

Chapter 182 Bleed

Fiona

“I’m sorry but vampires? Fi—vampires are here? VAMPIRES?!”

She woke up the baby.

Shit. Lexi had been crying so much these past couple days.

“Nina.” I closed my eyes and left them closed a moment. I was so tired.

My friend clapped a hand over her mouth. “I’m so sorry, I’ll go get her.”

I opened my eyes just in time to see that Nina had tears welling in hers. She jumped up and disappeared into the nursery to do as she promised and try to get the baby back down.

We’d had the TV news on and the volume pretty low. I muted it completely now. But I couldn’t tear my eyes away from the screen yet. I watched with emotionless horror as they played footage of the battle... it was hardly a glimpse of it, really, captured from a very far distance.

All that could be seen was what rose above the line of the buildings. And all that was, was vampires. Flying down from who-knows-where to assault my husband and our friends on the ground below. It was terrifying to watch. But for some reason I felt oddly calm, at least in terms of my bodily response. I felt rather numb, in fact.

But Nina was scared senseless. Unlike her, I did already know the vampires were here. Her shock tonight was of course valid and understandable.

As I considered this, I realized I should be the one holding the baby right now. I shouldn’t have had Nina go.

I turned the TV off.

“Hey. Let me take her.”

Nina had been pacing the nursery with Alexis held against her chest. She handed her over to me. The baby was still crying, and Nina looked like she was close to joining in.

Lexi started to slow her wailing almost immediately.

“Oh, I’m sorry, Fi,” Nina whispered. She meant about waking the baby.

“It’s okay, Nina. I know you didn’t mean to. This is all really scary...”

She covered her eyes with her hands and rubbed at them. Maybe trying to push some frightened tears back into her head before they could spill out. “Fi, the guys are out there...”

“Do you remember what you told me a while back? That if anyone can handle himself in any situation, it’s Alexander?”

She nodded.

“And he has Kayden with him, too. Kayden is also a badass, right?”

That got her to smile for a split second. “Yeah.”

“Why don’t you go put some tea on? I’ll stay with her a while till she can get back to sleep.”

Lexi settled down a little more when Nina left the room. She was always so aware of and reactive to what her adult companions were feeling. I hoped for her sake that it was just her age that made my daughter so sensitive. I hoped that she did not have the same acute empathic abilities that I now did. Because it was hard enough for me, a grown woman, to control them... I could not imagine what experiencing that would be like for a child.

I decided to sit in the rocker while she staggered through the end of her crying fit. I shushed her quietly and started rolling back and forth in the rocking chair, and gradually, Lexi’s breathing slowed down, her vocalizing grew faint and then stopped.

The crying must have worn her out, because as soon as she was calm again, she fell back asleep.

“You turned it off,” Nina said quietly when I returned to the bedroom. She handed me a steaming teacup and nodded at the TV.

“Yeah. Let’s just leave it off for now, okay? You can’t really see anything in that video they’re playing anyway. It’ll just stress us out. Alex will call as soon as he can to let us know that they are okay. And they are going to be okay.”

Nina took a big inhale and exhale, nodding. I think I had comforted her a bit.

I only wished that I believed my own words as much as my friend seemed to.

“How are you so calm right now, Fiona?” Nina was now keeping her voice conspicuously quiet, very much not wanting to rouse the baby again.

I shrugged. “It’s my job.”

Third person

“Another failed idea of yours... imagine that...”

Caius’s voice never seemed to change, even when he was enraged. The smooth, even quality of it was deeply unsettling in the context of the absolute rage bared on his horrific face.

If Scarlet had thought his face was scary yesterday, when he was in a somewhat pleasant mood, that was nothing compared to his current countenance. Anger, frustration, and what probably felt to him like righteous indignation made him look ancient, skeletal and demonic, wrinkled and furrowed and twisted as all his sharp features were.

Scarlet’s patience had worn thinner than thin. She was sick of being blamed for everything, when all she did was help. If her ideas were all so bad, why did the vampires act on them in the first place?

But she was scared, too. She bit her lip to keep from speaking. So hard, in fact, that it started to bleed.

Caius smelled it. He whipped around to face her, his dark eyes going right to her mouth.

Scarlet pressed her lips together, licking them from the inside and swallowing down the copper-flavored liquid. As if that would help. He’d already gotten a whiff of blood; and he’d been riled up already, of course. After returning from a badly failed attack on Alexander.

“And now he knows,” Caius murmured. His black, unblinking eyes were still fixed on Scarlet’s mouth. “We kept ourselves hidden so well, for so long. Our first attack was our only chance at ambush.”

“It seemed like a good idea,” Scarlet said quietly.

She simply could not stay silent any longer. She had to defend herself. She did so with as much calm as she could muster, showing as much respect as possible.

“I know you thought so, too. Perhaps you should have been prepared for him to... be prepared, to come with backup...”

Caius’s upper lip snarled. His fangs began to elongate and he took a few slow steps forward.

Scarlet’s breathing went shallow. She heard it rattling in her throat. Caius had not taken his eyes off her lip since she’d bitten it into bleeding.

He closed the last of the distance between them and bent his face to hers. Wrapped one large, cold hand around the back of her head, and lapped his tongue at her lips slowly, wiping away a small slick of crimson blood. Then he took the injured lip into his mouth and suckled on it.

Her heart had never beat faster in her life.

There was nothing to be done in this instant but wait. It seemed like every word she said just made her situation worse.

“Mmm,” Caius moaned, apparently enjoying the taste of her blood. Finally he released her lip and pulled back. He looked Scarlet in the eye and she noted that his expression had softened a bit. Some of the edge had worn off.

She almost started to feel relieved.

But then, with one of those impossibly, invisibly fast movements, he bent to her neck and bit it.

She shrieked. The sound was the high shrill of mortal terror.

Caius, much stronger than Scarlet, held her immobile in his arms and sucked on her neck, drawing thirstily.

Until she cried out, her voice swampy and strangled. “Please! There is more! I can help—I can keep helping you! There is more that I know!”

He released her neck and drew back. Let out a heavy sigh. And smiled, with her blood dripping down his chin.

His fangs were still out. And impossibly long, she thought to herself. Bigger and longer than those of any other vampire she’d ever seen. Her neck ached badly.

“Good.” Caius licked his lips and smacked them noisily. “That’s good. Because I was just starting to think that it might not be so bad to keep you around for a while.”