

Chapter 162 Acting Alpha King

Alexander

“Alex. Are you okay?”

I could hear the concern in Fiona’s voice and instantly regretted not communicating with her sooner. “Yeah, baby, I’m okay. I’m so sorry if you were worried. I’m sorry I left like that.”

“It’s okay. Obviously, I understand.”

“Thank you, sweetheart. How are you?”

She blew out a long exhale. “I mean, physically, I am fine, Alex. But this is crazy, what’s happened. I’m a little in shock about your father. Are you sure you’re okay?”

“Yeah. I’m fine, Fiona. And I know, it’s a lot to process.”

“Alex, did you... did you see the video?”

It took me a second to realize what she was talking about. That of course by now the media would be playing and posting the traffic cam footage of the collision. Fiona was probably watching it on the news. “The crash?”

“Yes. Did you see what happened, Alex?”

I could tell by her tone of voice that she’d seen what I had seen.

“Yes, I did.”

Fiona sighed.

“Fi, I know I don’t have to tell you this, but... you know you can’t say a word about this to anyone, right? Not even Nina. Not yet.”

“Of course, Alex.”

I worried she might take a little offense to my even asking that question, but Fiona sounded patient and understanding as always. It wasn’t like I expected my perfect Luna ever to let confidential information slip by accident.

What I was thinking about was how much she loved her friend. Her friend who seemed to live, if I wasn’t mistaken, a mostly nocturnal and potentially somewhat dangerous lifestyle. Not that I’d ever been able to pin down any details. My concern was only that Fiona might be tempted to warn Nina in some oblique way, in an effort to protect her.

“Where are you right now?”

“I’m just leaving the hospital.”

“How is... I mean, I know it can’t be good. But what’s happening with your father?”

“He’s unconscious. They put him into a medically induced coma. The burns are pretty bad. They can’t wake him up until they’ve repaired a lot of the damage. If they can.”

“My god. Alex. I’m so sorry.”

“Me too.”

“And so... this means... you are acting Alpha King now, right? Until he’s... back?”

“Yes. It does.”

Fiona was silent. I could practically see her sitting in bed, thinking. Her pale blue eyes focused, well-oiled gears turning inside her head.

“Are you sure you’re feeling okay, baby? Have you had any more stomachaches, or contractions?”

“No, I haven’t. I’m really okay, Alex. Don’t worry about me. I’m sure there are other things you need to handle right now.”

“Well. I do have just a couple urgent matters that need attention.”

“I could ask Nina to come over,” she suggested. “If that makes you less worried about me being here alone.”

“That’d be fine. But if she does that, she’ll need to stay overnight. Palace security is heightened right now. Let me know – text me – if she’s going over. I’ll call and let them know she’s coming so that she can get through.”

“Okay. Text you in a minute.”

“I’ll be home as soon as I can, Fi. By morning, at the latest.”

Fiona

“I thought Alex would’ve beat me in here,” Nina said as she walked into our bedroom.

“Huh? He’s... out. That’s why I invited you over, remember?”

“Yeah, I remember. You said he was busy and stuff, but then when I was driving, I’m pretty sure he zoomed right past me on the highway. And I saw him taking the exit toward the palace.”

“Really?”

“He drives a black Bentley, right?”

“Yeah.” Alexander had a lot of cars, but I knew the Bentley was the one he preferred when he was driving himself.

“Well, I don’t know. That was like—” she checked the time on her smartwatch — “sheesh, an hour ago. I was stuck at the gate forever. They had me get out and searched my whole car.” She set down her overnight bag, a black leather designer satchel with neon holographic trim and hardware edges, and shrugged. “Anyway. Whatever. How are you doing, Fi?”

“I don’t know, Nina.” I frowned deeply. I was worried about my husband, very worried, and I couldn’t tell her why.

“Babe. Come here.” She wrapped her arms around me in a tight, tight hug. “It’s gonna be okay. Alex is alright and I’m sure he’ll stay that way. If there’s anyone in the world we can believe will be able to take care of himself in any kind of situation, it’s your boo. Right?”

I nodded into her soft hair. She was right.

“Wait.” I had a belated realization. Nina’s hair was lavender. I grabbed her by the shoulders and pulled back to study it. “Your hair changed. I thought you weren’t supposed to do that. For your job.”

She grinned. “They did bitch about it. They liked how the white looked under blacklight. But I can’t help it, you know. I got bored. It just happens.”

Alexander

Kayden had already been at the palace, so he beat me up to the high tower suite that had been Scarlet’s son Lucas’s residence for the past decade.

“Not here,” Kayden reported, his voice a low, frustrated growl. His chest was still heaving from having been running, and his upper lip twitched. “We searched the whole wing, Alex. Everywhere. Just a few confused servants wandering around, telling me they haven’t seen anyone all day. It’s like a ghost town.”

I scrubbed a hand down my face, looking around Lucas’s bedroom.

When I got back to the palace from the hospital, I had driven through all the lots and parking structures on the grounds. Whipping around fast, faster than was safe on these tiny little private roads, even with my driving skills. But I’d been able to quickly cover every inch of the perimeter, while Kayden and Cal and a few other Gammas kept searching inside, so I knew.

I knew for certain that Lucas was not here. I hadn’t really expected him to be. But I’d hoped.

I’d had a few vivid fantasies, while driving, of interrogating my brother for information.

It would be a quick job. But enjoyable.

Maybe Lucas was with his mother. Or maybe Scarlet had just given him a heads-up, sent him on the lam ahead of her, told him she was pulling the trigger on whatever it was she was up to before she did it and disappeared herself.

The bedroom smelled like... chemicals. And smoke. And sex.

It was clean. The silky red and purple bed linens were fresh and neatly made up. The furniture was arranged at crisp angles. The polished gold bases of twin lamps flanking the king-sized bed glinted in the moonlight pouring in from the balcony. That was the work of palace staff.

But the dank, dirty aroma of smoke had embedded itself deep into the walls, even if the soot stains had been scrubbed off their surfaces. And the smell of bodies – lots of bodies, the mixed smells of cheap perfumes and ripe women and female wolf pheromones – that was all over. That was recent. It was lingering in the rugs and carpets, which had probably only been spot-cleaned after the good time Lucas clearly enjoyed on his last night before fleeing.

I circled the room slowly, looking over everything. Looking for any sign of where my little brother may have gone from here. Clues, evidence of any kind. Lucas was stupid and sloppy. He might have left something telling behind.

There was more clutter in the bathroom than the bedroom. Looking over all the miscellany that covered the marble countertops, I got the feeling that servants had been instructed not to touch this area, to leave this stuff alone.

There was an obscene amount of men’s hair products. A few boxes of sex toys. Lots of other uninteresting things.

And, inside what appeared to be stash bag with a little drug paraphernalia, a cell phone.

The screen was shattered. The battery was dead. It looked old, a years-obsolete model.

I put the phone in my pocket. I’d get it charged up in the car and see what I could find on it later.