,” Alexander continued, dropping my hand and returning partial attention to devouring his meal with haste. “Tell me more about that.” It occurred to me, watching him demolish a steak in about a minute flat, that it had been challenging for him to wait so late to have dinner with me.

I started telling him about my day, but glossed over the details. I wasn't sure, at first, how much he really cared to hear any specifics, thinking that he was asking about my work just to be polite. But he was

more interested than I expected, asking lots of follow-up questions that I soon began to tire of answering. He was hanging on my every word while I spoke about real estate and finance minutia, behavior I would have found odd from just about any person who did not work in the industry themselves.

“Why are you so interested in this?” I asked him outright, keeping my tone sounding casually pensive.

He looked away and shrugged. “I’m just excited for you,” he answered a little too quickly.

The fact was, I was truly grateful for Alexander’s help. Without it, my project would be dead. But it was clear that he was hiding something from me. Of that, I was sure.

I resigned myself to put my questions aside for the rest of the night, though. At this point, I just needed to

rest. A long day at the office had been exhausting enough, and managing this careful conversation zapped the last of my mental energy.

It was full dark when we left the dining room. The night had turned chilly, with blustery winds knocking on the palace windows. I was sleepy after eating, and the only energy I had seemed to be coming directly from Alexander's touch. He held my hand as we walked through the cold palace halls that were teeming with deep shadows, making me feel safe in the darkness.

He was still enjoying his suspiciously good mood, and once we were alone again with a locked door behind us, he was all over me.

His charming half-smile and the seductive look in his amber eyes had me melting already, when suddenly his hands were on my hips and slowly inching my

dress upwards. The light touch and anticipation both had me tingling. I put my hands flat against Alexander's chest, feeling the ridges of his muscles. He grinned, looking down at me darkly.

He had the skirt of my dress balled up in one hand and slid the other between my legs, starting to tease me with a feather-light touch. I kept my eyes locked on his, loving the lust I saw in them, feeling how much he wanted me. At some point, my mouth had fallen open. I didn't bother to close it. I just grabbed the loose collar of his shirt to keep myself standing while he increased the pressure with his fingertips.

"Take me to bed," I begged. I was getting shakier by the second. He picked me up and carried me there like I weighed nothing, laid me down gently and then stripped off his own clothes. I shimmied my dress the rest of the way off, up and over my head, and threw it aside.

If I'd had more energy, I would have leapt on Alexander by then. But I'd been working myself into the ground all week. I was at his mercy, flooded with desire for him, desperate for his touch.

Finally he climbed into bed and hovered his big, strong body over mine, then started kissing me all over. My eyes were tempted to flutter closed, but I kept them open, taking pleasure in the sight of his perfect, golden body. He sat back on his heels, pulled behind my knees to get me flat on my back, then gently stacked my legs to one side. I let him do what he wanted, my body limp in his hands. Alexander then buried himself inside of me with little effort, making me shiver and gasp.

A shock of pleasure went surging through my entire body. Alexander smiled, looking gratified, and started to pulse his hips against me. Slow at first, then faster.

I tried clutching at pillows and sheets for purchase, but it was nothing doing – eventually I found the edge of the mattress with one hand and kept a grip there while Alexander pounded our bodies together hard, making me scream with even greater pleasure and release than I'd been expecting.

I'd been spending so much time lately being the one in control. At work, I was running a big show, with hundreds of people reporting to me and millions of dollars on the line. And I was always in control of my image, from the perfection of my clothes, hair, and makeup, to the polite, professional smile on my face.

It felt so good to let it all go.

After he made me come a third time, Alexander dug his fingers hard into my hips and pushed himself as deep inside me as he could, then enjoyed his own

moment. Then he rolled me onto my side and sidled up behind me, pressing our sweaty bodies close together, and put his lips against my neck in a light, lazy kiss that brought an involuntary smile to my own. He stroked my neck and back so lightly, I could hardly feel the pressure of his hand, only the spark of warmth that rolled off his skin and into mine.

I thought briefly about wanting to take a shower before falling asleep, but then Alexander pulled a sheet around the both of us, cradled me in his arms, and let out a low moan that sounded so content, I couldn't bear the thought of wrenching away from his sweet embrace.

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