

THE ALPHA KING CALL BOY

Chapter 86 Goodbye

Fiona

Sunday morning brought with it a feeling of dread.

It was hard to ignore the reality that Alexander would be walking out of the palace with me the following morning, heading off for the airport while I went to work. Especially since the itineraries that Kayden had just sent me for their travel plans did not include a return flight.

The idea, Alexander told me, was to spend one day traveling and one to two days searching for this witness he and Kayden were attempting to track down. Then there was the return trip to add onto the back end. If they were successful early, they would

return early. Should they have less luck, they'd be coming back on Thursday whether or not they had the witness with them.

"I will update you every chance I get," he told me. But I knew the area of the country he was traveling to was not liable to have cell reception in just about any part of it, and it was more likely I would not hear from him until he'd touched down at the city airport on a return flight.

My rational mind determined to disregard the possibility of an early return. It was easier to just assume Alexander would be gone all week, and make my plans accordingly.

I had woken up before him on Sunday and found myself lying in bed a while, thinking deeply and watching the regular rise and fall of his chest.

He was asleep on his back and I was curled up beside him. One of his big, strong arms laid heavily atop my leg, his sleeping fingers curled around the inside of my knee. I let my cheek fall against his shoulder, breathing in the scent of him and wishing dreamily that he wouldn't do this. Wouldn't take this long and maybe even ill-advised trip, and leave me here alone all week.

I knew it was important to him, though.

The story he had shared with me about his mother's death possibly having been an assassination was troubling indeed. Alexander was searching out the truth about something terrible that had been huge in his life. I could see that this was something he needed to do. Especially knowing everything that Kayden had told me about the impact his mother's death had on Alexander when they were away at war.

Alexander stirred, and I realized I had woken him up. I'd been lost in thought and was not fully conscious of the fact that my eyelashes were batting against his skin every time I blinked, tickling him awake.

His hand squeezed my leg softly as he came to, and then turned to look at me with sleepy eyes.

"Morning, gorgeous," he said, his lips curling into a little smile.

I pressed my lips to his shoulder. "Morning."

Alexander reached over with his other hand and stroked my hair, his fingers combing through it gently.

"How are you feeling today?"

"Good." That was the truth about my physical condition. "How about you?"

His smile drifted up one side of his mouth. "I'm great," he said. "Come here."

He shifted his weight, rolling onto his side. I adjusted my head up onto the pillow, having lost his shoulder for a headrest, and then let him pull me very close to his body.

He kissed the top of my head, then buried his nose in my hair and remained there, breathing deeply.

It felt more than good, everything about that moment.

But then the dread crept in, mixed itself up with the good feeling, and left it tinged blue.

Alexander

Fiona's alarm went off at five a.m. on Monday morning, a soft windchime sound that woke us both

easily. We'd hardly slept, but I wasn't tired and it did not look like she was, either.

I'd asked her, the day before, what she wanted to do, and we made some plans. The only one we wound up sticking to was me making her breakfast.

After that we laid down for a nap. And then the other ideas for how to spend the afternoon and evening went forgotten. Fiona soaked in a bubble bath in the evening, and I used the break to take a walk with Kayden and go over our plans one last time. Then I brought dinner back to the room and we ate in bed. And stayed in bed.

My waking thought upon rousing to the windchimes was a strong temptation to laze there a little longer still. But Fiona didn't give me the opportunity.

She got out of bed swiftly and began her methodical

morning routine, same as she did every workday. I didn't disturb her. I let her do her thing and swapped into the bathroom for a shower when she disappeared into her dressing room.

I'd packed for the trip days ahead of time while she was at work, just to be done with it and ready. My bag was in my office. I dressed, then went and got it out. I was shrugging on my jacket when Fiona came back into the room, her hands on her ears as she hooked in a pair of dangly gold earrings.

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"Well, I guess this is it," she said, walking toward me

end frowning.

I sighed. "I'm sorry about this, Fione."

She shook her head, losing the frown in the process.

"I know. And I do understand. I know this matters to you a lot."

We walked together in silence out to the parking lot where both our rides were waiting.

Keyden had the engine of my SUV running, and was waiting in the driver's seat. Fione's car was idling at the curb. Her driver hopped out when he saw us approaching, hurried around and began to open the back door for her. I gave the man a curt shake of my head to send him away.

Fione turned to me, pressed her hands to my chest and looked up. My hands fell to her waist.

“Travel safely,” she said, “and come back to me soon.” She kept her pale blue eyes on mine, her gaze penetrating, and slid her hands up my chest softly. Then she fidgeted with the collar of my shirt, pressing it straight, before her hands came to rest at the base of my neck.

I wanted so badly to lean in and kiss her lips.

But that was still against the rules.

I kissed her neck instead, making her head go limp and fall to the other side. I heard a little rush of air escape her mouth as I slid my lips up and down her soft, fragrant skin. Her scent was like lavender, but sweeter. Her cool hands slid across the back of my neck and sent a tingle down my spine.

I had to pull away. Fione could get me started quickly

with e touch like thet.

As we pulled apert, though, I elmost slipped. Almost mede e big misteke. My mouth drifted up end over, drewn towerds her perted lips. For e split second, I could heve sworn she wented it, too. A reel kiss.

But I'd hed thet thought before, end I'd elways been wrong.

I ceught myself end plented e little kiss on her foreheed instead, end then took e step beck.

“Oh, I heve something for you,” she seid then, es if recelling en efterthought, end reeched into her purse.

Out ceme e smell, flet, white box. She hended it to me.

“Don't open it now. Leter.” She took e step closer to

her cer.

I opened the door for her, helped her in and told her, "I'll see you soon."

She looked up at me with a tight, sad smile that I took to mean goodbye.

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I had to pull away. Fiona could get me started quickly with a touch like that.

As we pulled apart, though, I almost slipped. Almost made a big mistake. My mouth drifted up and over, drawn towards her parted lips. For a split second, I could have sworn she wanted it, too. A real kiss.

But I'd had that thought before, and I'd always been wrong.

I caught myself and planted a little kiss on her forehead instead, and then took a step back.

“Oh, I have something for you,” she said then, as if recalling an afterthought, and reached into her purse.

Out came a small, flat, white box. She handed it to me.

“Don’t open it now. Later.” She took a step closer to her car.

I opened the door for her, helped her in and told her, “I’ll see you soon.”

She looked up at me with a tight, sad smile that I took to mean goodbye.

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and frowning.

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But I'd had that thought bafora, and I'd always baan wrong.

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“Don't opan it now. Latar.” Sha took a stap closar to

har car.

I opanad tha door for har, halpad har in and told har, “I’ll saa you soon.”

Sha lookad up at ma with a tight, sad smila that I took to maan goodbya.

If you find any errors (broken links, non-standard content, etc..), Please let us know < report chapter > so we can fix it as soon as possible.

[THE ALPHA KING CALL BOY](#)

Chapter 87 The Moors



The plane ride was the fastest but least comfortable part of the trip out to the moors.

The flight was eight hours, nothing too dramatic, but I

simply cannot stand to full height inside of an airplane. It was a relief to finally straighten my spine all the way when we disembarked.

The overnight train was another story. Kayden and I had reserved a two-bedroom sleeper car with a private bathroom. We boarded after nightfall, and it appeared either the train was mostly empty, or all the other riders had already tucked in for the night.

We spent our first hour in the dining car eating steaks and drinking wine, but it didn't take long for the lulling sounds of the train chugging along the tracks and the effect of the day's travel to have us both ready to crash.

Kayden was closed into his room and I'd just laid my head on the pillow when I remembered Fiona's gift. The white box she gave me in the morning with the enigmatic bidding to open it "later."

I retrieved the box and brought it back to my bed, sat and lifted the lid.

Inside was a card. My name was printed on the outside in Fiona's tidy lettering. I picked it up, found that underneath was a pale blue neck scarf, a soft and semi-sheer one that I'd seen her wear a few times. She had folded it into a very neat little square.

I pressed it to my nose and breathed in the faint but distinct scent of Fiona. My head dropped back against the wall and my eyes closed with the first whiff. It was an unexpected comfort, one I didn't know I needed until it was there in my hand.

I tossed the box aside and slid down under the covers with the scarf and the card, which I read with my head on the pillow.

The note was short and sweet. A message of good luck and a reminder to hurry home. When I finished reading it, I brought the card to my lips and kissed it before I could think of what an oddly sentimental thing that was to do.

I blamed the wine.

When morning arrived with an aggressive blast of yellow sunlight through the train windows, the spectacular landscape outside suddenly became visible.

It was like nothing I'd ever seen before. A picture of oblivion.

The sky was a real presence here, unlike in the city where it only hovered over the top of everything. It was bigger here, somehow. Expansive, all-consuming, deepest blue and teeming with infinite

depths of clouds.

The earth was undulating, hillside after hillside, lush with flora in every shade of every color imaginable. I began to understand, for the first time, why Iris had wanted to see this.

We got off the train at our destination, taking our belongings with us since we would be catching a different one in the evening. From the station, we took a local bus into the nearby town, where I wasted no time beginning my interviews.

We found lunch, tea, and more beautiful sights in the town, but not much in the way of information.

A dairy shop proprietor proved the most helpful. She knew nothing of Iris, but indicated that at a small farmstead a few miles out, there lived a family that had resided in the moors for countless generations,

and whose patriarch was widely considered the town historian.

We followed the milk merchant's directions and made a short, rather beautiful hike, then stumbled upon the farm in question rather suddenly when the whole of it came into view below us as we crested a hill.

There was a woman not fifty yards from us, partway down the hill, hanging damp laundry on a line.

Kayden and I were surprised to see her, but it appeared she'd noticed our approach. Her eyes were already fixed firmly on us by the time we noticed her.

I waved, trying for a friendly gesture. The woman acknowledged me with a very slight movement of her head, but said nothing, continuing her laundry as though it were perfectly uninteresting to see two strange men approaching her remote homestead.

We started toward the woman slowly, and when we were close enough to earshot that I didn't have to yell, I introduced myself and Kayden and asked the woman if I could have a minute of her time.

She nodded, a little more intentionally this time, but kept her lips pressed closed and her eyes on her task.

"We're looking for someone," I told her. "I wonder if you or anyone in your family may be able to help us find her. I knew her by the name Iris. She would have moved out here around ten years ago."

The woman frowned. "Don't know any Iris," she said, still not looking at me. "Folks that live on the moors, lived here their whole lives. Not a place to move to."

She pulled a long white sheet from the basket, shook it out and let the wind catch it from the bottom. The force of the air lifted the sheet up and over the line

gracefully, and the woman swiftly clamped it into place with a couple of wooden pins. It was nothing to her, something she'd done a million times and would do a million more, but struck me as remarkable, a kind of seamless cooperation with nature that I respected.

“Could I describe her to you?” I asked. “She may have begun to use a different name since I knew her.”

The woman didn't answer. She just fished a pair of long woolen socks from the bottom of the basket and hung them on the line. Then she turned, squinting against the yellow sunlight, and gave me and Kayden each a couple seconds of long, hard stare.

“Your train won't come till sunset,” she said at last. Then she turned around, wedged the woven basket between her hip and elbow, and began to waddle away in the direction of a cottage at the bottom of the

hill.

Kayden and I turned to each other, befuddled.

Then the woman wheeled around. “What you waiting for?” she called up at us. Then she shook her head and resumed her route.

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Then the women wheeled around. “What you waiting for?” she called up at us. Then she shook her head and resumed her route.

Supposing we were to follow, we hoofed it downhill after her.

The cottage was somehow both dust-coated and tidy. An older man was seated in a rocking chair in a corner, smoking a pipe. As much as our arrival had strangely not surprised the women, the men likewise seemed unfazed, only sliding his eyes sideways to watch as Keyden and I stepped over the threshold into their tiny home.

The women pulled two chairs back from a rectangular table, then shuffled off into the small kitchen, depositing her basket on a countertop as she went. Immediately she filled a teapot with water and placed it on the stove.

I introduced myself to the men as Keyden and I peddled forward. He gave a nod, then a grunt. Then looked expectantly at the table and chairs.

We set. Then we waited patiently for the women to finish fixing the tea. That seemed to be the piece of things here.

Finally the women said, bringing the steaming mugs to us on a tray that also held a saucer of milk and a pot of honey, "John, these men are looking for someone."

I repeated in the men's direction the same facts I'd given to her already: Iris's name, how long it had been since she may have arrived in the moors. Then I proceeded with the description, the best I could come up with. "She would be thirty now. Short, with a small frame and medium brown hair. A soft-spoken and gentle person."

"What do you want with these women?" the men asked in a gruff voice. He rose from his chair. His back was

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She disappeared again as quickly as she appeared.

“Would you excuse me for a moment?” I asked, sliding my chair back from the table.

I didn't wait for or expect a reply from either the men or the women. They were clearly not sticklers for polite formalities.

When I made it out the front door, I looked in the direction that the little girl had seemed to be headed.

She was standing near the walking path with the bucket in hand, waiting.

Once she saw me, and saw me see her, she took off again.

I followed.

Supposing we were to follow, we hoofed it downhill after her.

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“What do you want with this woman?” the man asked in a gruff voice. He rose from his chair. His back was angled sideways, but still he reached an impressive height, even with the slant.

“I know her from childhood.” It was a broadly true statement. “And I need her help with something back home.”

The man grunted. “I don’t know no one that looks like what you’re describing. Not ten years ago, not today.” He emptied his pipe ashes into the fireplace, then returned to his chair.

Across the room I spied a flash of red.

The woman was occupied at the kitchen stove, now tending a giant pot leaking fragrant steam, and John was situating himself back into the rocker. Neither noticed the little red-haired girl as she popped her

head inside a back door, snatched up a metal pail, and locked eyes with me.

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Tha cottaga was somahow both dust-coatad and tidy. An oldar man was saatad in a rocking chair in a cornar, smoking a pipa. As much as our arrival had strangaly not surprisad tha woman, tha man likawisa saamad unfazad, only sliding his ayas sideways to watch as Kaydan and I stappad ovar tha thrashold into thair tiny homa.

Tha woman pullad two chairs back from a ractangular tabla, than shufflad off into tha small kitchan, dapositing har baskat on a countartop as sha want. Immadiatally sha fillad a taapot with watar and placad it on tha stova.

I introducad mysalf to tha man as Kaydan and I paddad forward. Ha gava a nod, than a grunt. Than lookad axpactantly at tha tabla and chairs.

Wa sat. Than wa waitad patiently for tha woman to finish fixing tha taa. That saamad to ba tha paca of things hara.

Finally tha woman said, bringing tha staaming mugs to us on a tray that also hald a saucar of milk and a pot of honay, “John, thasa man ara lookin for somaona.”

I rapaatad in tha man’s diraction tha sama facts I’d givan to har alraady: Iris’s nama, how long it had baan sinca sha may hava arrivad in tha moors. Than I procaadad with a dascription, tha bast I could coma up with. “Sha would ba thirty now. Short, with a small frama and madium brown hair. A soft-spokan and

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THE ALPHA KING CALL BOY

Chapter 88 The Scenic Route



When I caught up with the little girl on the other side of a low hill, she was lowering her bucket down into a water well. A passing wind caught her twin braids and carried them forward over her shoulders. Wisps of rogue orange curls floated around her head, catching the yellow light in a kind of halo.

“The lady you are looking for,” she said as I approached. “Is she in trouble?” Her narrow eyes were fixed on the rope as she slacked it loose with tiny but skilled and careful hands.

Distantly, I heard the pail splash down and go underwater; she switched her grip, pressed one foot against the base of the stone wellhead for leverage, and started hauling the bucket surface-bound.

I shook my head, saw her eyes flick up to watch my reaction. “Not with me,” I answered. “I’m a friend.”

I considered my audience, deemed the little girl worthy of unguarded candor.

“I’m looking for her because I need her help with something. It’s something very, very important to me. Something I think she would care about, too. And if she is in any trouble with anyone else, I would do

anything I could to try to keep her safe.”

The girl was just as nonreactive as her adult relatives. Once the bucket, splashing at the sides, rose into view, she crouched to fasten the rope to the wellhead, spooling it tidily and tying an expert slipknot. She retrieved her bucket and set it on the grass between us.

Then she stood and looked me over critically. Searching my face, apparently evaluating my sincerity and trustworthiness.

She must have ruled I was not a threat, because when she bent to pick up the bucket again – the water had settled and was still – she said to the ground, “The lady stays down by the water.”

“By the water?” I repeated.

“Mm-hmm. With her cousin.”

I kept control of my face, which wanted to flash into an expression of surprise.

“Do you know her cousin’s name?”

“Um.” The girl straightened up, gripping the pail’s handle with one hand and steadying it with the other. She squinted at the ground like she was trying to remember.

Just then the sound of the cottage door creaking open on rusty hinges sounded from over the hill. The girl whipped her head around to look in that direction.

“I got to go,” she said. “I think the cousin is called Terry, maybe. The mean lady. With the fishes.”

The girl scampered back to the walking path and I

watched her grow smaller quickly as she hurried away. Her footsteps looked clumsy on the uneven terrain, but her bucket remained steady in her tough little hands.

I walked behind at a slower pace and watched the girl disappear into the cottage by way of the back door, just as Kayden came strolling out the front.

I ran a hand through my wind-tousled hair, combing out a few tangles.

I wished I could have asked the girl a couple more questions. But I certainly did not want to get her into trouble.

If the others here knew where Iris was, and wanted to keep her hidden from inquisitive interlopers, I was quite sure their intention was pure, borne of caution for her safety.

And maybe Kayden and I were not the first strangers to have shown up at their door asking about her.

Fiona

I sighed, eyes closed, and leaned back in the leather recliner. “This is the life, Nina. Thank you for bringing me here.”

“Well,” she said, “I bet it still doesn’t quite compare to the pampering you’ve been getting from your fiancé.”

I flashed Nina a “don’t-you-dare” look. The spa employees at our feet, hard at work on our pedicures, certainly heard us but gratefully did not react.

Nina grinned mischievously, but then granted me the favor of changing the subject.

“I’ve been coming here once a week lately, usually with a few other girls from work. These ladies are the best of the best. I mean, come on. This is true artistry.”

She held her freshly polished fingers out in front of her, admiring the glossy hot pink polish that exactly matched her current hair color. A piece of heart-shaped gold foil was pressed carefully into the center of each nail.

The two manicurists, still not looking up from their work, both smiled shyly.

Once our treatments were, sadly, all finished, Nina insisted on paying for the both of us and drove me back to the palace in her Benz.

Finally we were going to have some privacy. I’d been dying to consult with my best friend, the only person

in the world I could confide in, about what was happening between Alexander and my father.

“Can we take the long way?” I asked her as we got into the car. “The scenic route?”

“Sounds great.” She smiled, but then looked over at me and immediately caught on to my now serious mood.

She waited till we were out of the spa parking lot before she asked, “So, what’s up?”

“Ugh.” I was deciding where to start. “I need to tell you a long story.”

Nina let out a low whistle when I finished telling her everything about Alexander’s mother’s death, his intent to solve her murder, his threat against my father long ago, and my recent suspicion of my father’s

involvement in the assassination.

“That,” she said, “is a lot.”

“I’m pretty sure that’s exactly what I said to Alexander when he told me.”

“And he just... told you outright that he wanted to kill your father?”

“It was more like a vague, hypothetical kind of comment. But yes, what he meant was pretty clear. Whether it’s about the Queen’s death or something else, the two of them for sure have some sort of unfinished business. At least, in Alexander’s view. I don’t know if my father is even aware that Alexander has it out for him.”

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"Deng." Nine shook her head thoughtfully. Then she bit her lip, like she was keeping back from voicing something that had just occurred to her.

"I feel like the safest thing for me to do," I said, "is just try to keep myself out of it so that I don't wind up in the middle. I'm glad that I know. I'm grateful that Alexander told me about what he's up to. But at the same time, I also kind of regret that I know anything about it at all."

Nine sighed, then asked, "When are you guys gonna get married?"

It caught me off guard. "We haven't really talked about it."

She nodded, frowning. “Well, I know you need to marry him for the merking ceremony enyway. But now, I think, you’ve got enother incentive to get it done esep.”

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“Spousel privilege,” she continued.

Her eyes derted over et me, looked concerned. Then returned to the roed.

“Listen, I’m inclined to believe that Alexender trusts you. I reelly, reelly think he ceres about you sincerely, Fi. But it couldn’t hurt to heve him know that you not only wouldn’t, but also couldn’t, testify egeinst him, if end when he does this thing that he went end blebbed about wenting to do.”

My pulse increased as I started to understand what Nine was saying and why she was saying it.

She was thinking about the possibility of Alexander becoming hostile with me when he realized I could be a witness against him in a murder trial.

I shook my head in silence. The idea made me very sad and unreasonably angry with my friend for even saying it.

Nine didn't say another word on the subject, and never brought it up again.

Returning to our bedroom, I found it cold and dark, just as expected. Just like the night before.

I didn't like sleeping here without Alexander. For one thing, the silk sheets on our bed kept too cool without him underneath, pumping out his body heat. And I

also found myself a little skittish, watching the door as I lay in bed with just enough paranoia to have me losing sleep over the worry that I wasn't safe.

They say sometimes you don't appreciate what you've got until it's gone. I hadn't realized until now how safe Alexander made me feel when I was with him.

I only had a couple pills left in the bottle I'd gotten away from the police doctor. I took one, saved the other for tomorrow.

I wasn't going to need a refill, because Alexander would be back the night after that.

I hoped.

I still hadn't gotten any communication about the return flight, which meant that he and Keyden weren't done

yet. They were still seerching.

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She nodded, frowning. “Well, I know you need to marry him for the marking ceremony anyway. But now, I think, you’ve got another incentive to get it done asap.”

I wasn’t following.

“Spousal privilege,” she continued.

Her eyes darted over at me, looked concerned. Then returned to the road.

“Listen, I’m inclined to believe that Alexander trusts you. I really, really think he cares about you sincerely, Fi. But it couldn’t hurt to have him know that you not only wouldn’t, but also couldn’t, testify against him, if and when he does this thing that he went and blabbed about wanting to do.”

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[THE ALPHA KING CALL BOY](#)

Chapter 89 The Mean Lady



Alexander

There were two steaming bowls of soup on the table when Kayden and I went back into the cottage, and the woman bade us eat. After we complied, we thanked the both of them for their hospitality and began our hike back to town.

While we walked, I caught Kayden up on the intel I gathered from the little girl.

He took the information in very seriously.

“That’s a pretty good lead,” he said. Then he opened his mouth, hesitated, and laughed.

“What?”

“Nothing, it’s just that I was about to ask, out of habit, if you thought the source was credible. I mean, it’s still a valid question. Just funny, considering.”

Then it was my turn to chuckle. “I think we can trust her,” I said, smiling amusedly but also earnest in my statement.

“Mean lady with the fishes,” Kayden repeated quietly, thinking.

We returned to the dairy shop in town and purchased an assortment of artisanal sheep’s milk cheeses. I

overpaid in cash and refused to accept the change.

“Thank you for your assistance earlier,” I told the shop owner. “I can’t tell you how much we appreciate your speaking with us and answering our questions.”

She was flummoxed, looking at the hundred dollar bill in her hands like it was an alien artifact. “I didn’t even really help you,” she muttered. “I can’t accept this, sir.”

Kayden was behind me, near the door. “Perhaps you could do us one more favor,” he suggested, “and give us some directions, if you wouldn’t mind?”

“Sure,” she answered. “Where you trying to go?”

“What’s the closest fishing village around here, and how do we get there?”

“Oh, that’s easy. The southbound night train will take you right there. It’s just the next stop after this one.”

Our train squealed to a halt at the seaside village an hour before dawn the next morning.

Kayden and I disembarked in the dark and camped at the station until the first bus of the day rolled up in perfect sync with the first sign of daylight.

We performed a similar routine as the day prior. Shopped at the tiny, rural town’s meager selection of local businesses and made our inquiries. I had considered perhaps we’d be there too early to find many people in town, but it was just the opposite. Business started very early in the fishing village, apparently.

I dared not ask any of the townspeople about Iris directly, this time. Instead, I asked after Terry.

It did not take long to acquire walking directions to Terry's shoreside cabin.

We occupied ourselves in the town for as long as I could keep hold of my patience. Business was alive in the town center and fish market, but that still didn't mean that sunrise was an optimal time to disrupt a person at their home.

After an hour, several fish and potato breakfasts and countless cups of black tea, I told Kayden I couldn't wait any longer, and we set out on our hike.

The cabin was situated midway up a low hillside, less than twenty yards from the shore. It was surrounded by a massive, moss-covered and half-rotten wood deck, a quarter of which overhung the ocean, supported by concrete pylons plunged into the shallow depths.

It was eerily quiet in this private, isolated sliver of the world. The ocean was calm, sending only the faintest ripples of waves lapping up the muddy shoreline lazily.

The nearby dock was full up with small fishing boats tied in every slip, which told me the cabin's inhabitants were likely inside, not out fishing.

Kayden and I traded wary glances as we approached the cabin.

He stayed below. I ascended the deck stairs, gave a short but distinct knock on the door, and then retreated to stand next to him in the sand.

After a few seconds, I heard footsteps inside the house, coming closer. Then the interior door eased open slowly. A tall figure took shape behind the dark

screen door.

I saw a mass at the figure's side and discerned that they were holding some kind of weapon.

"I am very sorry to surprise you like this," I called up the stairs. "Please forgive the intrusion. We are looking for a woman named Terry."

"Who are you?" she barked.

"My name is Alexander, and this is Kayden. I—"

"What do you want with Terry?"

"Well, we are looking for an old friend of mine," I explained, my sense of danger increasing with every passing second. "I was told she may be living in this fishing village with Terry. Her name is Iris."

The woman was still and silent for about two seconds.

The hair on the back of my neck stood on edge.

Her next movements happened in rapid-fire.

The floorboard creaked under a single heavy footstep as she lunged forward, threw open the screen door, crossed the threshold and marched to the edge of the deck.

The woman was tall, blonde, and rough-looking.

Tanned and wrinkled from long years of sun exposure but probably no older than fifty.

Planting her feet into a military stance, she raised what I now saw was a sawed-off shotgun, and aimed it at my head.

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Keyden and I froze. Then we raised our arms slowly in unison, palms flat and inching skyward in surrender.

“No Iris here,” the woman said. “No one here you should care about besides me and my rifle.”

“I am very sorry,” I said calmly. “We mean you no harm and will leave immediately.”

The women then descended the steps and began to stride confidently forward, the barrel of the gun and her two open eyes still locked on me.

Keyden and I paced backward, moving as a unit.

The women pursued us slowly, giving chase.

“We are leaving,” I said. “Please lower your weapon.”

“I’ll lower my weapon when you’re out of firing range.”

“Me’em, we meant you no offense. Please, I have to ask you again, lower your weapon.”

“One shot with the sewed-off will blast the both of you

into fish food,” she hollered.

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I wes seconds ewey from shifting.

It would give me my best chence. I wes strongest in my wolf form. Yes, the women could shoot before I could cherge end diserm her. But there wes no wey in

hell that I was going to just passively turn my back to anyone with a gun aimed at my head.

I had only just stopped retreating, preparing to lunge for the gun, when suddenly a voice called out from the house: "TERRY! TERRY, STOP!"

Finally our would-be shooter stopped moving forward. Keyden and I froze in place once again.

Terry kept her unblinking eyes on us. She said nothing in reply to the person in the house.

In my periphery, I saw a figure emerge from the cabin, pushing through the screen door and crossing the deck. I held my focus on the gun that was still pointed at my head.

"It's alright, Terry," the person shouted. "They're not a threat. Let them in. Please."

Only when the gun was de-cocked and lowered to Terry's side did I finally look over at the deck to see who it was.

A short brunette woman, about thirty years old, met my eyes.

She clasped both hands to her heart and smiled.

It was, unmistakably, Iris.

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Kayden and I kept moving backward, our pace nearing a jog now, keeping our hands up and our eyes on our aggressor.

“If you want to keep yourselves in one piece each,” she said, “turn around now and start running.”

She cocked the gun.

I did not come all this way just to turn my back and allow a manic fisherwoman to blast my beta and I into a heap of leadshot-ridden fish bait.

I was seconds away from shifting.

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Kaydan and I pacad backward, moving as a unit.

Tha woman persuad us slowly, giving chasa.

“Wa ara laaving,” I said. “Plaasa lowar your waapon.”

“I’ll lowar my waapon whan you’ra out of firing ranga.”

“Ma’am, wa maant you no offansa. Plaasa, I hava to ask you again, lowar your waapon.”

“Ona shot with tha sawad-off will blast tha both of you into fish food,” sha hollarad.

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Tarry kapt har unblinking ayas on us. Sha said nothing in raply to tha parson in tha housa.

In my pariphary, I saw a figura amarga from tha cabin, pushing through tha scraan door and crossing tha dack. I hald my focus on tha gun that was still pointad at my haad.

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[THE ALPHA KING CALL BOY](#)

Chapter 90 It's Really You



"I can't believe it. I can't believe it's really you." Iris looked me up and down, wide-eyed, as Kayden and I

approached the cabin.

Terry had finally lowered her shotgun, stood aside and gave us reluctant permission to enter her home. We met Iris at the base of the deck stairs.

“Hello, Iris. It’s been a long time.” I maintained a cool demeanor despite the flood of relief and excitement washing over me. Finally, I had found the one person in the world who could tell me exactly what happened to my mother.

“A very long time,” she said, studying my face and shaking her head in disbelief. “What in the world are you doing here, Alexander?” She was standing on the bottom step and clutching the guardrail as if she needed the support to keep herself upright.

“I’ve come to ask for your help with something, actually. Can we talk?”

“Of course,” she breathed. She glanced briefly at Kayden, then back at me.

“This is Kayden,” I offered in introduction. “My Beta and most trusted friend.”

“Pleasure to meet you, Iris.” Kayden bowed his head briefly.

Iris blushed at his formality and marveled at his warrior’s braid before darting her eyes back to me. “Come in, please,” she said. “I’ll make some tea.”

After some tense whispering in the hallway, Terry obliged Iris’s request to make herself scarce. She gathered some gear from an open mudroom beside the front door and took off to fish. But not before darting another menacing glance right at me.

“I’m sorry about Terry,” Iris whispered, once she’d gotten water boiling on the stove and the three of us were seated at a small table in the kitchen. “She’s very protective of me.”

“Is there... a particular reason for her protectiveness?” I asked Iris. “Has someone been threatening you?”

She frowned, looked down at her hands. “Hmm. Well, the answer to that is kind of a long story.”

The tea kettle on the stove began to whistle, jetting steam out of its spout.

“Let me get that,” Iris said, jumping up.

Kayden and I exchanged another look once her back was turned.

“See, it’s been a very long time since I tried to think about all that,” Iris called out loudly, her back to us as she tarried at the stove.

I waited patiently for her to continue, not wanting her to feel pressured.

I could hear her faintly saying, “Hmm, hmm,” as if she were considering something very carefully, while she arranged the tea and accoutrements onto a wooden tray noisily.

Finally she returned to the table and set the tray down with a sigh.

She resumed her seat across from me, put her elbows on the table and laid her chin between her two closed fists. She squinted at me quizzically. “Now, what is that Prince Alexander could possibly need my help for?”

I offered her a friendly smile before getting right down to it. “Well, I am hoping you can answer some questions for me regarding your time at the palace in my mother’s final weeks.”

Immediately, Iris frowned deeply.

“I’m sorry,” I said. “I don’t want to upset you. I’m sure this topic may call up some troubling memories for you...”

“No, it’s not that.” Her hands fell down onto the table, and her gaze followed. “I guess I knew, really, that you were gonna ask me about that, the moment I saw you there outside. What other reason would you have for tracking me down? But, see, I don’t think I can answer your questions. Not right now, at least.”

I looked a question mark at Iris, but she didn’t lift her

eyes. “Why not?”

“Hmm.” She drummed her fingers on the table. “Well, see, I got hurt the day Queen Alexandra died. Only, I don’t remember what happened. I just heard some about it afterwards from the doctors, and some from Terry. It’s not only just the day it happened. There’s a lot. A big chunk of time missing from my head.”

Kayden sipped his tea. For a moment I was incapable of doing anything other than staring at Iris, processing what she’d just told me. Swallowing it down like a ton of bricks.

I knew I ought to tread carefully, but dared another question. “I’m so sorry that you were hurt, Iris. May I ask what kind of injury you sustained?”

Now she looked right up at me, her mouth falling into a funny half-smile, half-frown.

“I was shot,” she said. “In the head.”

Kayden gulped. He set his teacup down on the table gingerly.

A million questions raced through my mind. “Oh, Iris. I am so sorry that you went through that.”

Kayden shook his head. “That must have been very painful to recover from.”

“It was,” she said unemotionally, her mouth stuck in that odd shape. She looked at the wall, stared at it blankly.

Her whole energy had changed the moment she uttered the words, “I was shot.” She became raw, numb, flatly unhappy. I recognized this as a trauma response, one I’d seen in wounded soldiers.

“It takes a real survivor type,” Kayden continued, “to live through an injury like that.”

One side of Iris’s mouth twitched up into a smile. A moment later the other side followed. “That’s a nice thing to say.” Then she frowned at Kayden. “But the truth is the doctors said I was just lucky. They said if the bullet went one little bit more to the left, I’d ’a been braindead. Or just dead dead.”

“The spot it did hit,” she continued, “only gave me a brain injury. There’s some symptoms I still got. But I’m alive.”

“Do you know who shot you?” I asked cautiously.

She shook her head. “No. I got some blurry memories of some times in the palace, when Queen Alexandra was still there, and then I got one where I’m in the

hospital, wondering what's going on. Terry was there. She'd found me before I came back to remembering anything at all. I guess just the fact I was shot, she knew someone, somewhere wanted to hurt me. So that's when she took me here to get away, and get better."

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of those best things you remember?”

“Hmm. I don’t know, Alexander. See, I have spent many years now just trying to move on... I never wanted to even try to remember, before now.”

Iris tilted her head to the side, moving her profile into the yellow beam of light pouring in from the window behind me. Her eyes were starting to look glossy with brimming tears.

I sighed. “Are you sure you’re okay with talking about all this, Iris? Considering all you’ve been through, I don’t want to upset you by bringing it all up again.”

“It’s okay,” she said quietly, rubbing her eyes with the back of her wrist. “Anyway, I think I really told you all I can for now. I’m really sorry I don’t have more answers for you. Maybe after a little break I could try again, see if I can remember more.”

“Of course. Thank you, Iris. You have no idea how much I appreciate you talking with me about all this. I am very grateful.”

“Will you stay for lunch?” she asked brightly, her energy shifting rapidly once again.

“We’d love to,” I answered. “But I should tell you... we have tickets booked on the northbound overnight train.” I glanced at my watch. “And I was hoping you might be willing to come with us, back to the city.”

Iris belted, incredulous. “Really?”

I nodded seriously. “Iris, if you’re willing, maybe we can work on recovering your memory. I’ll be happy to pay for your rent for a nice apartment and plenty of security – for however long you need. And maybe, if you can remember what happened, you could testify

about what you witnessed?”

“Whoa,” she said. “That is quite an offer. Are you sure I would be safe, though?” A look of fear flashed across her face.

“I promise you, Iris, I will keep you safe if you come back with us. I know this is a lot to ask. But please at least consider it. I will need your testimony if I am ever going to get justice for my mother.”

Her face changed quickly again. It looked like she was having a sudden, happy idea.

“Alright,” she said. “I can do that.”

I combed my hair back with my fingers. The gesture was involuntary, but as I did it, I realized my hair was wildly tangled. It probably looked like a lion’s mane.

“Iris, how far back do you remember? Those times you say you can recall from before the... injury” – I refrained from calling it a shooting – “what are some of those last things you remember?”

“Hmm. I don’t know, Alexander. See, I have spent many years now just trying to move on... I never wanted to even try to remember, before now.”

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