Chapter 198 We've Almost Got Them

"Somebody's looking satisfied." Nina raised her eyebrows while looking me over. "Have a good time 'getting some work done' with your husband?"

I squeezed her elbow and gave her a glare of mock reprimand. Alex had picked up a phone call moments after we returned to relieve our babysitter. I glanced out into the bedroom. He was standing with his back to us, looking out the window, holding the phone to his ear.

Nina followed my gaze then rolled her eyes at me. "He's not listening to us."

Maybe not. But I was pretty sure Alexander always heard just about everything, with his exceptional Alpha hearing.

"Yes, Nina. We did get some actual work done and it went well. And then he took me back upstairs to that room you had decorated for us recently, for a little break."

"Ohh. Niiiice. And…?"

Now I looked down at the baby. I was just finishing up changing her into some cute little pink and purple pajamas. Lexi gazed up at me with uncomprehending but desperately curious eyes.

"I can't go into detail in front of the baby, Nina."

My friend chuckled. "She really does pay attention to everything, doesn't she? I haven't been acquainted with a lot of babies. Are they all like that?"

"I don't think so." I swept Lexi up into my arms. Stroked the soft skin of her cheek and lightly booped her little button nose. She smiled, glowing with comforted happiness.

I was tempted to start telling Nina about my suspicions about my daughter's sensitive nature, but decided now was not the time. There was one other thing I wanted to try to talk to my best friend about tonight.

"Nina, can I ask you something?"

"Sure. What's up?"

I settled into the rocking chair with Alexis on my lap. I nodded at some nearby seating options – we had a small armchair in the nursery, as well as some cube ottomans covered in soft fabrics. Nina opted to recline on the floor using one of the fluffy ottomans as a backrest.

"I'm sorry if it's invasive when I do this," I started. "But when I touched you earlier I got a sense you're worried about something. Is everything okay?"

Nina gave me a half-smile. "It's fine, babe. I know you can't help it. But yeah, everything's okay. There is something on my mind, but it's not a big deal, really. Just something that's got me thinking about old worries, more than anything else…"

"Did Michael reach out again?"

"Damn, girl. You are good." Nina laughed her musical laugh. Lexi stared at Nina admiringly and smiled again. "Yeah, you got it. I answered his call this time and we actually talked for a little bit."

"Wow. How did that go?"

She blew air out between only slightly parted lips. "It's weird, I thought I'd be so stressed out speaking to anyone in my family, but it wasnice.Fi, it felt so good to talk to him. I was so happy after we hung up, I couldn't stop smiling for like an hour."

"So what's the problem?"

Nina shrugged. "Like I said, there's not really any problem. He told me he's no longer in touch with the parents anymore, either. I guess that'd been my worry, before. I thought it'd be complicated talking to him if he still talks to them… anyway, it was all fine. And he sounds really good, really happy."

"Aw. Well, that's wonderful. I'm really glad to have that news about him, actually. That's lovely, Nina. I'm glad you talked to him."

"Me too. He's a doctor, now. A 'resident' at a big hospital."

"Wow. Good for him."

"Yeah."

"So what's got you stressed out?"

"I don't know. I guess it just brought up some old stuff. It's just hard to stop thinking about it all again, now that it got stirred up in my mind. Does that make sense?"

I nodded. "Yes. Makes perfect sense."

Alexander

I knocked softly on the open nursery door. It sounded like the girls were in the middle of a serious conversation and I hated to intrude.

"Sorry to interrupt. But I have to go deal with something, Fi. I might be a while." I pointed over my shoulder in the direction of my study, where I was about to hurry off to.

She planted her feet on the ground and brought the movement of the rocking chair to a slow stop. "What's going on?"

I glanced at Nina. She misunderstood and jumped up off the floor, saying. "Should I let you two talk? I can go—"

"You're fine, Nina. This will be all over the news soon enough, anyway. I just don't enjoy sharing news like this. But there have been dozens of missing persons reports filed today all over the country. It's…"

Fiona shifted her hold on Lexi, wrapping the baby's blanket more tightly around her little body. "Go and deal with it," she said quietly. "Call me later when you have more information and let me know what I can do to help."

She stood and I crossed the room. I gave Lexi a kiss on the forehead and Fiona a kiss on the lips, and left.

The vampires had now abandoned their concern for keeping their activities under the radar. Before their attempted ambush at the courthouse, our enemy had been in hiding while they got comfortable in our world, found a place they felt safe to nest and hunt and built up their strength in secret.

Now things were different. Now, they were attacking our people mercilessly. Trying to hurt and frighten werewolves everywhere, trying to incite panic and disorder.

The information I received indicated that since midday today, there had been a spike in missing persons reports submitted by worried families, friends, and coworkers of individuals who had all apparently vanished overnight. It was when agencies in different regions of the country began to communicate with each other that the scope of the situation became apparent, and my team was alerted to the grim nationwide phenomenon.

I knew what he was up to. Caius. He was trying to throw me off his trail.

The abductions were clearly an effort to confuse us about the vampires' location. They wanted us to start spinning in circles, looking for them everywhere. Chasing our tails and splitting up and making ourselves vulnerable out in the open. Hoping we weren't going to track down their true whereabouts, the place where they'd set up base camp. Because they knew if we found that place, we'd execute every one of them the first chance we got.

"Do you think they know that we're onto them? That we're aware of their association with the casino?"

Kayden frowned, absentmindedly shaking his head left to right. "Who knows… I can't see how they would. These people went missing last night. We only sent the drones out after daybreak today. They all returned before sunset, by the way."

"Have you had a chance to look at any of the footage?"

My Beta was seated at my desk, opening and printing copies of the missing persons reports that had flooded into local law enforcement agencies all over the country today. "Just a glance…"

He clicked around and pulled up a paused video. The image on the computer screen was an aerial view of a seemingly empty red rock canyon about fifty miles east of Blackout Casino. This and many more videos had been recorded earlier today by drones we'd sent in this morning to survey the uninhabited area.

"We've got hours and hours of video to scrub through. But they said they got footage of the whole area. All we need to do now is study it. My intuition's telling me we're going to find them there, Alex. We've almost got them. I can feel it."

The printer was still running, spitting out more and more reports. Every page represented another werewolf that had been taken today, either as a prisoner or a casualty of war. Every one of them, I was sure, was either dead already or in mortal danger.

"I fucking hope so," I mumbled.

And then I remember the confession we heard today. The tale of the traitor who'd spent the past year selling our secrets to the enemy.

"We're going to need to rethink what to do once we do find the nest, Kayden. They know now. They know how we were getting in before. We trained the pack on attack strategies. We're going to have to do something different this time. Something they won't see coming."