

## Chapter 167 Tell Me Your Secret

Holding my sweet baby in my arms had me on cloud nine. And it was a huge relief to have reconciled with Alexander, too.

Physically, though... Ugh. I was sticky all over and my scalp itched, because of course I'd been sweating profusely through labor. I was just exhausted, too. I felt like I could hardly keep my eyes open.

Alexis had fallen asleep in my arms. Perhaps that drowsy energy of hers was also part of what was making me so tired. I asked Alex if he wanted to take her for a little bit.

Watching him handle her was adorable.

Alexander's hands are big and strong. And that brand-new, sweet little baby looked teeny-tiny inside them. But he was so extremely gentle with her. Like he was handling the most delicate, fragile, and precious thing on earth. (Because he was.)

He walked around the room with the baby, cradling her against his chest, and paused near an open window. I watched a gentle breeze sweep in and make a mess of his thick, fluffy hair.

The baby was awake now, and she started talking... babbling, making the cutest little sounds. Quiet, tiny, soft mumbles interspersed with adorable squeals.

Alexander turned to look at me, wide-eyed and beaming, while Lexi babbled on, amusing us both endlessly. And when another gust of light wind came sweeping through the window, it caught her attention in a big way. Her blue eyes fixed on the world outside the window and stared, looking fascinated.

I could smell the faint aroma of roses wafting in, carried on the wind from one of the nearby gardens. She smelled the floral scent too, I could tell; I saw her tiny little nose twitch, and she squealed in reaction.

"Do you think she wants to go outside?" Alex asked me. It took me a second to realize: I think he was actually asking me to read the baby's mind.

So strange. But that wasn't how it worked, it seemed.

I shrugged. "It looks like she does. Do you want to take her out for a little walk?" As I heard myself say these words though, a sudden pang of maternal fear struck me and I had to add, "Not too far, though."

"That sounds lovely. But you should come with."

I shook my head no. "I am too tired, my love... and I really want to wash my hair. It's so dirty, it itches. Why don't you take Lexi outside and show her some flowers? And I'll take the time to get myself cleaned up."

A funny look passed over Alexander's face.

"What?"

He returned to the bed and sat beside me before answering. I couldn't help but notice that little Lexi, unable to turn her head, tried to peer out the very corners of her eyes in the direction of the window. She did really want to get outside. My little adventurer.

"You've never called me something like that before," Alexander said quietly. His mouth flickered in and out of a smile.

What had I called him? I hardly remembered... it had just rolled off my tongue.

"My love," I repeated when it came back to me.

He nodded. I did not have to touch him and absorb his energy, or whatever that process was, to know what he was feeling in that moment.

I had made him very happy.

Nina had left to give us some privacy, but I guess she hadn't gone far. Alex bumped into her and Kayden out in the hall and I heard the three of them chatting. Then Kayden left to walk with Alex and Lexi, and Nina came in to check on me.

I could not handle conversing with her for very long before I had to confront her about something. And tell her my news.

"Come with me." I took her into the bathroom. I wasn't sure how much time we had before the guys came back. "Help me brush out my hair before I take a shower and wash it."

She obliged happily. But because she was intermittently making skin-to-skin contact with me, I got a few more glimpses of her feelings.

"Nina, I need to ask you something," I started.

"Sure, babe. What's up?"

"Is there something going on with you? That you're not telling me about?"

"Like what?" She kept her eyes on her work, brushing out some tangles in my dirty hair.

"Okay, I will tell you something first, alright? And then, you're going to tell me your secret."

Now, Nina met my eyes in the bathroom mirror. She squinted at me, looking spooked.

Gosh, I was so tired. I leaned to sit up on the bathroom counter. I could look directly at my friend this way, too, and we needed to be eye to eye now. It was time for real talk.

"Something happened to me when I gave birth to Alexis. Seems like I activated a latent ability I did not know I had. And now, when I touch people... I mean, I've only tried with you guys, and Alex and Lexi... but when I have touched all of you, I've been able to feel what you are feeling. Not read your thoughts, or anything super clear, but the emotions of the other person, they just take me over."

Nina blinked at me, taking this in. Then she said, "Oh, you're an empath. Neat."

I laughed hard, snorting. Leave it to Nina to be so incredibly light and casual about something that had been feeling so heavy. "You have heard of this before?"

"Yeah. Haven't you?"

Now that I thought about it in these terms, it was starting to make more sense. Yes. I knew some werewolves had varying kinds of psychic or empathic abilities. I just never thought I was someone who possessed any kind of magic like that. I never thought I would be.

"So," Nina said, nodding like she realized what my earlier question was about. "You felt something when you touched me, and now you're worried about me, huh?"

"What's going on, Nina? Please tell me. Let me help you with whatever it is."

When I'd hugged her, I'd felt happiness from Nina, and love. She was happy for me and Alex and the baby. But there'd been another, darker emotion lurking behind that, too. I got the sense, because of how faint it was, that it was a feeling she was trying to push down, trying not to think about.

But it was there. A little smudge of dull, aching panic and fear.

She frowned, bobbing her head. "Okay, babe. Why don't you take your shower first, though? I'll tell you when you get out. I'll tell you while I dry and style your hair for you, okay? You'll feel better when we get you all cleaned up."

"He showed up at my apartment," Nina said, nearing the end of her story. "Uninvited. Unannounced. It freaked me out."

It was a story about an unexpectedly complicated breakup she was going through over the past few days. With a guy she thought she'd been seeing casually, who apparently had developed much stronger feelings for her.

Ryker. The bouncer. The guy who'd nearly killed a man with his bare hands—defending and protecting Nina, at that time—on the night that she'd first hooked up with him.

"I never should have let him come to my place. He started wanting to be there all the time. I thought he got the message, after I told him I needed some space, that he was doing too much. He seemed to be backing off. But then, there was a bad moment. He asked, 'Is there another guy?' and, stupidly, I hesitated, and that let him know the answer was yes, and he flipped out, got so jealous. I should've just said no—"

Nina had been parting my clean, dry hair into sections that she planned to straighten. I spun around to face her and took hold of her shoulders.

"Hey. No one talks about my best friend that way. You are not stupid, Nina. This space invader is the one who was being stupid, if he got upset with you just for taking a breath. You know that, right?"

She smiled. "You're right. I know. Thanks, babe. I'm just a little rattled. It's been a crazy couple days."

"Tell me about it."

I wanted to tell Nina about my father, too, but we heard footsteps nearing the door, telling us the guys (and my baby!) were back, so that would have to wait.

The sight of my husband and newborn as they returned from their stroll – that picture will be etched into my mind forever. Both of them had wind-tousled hair and flushed cheeks, and they wore matching smiles. Just looking so, so happy.

Nina made herself scarce again, saying she'd return later in the day. Apparently, Alexander had offered to let her stay here at the palace this week, to support with the baby if needed.

She gave me a big, long hug before she left, and I got the distinct feeling that she was trying to intentionally broadcast her emotions to me, using my new talent to communicate something privately.

What I felt from her was relief. She was relieved she had a place to crash here, because her apartment was where she'd been feeling the most afraid.

She was trying to tell me she was going to be okay.