

Chapter 381

"You take the blood trail, I'll see to Pietro," Demetri ordered. "It might be best if you're not with me at the moment." His feral side was reacting to the heavy blood loss and the awful taint he could scent on the air. He wanted to try and ensure Joshua's safety as best he could.

The other man didn't argue simply peeled off into the kitchen and down the stone steps into the bowels of the cottage. Demetri turned to the door that hid Pietro from his view. He reached out telepathically now he was close to his friend.

"Are you sleeping on the job?"w©W.*novELWÖR*(m) (c)©m

There was a long moment of silence.

"Fucking wish I were, D," Pietro's weak response came back, pain lacing every word. "You have to be close to reach me. Be careful when you touch me. My blood's poisoned. Don't know what with but the delivery agent was bottled blood. The poison seems to eats our insides up and we can't regenerate. Thank fuck someone got here in time so I could at least get that information out before..."

Demetri turned the doorknob and swung the door open as his words trailed off. He sucked in a deep breath as he stared at the man lying on the bed. A large portion of his skin was black, rotting away even as he watched.

Pietro was missing an eye, his entire body one open mass of cuts, his bones sticking out in sharp angles which were just unnatural. The black rot was covering so much of his skin that it was hard to see if there was untouched flesh on his body.

The odour of rotting flesh was sickening, turning Demetri's stomach and making his nose wrinkle in distaste. Whatever this poison was it was deadly. He could only imagine the excruciating pain his friend was in. Fury rolled over him as Pietro's one good eye opened and the depth of his suffering was evident.

"That good?"

It was obvious that he couldn't speak. It was only his sheer strength of will which was allowing him to maintain the mental contact. The fury raged through Demetri, burning lava hot and then slipping into freezing cold as he stared at his dying friend. Heads would roll for this atrocity. He would bathe in the blood of those who had done this to Pietro.

He pushed at the fury, fought to keep himself on the edge of the killing rage without crossing over. Pietro needed more from him than mindless violence right now.

"Well you're not going to be getting dates any time soon," he finally managed to answer when he'd gained enough control. He walked into the room. "Report." He knew it would help his friend to feel useful despite his circumstances. He listened silently as Pietro's weak mental tone recited all he knew; trying to wrack his brain for anything he could do to help him.

Joshua came into the room briefly and Demetri turned to look at him. The other vampire's face twisted in sympathy as he stood silently for a moment before vanishing again. He was back before long with an armful of bottled blood which he put on the bed.

"How good are your mental skills?" he asked tersely. "Do you have a limit on how many humans you can mesmerise?"

Demetri frowned at him. "I tend to do it one at a time but I'm Ancient. I dare say I could handle a group of half a dozen or so." His confusion at the question was evident in his

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Joshua nodded to the bed. "I've seen this before only not as bad. The other vampire was found early enough. We bled him out and used humans to replenish him enough to stabilise him. Then we fed him the oldest vamp blood we had. He recovered. I don't know if it will work for Pietro because he's so far gone but it's his only chance."

Could they do it? Demetri had no idea but if it was the only option open to them? "Go," he ordered brusquely, grabbing a bottle of blood and twisting the lid off. He tried not to hurt Pietro as he dripped the blood into his ravaged mouth.

"Demetri." The mental tone was so weak. "Demetri, it's too late, my friend. The damage is too severe. I'm not walking out of this room and we both know it."

"Then I'll fucking carry you out! Now, finish your report and swallow this blood before I kick the shit out of you. You don't know the woman's name but you reckon she's the most dangerous? If you got to feed on Bruce then it must have been this Michael one who called me with the location. Is there anyone else? Any other names mentioned?"

Pietro swallowed painfully wishing Demetri would stop. He wanted to ask him to end it quickly. It would be no effort for his friend to take his head and then the burning agony would cease. But as long as he kept him focused on his mission, his vampiric side wouldn't give up. It kept fighting to keep him alive so he could protect his friends, protect the children.

"Bastard!" he ground out, his mental tone conveying what little trace of humour he could still find under the circumstances. "You never were one to accept failure but in this instance you're going to have to. Just don't hurt the vampire you're with. He's helping you, Demetri. Don't cross over when I die. Please, promise me that."

His friend was so tense, so strung out, he feared for the blond male who was out there somewhere trying to lure humans to the cottage. Only Caleb could halt Demetri when he lost control and he was thousands of miles away. Or Mara. The dark-haired vampire always listened to his wife no matter how feral he turned.

"Pietro, if you only ever do one thing I ask of you then do this one. Stop fucking talking about dying and fight! If you want Joshua to live then you have to live. If you want to halt a bloodbath then keep fucking breathing."

There was a sob at the end of the words, something so alien when it came to Demetri that Pietro was stunned into silence, his agony momentarily forgotten.

"Aw fuck, Demetri! Don't do this to me. You can't go all hearts and flowers on me right at the end. Save that shit for Mara. I'm sure she appreciates it." He managed to get enough teasing into his tone, giving his friend what he expected from him.

When Demetri next spoke his voice was firmer, harder, the expression on his face shifting from the naked anguish Pietro had just witnessed to his more customary neutral expression. He even managed a small smile, his green eyes full of a warmth he didn't display easily.

"You tell anyone about this and I'll fucking kill you myself," he responded gruffly dripping more blood into his mouth. "As soon as Joshua returns I'll start bleeding you out. It shouldn't take long; you don't have much blood left as it is. I have no idea if this is going to work and it'll probably hurt like hell but I need to do this, Pietro. You understand that I need to try?"

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Pietro did understand. He didn't believe it would make any difference to keeping him alive but if it made the difference of whether his friend could hold onto his sanity then that was all that mattered. He didn't care about the additional pain. What was a little more discomfort compared to saving a few lives?

"I'm ready when you are, D. Just promise me if it doesn't work...you'll say goodbye to Andrei and Alexei for me? You'll make sure nothing happens to the children? Don't let me die in vain, my friend. Make it worth something."

"You know you don't need to ask, Pietro. If this doesn't work..."

The sound of the approaching SUV had Demetri moving to the window to look outside. Joshua was chatting away with a group of kids barely into their twenties. They looked so young, so carefree. They looked like food...a way to save Pietro's life.©©Ŵ.ŊÖvêlwörm.©σm

"Demetri, you need a sample of my blood. Maybe the Were doctors or scientific types can work out what the poison is. The children are half vampire. This poison could work on them."

Demetri turned away from the window and headed back to the bed, a nod acknowledging Pietro's words. He met one pain-filled hazel eye and smiled gently.

Black talons whipped out and slashed across Pietro's throat, blood pooling instantly as the man on the bed began to gargle and choke and the scent of tainted blood added to the rot filling the room.

"Forgive me, my friend..."

To be continued...