

## Chapter 183 Downswing

Alexander

Every coroner in the region had been called in. The block was lined with medical transport vehicles. It was going to be a long and slow process getting all of the bodies into them and on their way somewhere that our kind could treat them with honor and begin the process of attempting to identify them.

The medical professionals tasked with pulling the bodies off of the pile and moving them into the waiting vehicles were wearing full hazmat suits, on account of all the still-tacky blood slicking the steps and surrounding area, as well as the rotten condition of some of the bodies.

It was an atrocious undertaking.

I saw one woman in a quarantine suit stagger down to the street, unzip and rip her face mask off frantically, double over and vomit into the gutter. I was a little surprised that she was the only one. I truly admired the courage of all these responders. I had no doubt they were badly frightened, but still, here they were. Showing up to do the honorable work of helping to lay our dead to rest.

The pack and I had checked the area to be sure it was secure, of course, before we allowed civilians to come near and begin processing the scene.

The guys and I had left our phones and changes of clothes in the SUV. Cal was somewhere speaking with a few pack members— young warriors under his command, with whom he was debriefing. Kayden was in an ambulance on the way to the hospital.

I sat in the driver’s seat and called Fiona. She picked up the phone right away.

“Alex.”

“Fi. I’m okay, baby.”

“God,” she breathed. “I am so happy to hear your voice.”

“Back at you, sweetheart.”

“Thank you for calling.”

“I did as soon as I could. Things are finally settling down over here.”

“And Kayden?”

“He is okay. Is Nina with you?”

“Yeah, she’s right here. You’re on speaker.”

“Okay. Listen—first I am going to tell you again, truthfully, Kayden is okay. He was injured, though. He’s going to be just fine, but he got bitten. He just needs some stitches. He went to the hospital. As soon as I can get out of here, I’m going to go pick him up and head home.”

“Okay. Thank you for telling us. I won’t keep you on the phone. I’ll let you get back to it. But, Alex?”

“Yeah, baby?”

“What can I do to help?”

“I don’t know, sweetheart. You just take care of Lexi and we will be back as soon as we can.”

“There has to be something.” She adopted a businesslike tone of voice. “There must be something that I can do. Please let me help, Alex.”

I thought it over for a moment and realized that she was right.

“Yeah, okay. I’m gonna text you Brandon’s number. Can you call him? I’m going to have to address the media about this at some point. Some point soon, later today I guess. Maybe while I deal with things on the ground here, you could find out when and where all that will need to take place. And help me start preparing for it.”

“Done. I’ll wait for your text.”

“Thank you, Fiona.”

“Don’t thank me. It’s my job.”

I chuckled. It felt good to feel my mouth move into the shape of a smile, even if it was only briefly. “I love you, sweetheart. I’ll text when I’m heading home.”

“I love you too. See you soon.”

Kayden was passed out in the passenger seat, and snoring lightly.

Like a truly prideful asshole, he’d been refusing pain medication when I finally got to him at the hospital. But his neck wound was a horror show. That vampire had gotten several brutal bites in, I could see now that all the blood had been cleaned away. The stitches looked well-applied, but they were stretching and pulling on his skin in ways that could only be terrifically painful.

I instructed my friend to let the nice nurse hook him up to a fentanyl drip like she wanted to. And threatened to force some kind of pill down his throat myself if he didn’t. He chose option one.

The drugs did make him sleepy, but I knew it was necessary when I finally saw his eyebrows unfurrow and his jaw unclench with relief from the severe pain he’d been enduring for hours by that point.

We were both still absolutely filthy and reeking with the stench of vampire blood. I’d wiped as much of it off me as I could, before pulling on the change of clothes I’d brought along, but it had seeped and dried into my hair and skin and needed to be scrubbed out with soap and hot water.

I loathed the idea of watching vampire blood draining down into the floor of the shower I shared with Fiona in our bedroom. I could not, would not do that.

I’d texted her before pulling away from the hospital, letting her know we were en route.

I sent another message when we parked at the palace. Told her I was here, but would be a few more minutes before returning to our room. I needed to get Kayden to his, and then wanted to clean up in my study.

Kayden roused when I opened the passenger door. I got an arm around him and helped him stumble to his room in the barracks, grateful he’d woken up so I didn’t have to carry him there like a baby. Would have served me right, though, for forcing the meds on him. He passed back out as soon as he hit the sheets.

I didn’t expect Fiona to be waiting for me outside the big double doors of my study.

“I didn’t want you to see me like this.”

Her keen blue eyes did flick all over me appraisingly, but she did not flinch or grimace at the sight of my blackened hair, teeth and fingernails. “Alex. You don’t have to be alone right now.”

She stepped close, but I told her to stop. “I want to clean up before I touch you,” I said gently. She nodded.

We entered my study. There was a bathroom suite off one end of it.

“I’m going to shower.”

“Okay. I’m going to call the staff and have them send some food over.”

My stomach growled at the mention of food. I thanked her for that, and then we parted ways.

I heard her speaking on the phone as I closed the bathroom door behind me. I cranked the hot water and stripped my clothes off. Before stepping in, though, I fished around the cabinets and found a toothbrush and some toothpaste, and took them with me.

I washed my face first. Then my hair. Then soaped up and rinsed my body. Then washed my hair again and ran some conditioner through it.

Then I brushed my teeth. I scrubbed my tongue so hard I gagged myself, but it was necessary. I doubled over and spat out a small rush of liquid, aiming it right into the shower drain. It was blackish green. Bile mixed with a little vampire blood I’d accidentally swallowed. At last, I could no longer taste the putrid, rotten flavor of it on my tongue. I added more toothpaste and scrubbed my teeth and gums once again for good measure, though.

The bathroom door swung open. I turned and saw Fiona enter. I guess I was thinking she was about to collect my dirty clothes or something. But then she closed and locked the door behind her and I watched through the glass as she removed her own clothes and joined me in the shower.

I was very glad I’d gotten a head start on cleaning myself. As far as I could tell, I was blood-free by now.

She put her cool hands to my chest, pressed her body into mine, stood on her toes and kissed me. I wrapped her body up in my arms. She felt tiny and feather-light when I picked her up – she was losing her baby weight fast these days.

The shower had been feeling pretty good. But that kiss actually made me feel better. Made me feel sane and whole again after all the madness.

Of course I became aroused, and quickly— I was on the downswing but still full of adrenaline from battle, and once Fiona started stroking me, my body took all the tension and stress and fear and excitement I’d been feeling and turned it into sexual desire. I took her once in the shower.

And then a second time on the couch. And then a third time on the bearskin rug in front of the fireplace, which the staff had been kind enough to start a blaze inside of when they’d come in to set out a breakfast spread.

I was beyond famished by the time I actually got around to eating that feast, and did a real number on it.