

Chapter 190 Nightmare

Fiona

Alex became very quiet and thoughtful over dinner.

“Penny for your thoughts?” I asked.

He whipped his eyes to mine and shivered. I had the odd feeling I’d just watched his soul jump back into his body after having left it for a moment.

“We must get him to give a full confession,” he said quietly.

“You mean the traitor? Roland?”

“Yes. I need to know everything about his involvement with Scarlet. I don’t know how to motivate him to talk, though.”

“Yes, I have been wondering the same thing. He has been incredibly tight-lipped so far, even when caught in lies. And you said it wouldn’t do any good to use physical force. How can you get a person like that to spill their secrets?”

“I honestly don’t know. I was hoping you might have an idea.”

“Hm. I will give it some thought.”

Actually, something did occur to me. Something related to my outing with Lexi this afternoon.

“Oh, I wanted to tell you. I ran into Iris today. The two of us did.”

Alex shuffled in his seat, straightening his spine. He looked at little Lexi in her high chair, seated between us at the head of the table. She met his eyes and offered her father a little smile.

“Did you? And how did that go?”

“It was... incredibly awkward.”

Alex frowned. “Where was this?”

“In the garden. She had an easel set up out there and was painting. I had been planning to take Alexis for a walk to smell the roses.”

Alexander looked to the side and rubbed a hand down his face, something he did when he was anxious.

“She asked if she could hold the baby.”

His eyes darted back to mine. I could tell he disliked this idea, perhaps as much as I did. He reached for his water glass and drank its contents all the way down.

“I told her no, and I’m afraid she took it personally. I was as polite as I could be about it, but...” I shrugged. “I don’t know, Alex. Things are feeling rather tense between me and her again. Did you talk to the doctor again yet, about all that stuff we discussed?”

“No, not yet.”

“Did she not go see her yet? Or...?”

“I don’t know, Fiona. She just hasn’t called me back yet.” Though he kept his voice from getting too sharp, it was nonetheless tinged with irritation. Alex was tired of discussing this topic.

This reaction did not sit well with me.

Fortunately, though, it only took about three seconds of silence for Alexander to recognize his mistake. He met my now-stern gaze and immediately his emotions sagged down into regret.

“I’m sorry. I’ve just got a lot on my mind this afternoon. I didn’t mean to snap at you, if that’s what that sounded like. And I really am sorry about Iris. You should be able to walk where you please in your own home and not have to worry about her. I will get it all sorted out, I promise you. As soon as I can.”

“I know you will.” I extended my open hand across the table like a peace offering. I really wasn’t trying to start an argument.

Alex took my hand and gave it an affectionate squeeze.

“I think I do have an idea, Alex. For the traitor.”

He looked a question mark at me.

“I’m not totally sure how to describe it, but there may be more that I could do, or at least attempt to do with my abilities. Maybe I could just give it a try tomorrow.”

A few hours later, while settling down for bed, we resumed our conversation about plans for the next day. “I would really like it if we could go together to see my Grandfather soon. Maybe we can squeeze in a visit tomorrow. I would like him to meet Alexis.”

It had been almost a full month since I’d visited my beloved grandfather, and I felt terrible when I thought about that. I had been legitimately busy with the new baby, but still I felt guilty of neglect.

“Of course. Let’s go see him at his breakfast time. Then we can conduct our interrogation in the afternoon.”

As always when planning to visit the nursing home, I began to feel a combination of excitement and dread. It seemed lately that Grandfather no longer had “good days,” only some that were less bad than others. His condition was sure to only get worse and worse; I knew this. But knowing the inevitability of it all didn’t make it any less distressing.

I just hoped he would be lucid enough to recognize what was going on and who she was when I introduced him to his great-granddaughter. That was all I wanted.

I texted Nina while Alex took a shower. I asked if she could come by in the afternoon to babysit, and she replied quickly to agree.

It had been a strange couple of days, and I was feeling very tired. Not just physically – my mind felt tired. When Alex met me in bed, I told him I wasn’t sure I was up for another round of delicious but exhausting super-quiet sex, and asked if he’d just hold me till I fell asleep.

He turned out to be the first one to drift off.

I was comforted by his warm embrace and the soft sound of his snoozing breath, but still, the thinking machine would not be quiet. My thoughts were hyperactive and all over the place, jumping from worry to worry to worry. And I had so many things to worry about right now.

Behind my closed eyes, my mind replayed that TV news footage of all those vampires flying over the tops of the government buildings downtown.

And then I was picturing Nina walking out to her car in the dark and getting snatched up by a vampire or an ex-lover that had been lurking in a nearby shadow, lying in wait to abduct her.

But what really got me rattled was a terrifically vivid scene my anxious mind decided to play out for me like a short film...

I was standing in a forest clearing, holding Lexi in my arms. There was thick greenery all around us and dabbled sunlight pouring down from above.

I thought we were alone. But then I heard the footsteps. Light, fast footsteps growing louder, getting closer.

I turned in the direction of the approaching sound, clutching my baby tightly to my chest.

From the shadows I saw a smallish figure creeping forward. It was only a shadow, a silhouette at first. But then, as it came closer, leaves and branches rattling noisily as it passed them by, I discerned a pair of round, dark eyes glinting up at me, wet and menacing.

The creature moved forward into the clearing, but I found myself unable to look at it directly now. It was a bright, dizzying blur of color and movement, a blinding haze of chaotic energy flickering and swirling like a whirlwind, coming closer, growing larger. I dug my heels into the earth below as I felt the wind pulling at me, sucking like a vacuum, threatening to drag us into it... Lexi’s little hands drifted up into the air...

“Fiona, wake up! Fi. Hey, you’re okay, baby. You’re safe. It’s me, Alex. I’m here. You were just having a nightmare. You’re okay, sweetheart.”

My heart was hammering; I could hear my pulse drumming in my ears, feel it moving in my throat. The baby was crying. I tried to breathe in and coughed, almost choking; my throat was extremely dry.

“You’re okay, Fi.” My husband squeezed my hand, pulled it to his lips and kissed it. “I’m gonna go get the baby but I’ll be right back.”

I tried to catch my breath while he did just that. By the time he returned to bed with a sobbing infant in his arms, I had my bedside lamp on and was seated upright, sipping some water.

“Did I wake you both up?” I asked. “Was I talking in my sleep?”

Alex looked over at me and frowned. He was holding Lexi tightly against his chest and gently patting her on the back. “More like screaming,” he said quietly. “Must have been quite a dream you were having.”