

## Chapter 161 Assassination

A quiet sound from my phone started to drag me up and out of a deep sleep.

I had been napping the afternoon away, while Alexander was working.

And the evening, too, apparently. It was already dark out, I saw through the window as I peeled my tired eyes open. I was surprised that he had let me sleep so late.

My phone chimed again. I was more awake now and registered the specific tone as a text notification.

After the third and fourth pings, my mind went into overdrive, suddenly fully worried about who was blowing up my phone and why. I scrambled for the phone but accidentally knocked it to the floor in my state of sleepy panic, and had to get up and out of bed to find it.

Something was strange about the lighting in the bedroom, the state of things.

All was quiet, but the door to Alexander’s office was wide open, and inside it all the lights were on. A rectangle of yellow light stretched out of that open doorway and across our bedroom floor. But none of the bedroom lights were on, leaving the rest of the room in full shadow.

I finally found my phone where it had rolled under the bed and stood back up with some difficulty. I rubbed sleep from my eyes and swiped my finger across the screen to open up the notifications while I walked over to my husband’s office.

What I found in there was a confusing sight.

My phone was still pinging – more and more texts from Nina continued coming in, and now I was tearing my eyes back and forth from the scene in Alexander’s empty office to the screen on which my friend’s frantic messages were displayed.

Nina: Just saw the news. Are you ok? Tell me you weren’t with him or anywhere around there!

Nina: Fi – are you safe? Just text to confirm please.

Nina: Call or text me tell me you’re okay, Fiona. Please

My heart was pounding. I felt it hammering in my throat.

My mind reeled, trying to wake up enough to process what in the world was going on, trying to catch up on what my body was already responding to. Something was wrong. But that was the only thing I could understand right now.

My thumbs had typed to Nina, with a couple of groggy typos, that I was fine, I’d been asleep and what the hell was she talking about?

Alexander’s office had been abruptly abandoned. That much was clear.

There were maps, notebooks, papers, all kinds of things spread out all over his desk, as if he’d been deeply entrenched in planning or mapping something out before he literally dropped everything and fled. An open permanent marker lay on the floor, leaking red ink into the plush white rug. I picked it up and replaced its cap, which had been on the desk.

While three dots rippling across my phone screen told me Nina was still typing a reply, I hurried back to the bedroom and turned on our giant TV.

A text came in then from Alexander, just as the news began to play on the painfully bright TV screen.

Alexander: Dealing with an emergency. Call when you’re up.

I almost called him right away. But as soon as the TV was on, it caught and held my attention.

Breaking news on every channel was covering what had just happened within the past hour.

My jaw dropped when I read the headline scrolling along the bottom of the screen.

ALPHA KING NEARLY KILLED IN FIERY AUTOMOBILE COLLISION, HOSPITALIZED IN CRITICAL CONDITION...

“The cause of the crash is still undetermined,” a blonde news reporter was saying, “but of course many are saying, however inexplicable it is right now, that this must have been an assassination attempt. A failed assassination attempt...”

I had only just seen the Alpha King, my father-in-law, this morning in court. And the memory of our time together at the wedding was still quite fresh in my mind, too. Now, he was lying in a hospital bed with critical injuries. I could hardly fathom it.

The blonde woman said they were now going to show a CCTV video that captured the moment the Alpha King’s car crashed. I went wide-eyed at the idea that there was actual footage of this, and turned up the volume while I waited impatiently to watch the clip.

“This bizarre event occurred just after sunset, as the Alpha King was traveling a secure route back to his palace after spending the day in court, where he was finalizing the ruling on his now-fugitive wife Scarlet’s embezzlement case...”

“We must warn you,” a male news anchor said, taking over. “This shocking footage may be too disturbing for some viewers.”

Some viewers, I figured to mean children. I thought I was prepared for what I was about to see. A car accident of some kind.

Then the video began.

A small motorcade was traveling a mountain road that appeared to have been closed to all other traffic. In the center of the mass of vehicles was a black limousine. In front of and behind the limo were two black SUVs. On either side of it were motorcycles, atop which rode armed guards.

The motorcade neared a big concrete traffic tunnel, and then it happened. So fast. All in just a couple seconds.

The news program replayed the video several times, including once in slow motion.

Just as the lead car began making a slight turn into the tunnel, flicking its brights on, something happened to the limo. Its back end soared up into the air and the limo flipped all the way over, landing upside-down on top of the lead car. The limo and flattened SUV then skidded forward together into the tunnel and disappeared.

The two motorcycles and the rear SUV swerved and braked, attempting to avoid the collision, but one of the motorcycles went down into the tunnel while spinning out of control, having been unable to change his course in time.

And then a tremendous blast of fire came bursting out of the tunnel as something exploded inside.

Blonde lady said that first responders arrived on scene to find the Alpha King, his entire body on fire, staggering forward out of the blaze that continued to roar inside the tunnel. If there was video of that scene, they weren’t showing it on the news. The limo driver, the guard on the motorcycle and the two that had been inside the lead SUV did not survive.

“Confused?” the male newscaster asked. “So are we. What exactly happened on the road there is unclear, even with this video of the event. No one knows why the Alpha King’s limousine flipped, how such a thing is even possible...”

But there was something I had noticed during the slow-motion replay, and the reporters were not talking about it at all. They appeared not to have seen it.

Just before it all happened, a weird blur had appeared on the road behind the motorcade. It then traveled up between the rear SUV and the limo. And then it vanished, just after the limo performed its “inexplicable” forward flip.

I put the TV on mute and called Alexander.

He didn’t answer.

Alexander

I felt my phone vibrating in my pocket and just knew that it was Fiona.

She was up. She’d gotten my text.

I slid my hand into my pocket and silenced the call. I’d have to get back to her after I was done with the doctor.

He was speed-talking, running me through the status of all of my father’s injuries.

“He has a fair chance at survival,” the white haired, white clad man was saying. “But the burn damage is severe. He suffered second, third and fourth degree burns to over seventy percent of his body, including his face and neck. We have a lot of work to do here.”

I hadn’t seen my father yet, and had been given to understand that I was not liable to do so anytime soon. The Alpha King was in a heavily guarded sterile room in the Burn Ward of a local hospital, which was now closed to the public until further notice.

He’d been rushed here from the crash site. It was really only because they happened to be so close to the hospital already, I reasoned, that my father had been able to survive such bloody and horrific injuries.

“He is under heavy sedation,” the doctor said. “The level of pain he would be feeling if he were awake is not something the body or mind can tolerate... we have to keep him out for now. We will perform more skin grafts as soon as his vitals are stable enough for the operation.”

“And when he wakes up?”

The doctor blinked up at me, adjusting his glasses.

“Let’s cross that bridge when we get to it,” he said after a pause.

The look in his eyes told me he believed that bridge may be quite far off in the distance.