

## Chapter 367

W@.n0v3l(1)w0rk.Com

"The decision was made a long time ago to keep the Praetoriens a secret," Refe answered calmly. "You were all so young when the first attack was made on the pack, the first attempt to reach you and cause you harm. Some of you weren't even born." He smiled at Eline for a moment and then looked at Kotheri briefly.

"You shouldn't be angry with your parents or Refe," Rhienne added. "I needed to protect the pack, to protect you. The Praetoriens seemed the best way of doing so at the time. We wanted you to have normal childhoods, as normal as possible considering your heritage."

Eline shifted beside Liam, leaned into him slightly and rested her head against his arm as though picking up a rise in his distress levels. He smiled briefly closing his eyes and rubbing his cheek against her hair.

"So not all vampires were accepting of hybrid children coming into the world?" Eline guessed correctly as she soothed her cousin unconsciously, strengthening her shields within his mind not realising her expression turned colder, more remote when she did so, her voice dripping with ice.

Kern noticed the subtle changes and felt his anger ratchet up a notch, though he kept his expression neutral. He didn't like what he was witnessing, was worried at Liam's sensitivity levels and also the effect it had on the women at his side. The warning signs were clear to him. How no one else was seeing them was criminal. He wanted to yell at the others, ask them how they could have let things become so dangerous.

The ensuing silence was broken when Gerd spoke addressing his son. "How long have you known about them?"

"Longer than Lily hes." Kotheri turned from the window to look at his father before his hidden gaze swept over Dere and Cessie. Liam and Eline didn't appear to be put out with what they were hearing but the sisters were not happy about it, were particularly unhappy with him. The corner of his mouth twitched in a satisfied smile.

"It was amusing watching Lily work it out. She was so smug when she worked it out and thought no one else knew." His words sounded harsh but there was an undercurrent of warmth in his tone revealing a hint of genuine affection.

"The decision was made a long time ago to keep the Praetorians a secret," Rafe answered calmly. "You were all so young when the first attack was made on the pack, the first attempt to reach you and cause you harm. Some of you weren't even born." He smiled at Eline for a moment and then looked at Kotheri briefly.

Andrei growled softly and Kotheri met his gaze for a moment and then nodded at the silent rebuke. Andrei didn't like it when he felt someone was maligning a child of his. The vampire was already volatile. It was pointless antagonising him any further and Kotheri genuinely adored Liliane and her wild ways even if he didn't show it.

"How did you and Lily find out?" Refe asked his gaze sweeping from Kotheri to Andrei and finally settling on Kern who had been identified as a member of the Praetoriens. If his scrutiny made the vampire uncomfortable, there was no outward sign of it.

"My senses are sharper than the others," Kotheri answered. "I was about six when I first realised we had silent guardians shadowing our every movement. Lily's senses are not as acute as mine but she has an agile brain and not a lot escapes her. She worked it out by the time she hit maturity."

W@w.m0v3l(1)w0rk.Com

Andrei's irritation fed his eyes boring into Kotheri as he spoke. He couldn't help but feel pride at his daughter's intelligence, proud of the knowledge she'd been one of the few to have worked out a secret so closely guarded that most people didn't know it.

"Lily would have seen the Praetoriens as a challenge," he mused almost to himself. He turned to look at Kern his eyes narrowing. "That's where she is, isn't it?"

Kern pursed his lips and then nodded. Mec had told him to attend this meeting, to bring Kellum with him to help. He'd thought it madness, but Mec had been insistent. His opinion hadn't changed but so far everything was going reasonably smoothly.

"We didn't know who she was," he answered carefully. "She managed to circumvent all our careful screening to become accepted as a Praetorian candidate. She was the top recruit in her class, the best soldier I've ever trained."

His pride in his charge was evident in his voice as well as his affection for one of their own. Because of that Andrei found it easier to accept, his own pride escalating higher. His daughter had fooled everyone and been the best soldier. She was so much like him it was scary but he was proud of her anyway.

"How did she get past the final check?" Refe asked suspiciously his eyes already dropping to his sister for confirmation. He was stunned at the news and not entirely happy about it. Seeing Rhienne's sheepish expression ignited his temper.

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"For the love of God, Annie, what were you thinking?" he ground out furiously, her guilty expression telling him all he needed to know. Once again his sister had kept a secret from him, one that directly affected a member of his pack. He was furious with her.

"You know the uproar Lily's disappearance caused. How could you keep quiet when you knew she was safe?" Because Lily had been safe all this time only they hadn't known it. She couldn't have been safer living in the heart of the Praetorians.

"Sometimes the needs of the one is more important than the needs of many," Rhienne answered, accepting Refe's anger because she knew it was justified on one level. It hurt though. It always hurt when she disappointed her brother even if sometimes it was necessary.

"Lily needed her freedom, Refe. You would only have dragged her back here and despite the fact that we all love her it would have been the wrong thing for her. You know that deep inside. And in my defence, I've only known a few days. I was just giving her a little time until she was ready to come home again."

Refe opened his mouth to retort, fury still in control. Deep down he knew she was right, Annie was always right. But he still wasn't ready to let go of his anger. If she'd told him, explained her reasoning, then he would have listened to her no matter what she thought. He trusted her decisions. His scathing words were silenced when Andrei spoke.

"Annie's right."

All eyes turned to the one person they'd all expected to be demanding they march up to the Praetorian compound and retrieve his daughter instantly.

"Lily contacted me earlier today," Andrei continued in a quiet voice. "She has the same genetic flaw I have only it manifests itself in her wolf side rather than her vampiric side. She's scared and a little confused but she's found the one thing that can help her and she can only find it with the Praetorians."

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