

## Chapter 185 Labyrinth

Alexander

“This is good. Really good.” I finished reading the speech Fiona had written and passed her laptop back to her. “Thank you so much for preparing all of this.”

“It was no problem. As soon as I started writing, it just came to me. I did tell Brandon to go ahead and have the speech writer put another one together, as well. Couldn’t hurt to have a backup, I figured. He emailed it to the both of us a couple hours ago.”

“Did you read it already?”

She nodded, frowning.

“Is it better than yours?”

“No.”

“Then I don’t think I even need to look at it. Let’s use yours.”

“Okay. Is there anything you want to add or change?”

I shook my head. “No. Honestly, I think it is perfect as is.”

“Alright. I’ll print out a few copies and call it done.” She reached over and stroked my short beard. “I’m so glad you got some res. Those dark circles you were sporting this morning have gone away. But you ought to get a shave before you go on TV tonight.”

I smiled. “You know... you are really good at this.”

She arched an eyebrow. “At writing speeches? Thanks. It’s my first attempt.”

“Well, yeah. But what I meant was...” I wasn’t sure the best way to put this. “You are good at taking care of me. I’m so grateful for this—” I pointed to the laptop— “but also for this morning. And everything you do to keep me going through all this insanity. You are a good wife. A good Luna. A good Queen.”

She blushed and looked away, shaking her head dismissively.

“And what about you – are you prepared to go on camera tonight?” I asked.

Her eyes went round with surprise. “Me?”

“Yeah, you.”

“I... You really want me to do the press event with you?”

“I really do. We should deliver this speech together.” I leaned in and gave her a peck on the lips. “Fiona, you and I are going to be leading this country together. You are as much a part of all of this as I am.”

I knew my perfect Luna would be poised and commanding in front of the camera, even though it was something she had never done before. Fiona tended to thrive under pressure.

And it turned out that she really was a natural. Calm and confident, charismatic and charming. I didn’t need to wait for Brandon to call me with poll results to know that after this media appearance, our people were going to love her. And they would like me more for having her by my side, too. I was quite sure of that.

The topic of our address was somber and serious, of course. A war had arrived on our doorstep overnight – literally. We assured the public we had a plan working. We promised them we would root out the evil and abolish it as fast as we could. We warned against the dangers of being out at night for the time being, and recommended many specific precautions.

And I announced that until we could be sure the threat had been removed, there would be a kingdom-wide curfew enforced for minors. Children under eighteen years of age were to be kept at home from dusk to dawn.

I could not impose such a restrictive rule upon adults, though. Especially considering that many of them relied upon late night, early morning, or graveyard shifts for their livelihoods. It would be up to every individual man and woman, it would be their choice whether to make changes to their lives that would allow them to remain safe indoors during the dark hours in which the lurking enemy came to life.

But the children— they had to be protected at all costs. I only wished there were more that I could do to keep them safe until the enemy could be exterminated.

“You drugged me,” Kayden grumbled, making a half-hearted effort to suppress a smile. “I feel hungover. Like I could sleep another full day.”

He was pacing his room slowly, trying to stretch out his shoulders without disturbing his neck.

“It was for your own good. And maybe you should do that. I highly doubt the bloodsuckers are going to be out again tonight. Not after the loss they just suffered. They’re in hiding. All you and I would be working on tonight is strategy, and honestly pal, you’ve earned a night off. Just get some more rest.”

Before discharging him, the doctor had wrapped Kayden’s freshly stitched neck with stretchy white gauze. He was now picking at its edges like they were itching him.

“Here. I’ll unspool you.”

He chuckled and sat down in the chair I was pointing to. He was going to fuck with the bandage anyway; I figured I might as well remove it and spare him the needless strain reaching up and around to do it himself.

“Looks better than it did this morning.” The stitches were doing their job. The doctor had cauterized some areas of the wound, too. Kayden’s neck was now in a good state of early healing. It was covered in scabs and black and purple bruises, though.

He got up and went over to a nearby mirror to see for himself. “Ugh.”

“You should probably wrap it again before you lie down. So you don’t accidentally scratch at the stitches in your sleep. And clean it before you cover it.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Kayden knew how to treat an injury. This sure was not the first one he had ever sustained. But he could be stubborn about taking care of himself.

“You talk to Nina today?”

Kayden’s eyes paused their work of studying the fang-mark bruise patterns on his neck, and darted over to me.

“Yeah. I texted her a bit ago, when I woke up.”

“She was really worried about you.”

“I know.”

“I bet she’d be happy to come over here and help you take care of that crime scene on your neck.”

He chuckled, casting his eyes down. “Yeah, probably.”

I wasn’t really sure to make of that reaction, but I let it go. I needed to get back to my study for a scheduled call, and now wasn’t the time to press Kayden to talk about anything, anyway.

He needed rest. Given a little more time for his injury to patch itself together, I had no doubt he’d be back in fighting shape soon. I’d seen my Beta bounce back fast after worse than this. He was a tough sonofabitch.

My phone meeting with Brandon lasted almost an hour. There was much to discuss. He reported that the morgues were making progress on identifying some of the bodies recovered from the courthouse. He said he’d await more reports before sending them over to me in a large batch, but I couldn’t wait. I told him to email me everything they had so far.

After we hung up, I went to my computer and opened up the reports. There were only a dozen or so completed, though I had been informed that the total body count amounted to a horrific one hundred and eighty-eight souls.

But already, a pattern was emerging.

These few werewolves who had been identified so far— they were all adult women. And two of them had apparently been employed by none other than Blackout Casino.

I started pacing my study, thinking about what that meant.

We already suspected one of our traitorous fugitives was hiding out at that resort. And now we were finding that at least some of the vampires’ victims had connections to the same place.

The casino had to be their headquarters. It was where the vampires were making themselves at home. Where they were feeding. Where they were keeping their allies under their protection.

But even if I knew that, I still needed a lot more information before I would be able to find them there. The Blackout property was like a small city of its own. A small city densely populated by busy and distracted workers and travelers that the vampires were hunting and also hiding behind.

I stared down at the hotel map. It was infuriating, thinking about how to find anyone inside this labyrinth, anyone who didn’t want to be found.

Caius had chosen a good place to hide.

But I would find him.