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## **Chapter 164 The Morning After**

Kayden drove back to the palace while I sat in back and made some calls.

I called Brandon first. Told him he was going to work full-time for me going forward. That I needed him heading a cabinet for me, and to get started tomorrow hiring a team. He was all "yes," as I expected.

I had been preparing all my life for the big job I had just inherited. But the way it was unfolding tonight was definitely a surprise. And the timing certainly could not be worse.

I had to do anything I could to stay by Fiona's side right now. Until the baby came. And then when the baby was here, too; I needed to be present in my child's life from the start.

whether or not I had a baby coming in a matter of days. A leader's job is to lead, not to do everything oneself, alone. Kayden, I was entrusting with the most important task of all. My Beta was going to take all the maps and plans we had been

The best thing I could do was get a machine working behind me immediately. Assign orders. Delegate. And that would be true

working on in my office, and set up a proper war room elsewhere. And lead the charge on strategizing a counter-attack against the invaders in our midst.

The Alpha King's study was the right place for our command center. It was perfect for our needs. A bright and spacious room located at the very center of the palace grounds, with a hidden passage leading up a tower to a crow's nest.

We made a quick trip there when we got back. Walked around and talked about what Kayden should get started on setting up first.

And then, finally, I was on my way back to Fiona.

tell you she had more contractions this morning?"

She was sound asleep.

But the sounds of my careful entrance roused her friend, who had been sleeping beside her. It was kind of a strange sight, seeing another body there next to Fiona on my side of our bed. But Nina jumped up quickly, quiet and catlike, as soon as I stepped inside.

She moved swiftly into our kitchenette and started to pour water into two glasses. I met her there.

"Alex," she whispered when I was close, "I'm so sorry about your dad."

"Yeah." Then, after a pause, "Baby's coming soon, Daddy."

"Thanks, Nina." I took a glass from her outstretched hand. "And thanks for coming by last night and staying with Fiona. Did she

She said this innocently. I knew that. But also the way she said it was for sure a bit suggestive, too. I was just suddenly aware that we were standing side by side in the dark, and felt very awkward, and wanted to run away from her.

She beat me to it, pacing away quickly and holding her hand over her mouth, trying to suppress a goofy laugh.

"I'm sorry," she whispered over shushed laughter. "I promise you, that wasn't supposed to sound dirty, if it did. I'm so sorry."

"Don't worry about it, Nina." I was now trying not to laugh, as well. Her severe embarrassment appeared quite sincere, and her laughter was contagious.

"I don't even hear it anymore," she mumbled. "Just comes out of my mouth." Then she fell back into giggles, I guess hearing

innuendo in even that. "I'm sorry, Alex. I'm just tired. And wired."

"I'll make it," I told her. "Go sit down. I'll get it started."

She sighed, headed over toward the coffee maker and started fiddling around with it.

"This is all so crazy," Nina whispered.

She sounded more like herself, less loopy, now that she'd had some coffee and a bite to eat.

"Is it... selfish," she asked hesitantly, "to confess that I'm more disturbed by this, I think, because I met him? Like, a week ago I

would have been shocked, sure, that such a horrible thing had happened to the King, but now, he's... a person that I know. I feel so sad, Alex, thinking about what he has gone through. I'm sorry. I'm rambling. I should be asking you how you're doing."

"Nina, can I ask you something?"

Gratefully, though, she did not. She left it at that.

"Uh, sure." She set down her coffee mug. "Of course. What's up?"

"I don't know if this would be something that you'd like or not, but I'll just offer. We have plenty of empty rooms here. We can

set one up for you. Get you a key. That way, if you need to stay here overnight sometimes, you could have more comfort and privacy. Can I do that for you?" "Oh. Hm."

"With things the way they are right now... I am doing all I can to make sure I have time with my family, but there may be times I

I come home."

I went to her. "Hey, sweetheart."

only be fine, but it would also give me some peace of mind. Knowing that she has her friend nearby." "Maybe, I could do that," Nina whispered. Then, her tone suddenly light: "Ohh, I see. You didn't like coming home and finding me in bed with your wife."

may be called away to deal with emergencies. Like last night. I'm just saying, if you wanted to crash here sometimes, it would not

I just wasn't expecting another one of these. She got me. I laughed.

And woke up Fiona, who started stirring. "The way you say it, Nina, is not the way I was thinking about it. But yes, I would like to be able to get in bed with my wife when

"What are you two giggling about?" Fiona grumbled from across the room. "So rude. When I'm sleeping." I could hear a smile in her sleepy voice.

"Hi." She put a cold hand to my face and stroked the short, scruffy beard I'd started growing over the past couple days. I kissed

"Coffee." She cleared her throat. "I'm up."

"You want me to make you some coffee? Or should I let you keep sleeping?"

her palm, then began to massage both her hands with my own, pressing warmth into them.

"I'll get out of your hair," Nina said from a distance. She was collecting some items and putting them into a shiny leather bag. Trying to quickly give us some privacy.

"Yeah?"

"Nina."

"Nah," she said, batting a dismissive hand in the air. "You guys need your alone time. I'm tired anyway, should get home and crash out. Fi, honey, call me later, 'kay?"

"Sure," Fiona muttered. She retracted her hands from mine, needing them to push herself up into a comfortable seated position.

"You don't need to rush off. Take your time."

"If you're tired, you shouldn't be driving, Nina." I hoped my tone of voice didn't come across as condescending. Nina was trying to be considerate, and I really appreciated it. But I was a little concerned about her.

Fortunately, she wasn't offended. She stopped packing. "I'll have Kayden come by in a few minutes. He can show you to a room. Just get a couple hours of sleep before you get in the

She nodded. "Thanks. That actually sounds great." Third person

me when you're up. I'll see if I can take a break."

car, okay?"

It was a smaller bedroom than Alex and Fiona's, but still a luxurious accommodation.

The giant bed at the room's center looked extremely inviting. It was covered in plush white and cream colored linens. Nina's

aching body was exhausted; she'd worked an early show, a rare day shift, and usually after dancing for several hours she ate a big meal and crashed out. But that's not how last night had wound up going.

"Wow." Nina took the key that Kayden offered her and stepped into the room he'd just unlocked.

"I'll leave you to get settled in." He put his hands on either side of the doorframe and leaned forward, using the leverage to stretch his muscular arms. "See you later, Nina. You can text me if you need anything here."

"Wait. Why don't you hang out a little bit? Have some breakfast with me?" Kayden smiled. "I'm sorry, Nina. I have some things I need to take care of right now. But if you still feel like company later, text

She spun around to find Kayden watching her from the hallway. He had not followed her inside.

"Sure, okay."

"Trust me." He started pacing away backward, pressing his lips against a smile. "I really am sorry I can't stay. Very sorry."