

## Chapter 322

He cursed himself for having stopped doing guard duty all those years ago. It had been close onto twenty years since he'd escorted one of the Vârcolac when they'd left the pack compound.

He'd left Karn in charge of Liliana's protection. If he hadn't then he would have been aware of...aware of what? He didn't know what the hell he was thinking at the moment. All he did know was he had to hide her scent before the other Praetorians came running upstairs.

"Lily, can you ask your wolf to mask your scent again?" he said through clenched teeth. "It's very powerful and we don't want the rest of the Praetorians tearing upstairs to find the Vârcolac among us, do we?"

Her scent changed instantly, going back to the warm nutmeg it had been before. He gazed intently into her face as she raised her head to look at him. Her big brown eyes were swimming with moisture, her bottom lip starting to tremble.

"You're pissed at me, aren't you?" she whispered. "Because I kept a secret from you. Are you going to send me back? Please, Mac, don't make me go home. Daddy will be so angry with me for running away to join the Praetorians. He won't let me see you again and I'll just die if I can't see you. Or go Rogue... maybe."

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Her impassioned plea cut off and she frowned in confusion even as tears trickled silently down her face. "Do you think Vârcolac go Rogue if their animal half can't be with their mates, Mac? I guess there aren't enough of us to know if we would. No one else has found their mate either. I don't think we would. I was eighteen when I first saw you and knew you were mine. That was twelve years ago and I didn't go Rogue in all that time so I guess that must answer my question."

The more she talked the more tense he became. His brain was whirling, trying to take everything in. She was a hybrid, daughter to Andrei Romanov who would rip his head off without blinking when he found out he had his daughter here. She'd obviously run away and Annie had protected her identity, lying to him when she was here earlier.

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He was furious at Lily for her deception. She was under the mistaken impression that he was her mate, which was just utterly ridiculous. She'd developed some kind of crush on him and behaved stupidly. Her actions could endanger everyone in the Praetorians as well as her family and friends.

Just what did she think she was playing at? And what the fuck had Annie been thinking leaving her here with him when she knew who she was? His queen must have known what a fucked up mess this was when she waltzed off and left it in his lap. He would be having words with her in the morning. But first he had to deal with Liliana Rose Romanov.

He wanted to groan out loud just thinking her name. Her silent tears were still falling, her big eyes swimming with fresh tears as she bit her bottom lip. He could feel his fury ebbing in the face of her misery, his heart twisting hard in his chest, and he was astounded by his reaction.

No one manipulated him. No one climbed into his head and made him second guess himself, or forced him to do anything other than what he knew was right. The correct course of action was to throw Lily's tempting backside into one of the Jeeps in the garage and take her straight back to her pack.

But there was just something so very wrong about seeing tears on her face. The sight did something to him, made him want to hit something hard. He should be taking her home and yet he was holding her close, running a hand down her spine in soothing strokes, comforting her.ww.N©©Łwôrm.COm

"Shhhh, don't cry, Lily," he said softly reaching out to brush at her wet cheeks. "We'll figure something out in the morning. For the moment this is our secret, yours and mine. You can't tell anyone else, okay sugar?" Mac had no idea what he was promising her, he just wanted her tears to stop.

She threw her arms around his neck and buried her face against him. He hugged her close, his lips brushing the top of her head as he lifted her from the counter and carried her back into the bedroom.

"Get ready for bed and I'll be back in a minute," he ordered, turning to stride away before pausing. "Can you drink blood? You'll need some after the amount you've lost today."

"It's not as nice as a steak but I can survive on it," she muttered with a scowl on her face, heading over to her chest of drawers.

Mac made a quick exit before she decided to take her clothes off in front of him and make him do something he shouldn't. Part of him was slowly starting to cease to care. The shit he was in at the moment was astronomical. Bedding Andrei Romanov's daughter wouldn't make the situation much worse than it already was. It was such a tempting prospect. His body was screaming at him to give into his baser urges.

Jaw clenched painfully, he headed downstairs to give her time to change and give himself time to find a way out of the hole Lily had just dug for him. She'd been planning this for twelve years, convinced he was her mate. He'd scoffed at the very notion, ridiculing her claim in his mind. And yet the moment she'd unmasked her adult true scent something had stirred deep within him.

He'd been unaccountably attracted to her from the first moment he'd seen her. When he'd hurt her when sparring it had almost crippled him with pain and guilt. He'd wanted to rip Brandon to pieces when he'd been rubbing his body against hers. Now her tears were melting his fury in an instant and her scent was driving him crazy. And Annie had encouraged him to be with her.

Fuck, if Lily was right, if he was her mate, then he had no idea what they were going to do.

Because the moment he crossed that line, the moment he accepted that she belonged to him, no one would ever take her from him. He wouldn't give a fuck who it was, he'd fight to the death to keep her. And that meant he may have to kill her father.

Strangling down a groan, Mac closed the fridge door, a bottle of blood gripped tightly in his hand. He'd work out some way to get normal food for her until they figured out what they were going to do. For now she had to survive on what he could provide, and he'd have to work out a way to keep her identity secret while she was with him.

He hurried back upstairs, relieved that no one else had noticed Lily's true scent in the house. He was back in her room and closing the door quietly less than five minutes after he'd left her alone.

His breath locked in his throat and he froze as he stared at the bed. Lily was lying across it, a cream satin and lace chemise slithering all over her womanly curves.

Way too much of her sun-kissed skin was on display. Her toned thighs stretched on endlessly beyond the short hem of her nightwear. He could just make out a scrap of lace against one hip which was way too exposed for his comfort.

Mac's body slammed hard with need. His breath whistled out on a harsh groan as he tried to drag his eyes away from the temptation before him. The noise made Lily open her eyes and she raised her upper body up on bent elbows.

He groaned again, quieter this time, his gaze riveted to the silky masses of thick brown hair which flowed around her and over the bed. She'd taken her hair down and it was the most glorious thing he'd ever seen in his life. She'd always had it tied back until now. He'd never imagined hair could be so fucking erotic he was ready to rip his clothes off and join her on the bed.

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