

Chapter 385

Pietro fell asleep after his feeding. Demetri was loath to leave him in the filthy bed but he needed his hands free for the moment. He left the blood-soaked room with the sickening stench of rot still in his nostrils. In the main bathroom he turned on the shower careful not to have it too hot. He filled the bath too.

He quickly examined the cottage trying to find any hint of the poison used but coming up empty. The room downstairs where Pietro had obviously been imprisoned was just as bad scent wise as the bedroom, the bloodstained chains having his fury building again and he had to work to stifle it down.

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Heading back to the bedroom after a desultory glance at the dead vampire in the basement, he was already mentally working out how to clean up the mess. He considered calling Caleb but figured Mara would take care of that. The entire cottage would need to be sanitised once they left and there was still the unknown woman out there somewhere and Michael.

The pungent aroma of the bedroom assaulted his nostrils once more and he stifled down a groan and quickly crossed to the bed. The change in Pietro was staggering. His skin was no longer black though still covered in angry red scars. It was pink and so fragile looking Demetri was afraid to touch him for fear of hurting him.

"Wake, my friend," he urged softly. "I can't leave you lying in this shit any longer. It's disgusting."

Pietro's eyes opened instantly and Demetri blinked in surprise as he stared down at him. "Well, that's going to get the ladies attention," he smiled, feeling the first real amusement since he'd arrived in Scotland.

"What?" Pietro's voice was still weak but getting stronger the longer the untainted blood had to work.

"Your regenerated eye...it's black like Mac's."

Pietro frowned, closed his eyes and then opened them again. His expression asked a silent question and his friend's smile just deepened.

"You're not shitting me?" Brown was his dominant eye colour though they were flecked with green to create the hazel hue. Or they had been until he'd lost his right one. "My eyes are different colours? Fuck!"

Demetri reached down and very carefully helped his friend from the bed ignoring the blood and dead skin coating his clothes as he touched him. "It's quite striking. I'm sure the ladies will love it," he quipped, distracting the other man from his pain.

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He could have carried him to the bathroom easily but Pietro needed to feel as if he was in control. It had been taken away from him by his abductors and he wasn't the kind of male who ceded control to others willingly. So he supported his friend into the bathroom teasing him about his new eye the entire way.

"Shower first to get all this shit off and then a soak in the bath," he told him, opening the shower door.

He stayed close watching to see if Pietro was strong enough to shower unaided. When it became apparent he wasn't, Demetri stripped off his shirt, boots and belt and entered the cubicle with him clad only in jeans.

Pietro let the water wash over him closing his eyes so he couldn't see the debris falling from his body. The scent of it was vile enough and he was still in shock that his eye hadn't retained its natural colour. The water hurt the new skin which was regenerating but at a much slower rate than normal. He was afraid to look in the mirror and see the evidence of his capture.

Would he be scarred? He'd overheard enough of Demetri's conversation with Mara despite being weak at the time. The very thought of bearing a permanent reminder was enough to make him shudder. Vampires were vain. They couldn't help it. Something happened when they were Sired, their genetics mutating and enhancing their physical attributes.

Pietro was used to being perfect and now he wasn't. Already he had a flaw with his eyes. Would his skin be marred too? Would he carry more permanent reminders of his utter humiliation at the hands of his abductors?

Now that safety was guaranteed, now that he didn't have to court death, his emotions were rebelling deep within him. He was used to being strong, invincible. Having to admit that his own arrogance had been his downfall was hard to take. Having to admit that he'd been taken, stripped naked, his body abused and tortured at the whim of others...he couldn't accept it, couldn't deal with the humiliation.

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Something fell from his hair to land on the shower floor and he moaned pressing both hands against the wall as his knees weakened and he had to hold himself up so he didn't fall down beside the red and black clotted *thing* lying in the drain.

"I'll do it."

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Demetri's quiet words reminded Pietro he wasn't alone. While he was relieved to be able to lean on his friend and avoid what he couldn't face at the moment, another part of him screamed in denial as Demetri began to shampoo his hair.

He was like a helpless baby. For the last two days he'd been fucking helpless, alternating between screaming in agony at the pain and crying like a child.

Helpless! The word banged through his skull, taunting him, laughing at him, adding to the awful humiliation he couldn't shake. All the time Demetri's strong fingers stroked through his matted hair, shampooing and rinsing over and over again as chunks of something unknown landed with a thud on the shower floor.

"It's okay to cry, Pietro," Demetri voice was low and gentle. "There is only you and I here and nothing will leave this room. I understand. You've been through a terrible ordeal and the pain has to come out. I will not think less of you, my friend. I would be honoured that you trust me enough to allow me to help you through this vulnerable moment."

His words were like turning on a faucet. The instant Demetri spoke, Pietro's head reared back and he uttered an anguished scream up to the ceiling. His knees buckled and he fell, strong arms catching him from behind to hold him tightly as he screamed again.

Every second of the pain had been like an hour, every cut, every punch, the talons imbedded in his eye. He couldn't escape the painful memories and he couldn't assuage the feelings of helplessness, reliving the moment when he was ready to give up and he'd prayed for death as the only end to his agony, the poison burning him like a furnace as the torture raged on.

The bastards had broken him, he who was so strong in his world, so powerful and feared by those beneath him. He was broken and he didn't think he would ever be able to fix what they'd done to him.

A loud hiss in his ear, bands of steel squeezing his chest.

"You are NOT broken," Demetri hissed his voice full of fury. It was those words that made him realise he'd been whispering the word 'broken' over and over again as he sobbed like a child.

"I wanted to die, Demetri!" he admitted hoarsely. "I prayed to die before you arrived and when you came, when my body was eating itself apart, I wanted to beg you to end it so I didn't have to suffer anymore. I was willing to abandon everyone, the children, my friends."