

Chapter 194 Brick Wall

Alexander

“Fiona specifically said that you were not going to kick me out. She said I could stay. Why would she say that if she didn’t mean it?”

“I am not kicking you out, Iris. I am not telling you that you need to leave the palace immediately. I only want to talk about a plan for the long-term. I brought you here to help me with my mother’s case and to get you medical care. These things have now been done.”

“But I thought you were going to have me testify or something? Right? You needed to know what happened to your mother, but then don’t I need to stay to help you prove it in court or something, too?”

Iris’s cheeks were red. She was irritated and speaking fast, interrupting me every time I tried to talk. She had become heated the second we began talking and was running hotter and hotter every second we continued. I took a deliberate pause before answering, trying to reset the pace of the conversation.

“I did believe, in the past, that we’d need to take Scarlet to court to prove her involvement in my mother’s murder. But right now, she is on the run. And when I catch her, she will have a great many recent crimes to answer for, including high treason. Bringing charges against her for the murder will no longer be my priority.”

The truth was, I had actually realized I would never be able to put Scarlet on trial my mother’s murder. If I put Iris on a witness stand and had her recount her story, she would implicate Fiona’s father in the crime. And then I would be expected to bring charges against him, too.

But the last thing I needed was to stir up interest in that dead man. The road to finding him would only lead to my uncle and his own crime, which I was now committed to covering up.

“Not a priority,” Iris grumbled, looking down at her hands.

“I’m sorry that I have upset you, Iris. I am so grateful that you came out here with me. It was a long journey. Now that you have told us what happened, I can finally put my questions about my mother’s death to rest. Thank you for that. And I hope you benefited from your time receiving care from the palace doctor, too. But she has told me that you are in excellent health now. It just seems that it is time to start planning for your return home. Don’t you miss your cousin Terry?”

“Hm. Yes, I do miss Terry. But I don’t really miss the moors. It’s so much work all the time out there. This…” Iris looked around her bedroom suite, her eyes sparkling. “It’s so comfortable and safe here. I can sleep as much as I want. I don’t have to work for food. And I love to paint now.”

“You can still paint in the moors. There’s so much beauty there to inspire you, too. And I will be happy to provide you with a sum of money that can set both you and Terry up to live more comfortably.”

Iris shrugged. “Okay. I guess. I mean, I don’t really have a choice, huh? You… you guys don’t want me here.”

I tried to hold it in, but a frustrated sigh escaped my lips. “I wish you would not look at it in that way, Iris. When I invited you here, it was for specific, temporary reasons. Like I said, I’m not telling you to leave immediately. I only want to create a plan.”

“Did Fiona tell you I saw her and the baby out in the garden yesterday?”

I was caught a little off-guard. “Yes.”

“That’s why, isn’t it? That’s why you’re here right now. She wasn’t happy to see me.”

“No, Iris. I’m here right now because I’ve spoken to the doctor and learned that you no longer have need for medical care here. That was one of the main reasons I brought you here, remember?”

I felt like I was talking to a five-year-old. Or a brick wall.

“I think I upset her when I asked if I could hold the baby. I don’t know what she thinks I would do though, like I would really hurt a baby? And why? And especially one that looks so much like…” She gazed up at me with an expression I could only describe as adoring. It made me uncomfortable.

“She does not think you are going to hurt the baby,” I replied quietly, with as much patience as I could muster. This conversation was getting me nowhere, and starting to spiral out of control. I didn’t want to engage in an argument about Fiona. “Lexi is very young, Iris. You must understand that as parents we are just extremely careful with our newborn child.”

Iris’s lips twitched, tempted to smile. “Lexi. That’s cute.” Then her mouth dipped back down into a frown. “Fiona will never trust me, will she? I try so very hard to respect her wishes, but still she just does not like me. What more can I do?”

“Look, Iris. I don’t want to argue with you. Please stop with the comments about Fiona; that’s not what I came here to talk to you about. I am going to head out now. Just think about what we have discussed. We can resume this conversation another day, okay?”

I rose to stand, but Iris quickly added, “What about the vampires?”

I sat back down. “What about them?”

“It’s dangerous out there right now, isn’t it? The palace is the safest place in the world right now. Isn’t it?”

I didn’t know how to answer this unexpected line of questioning.

“I feel safe here, Alexander. But what will happen if I leave? They can just come and get me if I don’t have anyone to protect me.”

“The vampires are not going to come after you, Iris.”

Now a look of pure anger swept over her round face. “You said on the TV that everyone needs to be careful. That’s it’s best to stay indoors at night, every night. Is that true, or what?”

I left Iris’s room wishing I had somewhere I could go to scream.

She was so frustrating. She had an argument for everything, and she seemed very determined to stay in my home as long as possible. If I kept up the back-and-forth with her any longer, I was liable to punch a hole in the wall. I had to leave her with a noncommittal answer and just get out. I’d have to gather my thoughts and return to this problem another time.

One thing I knew: I couldn’t just kick my mother’s caretaker out heartlessly.

But the gentle approach I’d taken so far in my attempt to evict her was not working.

I didn’t know what I was going to do.

And I wasn’t looking forward to walking back into our room right now and confessing as much to my patient and longsuffering wife.

Fiona knew as soon as I walked in the door that I had not returned with good news.

I offered her a greeting and the best smile I could manage. She replied quietly while turning her head to the side slightly and narrowing her eyes.

I recognized this gesture by now. She did this when she was perceiving someone’s energy. It seemed like she was trying not to look too directly at whatever it was she was seeing, while also trying to narrow her focus in order to identify it.

Nina emerged from the bathroom a moment later. She read the room and quickly made herself scarce. “I’m gonna go get myself settled in for the night,” she mumbled, collecting her bags and making haste for the door. “You guys just text me if you need me. Bye!” And out she went.

I met Fiona in the kitchenette, where she had busied herself washing some dishes.

“I got the conversation started with Iris, but she won’t agree yet to a date to move out. I’m sorry, Fi. She got really upset and there was going to be no reasoning with her in that state. I’m going to have to try again another day.”

Fiona nodded her head. She finished her task and wiped her hands dry on a dish towel, then used the towel to dry every inch of the empty sink until it was gleaming.

“That’s fine,” she finally said, her voice calm and neutral. “Thank you for speaking with her. I’m sure it wasn’t easy.”