

Chapter 328

The only sensible solution to the problem was to take Lily back to her pack and for Mac to forget about her. It wasn't fair to his friend but it was the only way to protect the children and the Praetorians.

Mac wasn't having any of it though. When Karn had brought it up this morning, the expression on Mac's face had been chilling to witness. He'd never been on the blunt end of Mac's legendary temper before, but he'd found himself there earlier.

Looking into Mac's black eyes had been difficult. They'd been pools of darkness, devoid of all life. When he'd spoken it had been quiet, almost subdued. His tone had been deceptively soft.

"I didn't ask for your personal opinion on the matter, Karn. This is how it's going to be, so live with it. Take Lily to the apartment as instructed and stay with her until she's ready to return. Once she's safely back here you can go about your business as normal."

He should have kept his mouth shut but his warring loyalties had made him stupid.

"This is fucking insanity, Mac. You can't keep her. You're going to start a fucking war and you know it. The Praetorians follow you but their loyalty will be tested to the extremes. They can't go up against the parents of their charges, not to mention the triumvirate. You're going to get us all killed because you can't keep your cock in your pants!"

Yeah, hindsight was a great thing. He hadn't even seen Mac move. One minute he'd been across the room and the next he'd been standing in front of Karn, his talons wrapped painfully around his neck.

It hadn't even crossed Karn's mind to strike back at his leader. Mac hadn't been trying to kill him, merely warning him. He'd been out of line with what he'd said and he knew it. He took his punishment and waited for the cold fury to seep out of his friend's taut body.

"Do not ever disrespect her like that again, Karn. I don't want to have to hurt a friend just because he can't contain his hot temper. I know the issues involved. I also know that Lily needs this moment of freedom. It may not last but if it's all I can give her then she'll have it as long as I can give it to her."

Karn had backed down. He'd had no choice in the matter. He still didn't agree with Mac but he wouldn't go against him. He'd said his piece on the matter, now they just had to see how it all played out, which was why he was now driving his charge to Mac's apartment on the edge of the city's limits.

Beside him, Lily had fallen silent since he'd snapped at her. He hadn't meant to take his temper out on her even though he was annoyed with her for acting out against her father. It can't have been easy for someone with her feisty nature to be cooped up at the compound. Maybe there was even a certain amount of justification for her feeling she had to run way, but that didn't negate the fact her actions were endangering everyone.

She kept her head turned away from him. For a second earlier, he'd thought she was crying but she'd made no discernible sounds so he'd decided he'd imagined it.

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The thought of her crying didn't sit well with him. He didn't have the first clue what to do with someone's wounded feelings. He'd have to try and lighten up a bit around her until he could dump her back into Mac's waiting arms. This was all his mess so he could clean it up.WŴw.w.ñôvêlwORM.co(m)

He let out a long sigh the instant the thought crossed his mind. He could no more dump her ass than he could quit the Praetorians and leave Mac swinging in the wind when Andrei Romanov came after him. Who was he was trying to kid? Liliana was his charge and it was his job to protect her.

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"Are you very disappointed in me, Karn?"

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Lily's quiet words startled him and he glanced at her. Her expression was carefully neutral, quite expertly done but she'd failed miserably at keeping the sad note from her voice. He'd have to teach her how to completely conceal her emotions.

"I'm angrier with myself and Mac than I am with you, Lily," he finally admitted. "I've been your main protector your whole life. You've never stepped foot outside the compound without me watching your back. Not officially anyway," he added with some consternation.

She had to have been sneaking out to build up her fake persona. Just the thought of it gave him chills. How many times had she snuck out of the compound over the years? Anything could have happened to her.

"Really, Karn? I didn't know that." Lily glanced at him sideways trying to gauge his true emotions. She didn't want to open herself up to him again in case his disappointment was really intense. She'd just use her eyes and be grateful he was finally talking to her.

"I saw you in the forest with Mac," she offered tentatively. "It was just you at first, then he came and the two of you talked. I had to be very quiet as I sneaked closer to hear what you were saying. I was shadowed in wolf form at the time. That's how I found out about the Praetorians."

Surprise crossed his face for a moment before his lip twitched slightly. "Yeah, we'd heard what a handful you were growing up. How old were you at the time?"

"Eighteen."

Karn's head swivelled around and he gave her a long look before he turned back to the road. They were almost at their destination. A few more turns and then she'd be safely inside, away from any potential harm.

"You waited twelve years? That's a long time."

She smiled. "It takes a while to invent a new identity. I imagined the Praetorians would do thorough checks on all the candidates. And Pietro is one of my father's closest friends. I had to use Europe as a base because it's easier to be unknown there. I knew Mac would have Pietro do a check seeing as he's been there for more than two decades. I had to be sure I'd pass even his scrutiny."

He was proud of how intelligently she'd thought out the situation. He shouldn't be proud of her but he was. Lily had planned this meticulously; it hadn't been a spur-of-the-moment thing.

"How did you circumnavigate Pietro? I know he probably hasn't seen you in the flesh since you were a child, but he must have seen photos or at least see your resemblance to your parents?"