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MARRIE ORR

THE ALICE SESSIONS

YOU CAN'T TREAT ME THIS WAY

— BOOK ONE —



Marrie Orr

**The Alice Sessions. You can't
teat me this way. Book one**

«Издательские решения»

Orr M.

The Alice Sessions. You can't treat me this way. Book one / M. Orr —
«Издательские решения»,

Что происходит, когда страх, чувство долга и желание сохранить отношения
становятся сильнее собственного голоса?

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The Alice Sessions

You can't teat me this way. Book one

Marrie Orr

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The Alice Sessions
You Can't Treat Me This Way Book One
Marrie Orr

All characters, events, and circumstances depicted in this book are works of fiction. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or deceased, or to real events is purely coincidental. This work is based on a synthesis of shared human experiences and is not intended to portray any specific individual or actual event.

Prologue

When you are strong—
but still stay silent.
When you have everything under control—
but anxiety lives inside you.
When you keep moving forward—
but something doesn't feel right.
These are stories about women
who carry life on their shoulders.
Work.
Responsibility.
The people they love.
And one day,
they reach a moment
when one thing becomes clear:
You Can't Treat Me This Way.
And they face a choice
that can no longer be postponed:
to stay
or to leave.
For everyone who has ever realized:
you are allowed to leave.

From the Author

This book is not about making the right decisions.

And it is not about strong people.

It is about the moments

when we realize:

this cannot continue.

About fear

that keeps us where we are.

About power

that changes relationships.

About closeness

that turns out to be something else.

And about a very quiet,

almost invisible thought:

I can leave.

The stories in this book

are not about specific people.

They are about experiences

that any of us can find ourselves living through.

If you recognize yourself in these pages,

perhaps your moment of choice

is already near.

And it can no longer be postponed.

Part I

When You Don't Understand What's Happening

Chapter 1: Alice

2010

Today's client looks calm.

She looks younger than her years.

Her gaze is steady, confident.

Only the faint shadows beneath her eyes betray her exhaustion.

"Hello, Claire."

"Good afternoon, Alice. Thank you for seeing me."

"What brings you here today?"

A slight smile crosses her face.

"Everything in my life is fine. Better than fine, actually. But I haven't slept for two nights."

I nod.

"Has this happened before?"

"Yes. It usually happens during a crisis at work. At least then I know why. This time... I don't."

"Try to think back over the last couple of days," I say. "Sometimes it's something that seems insignificant."

She doesn't hesitate.

"A new task force was formed. We're dealing with a major operational failure. But it wasn't our department's fault, so I don't really have a reason to be anxious."

"Tell me about it."

She closes her eyes.

"A conference room. Glass walls. Bright white lights. Three people are sitting at the table — Harrison, Mark, and Olivia, my manager."

"Mark is leading the meeting, even though the issue has nothing to do with his department. He presents the situation, the action plan for the week... everything. Olivia has already briefed him."

She opens her eyes.

"I don't belong there anymore.

I'm not the person in charge.

I'm just... watching."

"The strange thing is, I didn't understand it at first. All I felt was this quiet anxiety in the background."

Her words come faster now.

"During the day I'm fine. But every night I wake up at three in the morning. My heart is racing. I keep dreaming about the office."

I let her finish.

"Go back to that meeting," I say softly. "What exactly hurt you?"

She nods.

"I think I know now."

She takes a deep breath.

"I felt excluded from my own department."

"Mark behaved as if he were managing my team. He was telling me what to do."

"Has anything like this happened before?"

"Yes."

"Two years ago."

She exhales.

"And now it's happening again."

"Let's go back there."

Claire closes her eyes once more.

Chapter 2: Claire

2008

By four o'clock, darkness has already settled outside.

I've always loved winter.

A cup of cinnamon coffee sits on my desk beside an orange.

Someone has strung Christmas lights down the hallway.

"Last Christmas" is playing somewhere in the office.

For the first time in months, I almost feel festive.

I let out a slow breath.

The first real one in six months.

Late that afternoon, a message from Victoria appears on my screen.

"How have you organized your team's work for the end of the year?"

I keep my reply brief.

"Everyone is managing their own projects. The team is available whenever support is needed."

I hit Send.

I peel the orange.

Her answer comes almost immediately.

"We're changing the structure. From now on, all key year-end decisions will go through the central group. Your team will join when requested."

I stare at the screen.

Which means...

I'm no longer the one making the decisions.

I type back.

"I'd like to understand how this will work. Our processes are already established, and the team manages its projects independently."

I hit Send.

Another reply.

"We're standardizing our approach. It's important that everyone works within the same system."

I read it again.

The word *standardizing* sounds perfectly reasonable.

But something about it doesn't feel right.

An hour later, three messages arrive.

From my key team members.

"We've been invited to a meeting on Monday."

I read the sentence again.

A meeting.

Without me.

Monday.

I'm working from home.

I open my email.

The chats.

The documents.

I keep scrolling without knowing what I'm looking for.

I reread the same messages.

Over and over.

They're all in the office.

At the meeting.

Without me.
The entire day passes in silence.
No one writes.
That evening, my phone rings.
“Hey. How are you?”
“I’m fine. How did it go?”
“They asked us about the processes.”
“The projects.”
“The plans.”
“And... about you.”
I don’t say anything.
“About how we work.”
“What should change.”
“What difficulties we have.”
A chill runs through me.
“I answered carefully,” she says quietly.
“I didn’t say... anything unnecessary.”
I nod, even though she can’t see me.
“Thank you.”
I end the call.
I sit alone in my kitchen.
The kettle never boils.
Neither do I.
I just feel...
empty.
Tuesday.
Changes begin appearing in the system.
I open the files.
Look through them.
Some responsibilities have been transferred to another department.
Some approvals no longer come through me.
I read the new role descriptions.
And suddenly I realize...
I’m not angry.
I’ve been doing this job all along.
I just never had a name for what was happening.
Now I do.
They’re replacing me.
I close my laptop.
And sit in silence.
Wednesday.
Another message appears.
“From this point forward, all major approvals will go through the central group.”
I read it.
Slowly.
This isn’t about support anymore.
It’s about building a structure...
without me in it.
I look at my team list.

Nine people.
There used to be nine.
Now there are fewer.
And I know...
this is only the beginning.
I don't write anything.
I don't ask for explanations.
I simply sit there.
And for the first time, I finally allow myself to name it.
I've been excluded.

Chapter 3: Alice

2010

"I think I understand now," Claire says.

I don't answer right away.

I let the silence do its work.

"I think you do," I say at last. "But let's make sure."

She nods.

"What exactly happened again?"

"I was pushed out of the process.

Decisions were made without me.

Again."

"And what hurts the most about that?"

She doesn't answer immediately.

She looks away.

"Finding out last."

I make a mental note.

"And two years ago?"

"The same thing."

"Where do you feel it in your body?" I ask.

She places a hand on her chest.

"Here.

It's tight."

"How tight?"

She closes her eyes, listening to herself.

"As if...

there isn't enough room to breathe."

"Don't try to make the feeling disappear," I say softly.

"Just stay with it for a moment."

She closes her eyes.

Breathes.

Slowly.

Little by little, her shoulders relax.

"How did that situation end?" I ask.

"They cut my salary."

"Significantly."

I look up.

"Officially, it was because of a restructuring.

New processes.

New rules."

"But in reality...

it was because I was no longer the one making decisions."

I listen.

She continues.

"It was strange.

I decided to stay until I received my annual bonus.

Then I started looking for another job."

"When I opened the job listings, I realized something almost immediately.

Without an MBA, no one was even considering candidates for positions like mine.”

“So I enrolled.

I studied online every weekend.”

“Work was still exhausting.

But studying gave me something else to focus on.”

“I met remarkable people there.

We’re still friends.

We still get together.”

“When I graduated, I walked into work the very next day and told them I was leaving.”

She smiles for the first time.

“But they asked me to stay.”

“Victoria had transferred to the corporate headquarters in another state.

Without an experienced director, the department couldn’t function.”

“So we made a deal.

They restored my salary.

I stayed.”

“Over the next two years, I built a substantial financial cushion.

Now...

I can leave whenever I choose.”

She looks surprised by her own words.

“I never realized how much energy Victoria had been taking from me.”

“Every message from her felt like an electric shock.”

“Every ‘urgent’ email sounded like an alarm.”

“Every weekend phone call felt like a knife.”

She takes a deep breath.

“And now...

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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