Mo(u)rning

by schwarmerei1

Summary

Alicia’s question is finally answered.

Notes

Disclaimer: I mean no disrespect, CBS, Scott Free, and the Kings own them
Spoilers: Spoilers through episode 5x16 "The Last Call"
Author's note: Many thanks to randomizer for helping this along despite her demanding fic commitment.

A red vertical stroke vanished, then three horizontals and one vertical appeared before Alicia's eyes as the digit one became a two.

12:22 A.M.

Alicia turned her head on the pillow to look at the ceiling. Not so late yet, but it wouldn't be long before it was 1:22 A.M., then 2:22 A.M., and by then it would be too late to salvage much of anything. She tried to clear her nose by breathing through it.

Her sleep had become worse each successive night after Will's death. That first night, exhaustion
overwhelmed confusion and grief. But since then, sleep came in fragments between waking to imaginations and memories. More alcohol hadn't helped, neither had less. Work couldn't fill the crater left in her by Will's death. The orange plastic bottle of benzodiazepines her doctor had prescribed five years ago when Peter's scandal had broken had been emptied, pill by pill, years ago.

Each night she'd hoped that if she surrendered herself completely to crying -- the type with no witnesses: un-pretty, and suffocating on snot -- she would mark a place between Will's death and the future. Somehow she'd begin to move forward untethered from torturous thinking. But each night in her bed after Zach and Grace were asleep, she began to cry anew and progressed no further.

Tonight was worse though. Peter's and you're a selfish bitch had not even stung. But a man who you're not even sure cared about you had found its mark. Because that was the question her mind had been turning over and over.

The voicemail he had never left; the one he had but she'd never heard all those years ago; the love you she'd stopped him from talking about. A history of missed connections that would now stay unresolved permanently.

No way of finding an answer that was conclusive or even satisfactory. Crumbs of evidence led one way and then the other. And she'd had to stop herself from seeking more of them before she became even dizzier from her search.

Her phone hadn't been more than arm's length away since finding Will's final message. She tapped her way to a name that used to always sit amongst her recent calls list. It was late, she shouldn't call, but Alicia did.

There was something merciful about Kalinda's softly-spoken "Hey."

"Kalinda," Alicia struggled to speak.

"Alicia . . ." Kalinda's voice was like a caress and gave permission.

"Kalinda . . . I'm not okay."

The woman at the other end of the phone exhaled, while Alicia held her breath. "What can I do?"

She wanted . . . she wanted . . . but she didn't know what to ask for. Alicia remained silent.

Kalinda's voice was tentative. Three years ago it might not have been. "Do you want me to come over?"

The relief that washed over Alicia at the suggestion made it easy to answer, but she felt her voice break anyway on "Yes."

I'll see you later Alicia. And she had. They'd all been at the funeral. Kalinda had fixed her eyes on her old friend. Alicia had lost her courage and just smiled, nodded, then ducked her head.

Kalinda was lucky, Alicia thought with unfair bitterness as she set her phone back on the nightstand. Kalinda had lost a dear friend and her drinking buddy -- but she had the luxury of pure grief unsullied by fallings-out or by things not said.

Rumour also had it, a ghost in blue leather had claimed the satisfaction of vengeance. A few minutes of whispering through the mesh of the holding cells had sent Jeffrey Grant spiralling into a psychiatric facility.
Alicia tried not to watch the clock, to avoid calculating the minutes it would reasonably take Kalinda to get here. She didn't know if she was at work, or at home, or even if home was still where it was back when Kalinda had nudged a card across the conference table towards her at Lockhart Gard . . .

Alicia choked and stifled new sobs. She needed someone or something to break the cycle she was in. Diane, Will's other great friendship, wasn't someone she could be weak with. She wanted Kalinda -- the old Kalinda -- the one who passed notes in court, worked her cases with unmerited fervour, and guarded her until Kalinda became the one Alicia needed protecting from.

Her phone chirped bright and annoying. Kalinda's name flashed up with a text message and Alicia's heart sank. She wasn't coming, it was too late and she'd changed her mind, or work had called with an emergency.

Her finger touched the phone's screen with resignation.

_I'm here._

Kalinda was simply being considerate and not ringing the doorbell of an apartment she knew probably contained Alicia's sleeping children.

Alicia slid from her covers and padded in socks to her front door. She opened it to a Kalinda she'd never seen before. The black winter coat, leather gloves, and magenta scarf were familiar -- everything else was different.

Kalinda had been called in to more than a few middle-of-the-night emergencies for work. But the boots and stockings had always been on; her hair perfect. And if sometimes there hadn't been the careful shading of different colours for a true smokey eye, Alicia had never seen her without eyeliner, mascara, eyeshadow and lipstick.

Tonight Kalinda's face was naked, her hair pulled into a simple ponytail, and Alicia could see traces of cold rain that had streaked skin and hair in the distance between her SUV and Alicia's building.

Alicia wasn't sure if she pulled Kalinda in the door or if the other woman walked in herself. But she found her hands touching the cold of the outside of Kalinda's coat as she helped her shed it quietly in the hallway. She got tangled for a moment on what she realised was a bottle in Kalinda's hand. Kalinda shifted it to her other palm and freed herself.

"Sorry, it's already open." Alicia couldn't understand why Kalinda was apologising. She raised the bottle to explain. "It's mine. Scotch -- for Will."

And then Alicia really looked at Kalinda's face and saw how pinched with grief it was. And how self-centred she'd been to think she had a monopoly on the misery of the last week.

Alicia still stood stupidly. It was Kalinda who gestured her to the kitchen to find two tumblers -- still sensible of the fact that the living room (and the drinks trolley therein) was next to the bedrooms of Zach and Grace. She watched Kalinda in her thick woollen leggings, zippered pullover, and wedge-heeled boots (there were still boots) open her cupboards and then pour two fingers for each of them.

Alicia took the glass from Kalinda's hand. They clinked -- naming who they were toasting was unnecessary. The spirit was warm in her mouth and throat but Alicia shivered despite it.

"You were in bed." Kalinda observed. Warm fingers closed on the skin Alicia's wrist -- she'd been cold for days. "Come on, go back and get warm."

Alicia had been right about Kalinda versus Diane. Being told what to do and the idea of drinking
snuggled in her bed and baggy pyjamas was a relief from the responsibility of holding it together. Kalinda even walked her to the edge of the bed and retook her glass. "Get in -- you're freezing."

It felt odd, sheltering under the covers and nursing her scotch while watching Kalinda unzip her wet boots by the chair in the corner. Then her friend climbed onto the other side of the bed and rested against the pillows next to her. Odd, but good.

Kalinda's glass touched hers again. "Let's try this again." They both drank, Alicia felt the warmth and the strength of Kalinda's scotch, as well as the symbolism of the occasion bolster her.

"It sounds horrible," Alicia confessed, "I've been jealous of you being able to mourn Will without having regrets. I treated him so badly."

Kalinda looked at her, and Alicia could see that like the fact that Kalinda was the one to end their phone call that day, there was a little less deference to her than was there once. "You think I don't have regrets? I have everything to regret. I could have stayed to see if we got our continuance. I would have been sitting there right behind the table. I would have seen him go for the gun. I could have done something and none of this would have happened."

Alicia could envisage it. Kalinda pulling yet another courtroom miracle from thin air: somehow Jeffrey was disarmed; Will ducked for cover; and nothing bad happened in Cook County Courthouse. Maybe it would have even been her wakeup call that something could have happened, and she'd have resolved things with Will.

Alicia took a shuddering breath and tried to steady herself with another sip of her drink. "Sorry. I've been assuming a lot of things lately."

Kalinda's eyes were sympathetic. "Apples and oranges." And Alicia could tell that Kalinda knew (or guessed?) a lot of what she was going through and why.

"Diane told me he loved me. And I knew that, but we never. . ." Alicia trailed off. "I'm sorry, I'm pathetic." Her right hand covered her face.

She heard the noise of Kalinda setting her glass down on the far side of the bed and then movement and Kalinda's presence around her taking the glass out of her hand and likewise setting it down safely beside the bed.

Then arms, small but strong, were around her. It wasn't like that embrace in exceptional circumstances from Diane. It was generous and offered her a safe harbour for her battered emotions. The positioning was slightly awkward, as they settled back into the pillows together, but Alicia didn't want to move.

"I know things." Kalinda told the top of her head. "They were said in confidence, but that doesn't matter now. If you want to hear them?"

Alicia couldn't help the shuddering sob. Kalinda had offered to tell her things years before about Peter and she'd declined. "Yes, I want to know."

She felt Kalinda swallow. "He used to talk to me . . . when you were together." Kalinda gave her context. "He wanted to be different for you."

"Different?"

"A person. Will didn't feel like a person. He wanted to be a real one for you." Kalinda swallowed remembering that time and all Will's heart-rending, if quiet, confessions -- how it connected her still
to Alicia when everything was broken between them. "He didn't want to screw up. He wanted it to work more than he'd ever wanted anything."

Alicia realised she underestimated the depth of Will's friendship with Kalinda. "I stopped him. A couple of times I stopped him from talking." Stopped him meeting the kids.

"I know." Alicia felt Kalinda pet her hair before continuing. "He thought he wasn't capable of it, but he loved you. He wanted things he'd never wanted before."

Alicia was too afraid to ask. The potential for her questions to be answered tantalised her. She pressed her face closer into Kalinda's throat.

Kalinda took the silence for the acquiescence it was. "Before you broke it off with him," Kalinda didn't spare Alicia that fact, "He was going to ask you to commit. He wanted a future, he wanted kids with you."

Alicia was aware of Kalinda's arms tightening in anticipation of the wail that did, indeed, come from her.

She could only sob. Would it have changed anything? She wasn't sure, but at least the uncertainty that had been plaguing her had gone. And it made sense of how Will's constant generosity towards her had converted into such rivalry and outright hostility. And she was ashamed afresh of some of the pettiness she'd shown him.

One of Kalinda's arms stayed firm, while the other hand continued to stroke her hair. And then she felt Kalinda begin to shake too and sob, "I loved that man," before burying her face on the top of Alicia's head.

Finally Alicia granted herself the freedom she had been denying herself. Kalinda just held her, and for a while cried with her.

Minutes passed before Alicia began to wipe at her face as her shuddering subsided, aware that she'd left a wet patch on Kalinda's top.

Kalinda steered gently to happier memories. "Know what Will's most endearing quality was?"

"Loyalty?"

Kalinda snorted derisively. "No. He used to offer to help me pick up women and never once suggested having a threesome."

It worked -- Alicia sniggered. The feeling of a lifted burden couldn't be quantified.

Kalinda slid back leaving Alicia on the pillows and sat cross-legged on the bed before her.

They both let the silence sit in the room, and Alicia felt the miracle of drowsiness rather than exhaustion settle upon her.

"I'll go now." Kalinda's voice was very soft.

"Would you stay?"

Kalinda's eyes were liquid, and her voice even softer. "Yeah."

Alicia moved forward. "I'll find you something to . . ."
"Sssh. Stay in bed, I can find it myself."

Alicia slid down into bed properly and let sleepy feelings continue to build. She could hear movements behind the door to her closet that Kalinda had pulled shut behind her.

It was nothing short of a miracle what a balm to her soul Kalinda's presence was. She tried not to think how sterile her personal life had been during the last six months after destroying her relationship with Will and telling herself that Kalinda was unnecessary.

It defied belief that despite reducing their rebuilt friendship to amiable work colleagues and then to absolutely nothing -- in the space of a few hours they could be back in other's lives. First weeping together, and now sharing companionship on a level previously inconceivable.

Maybe this was the good she was supposed to make of Will's death.

Then she snorted internally. Tomorrow she'd even be able to tell Cary she was sleeping with Kalinda too. She must be feeling better if she could joke with herself.

"What?" Kalinda, reemerged, and knew something was up. A pair of Alicia's pyjamas trailed past her ankles to the floor, but pulled too tightly across her chest.

"Nothing."

"Hmmm." Kalinda's eyes were narrowed and briefly amused as she pulled the covers on the other side of the bed over her and let her head sink into the pillow next to the one Alicia rested on.

Their eyes met.

"Sleep Alicia."

Alicia nodded. Apparently that last bit of permission helped.

She felt the movement of Kalinda's hand under the quilt. Small, warm fingers rested comfortingly on her wrist. She began to slide her arm up, Kalinda's fingers loosened in response to Alicia seeming to pull her hand away. Instead Alicia wrapped Kalinda's fingers in her palm and held them gently.

"Good night Kalinda."

Her final thought as the temporary peace of sleep claimed her was that the last time she'd slept the night next to someone was that night with Will in New York.


+Alicia woke. It was still dark outside. Tiredness was still present, but it was the longest stretch of sleep she'd had since finding out about Will.

Kalinda's hand had come loose during their slumber, but she was still there nestled on the pillow next to Alicia's.

Kalinda stirred awake, as though Alicia's consciousness brought her own to the surface.

They just looked at each other for long moments in silence.

Then Alicia watched Kalinda's eyes scan the room for the illumination of Alicia's alarm clock that
told her it was currently 05:16 A.M..

"Do you want me to leave?" When Alicia didn't reply, Kalinda continued. "Before the kids wake up . . ."

Alicia remained silent. Despite her complete abandonment of their friendship, Kalinda was still prepared to appear, fix things, then disappear as though she were never there. To ask nothing in return.

He loved you. Diane's words echoed in her brain. Kalinda loved her too.

"Stay." Alicia kept looking into Kalinda's eyes, wondering how she'd denied the devotion she saw in them on so many previous occasions. Her hand slid through the bedding until it found Kalinda's left one. "Please."

"Thank you." Being kept rather than discarded once her usefulness was at an end meant more to Kalinda than she could say. The fingers of Kalinda's right hand ran down the side of Alicia's face in the gentlest of caresses. "Try to sleep some more."

I'll take care of you. Alicia shut her eyes. She didn't need to hear Kalinda actually speak the words.

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