

THE ALPHA KING CALL BOY

Chapter 71 Twisting The Knife

Fiona

I resisted the temptation to pull the shades down over my office windows after I closed myself inside. It did me no use to cry anymore, no matter how badly I was hurting.

Baron and Alexander had just made a huge, embarrassing scene in my workplace, for all of my coworkers to see. I had worked so hard on my professional image in this office for months. Now, in less than half an hour, my ex- and current fiancés showed up uninvited and blew it to pieces.

It felt surreal, too bizarre and horrible to have actually happened. But I could still feel Alexander's touch on

me and smell his scent on my skin.

His horrible, shocking words had sliced into me like a sharp knife.

What vicious, cruel things he said. And in such an intimate moment.

A growing pain in my chest felt, undeniably, like my heart was breaking. It hurt to breathe.

I had never expected to find romantic love in my life, not any kind. I was a child when I accepted and internalized my fate, that I would have an arranged marriage for the good of my pack.

Now I had to admit it. In the time I'd been with Alexander, I guess I'd started to feel something... I didn't call it love before. But now that he'd been so cruel to me, the pain felt like the betrayal of a deep

and delicate trust. I realized that I had started believing that this man really cared about me.

Someone knocked softly on my office door. I called out, "Come in."

The door inched open slowly and behind it was my coworker Gerald. "Hey. I wanted to check on you. Are you okay?" He took a step inside and closed the door quietly behind him.

I nodded to the chair across from me, inviting Gerald to sit. "I'm fine," I lied. "Just completely mortified." That part was true.

Gerald, his face solemn and pitying, shook his head. "No one's judging you, Fiona. I mean, well..." He pressed his lips together. "Yeah, people will be gossiping. But I did not hear any of them speak a bad word about you. Honest."

“It’s nice of you to try to make me feel better, Gerald.”

He sighed. “I hope you won’t let this get you down. You’re doing great here. And it can’t be easy...”

Gerald trailed off, darting his eyes away from mine.

“Anyway, I’ll leave you alone, I know you’re busy. Just wanted to make sure you’re alright.”

I wondered what he had stopped himself from saying, but not enough to ask about it. “Did Conrad say anything? He’s the only person I didn’t see out there watching that scene.”

“No, but I saw him walking your fiancé into the elevator after you came in here. He did not look happy – the boss, I mean. Well, I guess neither of them looked happy, but...” Gerald gave me an awkward look, like he wanted to stop talking now, aware he was edging into a too-personal

conversation.

I gave him a tiny nod that he understood as permission to leave. “Thanks for checking on me, Gerald.”

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He gave me another awkward, closed-mouth smile and left.

I dropped a stack of files on Conrad’s desk at the end of my workday, just as he was returning from his rooftop deck smelling of cigarette smoke, his thick, silver-streaked hair all a mess.

He cleared his throat. “Thank you, Fiona.” He nodded at the pile of paperwork and paced over to meet me at

the desk.

“Of course.” I flashed him a polite smile. “I’m going to head out now, unless you need anything else.”

“Not at all.” Conrad, taking a seat in his big leather desk chair, met my eyes and grimaced. “That ordeal was my nephew’s doing, you know. I just want you to know I am aware of that. And I hope you know it for yourself, as well.” He snatched up a mint-waxed toothpick and pressed it between his teeth.

I nodded silently. We had already exceeded the duration of conversation I wished to have with my boss on this subject. Fortunately, Conrad was a man of few words, and he seemed quite finished with our chat as well.

“I’ll see you tomorrow. Thanks, Conrad. I appreciate your understanding.” I didn’t wait for a reply before I

swept myself out of the room.

“Fiona.” Alexander stood as I walked into our bedroom. He’d been sitting the edge of the bed with his head in his hands. “I’m so sorry, Fiona. I don’t actually believe any of those things that I said earlier, please believe me.”

I had been feeling exhausted all the way home, with the car ride lulling me almost to sleep, but my emotions were suddenly set ablaze again the moment I saw Alexander looking at me with forlorn puppy-dog eyes and launching into this pleading rant.

I interrupted him. “I just walked in the door,” I said quietly. “Can you just give me a moment?”

Alexander paced backward, looking like it was physically difficult for him to distance himself from me. I watched his chest rise and fall with heavy, anxious

breathing.

I put away my work things, eased my shoes off (my feet were killing me) and used the restroom. I found myself looking into the mirror as I patted my hands dry, trying to recognize my reflection. The dark look in my eyes made my own face appear foreign, making me realize that I had never felt before the emotions that I was feeling right now.

The ache in my heart was getting tangled up with a bunch of different, other kinds of pain. The primary one was an anger that was getting deeper and stronger with every second that I let myself keep thinking about it. My wolf warmed my blood, urging me to lash out at Alexander in rage.

And my wolf still desired him, too. The growing anger

was all mixed up with wanting him at the same time. It was very irritating.

I fixed my focus on remaining calm, splashed my face with cool water, patted it dry, and opened the door.

Alexander was pacing the room slowly. He turned to watch me as I turned off the bathroom light and made my way to the bed, where I tried to get comfortable sitting loosely cross-legged, resting my weight back against the headboard.

“I’m so sorry, Fiona,” Alexander said again, more softly than before.

I couldn’t even look at him.

“I need you to know that I did not mean any of those things. I wasn’t in my right mind. I was going crazy, Fiona.” Alexander made his way over to his side of

the bed and sat down at the edge. “It’s just that the way you had been acting —”

“You stop right there,” I snapped, letting a tiny sliver of my anger out. “What you did today is not my fault.”

Alexander’s mouth hung open. He rubbed it with his hand. “I didn’t mean to imply that it was. I just wanted to tell you why I lost it—”

“Stop,” I had to say again. “I don’t think I want to hear why you were thinking those things about me. Not right now. It’s just making it worse.”

I looked down, blinking away a couple tears that had started to swell up in my eyes. I hoped he didn’t notice. I didn’t want to give him the satisfaction of seeing me hurting again, knowing he had that kind of power over me. But as Alexander stumbled through this so-called apology, making excuses and blaming

me for his own monstrous behavior, it felt like that knife he'd sliced through me earlier was back in my chest, lodged firmly in my heart now, and twisting.

He scooted a little closer to me on the bed, saying, "I'm sorry, Fiona. That wasn't... the real me, I don't know how to explain it. I swear, I didn't mean any of it."

I didn't want to debase myself by scurrying away from him. I just wanted him to leave me alone. He held out an open hand, palm up.

"No," I said coolly, building a wall between us. "I'm not ready to let you touch me. Not yet."

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Chapter 72 Don't Wait Up

After our tense conversation, Alexander left me alone for a few hours. Some food arrived at the door minutes later, three single-serving dinner courses and an assortment of desserts that I was given to understand he had ordered for me. I begrudgingly admitted to myself that I appreciated the gesture. I had no interest in sharing a meal with Alexander tonight, but I did need to eat.

I had gotten myself comfortable under the covers and was almost at the edge of falling asleep when he returned to our room hours later. He changed his clothes quietly in the dark before creeping into bed, keeping his distance from me, and we went to sleep with a tense, uncomfortable silence between us.

I woke in the dark of early morning, sleepily enjoying a sensation of warmth and comfort. It took me a few seconds to realize that the side of my face was pressed flat against Alexander's bare chest, which was rising and falling slowly with his sleeping breath. I was curled up next to him, nestled into the crook of his arm, which was draped around my side.

Suddenly I was wide awake and highly motivated to separate myself from him immediately. I didn't want to wake him, though. I tried to slither away quietly, inch by inch, guiding his heavy arm down to the bed very slowly once it was off my body. A chill shivered its way across my skin as I freed myself from his touch.

Despite my best efforts, Alexander woke up, no doubt feeling my movements. He sat up, cleared his throat, then asked, "How are you feeling?" His voice was deep and gravelly with sleep.

I shrugged one shoulder and turned to sit on the edge of the bed, facing away from him. I was still working on swallowing down all the pain he inflicted upon me yesterday. I sighed. “Not great,” I answered simply. I tugged the gold chain on my bedside lamp to turn it on.

“Is there anything I can... do for you?”

I turned back and saw Alexander rubbing his eyes, squinting against the light. He was offering me sex, like a peace offering or something.

I turned back around before answering, “No thanks.”

“I can do whatever you want,” he continued sheepishly. “And I’ll leave you alone after. If that’s what you want. I just want to take care of you, if you’ll let me.”

I rolled my eyes at the wall. “Not yet,” I said to him for the second time now. I kept my voice calm and quiet, but firm enough to communicate that the conversation was over for now.

My morning meeting was well-attended. Conrad had been assigning more and more team members to my project each week, now that we had broken ground on our first construction site and were planning ahead for the rest of the expansion. We concluded our agenda on time and I was feeling good about our progress on the project as I walked back to my office afterward.

The mail delivery guy surprised me, rolling his cart out of my office as I approached the door. I could not remember another time that he had ever entered my office. I raised an eyebrow at him and asked, “Lots of mail for me today?”

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The young man grinned. “No, just a special delivery. I left it on your desk.” He pushed his cart forward, still smiling, and headed back toward the elevator.

The “special delivery” was on my desk, alright. In fact, it took up nearly the whole desk’s surface area. I was irritated immediately, having a quick vision of shoving it to the floor in one swift motion.

It was a big, clear glass vase containing what looked like at least two dozen long-stemmed red roses. The flowery smell overpowered my little office, making me want to hold my nose until I could get them out of there.

A red envelope was propped against the vase. My name was hand-written on the front in swooping, delicate cursive letters. I opened it, frowning.

“I know I can’t undo the pain I’ve caused,” the card inside read, the words scrawled in that same ornate lettering. “But I beg you: Please give me a chance to prove that I can do better. Have dinner with me tonight. Tell me what time and I will be there. Alexander.”

I put the card back into the envelope and threw it in the trash.

Down the hall, I knocked on the half-open door to Gerald’s office. He glanced away from his computer screen for only a second, fingers still moving on the keyboard, and said, “Oh, Fiona. Come in. Have a seat. Just one second.”

“That’s okay,” I said, waving dismissively at the chair he’d vaguely gestured to, and waited patiently near the door instead while he finished typing. I heard the whoosh sound of an email being sent, then finally Gerald gave me his attention.

“Sorry,” he said. “Just needed to get that done.”

“Not a problem. And I’m afraid I actually just came in here to ask you a personal favor. I’m so sorry to interrupt your work.”

“Oh, no that’s fine. What’s up?”

I frowned, glancing down the hall toward my office. “I need help throwing out something unwieldy.”

“Oh! Of course.” Gerald jumped up, eager to assist the pregnant lady.

“Wow. That’s a lot of flowers. And a powerful smell.” My helpful coworker approached my desk cautiously, like the roses might bite him or something.

“While I really appreciate the thought behind it,” I lied in a compulsory display of loyalty to my Alpha, “you’re not wrong about the smell. And I just don’t have room for them in here, either.”

“Well, hmm.” Gerald picked up the vase awkwardly, trying to find a way to hold it where the rose thorns wouldn’t keep catching on his nice shirt. “Where do you want me to take it?”

I shook my head, pacing backward out of the room. Gerald followed me into the hall. “Do you think that your wife would like them?” I asked cautiously. I had

observed that Gerald wore a thin platinum band on the second finger of his left hand, and had propped on his bookcase a framed picture of himself embracing a petite brunette woman.

“Really? You don’t want to keep them?”

I shrugged. “Not particularly. And why not? You don’t need to tell her they’re... re-gifted.” Gerald paused, looking thoughtfully at the gigantic arrangement of pristine, velvety red roses.

“Alright. Be a shame to let them go to waste.” Gerald returned my shrug with one of his own, thanked me needlessly, and went to find somewhere to store his wife’s flowers for the rest of the workday.

The smell in my office abated somewhat after the departure of the roses, but their aggressive perfume did linger. The windows up here on the eighty-ninth

floor didn't open. I had to try to return to work with the persistent aroma of Alexander's disappointingly superficial apology still hanging in the air.

The very notion that he believed an expensive gift could win me over, after he'd been so absolutely horrible to me, just made me feel even more disappointed with him.

And more than anything, I wished he would just leave me alone in my workplace. It was bad enough, the scene Alexander had caused in his jealous rage. Sending apology gifts here just kept putting our drama on display for everyone to see. And it made me feel like he didn't know me at all.

I texted Nina, asking what she was up to later and if she could meet for dinner.

She responded after a few minutes: I'm all yours

babe. How's 8pm?

Perfect, I replied.

That gave me time to work late at the office. Then I'd be returning to the palace after dark, avoiding as much time as I could with my fiancé. For my health's sake, I could not do that forever. But for just tonight, at the very least, I needed space from Alexander more than anything else.

I texted him next to let him know I was meeting Nina for dinner instead of him.

He replied: Okay...

The three dots irritated me. They seemed sassy.

Don't wait up, I added.

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Chapter 73 Worth A Try



Alexander

“We can’t kill him yet,” I told my uncle. “You know there’s more to the story than we’ve been able to uncover so far. We need to find out the whole truth before we can kill Fiona’s father. We need to know who else was involved first, before we make any moves.”

He leaned back and folded his arms over his chest. “Are you suggesting we capture him alive and

interrogate him?”

“No. You can’t expect an Alpha to break under torture, Conrad. Honestly. He would give us nothing, and we’d just have a big mess on our hands.”

My uncle was not always so irrational and impatient. But as much as I, myself, had grown more eager for revenge every day since I learned of my mother’s unexplainable death, so too had Uncle Conrad been growing increasingly anxious to avenge his sister. But we needed to be patient a little while longer.

“Then what?” Conrad asked, refilling first his own wine glass, then mine. “What do you propose we do?”

I’d met my uncle at his penthouse apartment for an early lunch. He was usually difficult to get away from the office during business hours, but I understood I was not welcome there while Fiona was present, and

Conrad and I had an urgent matter to discuss.

“We leave him alone,” I answered. “For now. While I identify and track down his accomplices.”

“And how are you going to do that, Alexander?”

Conrad raised an incredulous eyebrow. “We’ve spent years trying to find out who was behind it. He is the only lead we’ve come across.” He sipped his wine thoughtfully, then added, “Are you sure you don’t want to torture him? Could be worth a try.”

“Quite sure.” I gave my uncle a look of gentle reprimand.

“Well, do you have some new lead you’re not telling me about?” He squinted at me suspiciously.

“No,” I admitted, “but I will find one. Just give me a little more time. Consider this, Uncle: if we kill Fiona’s

father now, whoever else was involved may realize we're onto them. They could go into hiding. We cannot kill him until we know who else needs to be held accountable."

Conrad gazed out the window, swirling the wine in his glass absentmindedly. "I knew she was keeping something from me, towards the end. I should have tried harder to find out what was going on. But she never wanted to worry me with her troubles. I was the only family she had, and all she ever did was take care of me. Look out for me. Protect me."

I had heard versions of this speech many times over the years as Conrad and I spoke often of our mutual guilt and regret surrounding our absences at the time of my mother's murder. But this time, one part of my uncle's familiar story struck me with new significance.

"The only family she had," I repeated. Conrad

nodded, his gaze still fixed on the city view. “After your parents died,” I started, working out my thought while I spoke, “didn’t you and Mother go to stay with a distant relative? Before she turned eighteen and became your guardian?”

“The only family she had,” I repeated. Conrad nodded, his gaze still fixed on the city view. “After your parents died,” I started, working out my thought while I spoke, “didn’t you and Mother go to stay with a distant relative? Before she turned eighteen and became your guardian?”

Conrad blinked, returning to the present moment. “Hmm. Agatha.” He rubbed his eyes. “I forgot all about her. Why do you ask?”

“Did Mother keep in touch with Agatha after you two moved to the city?”

“If she did, I wasn’t aware of it. Though I suppose, thinking about it now, it would not surprise me if she did.” He rested his chin in his hand and narrowed his eyes, remembering. “Yes, Alexandra was very fond of the old woman. It would not surprise me if she sent money back to her in gratitude for taking us in, once we’d gotten on our feet.”

“Where did Agatha live? Do you still have the address?”

Conrad looked confused. “My boy, we are talking about a woman who was elderly when I was a teenager. I highly doubt she is still alive.”

I shrugged. “It’s worth a try.”

“You are I are going to take a little trip tonight,” I told my beta.

Kayden raised a questioning eyebrow. “What about the Mrs.?”

“Fiona is going to be home late.”

“Ah. Working late?” The question wasn’t meant to be probing, just conversational.

But I had to shake my head and admit, “No. She’s having dinner with her friend. Pretty sure she doesn’t want to see me right now.”

Kayden cocked his head to the side. “Hm,” he said, pressing his lips together. He couldn’t resist, though, and came out with the smile, asking, “What’d you do?”

“I’ll tell you about it on the road. Let’s get going. We’ve got a couple hours’ drive out there and the same coming back.”

Kayden nodded, now jogging to keep pace with my quickened stride, catching on to my serious mood. I unlocked my luxury SUV and tossed him the keys, then made myself comfortable in the backseat.

Afternoon dimmed to evening as Kayden and I traveled past the palace district and up the highway until it ended. We wound up on a lonely two-lane road for the last and longest leg of the journey, following the road down a steep mountain pass and out into a remote, sparsely populated stretch of farmland.

“Well, you were bound to screw it up somehow,” Kayden said, once I finished recounting the tale of my fight with Fiona’s ex and the unfortunate events that followed.

“Thank you for that.”

Kayden shrugged, leaned back and met my eyes in the rearview mirror, smiling. "It's true." Then he gave up the mockery and added, sincerely, "But I am sorry to hear it. You know, I never thought I'd say something like this, and least of all to you. But honestly, you and Fiona are kind of a great couple. I mean, I can't imagine another woman that could keep you interested like this." He returned his eyes to the road, which seemed to stretch forward ahead of us endlessly into a blank horizon.

My friend was not wrong about Fiona and me being a good match. When I claimed her, I could never have imagined how well she would fit into my life.

"And now she hates me," I mumbled under my breath, more to myself than to Kayden.

He sighed. “Either way, I doubt she’ll leave you.”

He was right again. To a degree. Fiona was too rational to leave me while she was pregnant; she’d risk dying without my touch to keep our cub strong. But after the child was born, that was a different question. The possibility of a future with Fiona, beyond the next few months – that’s what I feared I had just let slip through my fingers.

We drove on in silence for a while. Then, just as the sun was gleaming copper right above the horizon, threatening to vanish at any moment, I spied it: a small structure appeared in the distance as we rounded the top of a hill. Then another structure just beyond it, and another. As we neared, I discerned that the three buildings were a small house, a small barn, and a stable.

Kayden slowed the SUV gradually on the gravel road,

making our arrival as slow and non-threatening as possible, just in case the inhabitants of this isolated place disliked unannounced visitors. He rolled to a stop near a rusty old pickup truck parked beside the barn.

I saw the woman, and the flock of sheep that had been following her through the field, as Kayden and I stepped out of the SUV. Her body was thin, her face tanned and deeply wrinkled. She held a shepherd's crook in one hand and a gnarled wood cane in the other. The sounds of the car doors thudding closed behind us felt rudely disruptive, and stunned the sheep into frozen silence.

The old woman was at least fifty feet away, but the air was clear and still, and briefly extra-bright with the last blinding shards of copper sunlight shining directly at us across the plain. We locked eyes across the distance, and an expression fell over her face that

indicated, undeniably, that she recognized me.

My heart started racing. This had to be Agatha. She was alive after all.

I felt deep in my gut that I was finally on the right track. I had found the lead I'd been searching for. I was finally going to solve the mystery of my mother's murder.

And once I did, I could finally avenge her.

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Chapter 74 A Total Stranger



Fiona

“Can I fight him? Please?” Nina was brandishing a forkful of chicken-fried steak in front of her like it was a weapon.

“Truthfully, Nina?” I looked her up and down, as if considering how well she’d match up against Alexander in a fight. “I don’t think that you could.”

She rolled her eyes. Silver sparkles on her eyelids cast tiny rainbows all around every time she moved, catching and refracting the diner’s bright fluorescent lights. “Okay, you may be right about that. But I’d still love to give it a try. Even if I could get just a couple blows in.” She whipped her free hand back into a fist behind her head, as if about to throw a punch. A hint of a growl vibrated from her throat.

“Thanks, Nina, but you don’t need to sacrifice yourself

for my honor.”

She shook her head, swallowed a mouthful of meat, and then asked in an urgent whisper, “Do you want to stay with him after this, Fiona? Do you want to keep living with him there at the palace?”

I pushed the food on my plate around with my fork. “What choice do I really have, at least while I’m pregnant? And where would I even go, hmm? It’s not like I could move back in with my parents.”

Nina shrugged. “I’d help you figure something out. But I get it. It’s just that as your best friend, it’s my job to tell you this right now: you deserve better, Fiona. That’s the truth and don’t you forget it.”

“I just need to get through the next couple months. He plans to divorce me anyway, as soon as the baby is born.”

“Are you sure he still wants that?” Nina arched one of her perfect eyebrows.

Her question caught me by surprise. “What?”

“Are you sure he’s still planning to divorce you?” she repeated.

“Why wouldn’t he?”

She shrugged one shoulder. “What do you think the flowers were about, then?”

I was not following whatever point she was trying to make. “I don’t know. He’s trying to convince me to forgive him? To stop being mad? Why, what do you think they mean?”

Nina frowned. “When you hear the whole story the

way you just told it to me, one thing seems really clear.” She paused, studying my face. I suppose waiting to see if I knew the answer. I did not. “He’s crazy about you.” She said these four words slowly, like she was teaching me a phrase in a foreign language.

I felt my cheeks flush warm. “I don’t know about that,” I muttered dismissively.

“It’s not an excuse for him being a monster. But it is what’s happening, whether or not you—or he—want to admit it.”

I spent several hours with Nina at the diner, talking and eating until she succeeded in lightening my mood. Our bedroom was dark when I returned to the palace, and Alexander was nowhere to be seen.

I took advantage of the solitude he was allowing me

and soaked a long while in a warm, lavender-scented bath. I readied for bed and curled up with a book I wanted to start reading, but sleep overtook me as soon as my body was horizontal.

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Alexander's return startled me awake not long after that, though. If the sounds of his clumsy entrance hadn't woken me, the atrocious smell he brought in with him would have. It filled the room as soon as he stepped inside. He smelled like a farm. Like a combination of animal manure, rusty metal and damp wool. His long golden hair was windblown, looking tangled and wild.

His energy was strange, too. He hurried inside and closed himself in the bathroom quickly. The shower turned on a beat later, confirming he was aware of how badly he smelled. But in the few moments it took Alexander to cross the room in the dark, I could have sworn I heard the hammering sound of his heart beating wildly against his ribcage, pounding hard with some intense emotion.

I shifted under the covers and put a pillow over my face to try to escape the unpleasant smell Alexander had dragged in, but it didn't work. I had to get out of bed and go open a window so that the ripe smell could start airing out.

The bathroom door opened just as I finally managed to get myself comfortably settled in bed once again. Fragrant steam came pouring out of the doorway, at last diluting the unfortunate aroma, filling the room with floral and pine scents instead.

I closed my eyes, willing Alexander to leave me alone.

But he turned the bathroom light off, paced directly over to the bed naked and climbed under the covers. I felt his body heat diffusing under the sheets. A shiver ran through my body as it started warming up to a more comfortable temperature.

“Fiona.” Alexander’s voice was a tense whisper.

I sighed. “What?”

“Please. Can I hold you?”

I could hardly contain my irritation. “No. I just want to go to sleep.”

Alexander’s weight shifted. His heart was still racing – I could hear it. “Please,” he continued. “I just want to

make you feel good. I'll do whatever you want. I'll do anything for you. Just tell me what to do and I'll do it. Please."

Was he drunk? He didn't smell of alcohol, but his behavior was so strange, I couldn't think of another way to explain it. And where in the world had he been tonight?

Whatever was going on with Alexander, I didn't like it. The strange smell, the odd demeanor, the overly excited state. It was all unsettling.

He suddenly felt like a total stranger to me.

I told him to leave me alone.

Birdsong and the first light of dawn peeking in through

the open window were a relief. I hardly slept at all through the night, but was forcing myself to stay in bed, resting my body, for as long as I could tolerate. Alexander had been awake all night, tossing and turning in bed anxiously, keeping me sleepless as well.

It was the weekend, and usually I would be all for spending a lazy morning snoozing under a warm blanket, especially after a hellish week like the one I'd had. But after spending the night patiently lying beside someone I was furious with, I just wanted to get away from him now that the light of day allowed me to do so.

Alexander was up by the time I got out of the shower. He'd opened the curtains and was standing at the window, gazing outside and sipping a glass of water.

"Hey," he said quietly, looking at me with a defeated

expression.

“Morning.” I made my way to my dressing room and started rifling through my clothes. I’d decided overnight that I was going to go see my grandfather this morning. I was overdue to pay him a visit, and spending time with someone who made me feel good about myself was something I needed right now, too.

The awful things Alexander said to me in my office were not just cruel. They were extra hurtful because they were so much like what my father had been saying to me. It was bad enough to hear my own father tell me I was a whore. But then Alexander went and hurt me with the same terrible insult.

And I had only just finished telling my father that my fiancé was a better man than he was. So much for that idea. Maybe the two men were more alike than I could have imagined. They were both willing to

degrade and demean a woman they once claimed to care about. If nothing else, they had that in common.

I pulled a dress from the back of the closet that looked like it would fit. It was pale peach, lightweight and drapey, floor-length with side slits that came up to just the knee. I selected matching earrings next and made my way back to the bedroom.

Alexander eyed my ensemble with curiosity. “Going somewhere?” he asked, glancing at the clock.

“Yes. The nursing home. It’s been too long since I’ve seen Grandfather.” I sat at the foot of the bed and swept my hair over one shoulder, then started tying it into a side braid.

He nodded. “I’d love to come with you, if that’s alright. Can I?”

I finished tying up the end of my braid and looked him square in the eye before answering, “No, thanks. I’d rather go alone.”

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Chapter 75 We Have To Find Her



Alexander

“I’m worried about Fiona. She didn’t look well this morning.” I wiped my brow with the back of my wrist, slicking off a film of sweat.

Kayden jumped neatly over a fallen log, landing his lead foot in a puddle. We both got doused in mud.

“Yeah? How so?”

“She looked pale. Had dark circles under her eyes. And I don’t know if I’m imagining this, but she looked thin, too. Like she lost weight over the past few days. It’s not good for her or the baby, the distance she’s keeping between us.”

“Still won’t let you near her, huh?”

“It’s not like I don’t understand. But she’s punishing herself more than she’s punishing me.” We slowed our pace as we neared the end of the trail we were running. I took a long, deep breath, relishing the tastes and smells of the damp forest air.

“You going to get to see her later today?” Kayden asked. We turned our bodies in unison and started running back in the direction from which we came. “What’s she doing after she goes to see her

grandfather?”

“I don’t know. Talking to her lately, it’s like trying to bleed a stone. She’ll answer when I speak to her, but only in as few words as possible.”

My beta fell quiet a minute, apparently fresh out of assurances on the topic of Fiona. It was just as well. It didn’t seem like there was really anything I could do to break through my fiancée’s cold anger with me. And obsessing over our fight and begging her for forgiveness only seemed to be making things worse.

Kayden changed the subject. “I know I don’t need to ask if you’ve thought more about what we learned last night.”

My heartrate spiked and my temperature rose. All thoughts of Fiona fled from my mind, chased away by the whirlwind of my other obsession. “I didn’t sleep a

single second last night, thinking about it.”

“Figured as much.” Kayden turned his head away and spat into the dirt. “Can’t say I was surprised, Alex. What are you gonna do?” He wasn’t asking for a battleplan, just wondering where my head was at.

“Well, I am going to kill her,” I said flatly. It felt good to say it aloud. “But not until the time is right. As for what to do next, I need to talk to my uncle and get him up to speed before anything else.”

I had lain awake all night mulling everything over and playing out scenarios in my mind. Planning for how to hold my mother’s murderer accountable for her atrocious crime, now that I had a suspect in my sights, one with the motive, means and opportunity to mastermind the entire plot.

Every scenario I played out for taking revenge on this

suspect, though, was likely to end very badly for me.

Every scenario I played out for taking revenge on this suspect, though, was likely to end very badly for me.

I looked at the yellowing envelope in my hand. My mother mailed this letter to her relative just before she started getting sick. About a month before she died.

“Here.” I handed it to my uncle, who pulled the folded paper out from within the envelope slowly, as if he were afraid it would crumble under his touch. He read it silently, holding his chin in one hand.

In the letter, my mother revealed a secret of my father’s.

The King had a mistress, the letter said. One that he moved into the palace, and who my mother feared was becoming obsessive, and maybe even

dangerous. In fact, the mistress had threatened my mother – indirectly – more than once. Mother didn't state the woman's name, but she described her. It was immediately clear to me who it was.

It was the woman my father married only weeks after putting his first Luna in the ground.

My stepmother, Scarlet.

I could only have guessed, before, that my father had likely bedded Scarlet before marrying her, and perhaps before my mother died. But I knew nothing for certain. And I was quite surprised to learn that Scarlet had moved into the palace while my mother, the Queen, was still alive.

It made me sick, thinking about my father doing such a thing.

Conrad finished reading the letter and set it on the table. He stood and crossed the room, retrieving a pack of cigarettes. “After all these years...” He coughed out a cheerless, self-deprecating laugh. “Alexandra’s killer was right under our noses the whole time.” He propped a cigarette between his lips and headed over to the balcony. I followed him.

Once outside, my uncle lit his cigarette and took a big drag. Blew out a white stack of smoke that dissipated into the blue sky. “I can’t believe the old woman is still alive,” he mused. “Was she alone out there?”

“Yes.” After considering a moment longer, though, I added, “As far as I could tell.”

“Hm.” Conrad was still processing all the information he’d just received.

“And you were right, Mother did send money back

after you two moved away. Not just once, but many times over the years. All of the letters came with cash inside.”

“And what did she have to say about all this? Agatha?”

I frowned. “She was concerned when she received the letter, of course. But it was not long after that she heard of Mother’s death. She considered going to the King with the information, but she was afraid he may have been involved.”

Conrad raised his eyebrows. “And what do you think about that?”

“I honestly don’t know. Either way, he is complicit and culpable, even if indirectly.”

I sincerely hoped my father was not directly involved in the plot to kill my mother. Because needing to kill the reigning Alpha King was a burden I did not wish to take on.

“Let me make some phone calls, nephew.” Conrad narrowed his eyes thoughtfully. “I have an idea. But let me chase it down first. I’ll let you know if anything pans out.”

I hadn’t even made it back to the palace by the time Conrad called with an update. I pulled off the highway and parked.

“I think there may be a witness,” my uncle said, his voice urgent. “Your mother had a maid who began to serve also as her caretaker when she became ill. Apparently, the maid had raised concerns that the Queen may have been poisoned, and even claimed to

have seen someone slipping a substance into Alexandra's drink."

My heart started pounding in my chest.

"Iris." I knew exactly who Conrad was talking about. I had no idea, though, that the maid had witnessed any such events in my mother's last days.

"You're familiar with her?"

"I am." I remembered my mother's maid very well, in fact. My mother was very fond of the girl, who I recalled was about my same age, maybe just a year my senior. "But where is she? I never heard another mention of Iris again, after I returned from the war."

Conrad sighed. "I'm afraid I've told you everything I know, Alexander. I am not even sure if the girl is still alive. But I said that about the old woman, too, and

you tracked her down.”

I turned this new information over in my mind. Iris witnessed someone poisoning my mother. It had to have been either Scarlet herself, or someone my stepmother had been using to do her bidding.

This was huge. This was everything.

I told my uncle, “We have to find her.”

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